Regional level of conflict dynamics in the South Caucasus: 
Russia’s policies towards the ethno-territorial conflicts

(1991-2008)

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Map 1 The Caucasus region
Introduction
The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced both external and internal implications for the international system. Among other things, it put an end to the Mutually Assured Destruction System, the East-West conflict and a division of the world into two political and ideological camps. Internally, fifteen new states emerged out of its disintegration, putting an end to their 200 year old common existence within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. This process however also produced challenges and difficulties, part of which had been inherited from the late Soviet period. The new states faced difficulties as state-building, corruption, immaturity of political elites and power struggles, economic decline, dangerous ethnic nationalisms and ethno-territorial conflicts. As a result, within a short period of time the post-Soviet space turned into an arena of global attention in the form of great power rivalry, conflict stalemate and political disturbances.

Nowhere else in the post-Soviet space are the above-mentioned phenomena as conspicuous as in the South Caucasus. The collapse of the Soviet Union on the one hand pushed the three societies to establish new institutions, and pursue state-building projects, but on the other hand, to tackle the ethnic and political grievances left from the late Soviet era, for which their respective elites had no maturity or experience. Despite 70 years of co-existence, relations between the title nations and minorities suddenly deteriorated to an unprecedented level, culminating in brutal wars and ultimately ending in secessionism. Ethnic and political relations aggravated on the one hand between Baku and the largely Armenian populated enclave of Mountainous Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and on the other hand between Tbilisi and its autonomous regions in late 1980s, becoming an important factor of instability in the region. All three regions declared their independence from their parent states on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union and ever since have existed as de facto states in the region. The picture became more complicated when all three conflicts developed regional dynamics, to be linked to the interests and policies of the regional hegemon-Russia.

Russia has declared the South Caucasus a region of its strategic interests. It has been the primary peacekeeper and peace-maker in all three conflicts, it has enjoyed political and military presence in the region and has been sensitive to any development there. Meanwhile, Russia has also been accused by the conflict parties of contributing to the continuing conflict dynamics in the region, and of destabilising the region for its own ends. The Russian authorities have naturalised the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, recognised both

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1 The South Caucasus states had briefly been independent in 1918-1920, but this period was largely insufficient for establishing functioning institutions of statehood. Therefore, there was not much of institutional and political continuity or inheritance in 1991, except for certain ideologies.
regions’ independence, but have come to hold a more neutral stance towards the Mountainous Karabakh conflict. Russia has seemingly become interested in the survival of the post-violence status-quo in the region, which is a challenge to the state and nation-building process of Georgia. Policymakers in the Kremlin explain their policies as aimed at guaranteeing stability in the region and stress their domestic security interests here, whereas the reality is, Russia is intent on guaranteeing the survival of the secessionist authorities for its own ends.

The central aim of this thesis is to examine Russia’s policies towards the three conflicts in the region in the context of its strategic interests in the South Caucasus. In particular it seeks to answer the following research questions: To what extent does Russia support the secessionist regions in the South Caucasus and what are the incentives of its policies. What are the strategic interests that act as the driving force behind its policies? The exploration of Russia’s engagement in all three conflicts also sheds light on a number of correlations as Russia’s bilateral relations with the states in the region, its engagement with the West, as well as its capacity and leeway to resolve the conflicts. In particular, an underlying question is the impact of Russia’s bilateral relations with the South Caucasus states on its policies towards the conflicts. Further, it is assessed whether Russia’s policies of engagement in the secessionist regions are aimed at retaining the status-quo for power-political ends or its domestic security concerns in the North Caucasus. This raises the question over Russia’s capacity to resolve the conflicts. It explores the significance of the South Caucasus to Russia’s domestic security and power-political interests and defines which one acts as the causal variable in its engagement in the region. It elucidates the nature of Russia’s great power status and hegemony in the post-soviet space and their correlation with its policies towards the conflicts.

The thesis further assesses if international relations theory can be useful in explaining Russia’s policies towards the three conflicts. It utilises the regional security complex theory to explain the security interconnectedness in the Caucasus. Further, it assesses to what extent various accounts of the realist tradition of state behaviour can explain the phenomenon raised in this thesis. Exploring the nature of Russian hegemony in the CIS and its overall position, a concept of relevant power is suggested. The study also sheds light (albeit limited) on the importance of geopolitics as a discourse in Russian foreign policy. Although some scholars have written on Russia’s policies towards the South Caucasus region, this study is original in a way that it examines systematically Russia’s behaviour towards the conflicts in its periphery for the whole post-Soviet period.
Methodology and sources
This study is largely qualitative, with very limited quantitative data, combined with document
analysis. The primary method to answer the research question is content analysis and
qualitative interviews, although elements of other methods and sources can also be found.²
The qualitative interviews have acted not as a primary research method, but only
supplementary to the discourse analysis. Therefore, the qualitative interviews are limited in
number. The principal sources systematically consulted for information are newspapers,
journals, statements, and communiqués from 1991 to 2008. Various Russian, Armenian,
Azerbaijani, Georgian and English language news reports have been examined. The Russian,
Georgian and Azerbaijani news reports were examined during the research stay in the relevant
countries. The primary sources used for the study include Russia’s successive foreign and
security concepts, military doctrines, speeches of successive Russian presidents and other
officials, bulletins of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as statements and
communiqués by the officials of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Moreover, research
reports of think tanks as the Centre for European Policy Studies, Centre for international
Studies at Oxford University, Carnegie Foundation, German Foreign Policy Council,
International Crisis Group, International Institute for Strategic Studies have also been
examined for the purposes of this study. The secondary sources include scholarly books and
journal articles in the field of international relations theory and social sciences as well as the
empirical questions of the study.

Causality
Causality in social sciences is often explained by linking an independent variable to a
dependent variable in a process of defining causal effect and causal mechanism. The causal
effect of an independent variable is, according to Bennett ‘the change in probability or value
of the dependent variable that would have occurred if the independent variable had assumed a
different value’.³ A causal mechanism includes the ‘causal processes or intervening variables
through which causal or explanatory variables produce causal effects’. In other words, the
above-mentioned concepts reflect a process of defining what causes a particular outcome and
why and how. Establishing causal effect rather than the causal mechanism is particularly

² It would be more appropriate to define the methodology of this study as triangulation. Triangulation is the ‘use
of more than one approach to the investigation of the research question in order to enhance confidence in the
ensuing findings’. There can be both within method and between method triangulation and this study has used
within method triangulation. For triangulation, see Alan Bryman Social research methods (Oxford: Oxford
131-132.
³ See Alexander L. George, Andrew Bennett, Case studies and theory development in the social sciences,
dominant in studies that include a large number of statistical data, but most social science research today is aimed at generating knowledge on how the process works. As Andrew Sayer puts it, ‘…merely knowing that C has generally been followed by E is not enough, we want to know the continuous process by which C produces E’.\(^4\)

There is distinction in social sciences between understanding and explaining a phenomenon.\(^5\) According to Ngaire Woods, explaining is by identifying what caused a particular phenomenon, generating and testing hypotheses. Under such a scheme, causal variables are defined as x, y, z and their correlation is tested.\(^6\) This study aims more to understand, rather than explain in the strict sense of the word. The complex nature of the social reality makes it nearly impossible to identify a single causal variable or testing falsifiable hypotheses on the causal correlations of this study.\(^7\) It does not attempt to test a set of falsifiable hypotheses on causal relationships or aim to provide a single definitive account of the social reality in the positivist sense of the thought. It instead attempts to shed understanding on how certain causal factors may account to explain why Russia’s policies have been aimed more at the retention of status-quo rather than conflict resolution in the South Caucasus.

**Case studies method**

Case studies method involves a detailed investigation of a phenomenon which reflects the operation of an established theoretic concept. The method allows the researcher to establish the mechanism by which a particular outcome is produced, by observing and comparing similar or identical cases much more in detail than any other method.\(^8\) Case study methods are based upon John Stuart Mill’s methods of agreement and difference. The method of agreement implies that if several cases have a similar outcome on the dependent variable and similar values on the independent variable, then the cause of the outcome is easy to establish. Such a method allows the researcher to identify one single variable that produces the outcome


\(^5\) Certain scholars have argued that explaining cannot be separated from understanding an actor’s behaviour, because if explaining is about determining the causal factors, it cannot be established without an understanding of the endogenous and exogenous factors about the actor. For the explaining versus understanding, see Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding international relations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). For an opposite view, see Emanuel Adler, ‘Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 3, issue 3, 1997, pp. 319-363.


\(^7\) This position is widely criticised by positivist social scientists who argue that any social system is as complex as the theory developed to study it and no social phenomenon can be outside the control of the researcher. See Nils Peter Gleditsch, ‘Armed conflict and the environment: A critique of the literature’, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 35, no 3, 1998, pp. 381-400.

in all cases. Such an approach offers a monocular explanation of the social reality, which is very critically perceived in modern social science today. The method of difference in contrast selects cases with different outcomes in the dependent variable and aspires to identify the variance in the independent variable. The method assumes that if two cases have divergent outcomes on the dependent variable, but identical values on the independent variable, the independent variable per se cannot be sufficient to have caused the outcome. The factors in both cases of agreement and disagreement are deterministic regularities, which leave little space for multiple causality and manoeuvre of the researcher in cases where the outcome is produced by more than one factor that varies to certain degrees in various cases. In compliment to case studies, process-tracing method has been developed and used by most qualitative research today. Process tracing for case studies enables the researcher to examine the process of how ‘certain conditions are translated into case outcomes’, focusing on the intervening variables in detail. The process-tracing method according to George and Bennett, ‘attempts to identify the intervening causal process between an independent variable and a dependent variable’.10

**Case selection**

According to Van Evera, case studies can serve 5 main purposes: ‘testing theories, creating theories, identifying antecedent conditions and testing their importance, and explaining cases of intrinsic importance’.11 The current study meets the last purpose and is organised around three case studies with similarities and differences on the dependent variables, hence the level of Russia’s engagement in and support for secessionist regions. Each case reflects both similarities and differences of Russia’s engagement. The differences on the dependent variables are of direct relevance to the purpose of the study and have implications for the key causal factor of Russia’s behaviour in the secessionist entities. All three cases share the same phenomenon, yet offer different insights on the research question. The cases vary in particular with regard to Russia’s engagement, capacity to act and impact of its bilateral relations. There is also time-wise variance between the cases: Russia’s engagement has varied over time.

Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Mountainous Karabakh conflicts were chosen because in each of them Russia’s policies had become a further complicating factor and each offers a different insight for understanding the motivation of Russia’s behaviour. In each of them three features

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11 Ibid., p. 55.
contribute to understanding the causality of the phenomenon: Russia’s domestic security interests in the Caucasus, bilateral relations with the parent states and the West, and its broader geopolitical interests. Competing theories make divergent predictions about the cases, all three cases are very relevant to current policy-problem cases, and the cases are good for replicating previous tests and have variance in values on the IV, DV and IV.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Delimitation of the research}

The study is largely empirical and aims to establish an understanding of the complex social phenomenon in investigation. Since there is at least one theory to test, the research is not aimed at theory-generation or theoretic contribution. In terms of theory, the study in question is largely deductive, rather than inductive. Although, it covers a timeframe of 1991 to 2008, the study is not a purely historic account of the events.

\textbf{Level of analysis}

The level of analysis of the study is unit level; it concentrates on an actor’s, hence Russia’s policies towards a particular group of states, while treating the former as a black box. Therefore, the study does not aim to explain the identity related dimension of the Russian political elite as an explanatory variable for its policies towards the conflicts in the South Caucasus. Economic interests and energy issues are also largely left out in the examination of Russia’s behaviour towards the conflicts, since this would be the scope of another study. Issues and models of conflict transformation and conflict settlement would also be the subject of another research. Nor is the research aimed at establishing the causes of the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus. The second chapter is therefore largely descriptive and aims to give background information on the domestic level of conflict dynamics, in order to avoid confusion at the regional level. It tries to cover all possible factors that could, further in the study account for understanding, and to a certain extent explaining Russia’s behaviour vis-à-vis the secessionist conflicts in the South Caucasus. The chapter includes some parts on the causes of the conflicts, and does shed light on the internal dynamics, basing it largely on the already established research. Although the level of analysis of this study is not the conflicts per se, but rather Russia’s engagement in them, a broader approach to the introduction of the ethno-territorial conflicts is undertaken in Chapter II. This has been necessitated by the linkage and interconnectedness of the local and regional levels of conflict dynamics in the region. Abkhazia’s dependence on Russia for example, or Russia’s leeway in South Ossetia does require a more elaborate examining of the internal dynamics of the ethno-territorial conflicts.

\textsuperscript{12} Such a selection meets most of the criteria for case selection in social science inquiry as established by Van Evera, see Stephen Van Evera, op. cit., pp. 77-88.
**Methodological challenges**

The primary challenge to this study is imperfect information that any social scientist faces. This factor is more conspicuous in the case of Russia since much parallel and confusing data on the same issue is available. Clarification of certain questions required access to the very top level of decision-making. I undertook field research in Moscow in March to April 2008, during which I examined the earlier editions of certain Russian newspapers and Ministry of Foreign Affairs bulletins. The limited nature of financial resources and time available for the field research was a further constraint. In Moscow, I arranged some 10 qualitative interviews with mostly government officials and academics. These included semi-structured interviews, as some of them became largely flexible and explorative in the course of the process, when the interviewee would go beyond the asked question. Interviews acted only supplementary, thus held in those areas of the study where information was insufficient and at the end I had to compare the interview findings with the newspaper and document data. There were certain challenges with the interviews as well. Some interviews represented the official policy line and therefore were not entirely helpful or innovative. There were few interviews from which I could distil innovative data. Since it was rather difficult to gain access to certain government agencies, most interviews took place in a private or informal setting. However, my overall fieldwork in Russia was useful in terms of getting a broader picture over the state of affairs and gaining access to data.

As to intended field research in the conflict regions, there were both technical and financial difficulties in gaining access to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Mountainous Karabakh. As a national of Azerbaijan, I needed special permission from both Azerbaijani and Armenian Governments for visiting Mountainous Karabakh. Time restraints and the costs of visiting the regions made it impossible for me to visit them. Moreover, field research in the regions could shed light on certain questions in this study, but were considered not so vital to the central aim of this study. Finally my frequent visits to Azerbaijan and Georgia were an asset for me, since I had an opportunity to access both academics and high level officials in both countries.

**Structure of the thesis**

The research is organised around five chapters. The next chapter accommodates the research phenomenon within the broader theoretic discussion, and assesses if international relations theory is useful to explain Russia’s policies towards the conflicts in the South Caucasus. The discussion builds on the realist account of state behaviour, regional security complex theory and hegemonic stability theory.
A shift to the empirical main text starts with Chapter II, which describes the three ethno-territorial conflicts, their causes, escalation and current state of affairs in detail. The chapter offers insight on the complex dynamics of each conflict. It is argued that an ethnic security dilemma should not be considered as the major cause of the escalation of the three conflicts in the region, and that the conflict spiral has developed in a rather coincidental way. To avoid confusion on the level of analysis question, it should be mentioned that the chapter is only of supportive character to the central research question of this study and is in no way original research on its own. This study aims to focus on the regional level, rather than on the micro level of conflict dynamics in the South Caucasus. Such a chapter is necessary though, for understanding the regional level and overall the research question.

Chapter III discusses Russia’s strategic interests in the South Caucasus since 1991. First, the context of Russia’s foreign policy evolution in the post-Soviet period is discussed, trying to answer the question why the Euro-Atlantic trend in Russian foreign policy did not last long and what implications sustenance of Euratlamism in Russia might have had for Russia’s policies towards the region. Russian-Western relations are treated as an intervening variable in Russia’s policies towards the region. Russia’s perception of the West, NATO and the US and their potential presence in the South Caucasus are examined in detail. The importance given in Russia to its great power status and NATO enlargement are discussed, because both have direct implications for the central research question. Further, the outline assesses Russia’s domestic security (interconnection of the South and North Caucasus) interests and power political interests in the region and tries to accommodate the resulting policies within them. The spill-over potential of all three conflicts and their relevance to Russia’s domestic security are elaborated.

The next chapter assesses Russia’s policies towards the three conflicts in the post-Soviet period under successive Russian presidents. It aims to establish the level of Russia’s engagement in all three conflicts, and also sheds light on Russia’s capacity and leeway to resolve the conflicts. The section on the Georgian-Ossetian conflict sheds light on the 2008 Russian-Georgian crisis, its causes and implications. The chapter also establishes the differences in the dependent variables.

Finally, Chapter V discusses the impact of Russia’s bilateral relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia on it policies towards the conflicts. Comparative analysis is carried out between Russia’s bilateral relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia and their impact on the conflict dynamics in MK and Russia’s bilateral relations with Georgia and their impact on the
conflict dynamics in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In the conclusion, the findings of the research are discussed.

Chapter 1
Discourse in international relations: realism, regional security complex theory and hegemony

This chapter is an attempt to accommodate Russia’s policies towards the ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus within the broader discussion of international relations theories. Realism and regional security complex theory are employed to understand Russia’s geopolitical interests in the region. Initially, geopolitics as a concept is explored in the context of its original and contemporary implication. The question to what extent, Russia’s policies and interests have been geopolitically motivated is briefly examined. It is argued that geopolitics with reference to the heartland concept obviously had a significant impact upon the Russian elite’s political thinking in the preliminary period, but the concept of ‘New Great Game’ often used in a geopolitical context is no longer useful or of explanatory value in understanding Russia’s policies towards the three conflicts. Geopolitics is currently used in Russia to refer to realpolitik. This necessitates exploring the realist paradigm and its predictions of state behaviour. Trying to operationalise the paradigm, its hypotheses are tested with regard to Russia’s policies towards the three conflicts. It is argued that overall Russia’s strategy towards the conflict regions is compatible with the explanation of the theory, but its tactics falls short in certain predictions. Further, regional security complex theory developed by Buzan and Waever is employed to explain the security interconnectedness of the North and South Caucasus. The theory views the Caucasus as a set of states, including Russia, bound together whose security concerns are tightly interconnected. The nature and structure of the security complex as well as possible alternative complexes are briefly discussed. The overlay element of the approach leads to the question of the nature of Russian hegemony in the region and its implications for the ethno-territorial conflicts.

1.1 Legacy of geopolitics

Geopolitics is the spatial study of international politics, a study ‘of the relationships among states and implications of these relationships for the morphology of the political map as a whole’. 13 It focuses on the security-political implications of geography, hence the relationship

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between security politics and material conditions. Its core point, \textit{geographic determinism} asserts that the geographic conditions of a state determine its foreign policy interests and its power.\footnote{In a critical view Simon Dalby defines geopolitics as ‘the politics of the geographic specification of politics’, see Simon Dalby, ‘Critical Geopolitics: Discourse, Difference and Dissent’, \textit{Environment and Planning D: Security and Space} 9, 1991, p. 274.} Geopolitical theory first emerged in the form of naturalism (natural material environments determine the differences between human societies) and then evolved into what is global geopolitics in early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Although geography and its importance for foreign policy can be found in the writings of ancient thinkers, it was in early twentieth century that geographic concepts of heartland, rimland and buffer zones were developed to refer to strategic zones in the world political map. Global materialist geopolitics focused, in addition to the material constraints given by nature, on the technological changes brought about by the industrial revolution, in particular the relationship of power and security with the geographical features of world politics.\footnote{See Daniel Deudney, ‘Geopolitics as theory: historic security materialism’, \textit{European Journal of International Relations}, vol. 6, issue 1, 2000, pp. 77-107.} The concept of geopolitics was coined by the Swedish political scientist Kjellen, who referred to great powers as ‘sensual rational organisms’, but was further theorised by Halford Mackinder, Alfred Mahan, Nicholas Spykman, Friedrich Ratzel and others.\footnote{See Geoffrey Parker, \textit{Western geopolitical thought in the twentieth century}, (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.55.}

Mackinder’s heartland theory among other concepts, has mostly contributed to the idea of geographic determinism, and is relevant to the contemporary debate of the importance of geographic determinism for foreign policy. The theory divided the world’s surface into a world island, determined a heartland to act as the pivot area of world politics. Accordingly, any power who controls Eurasia commands the heartland, and who rules the heartland commands the world island, which counts for more than half of the world’s resources. So, Eurasia, namely the area controlled by the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, was assumed to be the heartland.\footnote{See Halford Mackinder \textit{Democratic ideals and reality: A study in the politics of reconstruction}, (New York: Holt, 1942), p. 150. See also Halford Mackinder, ‘The round world and the winning of the peace’, \textit{Foreign Affairs}, vol. 21, 1943, p. 598. For a more detailed account of the Eurasian heartland thesis, see Saul Bernard Cohen, \textit{Geopolitics of the world system}, (Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p.65.} Mackinder referred to Eurasia as the pivot of history, control of which would enable an ultimate control of the world island.

Overall emergence of global geopolitics as a theory turned out to coincide with imperialism and great power rivalries. The theory originally tried to promote an imperialist agenda, supporting the superiority of the European civilisation and its economic, social and political
systems as a justification for the advancement of imperialism. Development of a powerful and efficient empire was considered as a necessary condition of being a world power.\textsuperscript{18} Geopolitics has allegedly not been a neutral discipline, but one influenced by national biases.\textsuperscript{19} It was discredited in the post World War II period, due to its association with the Nazi Germany and allegations of war causality as a foreign policy ideology.\textsuperscript{20} The concept had become a popular ideological tool for the Nazi regime based upon German geographers Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer’s arguments that the state is a living organism and therefore cannot be contained within its limits.\textsuperscript{21} Accordingly, in a competitive struggle for existence every great state needed space to advance its civilisation, a need described as \textit{lebensraum}.

In the post-war period, international relations theory, mainly through the contributions of structural realism, distanced itself from geopolitics. The term was not reintroduced until Henry Kissinger revived it in 1970s as a synonym for balance of power politics in the geographic map. During the Cold War, it was widely used by both Soviet and US leaders synonymously with international strategic rivalry and balance of power politics. In the last two decades, geopolitics has been widely referred to great power rivalry and especially a new \textit{Great Game} in Eurasia.\textsuperscript{22} Overall, geopolitics in the last two decades has been a popular concept, widely used in policy analyses and academic papers. As O’Tuathail notes, the concept has been popularly used by academics and foreign policy experts, its popularity owing to ‘a comprehensive vision of the world political map’ and a promise of ‘an unusual insight into the future direction of international affairs’.\textsuperscript{23}

Geopolitics has arguably been a part of any realist thinking and has often been coined as ‘realist geopolitics’.\textsuperscript{24} However, structural realism dismissed geographic determinism, and the concept was only recently integrated into international relations theory by the writings of Jervis, Walt, Mearsheimer, Buzan and Waever. It has, in various theoretic discussions, been argued that geographic features can influence the perceptions of decision-makers and mitigate or exacerbate the effects of anarchy. Geographic features have largely been treated as an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} See Klaus Dodds, \textit{Geopolitics: a very short introduction}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.31.
\item \textsuperscript{22} For the 19th century ‘Great Game’, see Peter Hopkirk, \textit{The Great Game: The Struggle for Power in Central Asia}, (New York: Kodansha International, 1990).
\item \textsuperscript{24} See Jonathan Haslam, \textit{No virtue like necessity: Realist thought in international relations since Machiavelli}, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 4.
\end{itemize}
The linkage between geography and power was further revived by the end of the Cold War. This was necessitated by the need to integrate structural realism with theories of foreign policy, and by the deconstruction of the overemphasis of the structural level over the unit one. As Jakub Grygiel puts it ‘if the disappearance of geography was indicative of the rift between theory and policy, the revival of geography is a sign of the desire to bridge that gap’. Meanwhile, scholars as Walt and Jervis have argued for the opposite of what geopolitical thinkers had predicted in the early twentieth century and kept the role of geography to a minimum. In particular, despite treating geographic adjacency as a variable, Walt’s balance of threat theory rejects Mackinder’s heartland thesis. According to this suggestion, Walt has argued ‘the outcome of the II World War should have established the Soviet rather than US hegemony’. Occupation of heartland according to the balance of threat theory had greatly increased the number of enemies.

The primary challenge of geopolitics as a concept in the post-war period has been its ambiguity. As O’Tuathail notes, the term is vague and ‘has had shifting and unstable meanings from the day of its emergence’. In an attempt to modify the concept, non-material post-modern critical geopolitics has emerged to suggest that geographic determinism has changed both with the modification of the world’s political map and with technological advancements. The emerging discipline of critical geopolitics today argues that the perception of ‘a world ordered geographically into a more or less fixed hierarchy of states, cores, and peripheries, spheres of influence, flashpoints, buffer zones, and strategic relations’ has changed due to changes in the world political map. Claiming that classical geopolitics is more an ideology rather than a theoretic platform, critical geopolitics has associated geographic space with leaders’ perceptions and intellectuals’ discourse and rejected the causal relations between geographic space and international politics.

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1.1.1. Geopolitics in Russia’s approach to the South Caucasus

As mentioned earlier, the concept of geopolitics with reference to Mackinder’s heartland theory was an important ideological consideration within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Russia’s geographic location has had an ultimate impact on its foreign policy in the last 200 years. Due to its continental isolation, the Russian Empire sought warm-water ports to be used throughout the year.\(^{30}\)

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, during Russia’s short-lived cosmopolitanism, the country’s foreign policy elite initially did not seem to embrace classical geopolitical thinking. At the time of the dominance of Liberal Westernism in Russian foreign policy, it was even argued that geographic determinism was not crucial and Russia should seek orientation towards Europe and the US no matter how far it could be. Concentrating on economic and political modernisation, with an objective of becoming a member of the European or Western international society, geopolitics and security-military power was less a concern then. With a return to Eurasianism in late 1992, geopolitics once again became a major ideological tool and policy basis in Russia.\(^{31}\) It provided a theoretic foundation for explaining international politics during the mid 1990s, in particular when the West began penetrating the CIS and refused to recognise Russia’s great power status.\(^{32}\) Analysts and policymakers both in the West and Russia continuously referred to a new ‘Great Game’ when speaking about the conflicts and alignment efforts of the states in the CIS.\(^{33}\) It was argued that Russia’s geopolitical interests should be aimed at impeding the resolution of the conflicts in the South Caucasus, and overall restoring the Russian Empire over the heartland. The South Caucasus was depicted by leading academics and policy makers as the epicentre of this geopolitical rivalry.\(^{34}\)


\(^{31}\) In fact Eurasianism was identified with geopolitics, and both were used in Russia to describe a strong state and ideological revival. See Elgiz Pozdnyakov, ‘Russia is a great power’, *International Affairs* (Moscow), vol. 39, no 1, 1993, pp. 3-13.

\(^{32}\) A prominent ideologue of Eurasianism was Sergei Stankevich, who argued for a modified Eurasianism, entailing a balance of Western and Eastern relations. His point was that Russia’s geographic separation from Europe would mean that Russia has to turn to the East, but since it was also Europeanised, extreme Eurasianism would not be useful either. He argued more in favour of realpolitik, rather than ideological foreign policy. See Sergei Stankevich, ‘Derzhava v poiskax sebya’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28th March, 1992.


\(^{34}\) See Zbigniew Brzezinski, ‘The premature partnership’, *Foreign Affairs* vol. 73, issue 2, March/April 1994, pp. 72-73.
Geopolitics in Russian political thinking was to a large extent based on Mackinder’s theoretic legacy. The heartland theory was adopted by Russian foreign policy thinkers, who believed that Russia had a special geopolitical mission. Influential thinkers as Dugin suggested that Russia should do its best to maintain its control over the heartland because this would enable it to possess an efficient means to command world politics, by maintaining the geopolitical balance of power in the world. They believed that Russia occupies the main part of the heartland and should do its best to maintain that position by all available means. The direct implications of this perception for the South Caucasus and the broader CIS were maintaining control by all means, including manipulation of the conflicts.

Certain changes in Russia’s capacity and capabilities within the last few years have made the ideological foundation of its foreign policy more sophisticated and the heartland theory is seemingly no longer the same central theme in Russia as it was. Certain interests dominant in the Yeltsin period are still valid today, but others are no longer an issue. For example Russia no longer views Turkey and Iran as geopolitical rivals, but it is still more interested in enhancing its bilateral relations with the CIS states and strengthening the relative autonomy of the CIS for its great power status. In this context, a systemic approach is perhaps more useful in explaining Russia’s complicated policies towards the region rather than geopolitics per se.

1.2. Realist account of Russia’s policies

1.2.1. Classical realism

Classical realism has found accommodation within the works of St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Thycidides, Hobbes, Rousseau, Carr, Niebuhr, Spinoza, and many others, but it has been largely Morgenthau who laid down an analytical framework of the concept. Realism is primarily based upon the concepts of power, national interest and competitive nature of politics among nations. The raison d’être of the state in international politics is to pursue egoistically its national interest, mostly by accumulating power. Power under realism explains everything and everything in state behaviour is correlated with it. As Morgenthau puts it with reference to the foreign policies of states, ‘all nations want to either keep power, to increase power or to demonstrate power’. Power is treated by realism both as an end and means to all other ends in international politics and a fundamental feature of international politics.

36 For a critic of the overemphasis on geopolitics, see Paul Goble, ‘In Moscow, Geopolitics is the Scientific Communism of Today’, RFE/RL, 11 Aug, 2005.
of a nation could be most effectively limited by the power of another nation. Power is the essential feature of international politics, and the nature of international politics is essentially conflictual. Power is relative, therefore states are concerned about relative distribution of power. As John Vasquez notes ‘realist logic of power is not simply an assumption that strategic thinking occurs in states’ interactions, but that states are engaged in a constant life and death struggle to get and keep power’. In another reformulation, one could put it, ‘in a world where power counts, no nation pursuing a rational policy have a choice between renouncing and wanting power’.

Under such a pessimistic world outlook, the only means of avoiding conflict is balance of power politics. Realism asserts that international security is supported by balance of power, while a state’s security depends on its components of power as well as the quality of its government and societal legitimisation. Balance of power policies include measures undertaken by governments whose interests and security are threatened to enhance their power by whatever means are available. The commonly used form of balance of power is alliancing, but it can also manifest itself in military build up, intervention in other countries or even war. It is basically a strategy of using power to curtail the power of either a genuine or potential adversary.

Realism makes a strict distinction between domestic and international politics in the struggle for power, treating the former as hierarchy. Domestic politics plays a role in Morgenthau’s analysis, but the theory overemphasises the importance of power in international politics as an explanatory variable. For realists the state is the main actor in international politics, and sovereignty is its main feature. Domestically, the state has superior authority and the problem of order and security is solved through the state’s monopoly over legitimate physical violence. The initial goal of the state is to organise power domestically and the second goal to accumulate power internationally.

39 See Morgenthau, op. cit., p. 33.
44 Realism has also been applied to non-state actors. On state-centrism of classical realism, certain scholars have argued that it is not necessarily the state per se that realism focuses on, but rather the self-interest of actors. Accordingly, classical realism does not argue that states are the only significant actors in international politics. See Steven Forde, ‘International realism and the science of politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli and Neorealism’, International Studies Quarterly, volume 39, issue 2, June 1995, pp. 144-145.
Under realism, the concept of national interest is rational and objectively defined in terms of retaining and enhancing power within the international system. National interest is clear, given and to an extent permanent, rather than subject to interpretations or to be constructed in a discourse. This is well captured in the famous phrase of Lord Palmerston, that ‘England has neither permanent friends, nor permanent enemies, she has permanent interests’. Realist approach to national interest is explained by Ernst Haas even more elaborately:

‘Usually it is contended that the national interest includes all those features of state aspirations which bear a relation to the permanent and enduring needs of the state….The national interest concept acquires the sanctity of a fixed historic law for each state, immutable over long periods and always properly understood by intelligent and imaginative statesmen, misunderstood and bungled by those who did not really appreciate the position and interests of their country in world affairs’.47

Thus, decision-making and policy-making are rational; statesmen make their decisions on a consideration of their country’s interests and of the structure of international politics. A peculiar feature of international politics is that no authority exists above the states, states and statesmen ‘act in terms of interest defined as power’ and the struggle for influence and power is the central core of international politics. Pursuing a rational foreign policy, the state will attempt to minimise the risks and maximise the benefits in order to increase its power. Cooperation between states is possible, but most states as rational actors will seek to maximise their benefits that serve their national interests.

Realism has a pessimistic philosophical insight; it treats human nature as the causal variable of all conflict in international politics. It sees power-politics as a law of human behaviour, and the behaviour of the state is understood to be merely a reflection of the characteristics of the people who comprise. As Morgenthau notes, ‘politics like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature’.

45 Forde equally argues that for classical realism, especially Machiavelli and Thucydides rationality is not a necessary condition, see Forde, op. cit., p. 144.
48 Morgenthau, op. cit., p. 5
49 Ibid, p. 4.
50 See Kenneth Waltz, Man, the state and war, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 14, 162.
Taking into consideration that realism emerged as a reaction to the misguidance of idealism that allegedly caused the I World War, it was set to not only describe how leaders are likely to behave, but also offer prescriptions for action with policy implications. Classical realists criticised the misguidance of idealists by their trust in the goodness of human nature, and warned such a mistake could lead to catastrophic results.\(^{51}\)

Explaining the contradiction that the same human nature acting for peace can act for war, classical realists as Niebuhr and Morgenthau often made a distinction between the morality of the individual and that of the collective.\(^{52}\) Niebuhr in particular argued that ‘human nature is so complex that it justifies almost every assumption and prejudice with which either a scientific investigation or an ordinary human contact is initiated’.\(^{53}\) Therefore, classical realists take collectivity as the primary unit of social life, and in international relations the only collective actor is considered the state. In this context, according to Waltz, Morgenthau hints to the structural cause of conflict in international politics as a secondary variable, recognising that ‘given competition for scarce goods with no-one to serve as arbiter, a struggle for power will ensue among the competitors and this can be explained without reference to the evil born in men’.\(^{54}\)

Overall realism is an old school of thought based upon the concept of power. It can offer a plausible account of state behaviour only under certain conditions when for example state interest is given, clear and permanent, decision-making is coherent and state behaviour is strategically consistent.\(^{55}\) Such a picture of national interest would be difficult to find in states whose state-building and interest formation are still in process. As Haas claims, ‘National interest to one may well be national lack of interest to another. In fact, it may be concluded that the conception of national interest which prevails at any one time is no more than an amalgam than varying policy motivations which tend to pass for a ‘national’ interest as long as the groups holding these opinions continue to rule’.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{54}\) Waltz, p. 34.

\(^{55}\) The permanence or pre-determined nature of national interest is even difficult to observe in those states whose statehood is advanced. For an account of the formation of national interests in international relations, see M. Kimura, D.W. Welch, ‘Specifying interests: Japan’s claim to the Northern Territories and its implications for international relations theory’, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42, no 2, 1998, pp. 213-244. For a constructivist approach to national interest, see Jutta Weldes, *Constructing national interests*, (Minneopolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997).

Realism, in particular structural realism does not take into consideration other important variables of state behaviour in the international system or the process through which state interests are shaped.\(^{57}\) It has been critiqued to have become a partial ethno-centrist ideology rather than an impartial theory to explain, and has been accused of adapting the reality into the theory rather than vice-versa. For this reason, a large number of scholars accept realist account of state behaviour in international affairs as an incomplete analysis of state behaviour.

1.2.2. **Structural realism**

Structural realism distanced itself from human nature as a causal variable and concentrated on the international system instead. Like Rousseau and Durkheim, Waltz argued that human nature as a causal factor of state behaviour in international politics is flawed, shifting attention towards institutions. Accordingly, Waltz claimed that ‘the assumption of a fixed human nature…… itself helps shift attitude away from human nature because human nature,… cannot be changed, whereas socio-political institutions can be’.\(^{58}\) Waltz developed his theory of international politics, in which he laid his main emphasis on the international system, treating it as an autonomous causal factor. Whereas anarchy in classical realism is only a permissive condition, by which other causal factors trigger a conflict in international politics, in structural realism anarchy plays a central role and nearly everything is explained by it. Anarchy itself explains why states balance, compete for power and security and end up in conflict. Another distinction from classical realism, was that structural realism divorced itself from foreign policy, arguing that it is not an autonomous realm.

Structural realism is a theoretic framework to understanding international relations, and claims to be more scientifically plausible than realism. It draws on the premises of classical realism, but in a more systematic way, adding levels of analysis and testable hypotheses to the paradigm. Borrowing from positivism, structural realism entails not only a claim about the nature of international relations, but a claim to know objectively the reality of international relations. Its core assumptions include rationality of actors, scarcity of social and material resources and the causal value of the distribution of material capabilities. Structural variables as anarchy and the relative distribution of power are the primary determinants of foreign policy and international outcomes.\(^{59}\) States with the greatest material capabilities are the ones

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\(^{57}\) Hans Morgenthau in his *Politics among Nations* takes into consideration culture, but he does not utilise it as an explanatory variable. See Julie Reeves, *Culture and international relations: narratives, natives and tourists*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 98-99.

\(^{58}\) Waltz, *Man, the state and war*, p. 41.

\(^{59}\) See Jeffrey Taliaferro quoted in Andrew Moravcsik, Jeffrey Legro, ‘Correspondence: Brother, Can You Spare a Paradigm?’, *International Security*, vol. 25, issue 1, 2000, p. 18.
to survive in the international system. Such a system causes competition on a global scale by the most powerful states.

Structural realism argues that international politics is a system with structural properties, the ordering principles of which are anarchy and distribution of power. The international system as an entity and whole is treated unequally and more important than its individuals, ‘the system itself is its own entity’. As Jervis notes, ‘the whole might be symmetric in spite of its parts being asymmetric, the whole might be unstable in spite of its parts being stable in itself’. Interstate relations are shaped on the one hand by the relations between the units and on the other hand by the system itself. Anarchy produces insecurity and leaves states with self-help measures. Whereas the organisational structure of domestic politics is hierarchic, the structure of international politics is anarchic. Under anarchy states have to look after themselves to ensure their survival. In an anarchic system, ‘each unit’s incentive is to put itself in a position to be able to take care of itself, since no one else can be counted on to do so’. States that fail to look after themselves risk at best loss of power, at worst loss of sovereignty and existence. Under anarchy the raison d’être of the state is survival and states that are powerful stand better chances of surviving. Survival is the fundamental interest of all states, and all other interests are linked to it. Relative security is the major motivation of state behaviour. The anarchical international system imposes competition between states for power and security, which makes agreement on universal rules hard to achieve. As Gilpin puts it, ‘world politics is still characterized by the struggle of political entities for power, prestige, and wealth in a condition of global anarchy’.

However, anarchy in the international system does not equal chaos and disorder in the national system. It is not used with reference to domestic disorder and chaos, but is rather an ordering principle, implying that there is no government of governments to enforce rules and punish perpetrators. In the Hobbesian condition of nature, anarchy means absence of all government, thus resulting in chaos, in internal and external threats to human society. At the international system level, anarchy does not imply absence of all government and is not therefore as negative as at the domestic level. Anarchy of the international system means

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60 Franz Kohout, ‘Cyclical, Hegemonic and Pluralistic Theories of International Relations: Some Comparative Reflections on War Causation’, *International Political Science Review*, vol. 24, no 1, p. 52.
63 Ibid. p. 122
absence of central authority over the sovereign units of the international system. Therefore, it would be incorrect to describe anarchy as chaos, and order as a unitary world federation. Anarchy and the sovereignty of units are ‘two sides of a single coin’, complementing each other.\textsuperscript{66} Government at the international system resides in the units of the system. The claim of the units for sovereignty makes them ultimate sources of authority, which automatically denies recognition of any higher political authority. Therefore, system of sovereign states equals anarchy at the international level. The international system is in fact a decentralised form of political authority since authority lies primarily within states and indirectly within institutions.

\textbf{a) Statism}

Structural realism sees the state as the fundamental actor of international politics. There can be no security in the absence of the state. Security of citizens is identified with the state and therefore relations between states are strategic. State is the subject of security and anarchy the eternal condition of international life. It recognises the functional similarity of all states and their rational character, arguing that in a self-help system all states will recognise and pursue the imperatives of survival and security.\textsuperscript{67} States act in a coherent, determined fashion in the pursuit of their national interests, dominated by power and military security concerns. States are treated as unitary actors with similar external preferences and decision-making mechanisms, and foreign policy is a response to the international systemic changes.\textsuperscript{68} All foreign policy outcomes derive from systemic constraint and changes in available power capabilities, not from domestic change or considerations. Causal variables of state behaviour in international politics are thus all at the systemic level.

The functional differences between states have no impact upon their foreign policies, since all foreign policy action is about survival. Waltz asserts that ‘differences between states are on capabilities, not functions’.\textsuperscript{69} In other words, ‘every state arrives at policies and decides on actions according to its own internal processes, but its decisions are shaped by the very presence of other states as well as by interactions with them’.\textsuperscript{70} States perform or try to perform tasks most of which are common to all of them. Under such an agenda, the predicaments of the international political system provide a sufficient basis for interpreting

\textsuperscript{69} Waltz, \textit{A theory of international politics}, p. 96
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 65.
state behaviour in the international system. As Waltz argues, ‘state behaviour varies more with differences of power than with difference in ideology, in internal structure of property relations or in governmental form’.\(^{71}\) He therefore does not consider other variables of state behaviour, and takes state interests as given, ignoring the process by which they are formed. However, Waltz confesses, that ‘beyond the survival motive, the aims of states may be endlessly varied’.\(^{72}\)

**b) Self-help**

In an anarchic international system, states act according to the logic of self-help seeking their own interests. As Steven Walt puts it, ‘the existence of several states in an anarchy renders the security of each one problematic and encourages them to compete with each other for power and security’.\(^{73}\) Waltz argues that the crucial distinction between domestic and international politics lies in their structures. In domestic politics, people do not have to defend themselves; in the international system, there is no such high authority to prevent and contain the use of force. States cannot rely on others to provide their own security as citizens in the domestic system do. Security can only be reached by self-help. Therefore, in an anarchic structure, self-help is the necessary principle of action.\(^{74}\) However, in the course of providing one’s own security, the state in question will automatically be fuelling the insecurity of others and this will lead to a security dilemma.

**Security dilemma**

Security dilemma is one of the well-researched concepts in international relations theory. It is an issue to be found in the writing of almost every structural realist international relations scholar and there is unanimity on its importance. First developed by Butterfield and Herz, it has been contributed to by Jervis, Glaser, Posen, Waltz, Kaufman, Roe, etc. In general terms, a security dilemma is used to describe a situation in which the measures taken by a state to enhance its security are counterproductive, hence produce insecurity and conflict. The definition made by Booth and Wheeler suggest that

> A security dilemma exists when the military preparations of one state create an unresolvable uncertainty in the mind of another as to whether those preparations are for defensive purposes only (to enhance its security in an uncertain world) or whether they are for offensive purposes (to change the status-quo to its advantage).\(^{75}\)

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72 Waltz, A theory of international politics, p. 91.
74 See Waltz, A theory of international politics, p. 111.
The essence of security dilemma is that conflict occurs between parties who are desperate to avoid it, but coincidentally cause it by their own activities.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, war can occur without the involvement of a revisionist state seeking to change the status-quo.\textsuperscript{77} The primary cause of a security dilemma is uncertainty that causes fear and suspicion in states with regard to each other. This uncertainty is coined by Jervis as the indistinguishability between offence and defence, i.e. status-quo state (security seeker) or revisionist state (power seeker).\textsuperscript{78} The resources and measures that seem sufficient for one state’s defence will seem offensive to its neighbours. Such an uncertainty causes action-reaction dynamics of armament and may end up in conflict.

A security dilemma emerges between two or more states because of lack of information about the intentions of each of them, but in reality all of them are benign. Benign intentions are a vital component of a security dilemma. This is explained by Herz as

\begin{quote}
[I]t is one of the tragic implications of the security dilemma that mutual fear of what initially may never have existed may subsequently bring about exactly that which is feared most.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

The causality of the security dilemma is debated at three levels: individual, state and international system level. Those arguing (Niebuhr, Morgenthau, Butterfield) that the security dilemma is caused by Hobbesian fear, i.e. human nature, suggested that politics among nations was defined by a flawed human nature characterised by the will to power.\textsuperscript{80} Later on, structural realists argued that security dilemma was ultimately caused by the anarchical structure of the international system. Absence of a world government to legislate and execute laws that would provide for security for all states, makes security the first concern of states. The self-help behaviour promoted by inter-state anarchy implies that states must look after their own security. It can be otherwise only if states did not care about their survival. Insecurity is thereby caused not by greedy actors, but by the inescapable self-help nature of the system.\textsuperscript{81} The idea of security dilemma suggests, a state will be insecure if it does not act and still insecure if it does act. Thus, there is always a glimpse of mutual mistrust in interstate relations which makes cooperation difficult to achieve. This situation is best explained by Rousseau’s stag hunt and Hobbes’s Leviathan, each indicating that a social contract between states is not possible.

\textsuperscript{81} See Waltz, \textit{A theory of international politics}, p.100.
Herz, who is considered to have articulated the term, concluded ‘it was a structural notion in which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs, tend regardless of intention to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and the measures of others potentially threatening’. This view indicated that in a self-help environment states are faced with an irresolvable uncertainty about the military preparations made by others and this will result in an action-reaction cycle.

Security dilemma is particularly acute if offence has advantage over defence. If offensive operations are more effective than defensive, states may choose the offensive for surviving. A preventive war for security reasons is a good example. Whether the presence of an offensive/expansionist state still qualifies as a security dilemma is a matter of contention. Randal Schweller, critiquing the attachment of neo-realism to security versus power, claimed that if all states seek survival only, then there is no possibility for conflict to emerge. Therefore, the ultimate goal of not all states is security maximisation, but can also be expansionism:

If states are arming for something other than security, that is if aggressors do in fact exist then it is no longer a security dilemma, but rather an example of a state or coalition mobilizing for the purpose of expansion and the targets of that aggression responding by acquiring arms and forming alliances to defend themselves.

The idea formulated above is that a security dilemma cannot exist in a situation where there is a revisionist state. Security dilemma is therefore a tragedy because it causes a deterioration in relations between status-quo states which both have benign intentions; thus it is made a tragedy by the benign intentions. As Herz mentions it, not all conflicts are caused by a security dilemma, conflicts can also be caused by the expansionist appetite of states.

This distinction between realism and structural realism is clearly depicted by Jervis in his formulation that too much emphasis on the security dilemma can lead to the false conclusion that ‘security rather than expansion is the prime goal of most states’. In contrast to Schweller, Jervis differentiates two models of security dilemma-spiral and deterrence models based upon the intentions of the adversaries. Spiral model equals the classical security dilemma and the action-reaction mechanism, whereas in the deterrence model the adversary’s intentions are not benign, but malign. Jervis claims that in his deterrence model the state has expansionist intentions for security reasons. Like Jervis, Glaser and Roe argue that not all security seekers are indeed status-quo actors and state security can sometimes require hostile

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85 See Jervis, *Perception and misperception in international politics*, p. 75.
actions for security reasons.\textsuperscript{86} Certain states may become revisionist not for gaining territory, but rather for their own security or that of its ethnic kin; Turkey’s involvement in Cyprus is an example.\textsuperscript{87} However, others, especially great or medium powers expand exactly for strategic and economic purposes of their national interests. The inclusion of revisionist states in the security dilemma basket generates the trouble of defining whether a state pursues offensive policies for security or expansionist reasons.

Whether security dilemma can be abolished, ameliorated or escaped is a matter of debate between scholars of international relations. One would find it difficult today to argue that the classical security dilemma is universal and unchangeable, applicable for all states, including the post-modern states in Europe. Security dilemma can be mitigated or escaped if the factors causing it are reduced. This firstly concerns uncertainty in the relations between states which is most clear in the distinguishability of offence from defence. According to Jervis, \textsuperscript{88}

\begin{quote}
\[\text{the differentiation between offensive and defensive systems permits a way out of the security dilemma … There is no reason for a status quo power to be tempted to procure offensive forces, and aggressors give notice of their intentions by the posture they adopt.}\]
\end{quote}

Jervis includes geographic features in his analysis of international relations and argues that it can be an important variable in mitigating or exacerbating the security dilemma. The security dilemma of a geographically isolated state will be less severe than that of geographically vulnerable ones. It can reduce the insecurity of actors, and states then would spend fewer efforts to build up for security and threaten others. According to Jervis, geography could soften the security dilemma by influencing the offense-defence dilemma. When there are natural barriers, the defence has the advantage, but when such factors are absent the security dilemma might become more acute. Accordingly, ‘if all states were self-sufficient islands, anarchy would be much less a problem. A small investment in shore defences and a small army would be sufficient to repel invasion’.\textsuperscript{89}

Trust-building for states is achievable by cooperation only because cooperation can change the circumstances in which the states act. This point is taken up by Wendt who claims that states can construct the circumstances in which they exist; thus these circumstances can be favourable for a security community or a security dilemma. According to Wendt, the identity of states and construction of interests as well as perceptions of statesmen can have an impact.

\begin{quote}
\[\text{Classifying revisionist states, in a similar argument Randall Schweller in another paper argues that ‘revisionist states need not be predatory powers; they may oppose the status quo for defensive reasons, see Randall L. Schweller, Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 32, 35, 37.}\]
\[\text{Ibid p.195.}\]
\end{quote}
on inter-state relations. Amelioration of benign intentions, deconstruction of hatreds and the overall identity of the state has a definitive impact on the security dilemma. Why an arms increase in the US does not cause a security dilemma in Canada, or that between Britain and Ireland, is because defence in these countries is clearly distinguishable from offence and mutual perceptions are positive. Amelioration of security dilemma is firstly subject to the perceptions of states of each other.

c) Mature anarchy
Mature anarchy is a highly ordered and stable system in which states enjoy a great deal of security deriving both from their own inner strength and maturity, and from the strength of institutionalised norms regulating relations among them. The term mature anarchy coined by Barry Buzan, implies that states’ level of understanding allows to resolve their differences peacefully, but they have also managed to quench the security dilemma, i.e. all fears regarding their military and political relations and force is not considered an option for settling disputes. States in a mature anarchy have come to recognise the intense dangers of continuing to compete and the power-security dilemma is minimal or null. States in such an arrangement still have their national interests and national security concerns, but they are tied to the international or regional level. Buzan argues that such an evolutionary process for international society is likely to be slow and uneven in its achievements. In the EU for example, the states no longer consider using violence or coercion to resolve their differences and thus form a security community. Use of force is very unlikely, if not unimaginable. The individual nation-state has not disappeared, but shared interests and identities allow an arena of post-sovereign politics to emerge. Mature anarchy is a consequence of the recognition by states of their security interdependence and it is an argument against the security dilemma.

d) Balancing and alliances
It was mentioned above that under conditions of anarchy, states are left with self-help, which can occur in two forms: military build up to provide relative security with only benign intentions. A second strategy is alignment and alliance formation under which self-help is partially suspended as states recognise the need to pool their capabilities together to deter a threatening state or a group of states. Competition between them is only suspended, not eradicated.

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91 Ibid p. 177.
92 Buzan, Peoples, States and Fear. p. 121-123.
93 Randall Schweller argues in a different context that the most important determinant of alignment decisions is the compatibility of political goals and not imbalances of power or threat, see Randall L. Schweller, Deadly
Alliance is a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation. Structural realists distinguish two forms of alignment strategies: balancing and bandwagoning. Balancing of power occurs when states join in alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior capabilities could pose a threat. Waltz argues that alliances are intended to balance power, so that no single state in the international system is in a position to dominate the others, and third states will generally align with the weaker state against the stronger one. If a state significantly increases its relative power, its neighbours have no choice but to balance against it, because the more powerful it is, the greater its ability to harm the others. For both Waltz and Morgenthau, the most powerful state in the international system is always a potential threat to other states no matter whether it is recognised a threat explicitly. For example, in the aftermath of the Soviet demise, Waltz argued that other states will balance the US in the post-cold war era for the simple reason it is too powerful. Another reason for balancing strategy is states join in forces to form alliances in order to share the burden of fighting or deterring an aggressor.

Balancing and external assistance are particularly relevant to small states. In order to ensure their survival, the weaker states will continuously join in forces and form coalitions in order to block potential aggressive ambitions of the strong. Structural realism suggests that small states traditionally band together or turn to the great powers in order to protect themselves against the greatest threat to their survival. Accordingly, small states have to appeal to outside help to resolve their security problems. As Morgenthau noted ‘the small nation must look for the protection of its rights to the assistance of powerful friends’. In contrast, Stephen Walt in his balance of threat theory argues otherwise. Walt argues that states seek a balance of threat instead of balance of power, i.e. states balance against threats rather than crude power alone. States, when making security judgements about the behaviour of other states, consider not only questions of physical and material might, but also the threatening behaviour. So, states’ alliance behaviour is determined by the threat they perceive from other states and they will align with the weaker state against the stronger one only if it is perceived by the third party as a threat. To elaborate the theory, Walt identifies four variables

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97 Morgenthau, Politics among nations, p.295.
by which states perceive the potential threat posed by another state: aggregate power, offensive capabilities, aggressive intentions and geographic proximity.

In balance of power theory states balance against those states whose power is rising whereas balance of threat theory claims that power alone cannot explain or predict the behaviour of states. Walt suggests that power does not have the same effect everywhere, states do not balance in a random order and balance only when they feel insecure. States will not balance against those states whose power has no offensive character, so they would not act on the basis of an international hierarchy of relative power, but seem to act according to particular criteria. Threats are mainly perceived by whether the perceived intentions of other states are aggressive or not. This approach according to Grygiel is a return to the initial realism that ‘states do not act within an abstract anarchical system, but within the world’. The theory also gives way to historic experience that could play a role in the process of forming one state’s perceptions of the intentions of another. This assumption allows the conclusion that threats may be different if perceptions of threat are produced by something other than differences in the distribution of material capability. According to Barnett for example, among Arab states, it is their construction of identity, and not shift in material capabilities that shapes alliance behaviour.

Balance of threat theory suggests that distance affects the perception of threat: the closer two states are, the more likely they will perceive each other as a threat; ‘…because the ability to project power declines with distance, states that are nearby pose a greater threat than states that are far away’. They balance against their proximate threats, and neighbouring states are more likely to balance than bandwagon. According to Walt, ‘the US is geographically isolated, but politically popular, whereas the Soviet Union was politically isolated as a consequence of its geographic proximity to states’. The theory is an important refinement of structural realism, but also an indicator of the emergence of a constructivist debate, because it claims anarchy is not equally dangerous in all parts of the world.

A second alignment strategy is bandwagoning. Bandwagoning is the opposite of balancing and means ‘joining up with the aggressive power to appease it or gain favourable treatment

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100 Walt, The origins of alliances, p. 23.
The strategy of bandwagoning occurs when states have no better chances of building alliances and hope to profit from bandwagoning. According to Schweller, balancing and bandwagoning are not limited to the survival and security of the state. When security concerns are less intense, bandwagoning can be for material profits only.

In realist scheme, bandwagoning is not a favourite option, and only states with limited capacities prefer it. It is usually applied when there is no balancing option and even then it is not always a good strategy. On this point, the offensive realist Mearsheimer argues that bandwagoning is nearly always a bad idea because it almost equals capitulation to the stronger state. Only very weak states without the prospect of resisting the aggressor choose this strategy. He instead suggests a more preferable buck-passing strategy, which would allow other states to balance the power of strong states. A buck-passing strategy implies passing the burden of deterring an aggressor to another state. It can be however a dangerous strategy if failed; the buck-catching state may fail to deter the aggressor and leave the buck-passing state to the rival power alone with fewer available alliance options.

1.2.3. Offensive realism

Offensive realism developed largely by Mearsheimer’s contributions, asserts that the ultimate goal of all states is to achieve a hegemonic position in the international system and that the structure of the international system compels states to maximise their relative power. States opt for the security strategies that best guarantee their long-term survival; they constantly seek more power, and will change the existing distribution of power to achieve a hegemonic position in the international system, even though such action might threaten their own security.

A hegemon is defined by Mearsheimer as ‘a state that is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system’. Mearsheimer suggests that since global hegemony is difficult to achieve states focus more on achieving regional hegemony. Great powers aim to build the largest military in the region and intervene in their near abroads whenever necessary.
particular, states strive to have superior armed forces since this is seen as the most important means of conquering and controlling land.

The anarchic international system encourages expansion, and states would seek expansion whenever the right conditions are there and where aggression is the only way to make their state secure.\textsuperscript{109} Thereby every state is a security and power maximiser, and in an anarchic world, security is the major driver of state behaviour. Thus, states seek hegemony for security and ‘given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today or tomorrow, great powers recognise that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another power. Only, a misguided state would pass the opportunity to become a hegemon in the international system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive’.\textsuperscript{110} In anarchy, no state can ever be sure of each other’s intentions, and no state can be sure that other states will not use their military capabilities to attack it. Benign intentions can quickly change into malign intentions and even defensive weapons can be used for offensive purposes. Therefore, there are in reality no status-quo states, all states search for opportunities to gain power at the expense of others. In other words, even status-quo powers might still exhibit high levels of competitive behaviour and pursue expansionist policies. International institutions merely reflect the power of states and can hardly restrain states in most cases.\textsuperscript{111}

Mearsheimer’s approach is different from that of Waltz and other defensive realists by his overemphasis on the competition for power and security. He sees power as flowing from anarchy and the need for security.\textsuperscript{112} Therefore, offensive realism does not need to invoke domestic variables to explain expansionist behaviour.\textsuperscript{113} Arguing that the anarchical structure forces states to behave aggressively, Mearsheimer makes the nature of international politics malign, whereas Waltz has a benign picture of international politics. In contrast, defensive realists argue that states have security as their principal interest and seek the necessary amount of power for their survival. States are defensive status-quo actors and will not risk their own security. The ultimate concern of states is not power, but security. Waltz asserts that outbreak of conflict between states is caused not by an intended aggression, but rather a miscalculation by states with defensive motives, which are involved in a security dilemma.

\textsuperscript{110} Mearsheimer, \textit{The tragedy of great power politics}, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{111} Mearsheimer ‘The false promise of international institutions’, pp. 5-49
Waltz’s realism, often coined as defensive realism was based upon the premise that international anarchy causes states to worry about their security rather than power maximisation and expansion. Defensive realism emphasises the offese-defence balance in the security considerations of states.\textsuperscript{114} Defensive realists argue that a balance exists between offensive and defensive weapons and the two can be distinguished. They see aggressive behaviour self-defeating. As Grieco argues, ‘states are mostly concerned with maintaining their relative position of power and not increasing it. It is not rational for states to seek strategies that would disturb status-quo’.\textsuperscript{115}

1.2.4. Neo-classical realism

Neoclassical realism emerged in the post-cold war period as a response to the criticism on structural realism, and as an effort to revive the theory. The peaceful end of the Cold War had brought about a number of challenges for overall systemic theories, but particularly for structural realism. The premises on which the theory had rested in the last 50 years seemed to change, and scholars both within and outside the paradigm began to question its plausibility for all times.\textsuperscript{116} It was argued that structural realism as a theory that emphasised the distribution of material capabilities, bipolar great power politics, nuclear deterrence and dominance of the existential threat on the structure in the form of the Mutually Assured Destruction System was tailored for a particular time-frame, a so called zeitgeist.\textsuperscript{117} Another critique was that realism as a research programme had degenerated. Moravscik and Largo argued that ‘the category of “realist” theory had been broadened to the point that it signifies little more than a generic commitment to rational state behavior in anarchy, that is, ‘minimal realism’’.\textsuperscript{118} Whereas during the Cold War almost every conflict was linked to the structural


\textsuperscript{117} Scholars as Moravscik and Legro argued that structural realism is only applicable under particular circumstances. See Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravscik, ‘Is anyone still a realist?’, \textit{International Security}, vol. 24, no.2, 1999, p. 49.

or systemic level, the new era has been dominated by intra-state conflicts, non-military threats, deepened regionalisation, non-state actors and non-material based policies as humanitarian intervention. So, understanding foreign policy and the dynamics of the international system became a challenge for international relations scholars. In response, structural realists on the one hand tried to adapt the theory to explain the self-help dynamics within states such as intrastate security dilemma, by focusing on the relative distribution of material capabilities within the state, but on the other hand argued for the enduring relevance of the paradigm for the new period. Meanwhile, realists as Stephen Walt, Gideon Rose, Randall Schweller, William Wohlforth tried to reshuffle the theory by adding the ‘missing’ non-structural variables that were vital for understanding and explaining action in international politics of post Cold War period. In particular much effort was made to incorporate foreign policy analysis into realism. However, these developments have also received a negative response from certain scholars.

As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, realism offers an insufficient theoretic framework of how states perceive threats and distribution of power in the international system. Claiming that actors always perceive the distribution of material capabilities correctly and respond to it accordingly, realism misses the point that these threat perceptions are often defined by the level of one’s own material capabilities. Structural realism does not predict how individual states will react to systemic pressures, and does not explain foreign policy per se. In the post-cold war international system of non-balance of power unipolarity, structural realism has had a weakened explanatory potential, and foreign policy theories have come to offer more in understanding international relations. As Fareed Zakaria notes, ‘a theory of international politics per se cannot explain the motives of nations. By contrast a theory of foreign policy

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120 William Wohlforth for example in his research on the end of the Cold War has argued that perceptions of power played a bigger role in the ending of the Cold War rather than objective shifts in power. He had employed domestic level causal variables to explain Soviet behaviour and treated perceptions as exogenous variables. William Wohlforth, ‘Realism and the End of the Cold War’, *International Security*, vol. 19, 1994-1995, pp. 91-129.


123 Nevertheless, structural realism dismisses the claim of a theory of foreign policy, arguing that the field is not qualified to be a theory of its own at least for the reason that it lacks autonomy. See Kenneth Waltz, ‘International politics is Not Foreign Policy’, *Security Studies* vol. 6, issue 1, Autumn 1996, pp. 54-57.
explains why different states or the same state at different historic moments, have different intentions, goals and preferences towards the outside world’. Moreover, correlation of foreign and domestic policies required the need to consider domestic variables.

The role of perceptions in international relations had previously been theorised by Robert Jervis in his *Perception and Misperception of international politics*. Jervis argued that misperception is a part of the state’s decision-making process, and decision-makers can only hope to minimize the risk of misperception as much as possible. Jervis’ research had shed light not only on the external dynamics, but also the internal setting of the decision-making process, and neoclassical realism further elaborated that approach in a more systematic way.

In a similar fashion, neo-classical realism focuses on the international structure and the relative positions of states within it, and elucidates the state’s perception of the international system. It takes the distribution of power as an independent variable and links it to security dilemma in international behaviour. Foreign policy is treated as the result of states’ response to systemic changes in the distribution of material capabilities.

Neoclassical realism examines the relative position of the actor in the system and its self-perception. It treats the international system anarchic, and emphasises distribution of power and the importance of security. In a bid to return to the origin of realist tradition, but also retain the riches of structural realism, neoclassical realists pay less attention to the systemic features in explaining concrete foreign policy decisions. The approach deals with the perception of relative power and threats in international relations and is built upon Stephen Walt’s analysis of the role of perceptions in alignment. It argues that since ‘…..there is no immediate or perfect transmission belt linking material capabilities to foreign policy behaviour’, there must be a further level to mediate between the two. According to Walt, neoclassical realism ‘places domestic politics as an intervening variable between the distribution of power and foreign policy behaviour’. The approach introduces domestic politics variables into the analysis and argues that any analysis of foreign policy must take into consideration how power is perceived by decision-makers. As Gideon Rose notes, ‘it aims to analyse how systemic pressures are translated through domestic level intervening

variables such as decision-making. Thus, the leaders and how they perceive the international distribution of power acts as an intervening variable.

Neoclassical realism attempts to bring foreign policy dynamics into international relations theory. According to Gideon Rose, foreign policy analysis is associated with the neo-classical realism, which is to explain the process through which the pressures of the international system are translated into specific foreign policy actions. Foreign policy decision-making is treated as a two level process. Distribution of power in the international system is taken as an independent variable and foreign policy decision-making as a dependent variable. While structural realists suggest that all states have similar interests, neo-classical realists argue otherwise. They emphasise that relative power capabilities in the international system and the actions of states and their foreign policies are not directly linked. Moreover, they argue that state actors can misinterpret or misunderstand the international structure, which in turn can produce foreign policy responses not compatible with realist predictions. For example, as Jonathan Monten argues ‘a neoclassical line of realist argumentation contends that the mechanism by which the effects of relative power are translated into state behaviour are not as smooth or determined as structural realists assume, and must be supplemented with unit-level’.

Thus, neo-classical realism asserts that perceptions of decision-makers can be of crucial relevance to states’ reaction to the system. An actor’s behaviour is determined by the subjective interpretation of the outside world. Interpreting the actions of the other states in the system is limited by the subjectivity of the political elites, and this is particularly relevant to the distribution of power. Perceptions of the distribution of power shape the state’s view of the international system and actors form their foreign policies on the basis of these relative material power distributions. In determining the strategic behaviour of a state, its perception of power and threat matter more than the given existence of power or threat. Neoclassical realism suggests withdrawing from polarity back towards classical realism because polarity missed out too much and had failed to achieve any definitional consensus.


130 Ibid, pp. 144-172.


Neoclassical realism has been critiqued for departing from the original realist thought in a way that it can no longer be called realism. It has been argued that its certain predictions have not been deduced from the logic of power, and bearing in mind that the new variables have been borrowed from other paradigms, it is questionable how much realist it is. Vasquez has argued that realism focuses solely on power and ‘when one tries to shift to other variables, then one may be borrowing the logic of other paradigms’ and it is no longer a realist thought then. But on the other hand, it is equally questionable if today’s international relations can be explained by a single paradigm or rather a single variable of a paradigm. As Legro and Moravscik formulate ‘is it realistic to maintain that patterns of important, complex events in world politics are the result of a single factor?’ Arguing that a multi-paradigmatic synthesis is the future of international relations theory, Legro and Moravscik have advocated in favour of theory-synthesis to fill the gaps of international relations theory and foreign policy analysis. Neo-classical realism with a realist foundation, emphasizing relative material power and meanwhile offering a consideration of unit-level variables and a focus on the role of perceptions is clearly an example of such a theory-synthesis.

1.2.5. Realist account of Russia’s policies towards the conflicts in the South Caucasus

This section revolves around three major questions to be explored: whether Russia’s behaviour towards the conflicts is compatible with the deductive assumptions and prediction of realism on international relations? What hypotheses does realism offer in explaining Russia’s policies towards the three conflicts? How rational is it in terms of cost and benefit; what has caused the balancing efforts of the states in the South Caucasus and why have they largely failed, and whether bandwagoning would be an optimal strategy; to what extent is Russia’s behaviour autonomous from the international system and what variables at the neo-classical system and domestic level cause its behaviour.

a) Compatibility with realism

Realism, in particular structural realism treats the state as a black box. It assumes that the state is a coherent rational actor and national interest is given and clear. States join their capabilities and direct them towards the achievement of their national interests. In explaining Russia’s policies towards the conflicts, in particular during the Yeltsin era, this assumption may be challenged, since several bureaucracies pursued divergent agendas and this sometimes produced unpleasant results for Russia’s strategic interests in the region. For example, the

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134 Vasquez, ‘Kuhn versus Lakatos’, p. 447
135 Legro and Moravscik, p. 46.
presence of Russian military in the Khojaly massacre in 1992 led to the ousting of the pro-Russian president Mutallibov in Azerbaijan and consequently election of a pro-Turkish government that became a headache for Moscow. Much of the Yeltsin period was noted by the weakness of the executive and general disorder in Russian politics. This was noticeable during the 1994 signing of the oil contract in Azerbaijan with the Western transnational companies for the exploration of the offshore oil fields in the Caspian Sea, the legal status of which had not been settled yet, and was strongly contested by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Whereas the Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested against the move and announced the treaty contradictory to international law, the Ministry of Energy and the Oil Consortium of Lukoil took part in the conference and acquired a share in the deal. Russia experienced state weakness to a level that certain analysts raised concern over it becoming a failing state.136 Realism, does not explain state weakness and incoherence in the case of Russia, but it explains Russia’s strategy of retaining its hegemony in the near abroad and resisting external powers’ penetration by all means.137 The broad strategy reached on the basis of consensus between various bureaucracies in 1993 that Russia should recover its great power status and enhance the autonomy of the CIS by all available means is compatible with a realist prediction of state behaviour.138 This was a result of Russia’s adaptation to the international system and its external environment. Russia’s treatment by the West and its overall stance before the West and NATO, as a militarily and economically comparatively weak state explain to a large extent why Russia sought to maintain its strength at least in the former-Soviet space.139 Its insistence on Georgia’s and Azerbaijan’s membership of the CIS and the Collective Security Treaty and establishment of physical presence along the external boundaries of the South Caucasus states all served its hegemonic ambitions and power-political interests. Taking into consideration that it has been largely the CIS and Russia’s

136 From the author’s personal communication with Jaap de Wilde, September, 2006. For state weakness in Russia, see Michael McFaul, ‘When capitalism and democracy collide in transition. Russia’s weak state as an impediment to democratic consolidation’, Davies Center for Russian Studies, Harvard University, Working Paper No 1, September 1997. For a good comparison of Russia’s declining power with the current level, see Franz Umbach, ‘Russia as a ‘Virtual Great Power’: Implications for its Declining Role in European and Eurasian Security, European Security, vol. 9, No 3, Autumn 2000, pp. 87-113.
138 Russia’s relative position in the CIS meets the criteria set by Gilpin. For the conditions of expansion, see Robert Gilpin, War and change in world politics, p. 10.
139 S. Neil MacFarlane argues that accommodation of Russia’s policies within realism diverges on Russia’s behaviour within the CIS and with the rest of the world. Its behaviour at the regional level is by and large compatible with the tenets of realism, whereas its behaviour at the systemic level is not entirely compatible with the predictions of realism. In particular, Russia’s position in the international distribution of power in 1990s would forecast a different picture. See S. Neil MacFarlane, ‘Realism and Russian strategy after the collapse of the USSR’, in Ethan B. Kapstein, Michael Mastanduno, Unipolar Politics, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 219.
relative autonomy here that has validated Russia’s claim for a great power status at times of economic and political uncertainty, its interests to impede external power penetration into the region are perfectly within the explanatory realm of realism. Moreover, it did not want any outside actor here because this region is one of its domestic security concerns as well; and the fact that the region hosted ethnic conflicts, border problems and uncontrolled criminality all justify Russia’s presence here. According to realism, Russia’s involvement in the CIS is an attempt to prevent any third state from taking advantage of the new states’ instability and weakness. And the distribution of power in favour of Russia makes it easier for the latter to assert its control over the other states.

In a broader picture, Russia’s resistance to NATO presence in the CIS, overall NATO enlargement and US hegemony are conditioned by balance of power policies. In this respect, Russia’s behaviour is no different from that of other great powers, and it has used various resources at its disposal, including soft power of authoritarianism and ethno-territorial conflicts. How these objectives have been achieved has changed from time to time. There were periods when Russia used carrots, but at other times sticks vis-a-vis the CIS states, and in Russian perception sticks seem to have been more efficient. To balance the US, Russia has aligned with states that are exempt from cooperation with the US, like Iran and Venezuela. The US plans for missile defence shield in Eastern Europe, support for potential NATO enlargement to include Ukraine and Georgia and Russia’s response in its withdrawal from the CFE Treaty or retaliation in the South Ossetian crisis (to a certain extent only) are all associated with balance of power policies.

As to the tactics, an accommodation of Russia’s policies within realist paradigm would be the justification that it lacked resources and capacity in early 1990s to use as leverage to maintain its power over the South Caucasus; given the shortage of resources to offer the states in the South Caucasus, Russian leaders saw the conflicts as leverage against the potentially unfriendly states. These were used to pressure those states to join the CIS and Collective Security Treaty Organisation and to host Russian military bases in the region. Its involvement in the region was also motivated by its domestic security concerns, given the vulnerability of spill-over of conflict into the North Caucasus. For that reason, Russia has since independence firmly stated that its unchanging and eternal interest in the region is security

140 Author’s interview with an influential Russian academic, Moscow, 10th March, 2008.
141 It should be born in mind that the Caucasus is for its ethnic composition the most diverse region in Eurasia, hosting some 50 ethnic groups, and this is also well reflected in the politico-territorial demarcation from the Soviet era. The North Caucasus has hosted much instability since 1991 and is still noted for its vulnerability today. See Uwe Halbach, Heinrich Tiller, ‘Russia and its Southern Flank’ Aussenpolitik, vol. 45, No 2, 1994, p. 158.
and absence of violent conflict in the South Caucasus. Such a scenario matches Waltz’s defensive realism. That being said, Russia instead of stabilising the region in accordance with its long-term security interests has pursued a policy of strengthening status-quo in both Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts and to a lesser extent in Mountainous Karabakh. Its tacit support to the secessionist regions was supposed to be its short term tactics in 1994 which would get replaced by alternative resources. However, as Trenin notes, what seemed to be short-term tactics became a long-term strategy. As a long-term strategy, Russia’s policies of controlled instability in the South Caucasus can have negative effects. Its inaction particularly in South Ossetia, which for a while was not far from a settlement, arms deliveries to Armenia and illicit support to Abkhazia raised the question as to what Russian foreign policy strategy towards the South is aimed at. So, overall Russia’s policies match its short-term interests in the region, but not long-term interests of stability and cooperative hegemony.

The link between Russia’s policies and the international system is weak. On the one hand, Russia’s relative capabilities in the system have increased, as a result, it has more resources and a bigger capacity for its interests today. On the other hand, Russia still sticks to its coercive rather than cooperative hegemony, and its increased capabilities at the systemic level have limited impact upon its autonomous policies towards the conflicts in the region.

The nature of the international system also adds a causal value to understanding Russia’s policies. NATO’s and Western penetration into the region is seen in Russia as an attempt to deprive it of its legitimate historic legacy. Russian foreign policy thinkers view US policies in many parts of the world as an endproduct of the anarchical structure of the international system, in which it needs to balance the US power before it is too late for Russia as a great power.

b) Rationality

Rationality implies cost and benefit calculation of state interests. The term rationality can be problematic when applied to state behaviour, since not all state behaviour is precisely calculated. State behaviour is marked by a calculation of maximisation of state interests, but whether a state succeeds in achieving the anticipated goals or not is another question. Thus,

142 See Dmitry Trenin, ‘Casus Kosovo’, Pro et Contra Jurnal Rossiyskoy Vnutrennoy i vneshnoy politiki, vol. 34, no. 5-6, 2006, p. 6-22.

143 NATO has played a significant role in Russia’s relations with the West and most of this role has had a negative nature. The association of NATO with the Cold War and its collective defence character has exacerbated Russia’s perception of the bloc. In contrast, Russia has for various reasons been more trustful of the ESDP. For an analysis of the role of NATO in Russia’s relations with the West, see S. Neil MacFarlane, ‘NATO in Russia’s relations with the West’, Security Dialogue, 2001, vol. 32, issue 3, pp. 281-296. See also Roy Allison ‘Russian security engagement with NATO’, in Roy Allison, Margot Light, Stephen White, Putin’s Russia and the enlarged Europe, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2006), pp. 94-130.
states have rational interests, but these interests are not necessarily interpreted into rational results at all times. As Waltz puts it, 'states try to maintain their position in the international system. That is an axiom. There is nothing in anybody’s theory that says you will succeed'. However, in the case of Russia, the rationality of its strategic interests vis-à-vis the conflicts in its South, in particular in the light of its long-term interests is not clear. As it became evident during the South Ossetia crisis, its engagement in the secessionist conflicts in Georgia has so far served its short-term interests unexpectedly well. Until the recent South Ossetia crisis the widespread belief was that Russia’s tactics towards the region is not plausible with rational-choice theories because it is largely irrational. Its tactics had led to the balancing of certain states in the CIS, and ultimately enabled the penetration of external powers into the region. In contrast, the recent South Ossetia crisis showed how efficient in the short run this tactics can be for deterring great power penetration into the region and strengthening its coercive hegemony. It proved maximal for the short run, as it achieved all the objectives the Kremlin had set for itself, but again as mentioned above, it is only tactical as it is not clear what implications they will have for its long-term interests. However, it is not clear what implications this will have for Russia’s long-term interests. Russia is interested in strengthening the relative autonomy of the CIS and maintaining its hegemony, but its policies have come to undermine both its long-term security interests in the Caucasus and its bilateral relations with Georgia, but also with other states as the Ukraine and Moldova. Russia could not acquire the required support from the Central Asian states and China after the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s independence.

c) Balancing

An ultimate result of Russia’s policies towards the conflicts was balancing and bandwagoning strategies adopted by the relevant states. In the South Caucasus, bandwagoning occurred in the first decade of the post-soviet period, because first the states in question were weak and had no alternative second regional power with whom they could align. Armenia from the very onset of its sovereignty found a way of accommodating its interests with those of Russia due to increased warfare in Mountainous Karabakh conflict. Moreover, from 1992 Azerbaijan’s efforts to distance itself from Russia eased Armenia’s rapprochement with Russia. After a period of adventures and sovereignty seeking, both Georgia and Azerbaijan tried to bandwagon with Russia throughout the 90s. Upon joining the CIS, Georgia agreed to host


Russian military bases and border guards for a 25 year period; it also cooperated with Russia during the I Russian-Chechen war. Tbilisi reciprocally expected Moscow to assist it restore sovereignty over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In response, Russia applied sanctions on Abkhazia and hardened its stance on South Ossetia, but these measures did not produce any results due to the incapacity in Russia itself on the one hand to impose peace upon Abkhazia, but on the other hand, the internal incoherence within Russia, and defiance of the sanctions by certain authorities. Further, certain political circles in Russia still shared the conviction that the status-quo would be more profitable for it than long-term peace. This led to Russia’s growing inaction in all three conflicts, and gradually grew to a policy of maintaining and strengthening the status-quo.

Convinced that bandwagoning with Russia would not produce any positive implications for their security problems, starting from 1996 Georgia and Azerbaijan tried to balance Russia’s power by alignment with the US and EU. GUUAM was established in 1997 as an attempt to offer a joint platform for all those states of the CIS discontent with Russia.146 It originally included Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Moldova and was later joined by Uzbekistan. At the initial stages of its existence, it also included cooperation in the transportation of energy resources from the Caspian Sea to European markets, but this agenda died out in recent years.147 Being discontent with Russia’s policies of coercive hegemony, both Georgia and Azerbaijan left the CSTO in 1999, and Georgia applied for NATO membership.

Balancing in the South Caucasus was not historicly predicated, but rather born out of necessity. In contrast, for example Mark Weber argues that the shared Soviet past has influenced foreign policy priorities of the successor states, and this was the cause of the mistrust of Russia in the CIS.148 This is more relevant for the other successor states as Uzbekistan and Ukraine rather than the South Caucasus and perceptions played a limited role in the case of the South Caucasus. For example, Georgia’s resistance identity or Armenia’s loyalty to Russia played a certain role in their perceptions of Russia. However, Georgia’s and Azerbaijan’s balancing efforts were largely a product of Russia’s own policies and increasing sympathy with the secessionist regimes in the region. It was not a random balancing aimed to balance the most powerful state, but rather aimed at balancing the one which both states perceived as an ultimate threat. Russia’s role in the Mountainous Karabakh, Georgian-Abkhaz

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and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts was the necessity to balance Russia. In the case of Azerbaijan, Baku believed that only through increased economic interests of Western oil companies in the region, would the West offer protection to it against the strategic Russia-Armenia alliance. The decision to construct oil and gas pipelines from Baku to the Turkish port of Jeyhan to bypass Russia was a result of the balancing strategy of both Georgia and Azerbaijan. At the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999 Georgia, backed by the West demanded the withdrawal of Russian military bases from its territory. Russia’s policies of active engagement in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia after Putin came to power led to Georgia’s refusal to cooperate with Russia on border control during the Chechen crisis.

Relevant versus relative power

Russian hegemony in the CIS has not seriously been challenged since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This has largely been due to the unavailability of balancing options. To the surprise of many analysts, balancing largely failed to produce the expected results. This was due to a number of factors. First and foremost is Russia’s relative power in the CIS. Although with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s position in the international distribution of material capabilities declined, this was less true for its position in the CIS region. Here, the shift in Russia’s systemic position and capabilities has been less relevant, mainly because of the power (economic, material and certain socio-political capabilities) asymmetry between Russia and the other Soviet states. Its manoeuvre potential in the South Caucasus is not comparable to that of any other great power. Russia can influence the security-political settings in the region, it has had the leeway to stabilise or destabilise the region through its involvements in the secessionist conflicts. It can even generate disturbance in all three states due to the existence of ethnic and political vulnerabilities and its own geographic location. It is, hence, the relevant power in the South Caucasus, whereas the US is a relative power.149

The US superiority in international system is not directly relevant to this region, here the superior power is Russia and therefore alignment with the US could not seriously affect the security-political questions in the region. Economic projects related to the transportation of energy from the Caspian and regime change in Georgia were all successful due to US backing. However, in terms of balancing Russia’s power and manoeuvre capacity in all three conflicts, alignment with the US has not been very useful. This has led to Azerbaijan to take a more balanced and tiered towards Russia position, which is now evolving into a renewed bandwagoning strategy of the leadership.

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149 The concept was first mentioned by Brenda Schaffer, see Brenda Schaffer, ‘Peace for the Caucasus’, The Miami Herald, April 4, 2001.
Secondly, Russia would not be prepared to give up its control and power over the region as it did in the Baltic due to Western pressure. Russia has viable domestic security interests in the South Caucasus due to its linkage to the North Caucasus and has securitised its physical presence in the region to an unprecedented level. Thirdly, the linkage between the global system and the region is weak because the region is not a priority for the superpower. The importance of the Caucasus region has been overestimated by scholars. The energy resources and the location of the region are unlike the Middle East not so vital for US national interests. The US support for the BTJ pipeline served more its hegemonic superpower interests in the international system, rather than economic interests. As a superpower the US is interested in exerting influence all over the globe and has supported balancing the hegemonic aspirations of Russia. The Baltic states in comparison, managed to succeed in balancing strategies because of the unilateral support of the US and EU and their pressure on Russia from the early days of their independence. The same level of pressure by the West has been absent, so the region is not strongly linked to the global system, it is more likely to depend on regional rather than global dynamics. Institutions as NATO and the EU are unlikely to expand into the South Caucasus the way it has happened in the Baltic. Partly because this would seriously undermine relations with Russia, but also these institutions, in particular the EU does not view the Caucasus as a part of the European family as it views the Baltic states, Bulgaria or Romania. Moreover, the existence of political problems in the states and regional instability in the Caucasus would make it difficult for both NATO and EU to expand into this region.

Why balancing did not function in the larger CIS was due to two major factors: weak statehood and immaturity of elites as well as plurality of interests. Realism asserts that weak states because of domestic problems such as illegitimate governments, lack of welfare as a source of legitimacy, institutional weakness etc. tend to bandwagon, rather than balance.\textsuperscript{150} The crude power of Russia was never perceived as a threat to Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan had joined GUAM at a time of Russia’s economic hardships and uncertainty over its future, but within the last few years, its leadership has found a better accommodation of its interests with Russia rather than with the US.

The weak statehood observed in most CIS states implied that the fragile governments often viewed Russia in terms of their clan interests, rather than state interests, or were too weak to choose a balancing strategy.\textsuperscript{151} The domestic weakness and unpopularity of the regime, rather


than its foreign policy weaknesses were often the reason behind a failed balancing strategy against Russia. States in the CIS have not been effective foreign policy actors and this has had its impact on balancing. In this context, the causes of failed balancing and bandwagoning in the CIS cannot be exclusively searched for at the third image level and must be examined in the context of both internal and external variables. To this is added, the plurality of interests and individualist strategies. The existing GUAM platform has been too small in members and weak in terms of the members’ capacities to create any balance against Russia’s power. Azerbaijan is now seeking a position between balancing and bandwagoning, but more inclined towards the latter, having seen the potential and dangers of balancing in the case of Georgia. Accordingly the Azerbaijan government has since the crisis tried to accommodate its interests with those of Moscow in both security-political and economic issues.

d) Offensive realism

Offensive realism would probably have more to offer in explaining Russia’s behaviour, particularly after the South Ossetia crisis than defensive realism. As argued in Chapter V, although Russia had legitimate domestic security concerns in both regions and the larger North Caucasus, its intrusion and in particular recognition of the regions’ independence was more power politically motivated. Russia in this context agreed to the changing of boundaries in the post-Soviet space since 1991 and became de facto a revisionist state.152 There are no doubt over Russia’s domestic security concerns in the North Caucasus, but it is not those security concerns that act as the major driving force behind Russia’s policies. If Russian engagement in all three conflicts were aimed purely to serve its domestic security interests only, then it would be plausible with defensive realism, but the conclusion of this thesis places the emphasis more on power-political considerations in Russia’s policies towards the three conflicts.

e) Role of perceptions in Russia’s behaviour: neo-classical realism

Certain scholars have rejected the overemphasis on systemic variables of structural realism in explaining foreign policy outcomes and changes, and argued instead that much of Russian foreign policy, including the shift in Russia in early 1993 in favour of Eurasianism was not systemically determined, but was rather conditioned by Russia’s domestic policies.153 When


taking foreign policy decisions, Russian foreign minister and president had to take into account the domestic opposition’s position and the domestic weakness of the state. That being said, Russian foreign policy also retained certain autonomy during the years of institutional weakness in Russia and on most occasions acted much better than what would be attributed to a weak state. The foreign policy under both Kozyrev and Primakov focused on Russia’s national interests and was less ideological (during the latter period of Kozyrev’s tenure) than it was expected. It would not be completely correct to assert that Russian foreign policy under Yeltsin was shaped by the domestic political forces, since the systemic level also had its effect. Russian policymakers realised Russia’s international position and carefully watched the reaction of the G7 to some of their policies in the near abroad. At times when the domestic opposition in Russia demanded more sharpening of relations with the US and a more balancing position, the foreign policy elite followed a different path.

Russia’s perceptions of the international system and of the West have played a significant role in its policies towards the CIS states. Its elite have largely viewed the West, particularly NATO and the US in Cold War context. The dominant perception has been that diplomacy and international institutions are insufficient in international politics and the international system is anarchic. This perception was particularly strengthened in 1993, when Russia’s leaders experimented that the West was not intent on treating it as an equal great power. Russia’s political elite have largely seen the US as intent on unilateral hegemony in the world and on minimising its role as a great power. Since Russia is more a regional great power, weakening its relative power in the CIS would be a first and easy step in that direction. The Russian leadership even perceived the unilateral support for Georgia’s territorial integrity by the West following the Georgian-Russian crisis in South Ossetia as a sign in that direction.

The culpability of the formation of a hostile perception of the West lies partly in US unilateralist policies as intervention in Iraq, abandoning the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, recognition of Kosovo’s sovereignty and ignorance of Russia as a great power overall. The US rejected Russia’s proposals to make the OSCE core of European security, where Russia might have had a cooperative role. Moreover, NATO enlargement to include those states of Eastern Europe which had largely seen Russia as their primary security threat exacerbated Russia’s perceptions of NATO. That being said, the West’s approach to Russia was also influenced by Russia’s policies towards the CIS states. Russia’s assertive behaviour in the

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CIS has been a source of tension in the Russian Western relations.\textsuperscript{157} The Russian political elite have refused to acknowledge the coercive character of their hegemony in the CIS, and have failed to recognise the balancing efforts of separate states as a result of the Kremlin’s own policies towards the region.\textsuperscript{158} In particular, the West’s refusal to accept the legitimacy of Russia’s hegemony in the region is related to the grievances certain CIS states have had against Russia. Moreover, as Iver Neuman notes, a substantial rational behind the West’s refusal to recognise Russia as an equal great power and ally was its failure to modernise and liberalise both in domestic politics and its foreign policy.\textsuperscript{159}

1.3 Regional security complex theory

The end of the Cold War marked changes not only in the international system, but also in the analysis of the international system. The US led intervention in Iraq during the Gulf War had created the impression that the post Cold War era would be one of security management at the global level through a more competently functioning United Nations system.\textsuperscript{160} This did not prove viable. The UN did not have the right mechanism for security management in the Middle East and Africa, leading world powers expressed signs of reluctance for costly humanitarian interventions in regions free of their strategic interests. Instead of global level, regional level of security management proved viable and dominant.

Regional level of security has become more autonomous in international relations since decolonisation, and the ending of the bipolarity has made the regional level more prominent.\textsuperscript{161} Since the end of the Cold War, conflicts have tended to remain regional rather than global, and the withdrawal of the superpowers from distant regions as South East Asia and Africa has enabled regional structures to evolve. Whereas the Cold war linked national security to the global level, the new era witnessed a return of concentration of security from the global level to the regional one. It has been argued by various scholars that the global

\textsuperscript{157} Russia’s strategy in the CIS created tensions in its relations with the West, because most Western powers have been committed to the sovereignty of the CIS states. This factor, among others was one of the reasons for the failure of cooperation and rapprochement between the US and Russia following 9/11. See the discussion on p. 223.

\textsuperscript{158} See Mikhael Alexandrov, ‘Tri elementa sderzhivaniia Gruzii’, Materik, 1 April, 2006.


system in its one + four format is not as global as it was during the Cold War. The linkage of many regions to the superpower is weaker than that to the regional power, and many regions are linked to regional rather than global security dynamics. A number of regions have not been prioritised in the national interest concept of the superpower. New security regionalisation has occurred in many regions of the world, where withdrawal of superpowers has been accompanied by increased institutionalisation of security cooperation. Because security is relational and relative, one cannot understand national security without reference to the subsystemic or systemic security interdependence. The unit level is not sufficient to carry out security analysis. Therefore, Buzan has suggested an intermediate level of analysis between the unit and international system, called subsystem or regional security complex that mediates the interaction between the two levels. He has introduced the regional subsystem as an object of security ‘to highlight the relative autonomy of regional security relations’.

Regional security complex theory developed by Buzan and Waever is a meta-theory of international security which is designed to analyse regional security. The theory evolved at a period when the dominance of the global level in security analysis was about to drop in salience to the regional level. The Cold War period witnessed the security interconnectedness of the national and international levels; national security concerns in many states were linked to the superpowers. As mentioned already, the linkage of the national level to the global one has not been that high in the new era. A number of regions on world map are not today that important for the national security interests of the superpower (or global powers) and therefore not linked. RSCT does not reject international and national security, but argues that the regional level is at least as important as the two other levels and aims to mediate between them. If the top level of security is interdependence at system level and the bottom is the one at state level, RSCT suggests an analytical framework to interplay between the two levels. In this context, the concept’s major premise is that the international system consists of several regional security complexes. It suggests that adjacency produces more security interaction (in the military, political and environmental sectors) among neighbouring states than among states in different regions.

A regional security complex is defined as a ‘set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot
reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another’. An RSC is defined by the ‘degree of security interdependence’ which should be ‘sufficient enough both to establish them as a linked set and to differentiate them from surrounding security regions’. Regional security complex theory is designed to describe and analyse security interdependence and interaction between actors in a region. The notion of a security complex implies that there exist a ‘distinct and significant subsystem of security relations’ among the neighbouring states, but there are also patterns of amity and enmity.

The regional dynamics of security complexes have a substantial degree of autonomy from the patterns set by global powers. It distinguishes between the system level interplay of global powers and the subsystem level interplay of the lesser powers whose main security environment is their local region. The criterion for qualifying for an RSC is security interdependence; because RSCs have external boundaries, the interdependence must be high enough to differentiate the region from the surrounding ones. Because threats are more intense between shorter distances, security interaction between neighbours has priority.

### 1.3.1. Components of regional security complexes

RSCs are defined by two components: power distribution and patterns of amity/enmity. Security complexes emphasise the interdependence of rivalry as well as that of shared interests. An RSC is generated by a bottom-up process in which the fears and concerns generated within the region produce it. The standard for RSC is a pattern of rivalry, balance of power and alliance patterns among the main powers in the region. Thus, at system level security complexes are caused by anarchy, at regional level by amity/enmity.

The theory breaks apart from structural realism by rejecting to link regional security to system level changes solely. Structural realism has a tendency to regard security at the global level, and defines security by distribution of power. The advantage of RSCT is it tries to bring back security analysis from the global level to its local level and to apply constructivism. The argument is that since overlay (heavy superpower penetration into regions) was a matter of the past, and the international system comprises one superpower only, conflicts and peace

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167 There are also regions, where security interaction between the units is at a very low level, and therefore they do not form an RSC because most of their security is internal oriented. This happens when the units forming the security region are weak states (socio-political cohesion between the civil society and the institutions of the state). In strong states, most of the threats are external because they are more internally cohesive. The weaker ones are vulnerable to outside threat, and the security dynamics of the region depends on this spectre.
168 However, this is not always true for superpowers. Threats to the USA both during the Cold War and in the new era derived from sources other than the American continent.
would remain at a regional level.\textsuperscript{169} It builds on the securitisation concept, treating amity and enmity and intraregional distribution of power as independent variables.

RSC theory contains two major characteristics of realism: structural and power distribution. RSCs are substructures in the anarchically structured international system, so they are a part of the larger structure. A second feature of structural realism in RSCT is its emphasis on the distribution of power in a region. Distribution of power in a region produces the polarity of RSCs-bipolar, unipolar or multipolar and is the major link of RSCs to the global system. The global system can influence or even determine the power relations within a region. That depends on the level of linkage of RSCs to the global system and how vulnerable the region is to external penetration. All the existing RSCs are anarchical, not hierarchical in character.

RSCT approach adds to the causal variable of RSCs, a constructivist element, patterns of amity and enmity. Patterns of amity and enmity make RSCs dependent on the actions and interpretations of actors, besides distribution of power. Amity includes relationships ranging from genuine friendship to expectation of protection and support. Amity and enmity can also be structural, of historic character or shaped by a common cultural area, border disputes or ethnically related populations.\textsuperscript{170} Amity and enmity are socially constructed, and act as independent variables. They can be transformed independent of systemic changes, e.g. the relations between Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan remained unaffected by the end of the Cold War. Patterns of rivalry or amity are not imported from the system level, but generated internally. The dominant patterns of enmity and amity can change due to a number of factors as war-weariness, ideological transformation, changes of leadership, etc. Enmity is particularly difficult to change when it has acquired a historic character, or is subject to a political process. This factor is even stronger in authoritarian societies where change of ideology, rather than leadership is required to transform the stereotype of enmity, since leaderships can be limited in their will to change structural hatreds. This would become more acute when the state in question is a weak state.

Thus, the essential structure of a RSC according to Buzan and Waever is:

1. Boundary which differentiates the RSC from its neighbours;
2. anarchic structure which means the RSC must be composed of two or more autonomous units;
3. polarity which covers the distribution of power among the units ranging from uni to bi or multipolar;
4. social construction which includes the patterns of amity and enmity ranging from conflict formation through security regime to security community.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{169} See Buzan, \textit{People, states and fear}, pp. 219-21.
\textsuperscript{170} See Buzan and Waever, \textit{Regions and Power}, pp.45-47.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid. p.53
1.3.2. Types of regional security complexes

Security complexes emphasise the interdependence of both rivalry and shared interests. So, they can emerge as either a positive or negative interdependence. Most security complexes are towards the conflict formation end of the spectrum. Regional security complexes can be standard and centred. Standard RSCs can be bipolar, unipolar or multipolar and form either conflict formations or security regimes, in other words ‘standard form for a RSC is a pattern of rivalry, balance of power and alliance patterns among the main powers within the region’, which can be added by ‘the effects of penetrating external powers’. A standard complex has a military-security agenda, with a pattern of rivalry and balance of power. In contrast, a centred complex is unipolar or the power concerned is a global power, and it is this characteristic that makes it centred. The regional pole is asymmetrically dominant so that it can largely disregard the other units in the complex. The important feature of a centred complex is that it is unipolar and no other power will have sufficient weight to define another pole. Unipolar complexes tend to be more stable and can easily manage negative security developments. A centred complex can also be a region integrated by institutions, rather than by a single power. In that case actors stop treating each other as security problems. There can be still competition between them, but they do not deal with problems as threats needing extraordinary measures. A centred complex may be one of hegemony, where the units in the complex either accept the dominance or try to balance the pole. It is still an RSC as the other units of the complex are each other’s main security concern. The consequence of an intra-regional hegemony is that the security dynamics of the region are suppressed, because the hegemon intervenes and manipulates the dynamics to meet its own needs. An RSC can also form a pluralistic security community when the socially constructed line of amity grows.

1.3.3. Great power engagement in a security complex and overlay

The mechanism by which external powers influence regional security complexes is ‘penetration’ which ‘occurs when outside powers make security alignments with states within an RSC’. This usually happens through the alignment of one or more states of the region with the hegemon or extraregional great power to balance the regional power. The penetration of external powers can redefine the power structure in a region by supporting the states militarily or economically and in this way shape the power distribution. Like Cantori and

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172 Ibid, p.47.
173 Buzan and Waever, Regions and Powers, p. 46.
Spiegel, Buzan argues that in general, intrusion of external powers has tended to impose conflict than cooperation upon members of a subordinate system.¹⁷⁴ Geographically distant powers are not included in the RSCT on the grounds that ‘most threats travel more easily over short distances than over longer ones’ and therefore ‘security interdependencies are normally patterned into regionally based clusters’.¹⁷⁵ Inclusion of geographically distant powers also contradicts the authors’ efforts to separate the region from the global level. The point is ‘both the security of the separate units and the process of global power intervention can be grasped only through understanding the regional security dynamics’.¹⁷⁶

In contrast, Lake and Morgan argue differently with regard to the presence of external powers in a region: since great powers have the ability to project force over distance, they should be considered members of the regional security complex.¹⁷⁷ Criticising Buzan’s geographic limitation, Morgan and Lake argue that great powers operating within a region cannot be outside that regional complex, since on certain occasions their security interaction with some members of the RSC can be stronger than that between the original members themselves. As Morgan puts it, ‘…..the location is where the security relationships of consequence exist; the members are states that participate profoundly in those relationships. The participants see their security as much more closely bound up with some or all of the other members, and with their interactions in that geographical area, than with states that are not participants in those interactions’. ¹⁷⁸

**Overlay**

The anarchical maturity of a region defines its vulnerability to external penetration; the more anarchically immature a region, the more vulnerable it is to outside influence. This can impede the evolution of regional security dynamics in the region. A stronger form of external power involvement is *overlay*, which implies the direct presence of outside powers in a region to an extent that it suppresses the local dynamics of security among the states. A security region is overlaid when extra-regional powers penetrate the region ‘so heavily that the local pattern of security relations virtually ceases to operate’.¹⁷⁹ Overlay may either take the form of imperialism or of unequal alliances, in which case ‘local security concerns are subordinated to the security orientation of the dominant power and this orientation is reinforced by the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 43
stationing of that power’s military forces directly in that complex’. In the case of overlay the security of the region is defined by outsiders. Overlay subordinates it to the larger pattern of great power rivalries and this subordination can be positive if it suppresses national conflicts. Outside penetration by great powers would not enhance structural divisions in case of overlay by one power. It occurs in two forms: by stationing of armed forces and by occupation. The primary difference between heavy penetration by great powers and overlay is, in penetration, it is still the local powers that shape the main security dynamics, whereas in overlay, outside powers have substantial military forces in the region. Overlay was most obvious in the Cold War period, during which intense competition and concerns for reputation caused minor interests of the superpower to become major interests. The conflicts got fed and expanded by external actors. The end of the Cold War also put an end to superpower overlay so that there is no example of overlay today. However, other forms of overlay can evolve in the future, or at least certain concepts in international relations literature can be found today that are very close to overlay.

Regional security complexes are to be differentiated from regional security systems. An RSC can be both positive, based upon amity, and negative, the major criteria being interaction no matter by peace or by conflict. It is not a matter of choice for states which security complexes they belong to. A state can belong to more than one security complex. Thus, security complexes arise naturally, they are a matter of destiny, without negotiation. There is hardly any region today where there is no security complex. Security systems in contrast are artificial and negotiated. Security complexes are often determined by geography, whereas security systems are a matter of choice. A security complex does not necessarily have to be or lead to a security system, e.g. there is no security system for the Middle Eastern security complex. However, security complexes can accelerate the formation of a security system. Thus, a security system is an institutionalised cooperation network between a group of states for the purpose of reducing threats against its members. Security systems are motivated by the existence of a common external threat. States can belong to the same security system, but different security complexes (Italy and US by NATO). A security system therefore cannot evolve if there are unresolved conflicts in a region. Security systems can also be imposed upon a group of states by a great power or superpower. Whether the security system is effective depends to a larger extent on the involvement of the great power.

1.3.4. The Caucasus as a regional security complex

180 Ibid, p.220.
The CIS as a security complex includes three subregions due to the level of security interaction: Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Western belt (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova) and is centred around a great power. The structural features of the post-soviet security complex are above all its relative autonomy from the international system and Russian hegemony. Most, if not all security interaction of the region includes Russia and together with it the Caucasus makes a mini security complex. The three obvious elements of the Caucasus mini-complex all include a regional level: the ethno-territorial conflicts in Georgia, the Mountainous Karabakh conflict and potential spill-over of conflict between the North and South Caucasus. The level of security interconnectedness in the Caucasus is high; any change in Armenian security immediately affects Azerbaijan and the other way round. The national securities of the two states are tied to each other, so that their primary security problems cannot be analysed exclusively. Any acquisition of weapons by one party, joining in alliances or international organisations, economic and population growth causes concerns in either of the sides. Shift in the balance of power between the parties is also relevant and sensitive to Russia, although it has no viable domestic security interests in the Karabakh conflict.

Taking into consideration that both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are largely populated by Russian nationals and are economically, socially and militarily tied to the Russian North Caucasus, Georgia’s security interaction is primarily with Russia. Any Georgian intervention into South Ossetia or Abkhazia will have implications for the Russian North Caucasus because of the ethnic relations. Emergence of conflict in Georgia has implications both for Azerbaijan’s and Armenia’s security, too. Now that Armenia’s border with Azerbaijan and Turkey is closed, Georgia is the only gateway of Armenia to Russia. Azerbaijan too, depends on Georgia for the transportation of its energy resources to Western markets. Moreover, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have substantial minorities in Georgia. Any serious disturbance in both regions is likely to cause tension. The potential of tension in Georgian-Azerbaijani relations is for a number of reasons not as high as that in Armenian-Georgian relations. Due to the oil and gas pipelines, Azerbaijan’s economic recovery is dependent on Georgian stability and the two states have enjoyed good relations throughout the 20th century.

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Figure 1: Caucasus mini-complex

Table 1: Lines of amity and enmity in the South Caucasus

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns of relations</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Type of relations</th>
<th>Causes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amity</td>
<td>Armenia-Russia</td>
<td>Strategic alliance of mutual support and protection,</td>
<td>Compatibility of strategic interests, MK conflict, fear of isolation (Armenia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Armenia-Georgia</td>
<td>Domination and dependence on the centre</td>
<td>Geographic proximity and Armenian minority in Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Azerbaijan-Georgia</td>
<td>pragmatic cooperation</td>
<td>Common interests, economic complementarity, Azeri minority in Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Azerbaijan-Russia</td>
<td>strategic partnership</td>
<td>Strategic interests, MK conflict, bandwagoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pragmatic cooperation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmity</td>
<td>Armenia-Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Conflict formation</td>
<td>MK conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia-Russia</td>
<td>Proxy conflict, hostile relations, balancing</td>
<td>Russia’s policies towards the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

There is clear security interconnectedness between the North and South Caucasus in three points at least: Dagestan, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Dagestan has thirty ethnic groups and any destabilisation in this area would be in the form of hostility between rival ethnic elites,
one of which is Lezgins.\footnote{Lezgins are an ethnic group, half of which lives in the North of Azerbaijan. See Robert Bruce and Enver Kisriev, ‘Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach’, \textit{Europe-Asia Studies}, vol.53, no 1, 2001.} This would have a spill-over effect to Azerbaijan through the large Lezgin population in the north of Azerbaijan, who had already once attempted to challenge Azerbaijani statehood by secessionism.\footnote{Lezghins numbered 200,000 in the 1989 census. Elizabeth Fuller, ‘Azerbaijan rediscovers its vanished minorities’, \textit{RFE/RL Report on the USSR} 2, no 52, December 28, 1990, p. 20. For Lezgi problem in Azerbaijan in 1990s see Elizabeth Fuller, ‘Caucasus: The Lezghin campaign for autonomy’, \textit{RFE/RL Research Bulletin}, 16 October, 1992, p. 30.} However, Azerbaijan is not likely to support any separatism in the North Caucasus that would pose a threat to Russia. The only threat to Russian security concerns in the North Caucasus is the possible Georgian intervention into South Ossetia or Abkhazia which could have a spill-over effect to North Ossetia and destabilise North Caucasus.

A further feature of the CIS complex is the penetration of external powers, in particular the US and Europe. Penetration of external poles into the South Caucasus has been treated with more sensitivity by the regional pole because of its objective security concerns here. Moreover, the CIS complex is important to Russia for its great power position and identity, as Buzan and Waever note, ‘…the ‘near abroad’ is such an important part of the security agenda partly for specific reasons, partly for strategic ones. … The strategic threat is as a bottom line interpretation that if Russia is to remain a great power both able to defend itself and able to assert some influence globally, it needs to retain its sphere of influence among the current CIS countries’.\footnote{Buzan and Waever, \textit{Regions and Powers}, p. 409-410.} External penetration of the US and EU in the South Caucasus has been by conflict mediation, presence of the transnational companies in the energy sector and various political, economic and humanitarian projects. The lack of legitimacy of the centredness of the complex has led to alignment efforts of Georgia and Azerbaijan to balance Russia’s hegemony. This has seriously disturbed Russian leaders, who have largely seen external power penetration aimed at limiting Russia’s role in the region or creating a second pole. Nevertheless, external power penetration in the CIS, and particularly the South Caucasus has not been as heavy as to transform or cause the erosion of the complex.\footnote{For an opposite view see Bertil Nygren, \textit{The Rebuilding of Greater Russia: Putin’s foreign policy towards the CIS countries} (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 12.} Russia has heavy military presence in all three conflicts in the region, has monopolised peacekeeping, and in addition has a large number of important economic assets in Armenia. In this context, its leeway for manoeuvre in this region is larger than that of any other great power.

The Caucasus mini complex can have a transformation in a number of ways. The easiest change would occur when the three conflicts could be peacefully resolved and the centre
changed its policies towards the region. This would gain the centredness of the subcomplex legitimacy by all three states. A transformation at micro level would include transformation of the socially constructed lines of enmity between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Georgia versus Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Such a scenario might lead to a security regime or even regionalisation.

Regional security complex theory is a useful analytical framework to frame Russia’s security interests in the South Caucasus. However, the findings of Chapter V argue that Russia’s behaviour towards the three conflicts in the region is not driven by its domestic security interests only. In fact, it is power-political interests that act as the core driving force behind its policies. Russia is a member of the complex, but meanwhile, it is a great power with regional hegemonic aspirations and therefore it is not clear how overlay or heavy penetration by intrusive powers explains Russia’s policies. Heavy military and political presence of the Russian Federation in the South Caucasus does not equal overlay since Russia is an actor of the complex. Thus, the approach by Buzan and Waever explains only one phenomenon—Russia’s security interests.

1.4. Nature of Russia’s hegemony

According to Keohane, a hegemon is ‘a state that is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing intersate relations and is willing to do so’.187 Most literature on hegemony stresses its cooperative character and suggests that hegemony often fosters stability, because ‘cooperation may be fostered by hegemony, and hegemons require cooperation to make and enforce rules’.188 Weaker states for the sake of security and protection seek accommodation with a hegemon. Presence of a single dominant state in the international system generates stability for all others, and all states benefit from it. As Gilpin claims, the international order is a public good benefitting subordinate states, and the presence of a hegemonic power is central to the preservation of stability and peace in the international system. Distribution of power among states enables the dominant state ‘to establish and enforce the basic rules and rights that influence their own behaviour and that of the lesser states’.189 The dominant power not only provides the good, it is able to extract contributions from the subordinate states towards the good. Therefore, the absence of a hegemon is equalled by Gilpin to disorder in international system. The authority of the dominant power makes sure that the lesser states obey it; there is also rational reason why they do so, because ‘dominant states supply goods

188 Keohane, After hegemony, p. 46.
that give other states an interest in following their lead’. In this context, the hegemonic power constitutes a quasi government by providing public goods and taxing other states to pay for them. If the subordinate states receive net benefits they may recognise hegemonic power legitimate and reinforce its performance. As Duncan Snidal notes quoting Gilpin, ‘subordinate states will accept their exploitation as long as the costs of being exploited are less than the costs of overthrowing the hegemonic order’.

However, scholars as Robert Gilpin, Duncan Snidal and Stephen Krasner have drawn attention to the point that hegemony is not always benevolent or profitable for all, it can also take a coercive form. According to Krasner, hegemonic power can structure the system to meet its own advantage, and under such a scheme strong states enjoying the rules of the order would not allow smaller ones to exit the system even if they wanted to. Gilpin too, asserts that a dominant power may not only provide the goods, it is also capable of extracting contributions from the subordinate states. Under such a scheme, hegemonic states provide an international order that furthers their own self-interest.

Snidal makes a distinction between benevolent and coercive forms of hegemony. The coercive model is distinguished by the ability to ‘force subordinate states to make contributions, and this ability rests primarily on the relative power of states’. In contrast, the benevolent model is distinguished by the interest of the hegemon to provide the public good, which meanwhile produces the capability. Because a hegemonic state has a dominant interest in a cooperative outcome, it has the capacity to ensure its emergence. The coercive form of hegemony emphasises the capability, rather than interest, supposing that interest in providing the public good follows from the distribution of capabilities. Such a model lacks legitimacy because the subordinate states are forced to contribute without getting any benefit.

In contrast, the military power of a hegemonic state which ‘gives it the capacity to enforce an international order also gives it an interest in providing a generally beneficial order so as to lower the costs of maintaining that order and perhaps to facilitate its ability to extract contributions from other states’. In this context, Snidal draws attention to a correlation between interest and capability.

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190 Ibid, p.34.
196 Ibid, p. 587.
In the case of Russia, it is the predominant power in the CIS in terms of its GDP and military capabilities vis-à-vis the other states. Russia’s historic legacy and ability to influence the leaders and political elites of most CIS states in what Roy Allison calls ‘legacy or presence of Russian regional hegemonic influence’ has also contributed to maintaining its hegemony.\(^{198}\) Hegemonic stability theory presumes hegemonic capacity, and this largely failed during the first decade of Russia’s independence. Thus contrary to Keohane, the hegemon must be not only willing, but also able to provide the essential rules. Russian state experienced financial crisis, indebtedness to Western governments, structural corruption and weak control over the state institutions, including the armed forces. State functions in Russia in mid 1990s, according to MacFarlane, at best included ‘a modest capacity to secure public revenue through taxation’.\(^{199}\) Under these circumstances, it would be hard to match Russia with the definition of hegemon in international relations literature. However, since the CIS from the very beginning has enjoyed relative autonomy from the international system, it has made it easier for Russia to maintain its hegemony. So, Russia’s hegemony and great power position is only relative in this region.

### Table 2: Defence budget and GDP, 2007-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Defence budget in USD 2007</th>
<th>Number in armed forces 2009</th>
<th>GDP in USD billions as of 2007</th>
<th>Population in millions as of 2007</th>
<th>Military expenditure in % of GDP as of 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>36.35 bn (2009)</td>
<td>1,027,000</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>142,10</td>
<td>3,90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>296 mn</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>936 mn</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>2,96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>573 mn</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5,60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As to the essential rules, Russia has set them in a coercive manner without offering the states in the region, in particular the South Caucasus any benefits.\(^{200}\) This is in tension with Andrew Hurrel’s definition that a hegemon in decline will be inclined to create common cooperation mechanisms for a region, because these might compensate for a decline in overall influence and structural predominance.\(^{201}\) Instability in a hegemonic region can only rule when there is insufficient engagement of the hegemon or its inability to maintain sufficient essential rules.

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\(^{199}\) S. Neil MacFarlane, ‘Factors constraining the success of the CIS’, in *Promoting institutional responses to the challenges in the Caucasus, Favorita Papers*, 01/2001, p. 84.

\(^{200}\) For a source of Russia’s policies towards the CIS, see ‘Ukaz prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ob utverzhdenie strategicheskogo kursa Rossiyskoy Federatsii s gosudarstvami uchastnikami Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimikh Gosudarstv’, No 940, 14th September, 1995, *Segodnya*, 22 September, 1995.

The conclusion of this thesis is that Russia has the capability to maintain the public good, but no interest. Its capability is limited though, but is sufficient to gain legitimacy from the subordinate states for its hegemony. Whereas Russia lacked both capacity and strategy to maintain its hegemony in the CIS in the Yeltsin period, under Putin, and in particular under Medvedev Russia has had the capacity, but has lacked the strategy.

Chapter 2

Ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union: causes and consequences of the conflict spiral

This chapter focuses on the three ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus that escalated in late 1980s. Primary attention is paid to the local level of conflict dynamics and its complexity. This is required for a broader understanding of the regional level, in particular for examining Russia’s capacity for influencing the insecurity settings in the region.

All three conflicts in the region are ethno-territorial in character. They have largely been referred to as frozen conflicts, but this definition is confusing, since, as many analysts confirm the conflicts have never been frozen, it is the mechanism of resolution that is frozen. And apparently in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the mechanism became the solution itself. Among the three conflicts, differentiation should be made between the minority seeking genuine self-determination and agreeing to cultural or any other kind of autonomy and minority agreeing to nothing less than independence as well as irredentism. Whereas South Ossetia was more inclined towards the minority seeking genuine self-determination, both Abkhazia and Mountainous Karabkah have tended towards the latter end of the spectrum.

2.1. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict

Abkhazia is an autonomous republic within Georgia on the Black Sea coast making up 9% of the Georgian territory and nearly half of its coastline. Out of a pre-war population of 525,000,

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202 Usual cause of minority conflicts is the factual or alleged discrimination against the minority, and once a window of opportunity emerges the minority takes advantage of it. Ethnic security dilemma, insufficient chances to maintain ethnic identity, arbitrary delimitation of boundaries, nationalities policies, etc. are all causes of ethnic conflict. There are further intensifying factors as historic grievances, ethnic mobilisation, deficiency of democratic institutions, miscommunication. Ethno-territorial conflicts are classified into two different groups: conflicts of interests and conflicts of identity. Identity conflicts in contrast to conflicts of interests are distinguished for their complexity, intractability and irrationality of the conflict parties. See Peter Waldman, Ethnischer radikalismus, (VS Verlag für Sozial Wissenschaften, 1989), pp. 17-25.

Abkhazia has today approximately 200,000 people.\textsuperscript{204} Formerly known as the Soviet Riviera, Abkhazia is rich in minerals and has a number of attractive assets; it lies 30 km away from the Russian resort city of Sochi, the ice and wind free port in Sukhumi is strategically important for the Russian Black Sea Fleet and is only comparable to the one Russia leases in Sevastopol, the Ukraine. Moreover, the military airport in Gudauta can host military planes at all weather conditions.\textsuperscript{205}

The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is a territorial dispute that contains ethno-social, political and economic elements. Its escalation was triggered by a complexity of factors as past grievances and (mis)perceptions, cultural differences and their institutionalisation, as well as the special circumstances of \textit{perestroika} and the immediate post-Soviet era. Although the conflict broke out in 1988 and turned into a full-scale war in 1992-1993, causing over 10,000 casualties, the roots of the conflict date back to the earlier periods of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{206}

The relations between Georgia and Abkhazia had a certain level of tension throughout the Soviet period and nearly every decade following the establishment of Soviet rule in Abkhazia, requests were made by the Abkhaz officials to the centre for changing the Autonomous Republic’s status. In 1956, 1967 and in 1978 Abkhaz intellectuals and communist party leaders appealed to Moscow to transfer Abkhazia into the Russian SSR. That said, Abkhazians and Georgians had peacefully coexisted within a common state for centuries, and only in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century had the inter-community relations deteriorated to an unprecedented extent. It would be interesting to note that there had not been any historic enmity between the Abkhaz and Georgians in the Middle Ages, on the contrary Abkhazian and Georgian aristocracy had enjoyed a certain level of integration.\textsuperscript{207} It was in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century primarily that the political ideals of Georgians and Abkhazians separated, although daily life and traditions remained largely similar. What caused the outbreak of an ethno-territorial conflict between the two communities, and what challenges the peace process has faced, will be explored below.

\textbf{2.1.1. Causes of the conflict}

The current conflict has an ethnic character, but ethnic and cultural differences alone could not have generated an armed conflict per se, it was far more complex. Its potential owed to


\textsuperscript{206} The number is disputed between 10,000 and 20,000 casualties.

some extent to the demographic situation of the Abkhazians, to both communities’ mutual perceptions of each other and immaturity of the political elites. It was on the one hand, immaturity of Georgian nationalism and political elite, and on the other an ethno-national and exclusive definition of the state and its people by both Abkhaz and Georgian political elites.  

a) Role of perceptions

Georgian perceptions

The approach of the Georgian national movement in early 90s disturbed the minority elites; the minorities’ rights not only to enjoy constitutionally protected autonomy, but to be physically in Georgia were questioned. The Georgian nationhood was presented in ethnic terms leading to minorities being described as ‘guests on our soil’. It was quite popular to discuss demographic issues, birth rate among the ethnic Georgians, which was lower than that

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208 Most scholars take the Soviet nationalities policy as a causal variable in the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus. As Dov Lynch argues, ‘in the Soviet Union ethnicity was territorialised and linked to institutions with different levels of representation, resulting in a state that was national in form, but socialist in content’. The Soviet federalism reinforced a ‘making of nations’ process. The experience of autonomy in the Soviet Union was that it supported the territorialisation of ethnicity, but real power lay somewhere else. The experience was also negative for the titular nation in the republic, who saw it as a divide and rule policy of Russia. In this context, the ethno-territorial conflicts were to a certain extent, a legacy of Soviet policies. For example, in Georgia, an important legacy of Soviet rule was the establishment of sub-republican autonomous political units. Therefore, Abkhazia’s secessionism was partly a consequence of Soviet era nationality policies which encouraged the flourishing of various cultural and ethnic groups and designation of ethnically delimited autonomous provinces. The existing structures of autonomy gave these peoples ready-made institutions to revolt against the metropolitan states in which they lived, all the institutions were there. Whereas elsewhere autonomy was a solution to secessionism, in the FSU, it was more a support. Most autonomies in the Soviet Union were not granted due to ethnic demands, but rather on the basis of arbitrary decisions. In contrast, the large Azeri and Armenian minorities in Georgia enjoyed no autonomy, although both titular ethnicities were demographically larger than in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Armenians in Samstike-Javakheti region have also had grievances vis-à-vis the central Government, and the region is generally known for very weak integration into Georgian society and even state. Although, Azeris and Armenians were equally touched by the Georgian national movement, only the autonomous provinces developed into secessionist regions. See Dov Lynch, Engaging Eurasia’s separatist states, op. cit. For the role of autonomy in the ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus, see Svante Cornell, Autonomy and conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and separatism in the South Caucasus-Cases in Georgia (PhD Dissertation, Stockholm University, 2002); Ronald Grigor Suny, The revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and Collapse of the Soviet Union, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993); Svante Cornell, ‘The devaluation of the concept of autonomy: National minorities in the former Soviet Union’, Central Asian Survey, vol. 18, no 2, 1999, pp. 185-196; Olga Jourek, ‘Ethno-Political conflicts in the Post-communist societies: Prospects for resolution and prevention in the context of international law’, (Cambridge, Mas.: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1999); Roman Szporluk, ‘Introduction: Statehood and Nation-building in Post-Soviet Space’, in National identity and ethnicity in Russia and the new states of Eurasia, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 4-5. On Javakhetia, see Oksana Antonenko, ‘Assessment of the potential implications of the Akhalkalaki Base closure for stability in Southern Georgia’, Conflict Prevention Network, Briefing Study, September, 2001.


among the Armenian and Azeri minorities. The Georgian media and certain intellectuals asked the Government to encourage the resettling of ethnic Georgians in the minority populated areas in order to change the ethnic balance in the country. One of the central newspapers even suggested to put restrictions on non-Georgian families to have no more than two kids. Slogans were raised at mass rallies that the minorities are either assimilated or ousted.

Perception of the Abkhaz in Georgian collective identity was that they should be grateful to Tbilisi for the latter’s delegation of so many rights. The Georgian perception was largely seen through Georgia’s relations with Russia. Every time the Abkhaz appealed to Moscow with grievances, the conviction was strengthened in Tbilisi that the Abkhaz were a pawn used by Russia as a part of the latter’s divide et impera strategy. Many Georgians believed that political autonomy had been granted to the minorities in Georgia for their support to Bolsheviks during the occupation of Georgia in 1920s. In this context, throughout the conflict period, most Georgians tended to see the conflict as either instigated or manipulated by Russia, dismissing the Abkhaz concerns.

A radical fraction of the Georgian national movement even saw the Abkhaz as a minority rather than the indigenous ethnic community of Abkhazia. A group of literature historians in Georgia in 1989 wrote in an open letter referring to the Abkhaz that ‘taking advantage of our hundred year kindness, the Adygee tribes came to us. The newcomers are now trying to obtain our land’. Numerous statements were made by public organisations including the Union of Writers, indicating the preparedness of the Georgian public ‘to force the newcomers to go back to where they came from’. They argued in favour of restricting the Abkhaz autonomy to cultural autonomy only and applying democratic traditions, which would imply proportionate allocation of resources for the 17.8% Abkhaz population of Abkhazia. There was consensus in the Georgian national movement that the political privileges that were given

212 In the case of Georgia a strong national identity or nationalism became quite problematic for the statehood. The weakness of national identity in Kazakhstan in comparison played a role in the relatively peaceful evolution of relations between the ethnic Russians and Kazakhs. See Ronald Grigor Suny, ‘Russia’s Southern tears. Dangerous opportunities in the Caucasus and Central Asia’, in Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: The 21st century, security environment, Rajan Menon, Yuri E. Fedorov and Ghia Nodia eds, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 156.
215 Ibid.
to the Abkhaz in Soviet times were exaggerated considering the proportion of the Abkhaz population of Abkhazia.

The thesis that the Abkhaz were newcomers to Abkhazia was also well-founded in Georgian literature and academic debates.\(^{216}\) In 1954, the literary historian Ingorokva published a book on the origins of the people inhabiting Abkhazia, in which he denied that the Abkhazian community was indigenous to the region.\(^{217}\) His thesis claimed that the current Abkhaz had migrated to Abkhazia from the North Caucasus in the 17\(^{th}\) century and taken over the name Abkhazians, while the real Abkhazians in ancient sources were Georgians. The thesis appeared when most Abkhaz grievances from Stalin’s period were still fresh in memories, and had quite a resentful effect. In 1978, Abkhaz historians G.Dzidzaria and Z. Anchabadze presented a study to the Georgian Communist Party, claiming that no less than 32 publications, most of them scientific, had included and developed Ingorokva’s thesis.\(^{218}\) This triggered Abkhaz intellectuals to petition a letter to Moscow in 1957 requesting the transfer of the province into the Russian SSR.\(^{219}\) As Coppieters notes with reference to Hewitt, Ingorokva’s thesis was taken so seriously that it might have provided the grounds for the forced removal of Abkhazians from Abkhazia.\(^{220}\) During the national movement in Georgia in the late 1980s, Ingorokva’s thesis was often invoked to legitimise a theory of ‘hosts and guests’, and it was adopted by influential intellectuals and public figures including President Gamsakhurdia.\(^{221}\) Initially, Gamsakhurdia, too, called the Abkhaz Adygeans belonging to the North Caucasus.

**Abkhaz perceptions**

Abkhaz claim for political sovereignty is partly based upon reference to the Abkhaz kingdom that existed in the 9\(^{th}\) and 10\(^{th}\) centuries.\(^{222}\) Abkhaz scholars in late 1980s argued that Abkhazia had existed as an independent state for more than a thousand years and not always

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\(^{216}\) The thesis was first suggested by the Georgian intellectual Davit Bakradze in the 19\(^{th}\) century, see George Hewitt, ‘The role of scholars in the Abkhazians’ loss of trust in the Georgians and how to remedy the situation’, in Mehmet Tütüncü, *Caucasus: War and peace* (Haarlem: Sota, 1998), p. 118.


\(^{219}\) In fact, the Georgian Communist Party after pressure by Moscow did admit that it had made mistakes vis-à-vis Abkhazia, and assimilation of the national culture of the local Abkhaz was committed. See Jürgen Gerber, op. cit., p. 125.

\(^{220}\) See Coppieters, ‘In defence of the homeland….’, p. 93.

\(^{221}\) See Hewitt, ‘The role of scholars…’, p. 120.

been part of the Georgian political space. Abkhazia’s history of statehood preceded its union with Georgia, whereas Georgian scholars claimed that Abkhazia had always been a part of the Georgian political space. Further, Abkhaz historians have claimed that in the Soviet period there were many instances of oppression by Tbilisi. They have tended to see Tbilisi and Georgians, rather than the Soviet Union as the major perpetrator of their demographic problems, regarding the immigration waves of Armenians, Georgians and Russians as Georgian colonialism.

Map 2 Abkhazia


b) demographic situation

The issue of Abkhazians’ extinction was a central point in their collective identity and is still one of the major challenges to the peace process today. Both Abkhaz society and the political elite have unilaterally blamed their demographic plight on Tbilisi’s perceived intentions to Georgianise the region. This fear became more explicit during the Georgian national movement.
Abkhazia’s first demographic shifts had occurred in the 19th century under the Russian Tsar. In 1783, Georgia, through the treaty of Giorgievsk joined Russia, accepting its patronage. The Abkhaz principality came under the Russian protection in 1810 independently of Georgia, and retained its principal autonomy until 1864, when Russia managed to break the Abkhaz resistance and abolish its political autonomy by sending the Abkhaz prince to exile. Between 1864 and 1878 (following the Russo-Turkish war) a large number of Abkhaz were deported to the Ottoman Empire.\(^{223}\) According to Kaufman, 32,000 out of 78,000 Abkhaz were deported in 1878 alone.\(^{224}\) As a result, the number of Abkhaz had decreased substantially, and Abkhazia was populated by Russians, Armenians and Georgians. According to the Russian census data of 1897, the Sukhum Okrug had 58,697 Abkhazians and 25,873 Kartvelians, mostly comprising Mingrelians. The next source is the 1926 Great Soviet Encyclopedia which set Abkhazians at 48.1% and Georgians at 18.4%.\(^{225}\) According to a census of 1989, of the 525,000 population of Abkhazia, Georgians made up 45.7 %, Abkhaz 17.8 %, Armenians 14.6 %, Russians 14.3%, Greeks 2.8%, Byelorussians, Jews, Ossetians, Tatars and Azeris each making between 0.4 and 0.1%.\(^{226}\)

c) Abkhazia’s status prior to the conflict

Abkhazians’ primary integration occurred with the peoples of the north Caucasus, with whom they also sought political union. Following the Russian revolution of 1917, Abkhazia proclaimed independence, and on 8th November 1917, elections were held to the Abkhaz National Council, which adopted a constitution. As early as May 1918 Abkhazia was incorporated into the North Caucasian Republic of Mountain Peoples (which included Dagestan, Chechnya, Ossetia, Kabarda and Abkhazia, Karachay-Balkaria and Adygea). Abkhazia, at the time of the proclamation of the Georgian Democratic Republic on May 26th, 1918 was outside the borders of the GDR, but was occupied by its armed forces in June 1918. The province subsequently remained a part of the Georgian Democratic Republic until the establishment of Bolshevik authority in Georgia in 1921.\(^{227}\)

In 1921 Bolshevik authority was first established in Abkhazia and after its extension into Georgia, Abkhazia signed a treaty of union with the latter on 16th December 1921 on

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\(^{224}\) Grigoriy Lejhava, Mezhdu Gruziey i Rossiey, (Moscow: TSIMO, 1997), pp. 48-49.


conditions of full sovereignty (ratified by the I Congress of Abkhazian Soviets of 1922). In official documents and in literature, Abkhazia between 1921 and 1936 is referred to as a treaty republic unified with Georgia. The accordingly adopted constitution of Abkhazia of 1925 proclaimed Abkhazia as a sovereign Soviet Socialist Republic independent of any other authority. Meanwhile, Article 3 of the constitution stipulated that Abkhazia joined the Transcaucasus Socialist Federal Soviet Republic through its special treaty with Georgia, and is represented in the USSR through membership of the TSFSR. The Soviet constitution of 1924 Article 15 already mentioned Abkhazia as an autonomous Republic.

Substantial change to Abkhazia’s status only occurred in 1931, when Abkhazia unambiguously became an autonomous republic of Georgia. The demotion of Abkhazia to an autonomous Republic must have been decided by the centre and imposed involuntarily; following the announcement of the decision, a national rally gathered in Abkhazia to protest the decision. The region’s status as an autonomous republic was also confirmed in the 1937 Constitution of Abkhazia.

d) Abkhaz grievances

1930s should be viewed as the starting point of Abkhaz grievances against Georgia and the construction of a feindbild of Georgians in Abkhazia. All the policies of this era were conceived as a demographic and cultural expansion of Georgia. Following the alleged murder of the Abkhaz Communist Party leader Nestor Lakoba in 1936, Abkhazia underwent massive resettlement of Mingrelians and Georgianisation. The policies carried out in Abkhazia included replacement of the Abkhaz script with Cyrillic script, abolition of Abkhaz language at secondary and nursery schools and replacement of Abkhaz proper names with Georgian ones. All this generated a myth in the Abkhaz social consciousness that the region because of the malicious intent of its neighbours-Georgians, was fraudently deprived of the status of a sovereign republic and artificially turned into an autonomous republic. The myth was added

228 Ibid.
by the fact that both Beria and Stalin were ethnic Georgians and the Communist Party Central Committee policies on Abkhazia were at the time aimed at the restriction of the Abkhaz autonomy. All these factors have made it difficult for the Abkhaz to distinguish between Soviet and Georgian sources of oppression. Abkhaz discontent with being subordinated to Tbilisi as a centre was expressed more openly after Stalin’s death. In 1957, Abkhaz officials appealed to Moscow for the transfer of the autonomous Republic from Georgian to Russian control. Among other things, the appeal was based upon the claim that the Georgians impeded Abkhaz efforts to use their own language. It would be worth mentioning that restriction of the Abkhaz language dated back to the 1925 constitution of Abkhazia, Article 6 of which proclaimed Russian as the state language. In this context, Russian, since the establishment of Soviet authority in Abkhazia had become the dominant language of communication taking into consideration the mixed character of the region’s ethnic composition. Moreover, the 1960s and 70s had seen an increase in the number of Abkhaz schools in Abkhazia, the number of which had risen from 39 in 1966 to 91 in 1978.

It is, indeed difficult to establish whether the alleged cultural oppression of the Abkhaz was a result of Tbilisi’s policies or the Soviet Union’s nationality policies. Regarding linguistic oppression, for example, it is worth noting that Russian had already become the dominant language of Abkhazia even before its unification with Georgia. Moreover, Georgian historians argue that Abkhazians enjoyed far more rights within Georgia than the autonomies in the North Caucasus. As Gerber puts it, ‘compared to the nations of the North Caucasus, whose autonomous status within the RSFSR were of a purely formal nature, the Abkhaz had incomparably larger opportunities to keep their language and culture. The Abkhaz, like the Ossetians, could doubtlessly profit from the well-built educational institutions in Georgia’.

There was oversensitivity observed on the Abkhaz side towards changes occurring in Tbilisi, followed by the widespread belief that the grievances of 1930s and 40s could come back any

234 It should be taken into consideration that Stalinist terror was directed against any dissent in the Soviet society regardless of the nationality. Within the Communist Party as well there is no evidence to claim that Stalin or his adherents had preference for any nation or any kind of nationalism. See Jörg Baberowski, Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus, (München: DVA, 2003). For repressions of Georgians see Amy Knight, Beria. Stalin’s First Lieutenant, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 84. For Stalin’s attitude towards Georgians, see Theodor Hanf and Ghia Nodia, Georgia: Lurching to Democracy, (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2000), p. 23-25.


time and exterminate the Abkhaz ethnos as a whole. Throughout the period both Abkhaz officials and intelligentsiya expressed concern over any publication on Abkhazia, in particular its history by Georgian authors. In 1977 the draft new constitution of Georgia suggested removing the status of the Georgian language as a state language and giving equal status to all languages spoken in the country. This was seen as a sign of Russification in Georgia and a threat to the national culture. Amidst mobilisation of Georgians in Tbilisi against the constitutional change, 130 Abkhaz intellectuals sent a petition to the Soviet leader Brezhnev accusing the Georgian authorities of Georgianising Abkhazia and requested the transfer of Abkhazia from Georgia to Russia, opening of an Abkhaz University and television in Sukhumi.\footnote{See Gerber, op.cit., pp. 130-135. See also See Stephen Jones, ‘Border Disputes and Disputed Borders in the Soviet Federal System’, \textit{Nationalities Papers}, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 1987, p. 56. See also Ronald Grigor Suny, ‘On the Road to Independence: Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society’, in R. S. Suny (ed.), \textit{Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change. Essays on the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia}, (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 395.}

A number of concessions meant to appease Abkhaz demands were made in cultural and staff policies; Moscow was convinced that improving the material conditions would help resolve the discontent. Abkhaz communist party cadres represented a prominent and disproportionate proportion of the administrative personnel in the region, Sukhumi got its own university, TV station and radio.\footnote{See Alexei Zverev, op. cit., see also Michael Ross, ‘How do natural resources influence civil war? Evidence from thirteen cases’, \textit{International Organization}, vol. 58, no 1, pp. 35-67.} These measures however did not make the Abkhaz community content; they still saw a threat of ethnic disappearance, which could only be avoided by establishing state sovereignty and complete control over the institutions.

### 2.1.2. Escalation of the conflict and success of secessionism

The national independence movement of Georgia aimed at acquiring full independence was regarded as a threat in Abkhazia, because in Abkhaz minds it was the Soviet Union, namely Russia that had prevented the Georgians from taking over Abkhazia and assimilating the Abkhaz. The Abkhaz intelligentsiya viewed the Soviet Union as a shield against ‘imperialist Georgia’ and therefore the issue of Georgia’s independence was sensitive for the Abkhaz. In this context, as Georgia boycotted the 17 March, 1991 referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia’s non-Georgian population overwhelmingly voted in favour. The Abkhazians voted overwhelmingly to preserve the Soviet Union which they saw as the only guarantor of their rights.\footnote{See Jurij Anchabadze, ‘History: the Modern Period’, in \textit{The Abkhazians: A handbook}, op. cit., p. 137.}

The preliminary event of the 1980s that initiated the deterioration of relations became the so-called Abkhaz letter. Inspired by the growing activity of Georgian nationalists, in June 1988
60 leading Abkhaz communists sent a letter to the Communist Party in Moscow requesting for the restoration of Abkhazia’s Union Republic status of the 1920s with special ties with Georgia. The authors argued that Tbilisi had pursued colonialist policies in relation to Abkhazia before and after the establishment of Soviet authority in Georgia, regarding both Georgian Democratic Republic and Soviet Georgia colonialist. In December 1988, the authors of the appeal established the Abkhaz Popular Forum Aidgylara (Unity), which defined two tasks in its charter: securing constitutionally the declaration of state sovereignty of Abkhazia and the building of a state governed by law.242

Tension in the Georgian-Abkhaz relations deteriorated after the Abkhazian letter. A belief dominated among the Abkhaz intelligentsiya that it was in this decade namely that Abkhazia would finally achieve its state sovereignty and correct ‘the historic mistake’. March 1989 witnessed a 30,000 rally of the Abkhaz in Lykhny village in Abkhazia with the participation of Abkhaz Party and Soviet officials. A declaration was adopted which recognised Abkhazia’s incorporation into Georgia illegal, and demanded return to the status of 1921.243

Abkhaz tendencies to secede from Georgia were further strengthened by the decision of the Council of Ministers to open a branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhumi. This decision had been made with reference to the demands of the Georgian population of Abkhazia, but it was largely the symbolic meaning of the decision, rather than the act itself that triggered anger among the Abkhaz population. Although the decision got abolished in March 1989 by the prosecutor general of the Soviet Union, it contributed to turmoil in Abkhazia causing the death of 14 people, mostly Georgians.244

The adoption by the Georgian Parliament of a new language law in August 1989, making Georgian obligatory at all schools triggered an even bigger discontent in Abkhazia. The law required Georgian language tests for entry into higher education and was seen as a new attempt of Georgianisation on the eve of a national independence movement in Georgia.245

242 See Chervonnaya, op. cit., p. 80.
243 See Chervonnaya, op. cit., p. 60.
a) War of laws

After certain tensions between Sukhumi and Tbilisi, the conflict proceeded in legislation. In July 1990, the Georgian Parliament, for the purpose of a return to the independent republic of 1918-1921, outlawed all acts of the Soviet Period. Such a decision also annulled the treaty status of Abkhazia as well as its autonomous status of 1931. In response, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, at the absence of a quorum, adopted on 25th August 1990 the ‘Declaration on the state sovereignty of Abkhazia’ and the resolution ‘on legal guarantees for the protection of statehood of Abkhazia’. Declaring the decision void and null, the Georgian Supreme Soviet annulled all the legislation emanating from the above-mentioned acts. The situation remained paralysed until a power-sharing agreement was reached between Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Abkhaz leader Ardzinba in August 1991. According to the agreement the 45.7% Georgian population of Abkhazia received 26 seats, the 18% Abkhaz population of Abkhazia 28 seats and the other groups (Russians, Armenians and Greeks) 11 seats in the 65 seat Abkhazian Parliament. The first elections to the Abkhazian Parliament on the basis of the law were held in September 1991 and it seemed that the relations between Sukhumi and the centre were improved. The new law however was short of shedding light on the status of the relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. Moreover, both in Tbilisi and within the Georgian population of Abkhazia the overrepresentation of the Abkhaz was seen as a betrayal. To make matters worse, in February 1992 Georgia abolished the Georgian Constitution of 1978 and changed to the constitution of 1921, which had mentioned Abkhazia’s autonomous status, but not legally specified it. In early 1992, with the aim of finding a dialogue with the Abkhaz community, Abkhazian was made the second state language in the whole of Georgia. Moreover, Gamsakhurdia during his late years at office expressed a more liberal approach to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz and even proposed a confederation of Georgia and Abkhazia with the latter having an equal status.

In June 1992, the Abkhaz leader Ardzinja proposed a new draft treaty which secured Georgia’s territorial integrity, but restructured the relationship in a confederative way. The draft treaty was immediately rejected by Georgia’s State Council, and as a response the

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Abkhaz parliament on 3rd July, at the absence of a quorum voted to abolish the 1978 Constitution and to restore the Constitution of 1925 according to which Abkhazia was a sovereign state united with Georgia on the basis of a treaty.\(^\text{250}\) The decision was accordingly nullified by the State Council of Georgia on 25 July 1992. Over the same period, the republican newspaper ‘Abkhazia’ published ‘the treaty principles of interrelations between the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of Georgia’, Article 2 of which suggested Georgia and Abkhazia as sovereign states and equal participants of international and foreign economic relations. The sides independently conclude treaties with other countries. Article 3 of the treaty stated ‘voluntary unification with Georgia’.\(^\text{251}\) The Abkhaz leader Ardzimba accordingly claimed that Abkhazia was not leaving Georgia, but was uniting with her on the basis of a new treaty on the delimitation of power.

b) Georgian-Abkhaz war

With the power-sharing agreement Gamsakhurdia’s approach to Abkhazia had dramatically changed and in the summer of 1991, he stated that there were two indigenous nations in Georgia: Georgians and the Abkhaz and suggested a Georgian-Abkhaz confederation of two equal subjects.\(^\text{252}\) However, just as there were hopes for improvement in the relations between Tbilisi and Abkhazia, a coup took place in Tbilisi, ousting President Gamsakhurdia and causing civil war in Georgia between Gamsakhurdia’s opponents and proponents. In January 1992, President Gamsakhurdia was ousted by the commander of the National Guard Kitovani and leader of the paramilitary group Mkhedrioni (Georgian horsemen), the two paramilitary organisations that had emerged during the Georgian national movement.\(^\text{253}\) A State Council comprising both Kitovani and Ioseliani first run the country until the former Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze was invited to lead it in March 1992.

In May 1992, tension arose between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. The Abkhaz Parliament dismissed the minister of interior of Abkhazia and appointed Alexander Ankvab instead. In June, Abkhaz guardsmen attacked the building of Abkhazia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs and the


Georgian minister Lominadze, who was refusing to resign, was beaten. The Georgian Government responded demanding the dissolution of the Abkhaz Parliament and resignation of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic Government to be followed by new elections to the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet. Tbilisi cut electricity and telephone service to Sukhumi for several hours on 1st July 1992. On July 2nd agreement was reached that all armed forces in Abkhazia should be subordinated to the Ministry of Defence in Tbilisi, which at the time was a nominal entity with no real power or resources. Meanwhile, displeased with Ardzinba’s decision to form an Abkhaz-only national guard, the Georgian fraction of the Abkhaz parliament had tried to form alternative structures and arm the loyal Georgian population of Abkhazia. Regional branches of Mkhedrioni were established in Sukhumi and Gagra.

In July, Gamsakhurdia’s proponents in the West of Georgia, in Mingrelia and in the Gali region of Abkhazia continued to challenge the Georgian Government by taking Georgian officials hostage, including the Deputy Prime Minister Kavsadze and interior minister. In Mingrelia, Gamsakhurdia’s supporters continued sporadic attacks, blew up bridges and disrupted rail traffic between Georgia and Russia. The Abkhaz interior minister announced on 12th August that Georgian and Abkhaz soldiers would conduct a joint operation to release the hostages. According to the official statements, combat units under Kitovani’s command were only to go and free the hostages. Shevardnadze had allegedly obtained the approval of the Abkhaz government for a limited hot pursuit operation in Eastern Abkhazia. As the Georgian National Guard entered the Gali region on 13th August to release the Georgian government hostages, they went on from villages of the Gali region to the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi, and after fierce fighting took the city. Kitovani marched detachments of his national guard into Sukhumi and opened fire on the Abkhaz Parliament building, while a draft federal treaty between Georgia and Abkhazia was being discussed. The Abkhaz Government withdrew to Gudauta in the North of Abkhazia. Georgian troops landing from the sea, took control of Leselidze and Gagra close to the Russian border.

Georgian military intervention into Abkhazia was a huge mistake and is considered to be the trigger behind the escalation of a violent and intractable phase of the conflict. Kitovani’s...

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258 Elizabeth Fuller, ‘Russian strategy in the Caucasus since the demise of the USSR’, RFE/RL Research Paper, 1994, p. 29.
intrusion into Abkhazia had allegedly not been authorised by Shevardnadze.\footnote{\textit{ITAR-TASS}, August 13, 1992. There are different accounts on this. Vasileva argues, that Shevardnadze on 17\textsuperscript{th} August declared on Georgian TV ‘Now we can say that Georgian authority has been restored throughout the entire territory of the republic’. See Olga Vasileva, \textit{Gruziya kak model postkommunisticheskoi transformatsii}, (Gorbachev Fund, Moscow, 1993), p. 35. It is possible that Shevardnadze did not authorise Kitovani’s intrusion, but chose to back him once the operation started.} An important factor contributing to the outbreak of war was Shevardnadze’s inability to control the country’s armed formations when he became the head of state in March 1992. Real military power continued to be exercised by Kitovani, who retained command of the National Guard, and Ioseliani whose Mkhedrioni effectively became an arm of the state. The obvious strategic rational of Georgia’s intervention was to control the railway and road to Russia, to close the mountain passes to cut off Abkhazia’s supply lines and win a war against a small Abkhaz force.\footnote{See Pavel Baev, ‘Civil wars in Georgia: corruption breeds violence’, in Jan Koehler and Christoph Zürcher eds., \textit{Potentials of disorder}, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p. 111, 128.} As soon as the war broke out, the first and paramount support that the Abkhaz received was from the Confederation of Mountain Peoples, of which Abkhazia was a member. Georgia’s intrusion into Abkhazia also had economic dimensions. Kitovani and Ioseliani after the coup, had established control over the arms trade and distribution of fuel in Georgia. According to Pavel Baev, Kitovani organised the war in Abkhazia to establish control over the region’s valuable tourism industry and transportation networks. His troops carried out extensive looting, and burnt down villages in Abkhazia.\footnote{See Christoph Zürcher, Jan Koehler and Pavel Baev, ‘Civil wars in the Caucasus’, in Paul Collier, Nicholas Sambanis eds., \textit{Understanding civil war: Evidence and analysis}, (Washington: the World Bank, 2005, vol. II).} However, the collapse of the economy in Georgia made it impossible to supply the troops adequately, and led to a mismanagement of the military campaigns, leading finally to the defeat of Mkhedrioni and the National Guard. The economic assets they were fighting for were also largely destroyed.\footnote{Charles Fairbanks, ‘The Post-Communist wars’, \textit{Journal of democracy}, vol.6, no 4, 1995, p. 25} The Abkhazian leadership headed by Ardzinba called for a total mobilisation and managed to secure the support of North Caucasian peoples, in particular the Circassians and Chechens. The Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, the first congress of which had been held in Sukhumi in August 1989, sent over 1,500 volunteers to support the Abkhaz forces.\footnote{Charles Fairbanks, ‘The Post-Communist wars’, \textit{Journal of democracy}, vol.6, no 4, 1995, p. 25} Moreover, Ardzinba had also succeeded in gaining an upper hand in the ideological justification of fighting; the war against the Georgian forces was presented in Abkhazia as a national salvation struggle, with the conviction that any victory of the Georgian force would end up in the extermination of the Abkhaz race. The Abkhaz forces in this context had a higher level of fighting moral than the Georgian forces. On the contrary, Shevardnadze and Georgian leaders from the very onset firmly believed that the war was one between Georgia
and Russia, instead of Abkhazia, a conviction generated by Russian military assistance to Abkhazia. Within a short period of time the Abkhaz had acquired T-72 tanks, rocket launchers, fighter planes and other heavy equipment.\textsuperscript{264} The involvement of the Russian military units in the conflict was also confessed by the then Russian minister of foreign affairs Kozyrov in 1993.\textsuperscript{265}

Ceasefire attempts in September 1992 and May 1993 did not lead to any cessation of hostilities. Only in July 1993 did Georgia, Russia and Abkhazia agree upon a substantial ceasefire agreement in Sochi; its provisions included withdrawal of all military units from the combat zone, return of the legal government to the region, a joint control group to monitor the ceasefire and the deployment of international observers and peacekeepers under UN aegis.\textsuperscript{266}

The ceasefire became a cause of disappointment for large parts of Georgia’s population and finally led to the renewal of the civil war. In Mingrelia (Western Georgia), Gamsakhurdia’s supporters launched an attack on the government forces. The Abkhazian forces took advantage of the turmoil and attacked to retake Sukhumi. A large number of atrocities against Abkhazia’s Georgian population were reportedly committed, which later became known as Sukhumi massacre.\textsuperscript{267}

The war made 200,000 Georgians from Abkhazia flee their homes and become IDPs in Georgia and Russia. The fighting formally ended with the memorandum of understanding between the parties signed in Geneva on 1\textsuperscript{st} December 1993, without resolving the status of the province. The Abkhaz forces retained control of the whole of Abkhazia except for the upper Kodori gorge at the Abkhaz-Georgian de-facto border, making the line of separation along the Inguri river.

The trilateral negotiations continued in the first quarter of 1994 and ended up on the 10\textsuperscript{th} February as a date to start the return of Georgian IDPs to Abkhazia. However, outbreak of hostilities between the parties later impeded the process. The Abkhazians accused Georgia of using the return of IDPs for an armed incursion into Abkhazia by guerrilla warfare. Further plans for the return of IDPs were cancelled when the Georgian parliament on 10\textsuperscript{th} March,

while Shevardnadze was in the US, disbanded the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia and annulled all its decisions.\footnote{See ‘Decree issued by the Parliament of Georgia on Legislative Practice of Apartheid and Racism in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia’, 10\textsuperscript{th} March, 1994, at http://www.parliament.ge/files/1_1148_280404_94-1.pdf}

The sides agreed on a ‘Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict’ on 4 April 1994, in which they rejected use of force, and promised to settle the conflict exclusively by peaceful means. Provision was made for the introduction of peacekeeping forces, presence of UN military observers and the gradual return of refugees and IDPs, stipulated in the ‘quadripartite agreement on the refugees’. Later on, Georgia and Abkhazia worked out an ‘Agreement for a cease-fire and separation of forces’ of 14 May 1994 in Moscow.\footnote{See ‘Agreement On A Ceasefire And Separation Of Forces, Signed In Moscow On 14 May 1994’, available at http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/georgia-abkhazia/keytext3.php} The sides agreed to establish a security zone of 12 km wide on each side of the Inguri river along the line of contact, in which there would be no armed forces. Armed forces and heavy military equipment belonging to the parties were prohibited inside the zone. The Abkhaz would pull back its artillery, tanks and heavy armament to Sukhumi and the Georgians to Zugdidi. In addition, the Georgians were to withdraw troops from the Kodori gorge, the only part of Abkhazia under Georgian control. The protocol to the Moscow agreement established the mandate of the CIS Peacekeeping Force. It established that its primary responsibility was to maintain and observe the cease-fire and prevent resumption of armed conflict, but it also had responsibility for disengagement in and Georgia’s withdrawal from the Kodori gorge. The mandate further included supervising implementation of the agreement with regard to the security zone and promoting the safe return of refugees and IDPs, especially to the formerly Georgian populated Gali region.\footnote{See Protocol to the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces, signed in Moscow on May 14, 1994, http://www.unomig.org/data/moscow_agreement.pdf} In June 1994, CISKF were introduced into Abkhazia as a part of a joint peacekeeping force of 3000 men deployed along the Inguri river in the south and the lower part of the Kodori gorge. The CISPKF failed to provide the safe and orderly return, but also the safety and protection of the returnees. Georgian returnees were often subject to harassment and human rights violations by the Abkhaz police; an example was in March 1995, when the Abkhaz police entered the security zone and arrested some 200 returnees, murdering twenty of them. Some executions took place before the CISPKF personnel.\footnote{See S. Neil MacFarlane, ‘On the front lines in the near abroad: the CIS and the OSCE in Georgia’s civil wars’, \textit{Third World Quarterly}, vol. 18, no 3, p. 518.} The UNOMIG too, has largely failed to prevent human
rights violations and to create the necessary security conditions for the safe return of Georgian IDPs.\footnote{272}{See ‘Report of the Secretary General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia’, UNSC S/2001/59, 18\textsuperscript{th} January, 2001, p. 3. S/2001/401, 24\textsuperscript{th} April, 2001, p. 3. S/2003/412, 9\textsuperscript{th} April, 2003.}

In the initial post-military period Sukhumi was intent on seeking compromise with Tbilisi, and the Abkhaz administration had allegedly agreed to a single federal state in the protocol to the Moscow negotiations in July 1995. The failure of genuine progress in the negotiations led to Abkhaz authorities hold a referendum and declare independence. The Abkhazian authorities claimed that until 1999 the chance of Georgia and Abkhazia uniting in a confederation was still there.\footnote{273}{Author’s interview with a Russian MP, Moscow, March 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2008.}

\section*{2.1.3. Peace process}

\textit{a) UN Commitment}

The peace process has been to a larger extent facilitated by the UN and CIS Peacekeeping Force, although Tbilisi denounces the latter of being impartial. The UN Security Council resolutions have all stressed Georgia’s territorial integrity, but since 2007, April 13 Resolution (SC Resolution 1752), the UNSC has tended to regard the conflict as one between Georgia and Abkhazia rather than the conflict in \textit{Abkhazia, Georgia}.\footnote{274}{UNSC Resolution 1752, available at http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2007/sc8997.doc.htm. See also Vladimir Socor, ‘UNSC Resolution on the conflict in Abkhazia: Less tendentious, but still dubious’, 17\textsuperscript{th} April, 2007.} A United Nations Observer Mission (UNOMIG) was established by a SC resolution in August 1993, whose major task has been to observe the ceasefire reached by the Moscow Agreement of May 1994.\footnote{275}{For UNOMIG, see Domitilla Sagramoso, ‘The UN, the OSCE and NATO’, in \textit{The South Caucasus: a challenge for the EU}, Dov Lynch ed., Chaillot Paper 65, December, 2003, pp. 63-88. See also, Susan Stewart, ‘The role of the United Nations in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict’, \textit{Journal on Etnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe}, Issue 2, 2003.} Its mandate also includes observing the CISPKF, monitoring the Georgian withdrawal from the Kodori valley and patrolling it. Since 2001 a UN Human Rights Office has been designated in Sukhumi. The Moscow agreement between the conflict parties has acted as a long-term cease-fire accord, which UNSC resolutions and resolutions of other international organisations have made reference to. At the initial phase of the conflict, amidst Georgian calls for an international peacekeeping force, the UN was unable to deploy a peacekeeping force in the region, partly due to Russian objection, and because of the lack of peacekeeping resources.\footnote{276}{See S. Neil MacFarlane, ‘The role of the UN’, in Jonathan Cohen ed., \textit{A question of sovereignty: The Georgia-Abkhazia peace process}, (London: Accord 7, Conciliation Resources, 1999).}

The UN Secretary General has also designated a special representative for the region who is often involved in facilitating meetings between the Abkhaz and Georgian elites as well as preparing peace proposals. In 1993, a ‘Group of Friends of the
Secretary General’ was established comprising the UK, France, Russia, Germany and the US. In 1997 a Coordination Council was set up to coordinate the activities of the group, which established three working groups: on security and non-resumption of hostilities, on the return of IDPs and on economic and social issues.277

In March 2003, at a meeting of Presidents Putin and Shevarndadze in Sochi a parallel negotiation process to the Geneva based one was established, known as the Sochi process. It established Georgian-Russian-Abkhaz working groups on the rehabilitation of the Inguri hydroelectric power station; the return of IDPs and reopening of the railway between Sochi and Tbilisi. Here, Tbilisi showed its readiness to accept a leading role of Russia provided that the latter would facilitate the peace process. The Sochi process created the perception in Georgia that Russia’s attitude to the conflict is subject to its bilateral relations with Russia. However, the deterioration of relations between Moscow and Tbilisi after the Rose Revolution led to the latter’s withdrawal from the Russian led process.

b) Return of Georgian IDPs

According to UN estimates in 1998, Abkhazia’s population had decreased from 500,000 to 200,000 only.278 The issue of the return of IDPs to Abkhazia has been one of the major questions impeding the peace process. Tbilisi has prioritised the return of some 240,000 IDPs, and the Abkhaz leadership has been insisting on the settlement of its legal and political status prior to demographic shifts. Tbilisi has received international backing on the issue of repatriation of Georgian IDPs and their security. The OSCE Lisbon Summit recognised the mass exodus of Georgians from Abkhazia as ethnic cleansing.279

The authorities in Sukhumi have tended to see the massive return of IDPs to Abkhazia as a threat, since such an act would shift the demographic composition of the region and put the Abkhaz authorities’ legitimacy under question. The Abkhaz side has not been prepared to accept returnees in significant numbers. The deep sense of ethnic insecurity was the cause behind the Abkhaz refusal to allow returnees in large numbers, because, it is not clear how the Abkhaz political elite would retain control over the region if Georgians returned. The Abkhazians’ demographic number had shrunk from the 19th century onwards, creating a fear of extinction.

The question of repatriation has concentrated on the return of Georgians to the Gali region where Georgians mostly lived before the outbreak of the conflict. As of 2006, an estimated 40,000 out of 240,000 have returned to Abkhazia, most of whom to the Gali region. However, Gali region has also been known for instability caused by Georgian guerrilla groups. The Abkhaz authorities’ response to the informal efforts of IDPs to return to the region has also been a source of tension. They have overwhelmingly rejected Georgia’s involvement in the security guaranteeing of the returning IDPs; Tbilisi has been concerned about the treatment of the returning Georgian population in Gali and raised concerns that the Georgians of the region are deprived of certain fundamental rights, including education in Georgian. A UNSC resolution 1716 guaranteed the property rights of the IDPs and refugees from Abkhazia, and on May 15th, 2008 the UNGA adopted a resolution supporting the rights of Georgian IDPs to return to Abkhazia.

C) Status of Abkhazia

The existence of differences between the parties on the status of Abkhazia has been another and possibly the major factor delaying the peace process. Since the cessation of hostilities, Abkhazia has insisted on confederative principles and Tbilisi on federal power-sharing. In 1994, Sukhumi sent a proposal to Tbilisi suggesting a union of two equal sovereign units, and following rejection by Tbilisi, a constitution proclaiming Abkhazia as a sovereign democratic republic was adopted. In 1995, Tbilisi offered Abkhazia autonomy within an asymmetric federation within Georgia. Rejecting Tbilisi’s federal proposals, Abkhazia held a referendum on state independence in 1999, which the authorities in Sukhumi have used to legitimate their claim for absolute sovereignty. Following the referendum there was a declaration of independence and governmental support for the status of free associated state with Russia.

The status issue was hoped to be resolved through the Boden proposal in 2001, an initiative brought forward by the UNSG’s envoy to the conflict, Dieter Boden. The Boden plan

282 Tbilisi’s concern was also confirmed by the UN investigator for human rights violations in Abkhazia. See ‘UN investigator raps Abkhazia over Georgia refugees’, Reuters, 2nd February, 2006.
284 For various peace models, see Bruno Coppieters, David Darcishvili, Natella Akaba, Federal Practice: Exploring Alternatives for Georgia and Abkhazia, (Brussels: VUB Press, 2000).
initially seemed to be contradictory, since it suggested political sovereignty for Abkhazia and territorial integrity for Georgia as compatible. Its essence proposed the reorganisation of the Georgian state as a loose federation, where the relations between Georgia and Abkhazia would resemble that of confederative units. In a federation (instead of a union as suggested by Abkhaz authorities) of two equal units Abkhazia would not be subordinate to Georgia and Georgia would not be more dominant than Abkhazia, both would have to comply with the federal constitutional order. In this context, Abkhazia would enjoy sovereignty within the federal constitutional framework. Unlike in a confederation, change to the status of one of the subjects would only be possible by mutual consent. The draft was rejected by the Abkhaz authorities at an early stage categorically, on the grounds that the only solution for the region’s status is complete independence.

Following the Rose Revolution in Tbilisi, new peace plans and suggestions were drafted and proposed to the Abkhaz authorities. The new Georgian Government pledged to deploy both hard and soft power for the resolution of the conflict. It has offered economic and cultural incentives. In 2004, on 26th May, day of Georgia’s national independence Saakashvili addressed the public in Abkhazian and Ossetian. However, following certain unsuccessful attempts to negotiate a federative peace plan with Abkhazia based upon the Spanish model in Catalonia, and in the light of deteriorating Georgian-Russian relations, Tbilisi has stated that a military solution to the conflict is not an exception. It has increased military expenditures and spoken of Georgia’s right to restore territorial sovereignty. Russia and the UN have both urged Tbilisi to conclude an agreement with Abkhazia on non-use of force.

A new priority on the Georgian agenda in the negotiation process since the change of Government has been the desire to change the format of the peacekeepers. Since 2004 the Georgian Government and Parliament have sought to exclude Russia from peacekeeping in Abkhazia and appealed to the UN to replace the existing CISPKF with an international one. Tbilisi has stated that as soon as the CIS peacekeeping force leaves, it would be ready to sign an agreement with Abkhazia on non-use of force. The UN and a number of Western states have urged Tbilisi not to act unilaterally on the issue, since it could further deteriorate the

288 It should be noted that Georgia was largely recognised as a failing state prior to the Rose Revolution. It was regarded by many analysts as a medieval feudal state at high level of crime, with limited protection for business and individuals, its ministries were allegedly often involved in kidnapping and smuggling. The new Government managed to establish an efficient state and transform Georgia’s status within a short period of time. This had implications for the conflict regions: any improvement in the state-building process required putting an end to the secessionist regimes, for both economic and political reasons, which produced activation of peace efforts and new peace plans, but also impatience with the secessionist regimes. For the failing state in Georgia, see ‘A moment of truth-The Caucasus’, The Economist, 29 November- 5 December, 2003, see also Anatol Lieven, ‘Georgia- a failing state?, Eurasianet magazine, 30 January, 2001.
relations with Sukhumi and Moscow. The Abkhaz foreign minister has accordingly reiterated the Abkhaz objection to the replacement of the peacekeeping force, warning that the peacekeepers’ exit would urge Sukhumi to dispatch forces to the security zone. Moreover, the UN has not expressed any willingness to dispatch a UN peacekeeping mission to Abkhazia, and the UNOMIG’s activity is largely dependent upon the CIS peacekeeping force. The Ukraine and Baltic states have expressed willingness to contribute troops, but only if the costs are borne by a third party. The EU has not expressed any eagerness to undertake such a task.290

d) Peace proposals of the Saakashvili Government

Most peace proposals have been based on federal power sharing models. In April 2008 President Saakashvili offered Abkhazia a peace plan that envisaged broad autonomy for the region. Under the plan, the post of Georgian vice-President would be established and given to an Abkhaz official who would have veto power over legislation affecting the region. Abkhazia would also be given control over an unspecified number of government ministries, and a free economic zone would be established in Gali and Ochamchire. Abkhazia would have its own currency and economic freedom. Abkhaz authorities despite the broad power-sharing rejected the proposal.291

In July 2008, a three stage plan for the resolution of the conflict was drafted by the German foreign minister Walter-Steinmeier. The plan did not mention Georgia’s territorial integrity or internationally recognised borders and referred to Abkhazia as an entity itself. The first phase of the plan envisaged mutual declarations on non-resumption of hostilities. Any internationalisation of the conflict and a possible deployment of international police force would be possible if the parties so agree. The first phase also enshrined a ‘general acceptance of the right of return of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to Abkhazia’, as well as the obligation to safeguard the full range of their rights with no mention of a timeframe. The second phase would be dedicated to the region’s reconstruction through an international donors’ conference, and in the third phase a working group would be established to draft the political status of Abkhazia, assisted by international parties and facilitators. The plan got finally rejected by the Abkhaz side on the grounds that the first phase envisaged the return of Georgian IDPs instead of the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Kodori Gorge; further, the Abkhaz authorities expressed concern over Tbilisi’s plans to launch an offensive.


from the Kodori Gorge and stressed the need for Georgia to sign an agreement on non-use of force. Praising the plan as a step on the right direction, the Russian Foreign Ministry also reiterated its position that it is too early to speak of a repatriation of the Georgian IDPs.

In May 2006, Sergei Bagapsh submitted the Abkhaz version of the peace plan, called ‘key to the future’. He firstly argued that the Georgian side should recognise its past mistakes and apologise to the Abkhaz people for the politics of assimilation, war and isolation, lift the economic blockade, sign a joint peace treaty and alludes to the international recognition of Abkhazia.292


At the end of 1997 the Georgian partisan groups linked to Tbilisi (Forest brothers and White Legion) increased their activities in the areas where the Russian peacekeeping forces were operating.293 The situation in the Georgian administered Kodori gorge and Georgian populated Gali region has been tense in the last decade. A number of Georgian guerrilla groups have formed in Gali with the claim to provide self-defence for the displaced Georgian population in Abkhazia. Fighting broke out in 1998 in Gali region as the ethnic Georgian paramilitary groups crossing the cease-fire line launched an insurgency against the Abkhaz authorities. As a result over 20,000 Georgian IDPs who had recently returned home were displaced for a second time with over 1,500 recently rebuilt houses destroyed. The Abkhaz authorities claimed Georgian security ministries’ involvement in the crisis, although the Georgian Government insistently rejected any affiliation.294

The relations further deteriorated when Chechen and Georgian forces tried to intrude to the Abkhaz part of the Kodori gorge in 2001. In October 2001, Georgian paramilitaries supported by Chechen field commander Ruslan Gelaev and a unit of 500 men crossed from the Kodori gorge into Abkhazia, meeting fierce resistance from the Abkhaz forces. Chechen fighters allegedly assisted by Georgian paramilitary groups carried out attacks on Kodori and shot down a UN helicopter. Russian air force jets immediately reacted bombing their positions. The Georgian Government denied any prior knowledge of the operation, but it was alleged to have known and assisted the operation. Georgian interior ministry trucks had allegedly

shipped armed men to the conflict zone. The crisis continued for a few months until finally Georgian troops withdrew from Kodori in February 2002.

**Kodori operation**

The negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia got deadlocked following the deployment of Georgian Interior Ministry forces in July 2006 to the Georgian controlled Kodori gorge. A local militia leader Emzar Kvitsiani, who had led the defence of the gorge against the Abkhaz forces, declared his disobedience to the Saakashvili Administration as the latter decided to disband the militia group he was leading. Deployment of Georgian armed units in Kodori, hence the immediate vicinity of the conflict zone raised concern in Sukhumi and Moscow as well as at the UNOMIG. A UNSC (1716) resolution in 2006 October raised the issue, criticising Georgia’s military action in the region and recognising the operation a breach of the Moscow agreement of 1994. According to the Moscow agreement Kodori gorge should remain as a demilitarised zone free of both Abkhaz and Georgian military presence. It criticised Georgia for restoring control over the Kodori gorge. The Resolution further stipulated that the Moscow agreement should also be applied to the Kodori gorge. Meanwhile, Tbilisi managed to relocate the Abkhaz Government in exile from Tbilisi to Kodori, adding a third actor to the conflict to delegitimize the current authorities. The operation was however a blow on the trust-building between the sides.

**2.1.5. Challenges to reconciliation**

The primary challenge to achieving peace in the conflict has been the disagreement between the parties over the region’s status. Since 1999, the Abkhaz authorities have continuously rejected Tbilisi’s proposals for an asymmetric federation, insisting upon absolute sovereignty. Instead the idea of free associated state with Russia has become more outspoken. Until the recent years, the only solution Abkhazia agreed to, was a loose confederation of two subjects so that the people of the region could exercise their self-determination. However, such an arrangement would equal Georgia’s recognition of Abkhazia’s sovereign statehood and of its unilateral right to secession. For Tbilisi, Abkhazia is important because of the region’s strategic location on the Black Sea, its economic potential and the high number of IDPs. On the Abkhazian side, any compromise on the status of Abkhazia might cause internal discontent.

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Another challenge has been the shadow economy. The de facto authorities have largely funded themselves through the smuggling of various products to Russia, conflict resolution would threaten the flow of revenue for those who run these businesses. This remained profitable for all sides, since under President Shevardnadze Tbilisi was also taking part in the smuggling. Under such circumstances, criminal groups benefitting from the status-quo in Abkhazia and in Russia would not have an interest in changing it. The frozen state of the conflict creates an excellent opportunity for illegal or tax free trade. Many border guards, monopolists and police forces in Abkhazia prefer the current status-quo. Therefore, Steinmeier’s plan envisaged this factor and offered broad economic autonomy that would not endanger the profit-making activities of those groups. A West Abkhaz group controls the shipment of oil, food and tobacco, and participates in the smuggling of drugs. In the Gali region, various groups control the smuggling of mandarins, hazelnuts, cigarettes and petrol. The smuggling takes place in a defence corridor established by Abkhazian paramilitaries who use it to generate some revenues through taxation.\(^{297}\) Thus, control over economically important territory and its infrastructure have been a further complicating factor for conflict dynamics in Abkhazia. Today, profits gained from the shadow economy of the region sustain an interest in maintaining the status-quo of the conflict.

**Societal challenges**

War has replaced most of the positive feelings and developments that the two communities had previously enjoyed. Unlike in South Ossetia, interaction between the two communities has been to a minimum. Even the Georgian returnees to the Gali region have not reintegrated with the Abkhaz community at large. The war and the peace process have both been elite driven. In 1995, 42% of Georgians thought that keeping Abkhazia and South Ossetia was not worth the sacrifices of the war.\(^{298}\) On other occasions, public opinion has been supportive of the ruling elite’s position. For example, most Georgians polled spoke in favour of granting Abkhazia the status of autonomous republic, whereas 87% of the population in Abkhazia thought that early return of IDPs would cause a renewal of war.\(^{299}\) Survey conducted in Abkhazia in 1994 by ‘Civic Initiative’ showed that 45.5% wanted Abkhazia to be an independent state, while another 45.5% wanted to unite with Russia. Only 6.7 % favoured union state with Georgia on an equal basis; Abkhazia becoming a part of Georgia found

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\(^{299}\) Ibid., p. 89.
support among 0.6 % of the population, all of whom made the Georgian returnees. A survey by the Norwegian Refugee Council has shown that 74% of Georgian refugees consider bringing Abkhazia back under Georgia’s jurisdiction as a precondition to return. The most recent opinion poll in Abkhazia (including the Georgian populated Gali region) on the conditions of reconciliation shows the societal challenges to the peace process even more explicitly.

Table 3 Polls in Abkhazia on the conditions of reconciliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions of reconciliation</th>
<th>Total respondents in %</th>
<th>Respondents in Gali r. in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By mutual pardoning</td>
<td>8,1</td>
<td>51,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Georgians recognise their fault and offer an apology</td>
<td>13,6</td>
<td>2,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Abkhazians recognise their fault and offer an apology</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>3,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation will not be possible for a long period</td>
<td>28,7</td>
<td>12,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation would be possible if Georgia recognises Abkhazia’s independence</td>
<td>40,8</td>
<td>6,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible if Abkhazia unites with Georgia</td>
<td>1,0</td>
<td>13,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible in case of enforcement by outside forces</td>
<td>2,8</td>
<td>7,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opinion poll on the reasons for Abkhazia’s aspiration to independence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Population in Gali</th>
<th>Experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic prosperity can be achieved by independence</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>6,6</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abkhazians have the right for independence and free will for their historic land</td>
<td>56,6</td>
<td>28,3</td>
<td>30,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Abkhaz movement was not externally oriented, but had its internal roots, and no matter which union republic it had been a part of, the movement would have taken place. What shape it would take would be subject to the circumstances and developments. Threats from Georgia to Abkhazia during Gamsakhurdia period led to the tactical goal of emancipation from Georgia becoming a strategic one. Therefore, the real goal of independence in the true sense of the word was replaced by independence from Georgia, but gradually adapted itself to integration with Russia. In a way, choice between independence and dependence became a choice between Georgia and Russia. The fact is, today the Abkhaz government has oriented all its resources towards another state, including its population.

2.2. The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict

The emergence of an ethno-political conflict in South Ossetia owes more to radical elites and security dilemma, rather than a societal level of discontent. Ossets, unlike the Abkhaz, formed the majority in South Ossetia during the Soviet era: Ossets composed 66.2% (made up 65000 out of the 98000), Georgians 29% and the rest consisted of Russians, Armenians and Jews. However, only 40% of Ossetians in Georgia lived in South Ossetia, and before the outbreak of the war, there were 164,000 Ossetians in Georgia, 97,658 of them scattered all

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302 A widespread cause of ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus has been referred to as ethnic security dilemma. The concept implies that the disintegration of the central state leaves various ethnic groups to consolidate their identity, and finally this leads to a security dilemma. Barry Posen, who first coined the term in an attempt to adapt realist logic to post-cold War developments, argued that the conflicts in the South Caucasus have all been caused by an ethnic security dilemma. Equally Stuart Kaufmann has argued that the ultimate cause of the MK conflict was an ethnic security dilemma. When reviewing the conflicts in the South Caucasus, one comes to the conclusion that an ethnic security dilemma as a cause of conflict is only applicable to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The Georgian national movement was initially not directed against the Ossetians, but against Russia, however the way it evolved, and disintegration of the Soviet Union intimidated South Ossetians; this finally ended up in seeking security in the form of upgrading their status, which subsequently led to secessionism. Measures as the language and citizenship laws of the Georgian Parliament were aimed at institutionalise and preserve the Georgian identity, but as a reaction to the processes in the centre a South Ossetian national movement emerged, though with no central agenda first. Thus, the processes that might have been very natural for an independence movement in other Former Soviet states turned out to be a catastrophe for Georgia and left wounds on both sides which still cannot be healed today. Such a scenario was absent in both MK and Abkhazia, both of which did include a so called malign intention. Therefore, a security dilemma cannot universally be applied to all conflicts. See Barry R. Posen, ‘The security dilemma and ethnic conflict’, Survival vol. 35, No 1, Spring 1993, p. 27-47. Paul Roe, ‘The intra-state security dilemma: Ethnic conflict as a tragedy?’, Journal of Peace Research, vol. 36, no 2, 1999, pp. 183-202. Stuart J. Kaufman, Modern hatreds, op. cit., p. 34.
over Georgia. Today there are 38,000 Ossetians left in Georgia proper, since most Ossetians have migrated to their ethnic brethren in North Ossetia.

In 1991-1992 a brutal war with serious atrocities on both sides was fought by Georgians and Ossetians causing some 600 casualties. The cease-fire of 1992 has left South Ossetia divided into Georgian and South Ossetian controlled areas, the latter being administered by a de facto Government led by Edward Kokoity. Another fundamental difference between Abkhazia and South Ossetia is, South Ossetia’s secession has pursued the goal of joining their 600,000 kindred in North Ossetia.

The South Ossetian conflict has been regarded by Tbilisi as a political-territorial one with no ethnic element although South Ossetia’s de facto authorities have constantly attempted to add one. Indeed South Ossetia had no record of ethnic grievances during the Soviet period, and both communities had enjoyed good interrelations. It was rather the radicalisation of Georgian politics that enabled the once unpopular radical leaders in South Ossetia to gain in popular support. In this respect, the conflict was a consequence of an ethnic security dilemma caused by Georgia’s language law and national independence movement led by Gamsakhurdia. That said, at its current stage, contributed by past perceptions, in particular the 1918 clashes, and added by ethnically delimited boundaries, as well as South Ossetia’s integration into North Ossetia, the conflict does include an ethnic factor, albeit not as strict as in Abkhazia.

2.2.1. The Georgian and South Ossetian national movements

The South Ossetian conflict must be examined in the context of a complex of factors as the Georgian national movement of 1980s, Georgian national concept, Gamsakhurdia’s nationalistic rhetoric and an ethnic security dilemma. Initially the Georgian national movement in late 1980s was not directed against any minority, but it did not take it long to lose its original direction. Adopting a resistance identity, the national movement was primarily directed against Soviet/Russian influence, and strived for ‘purifying’ Georgia of all elements of Soviet legacy. Georgia’s return to its 1921 constitution and protection of its distinctiveness by ‘Georgia for Georgians’ campaign seemed at first to be a peaceful national self-determination of a nation fighting against colonial rule. However, subsequently...

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adopting an ethnic definition of the nation, the Georgian elite recognised the minorities as non-Georgians, second class citizens and even an anomaly in Georgia; for the national movement the minorities were an artificial factor created by the Soviet rule, and might therefore become a Soviet threat to the realisation of the independence project. In this respect, any sign of discontent amongst the minorities was regarded with suspicion and mistrust by the Georgian national movement, often linked to Russia’s impediment of Georgia’s acquisition of independence.307 Thus, minorities were linked to Bolsheviks, and a feindbild of both was generated within the national movement, both seen as an impediment to the evolution of the Georgian nation.308

Gamsakhurdia’s rhetoric in late 1990s, directed already against South Ossetia, further alienated Ossetians from Georgia. In an infamous speech of hypernationalism309, expressing his anxiety about the demographic changes in Georgia, said: ‘…….Tatardom (referring to the muslim minority) is rearing its head there and measuring its head against Kakhetia, there are Laks in one place, Armenians in another, Ossetians in a third place, and they are on the point of swallowing up Kakhetia. That’s what these traitors, these communists have done to us. In another speech, Gamsakhurdia even went further saying ‘they should be chopped up, they should be burned out with a red-hot iron from the Georgian nation…. We will deal with all the traitors, hold all of them to proper account, and drive out all the evil enemies and non-Georgians...!'310

As South Ossetia appealed to raise its status within Georgia, Gamsakhurdia responded by calling the Ossetians ‘ungrateful guests of Georgia’, supporting the claim that Ossetians’ homeland is in the North Caucasus, namely North Ossetia. The Ossetians, like the Abkhaz were accused to have benefited at Georgia’s expense from a Kremlin policy of ‘divide and


308 See Nicolo Cvetkovski, ‘The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict’, (PhD dissertation, University of Aalborg). Some Georgian writers shared the perception that the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was created by the Bolsheviks to generate permanent sources of tension. Such a perception towards the Bolsheviks and Russia partly stemmed from Georgia’s resistance identity.


310 See Stuart Kaufman, op. cit., p. 110.
As Suny notes, ‘….the notion was widespread that the fears and aspirations of the non-Georgians were artificial, illegitimate and influenced by sinister forces from Moscow’. This radical position is well depicted in the words of the writer Giorgi Gachechiladze: ‘a minority does not deserve any moral support when it is used as a blind weapon against a nation struggling for its freedom’. The Ossetians were even accused of bringing Bolshevism to Georgia.

2.2.2. Role of historic narratives

Historic perceptions of each other played a certain role in the escalation of the conflict and generation of a feindbild. The Georgian position argues that Ossetian settlements in Georgia began mostly in the last two or three centuries. In contrast to Abkhazia, which Tbilisi recognised as the historic homeland of the Abkhaz, South Ossetia is not seen as the historic homeland of Ossetians. The term South Ossetia has not been widely used in Georgia, most Georgian literature and media have referred to it as Smachebalo, meaning land of the Machabelo feudal family that ruled it.

The Ossetian interpretation is, Ossetians joined the Russian Empire in 1774 voluntarily and that the agreement had no clause distinguishing North and South Ossetia. After the Russian revolution, South Ossetia became a part of the Georgian Democratic Republic and was always a problematic area for the central government. Having been a traditional ally of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus for the last 200 years, the Ossetians sympathised with the Bolsheviks and Soviet Russia. Ossetians within the Georgian Democratic Republic were rebellious against the central government in Tbilisi and organised revolts that caused casualties. In 1920, a large Ossetian revolt ended by the massacre of thousands of Ossetians by the People’s Guard of the GDR. The Ossetian massacre played an important role in the generation of a feindbild against Georgians during the armed phase of the conflict, making Ossetian self-perception as a victim. Interestingly enough, the negative memory of GDR was never a

313 Quoted in Suny, op. cit., p. 325.
serious impediment to the peaceful coexistence and integration of Georgians and Ossetians during the Soviet era. Ossetians and Georgians enjoyed a high level of inter-marriages and community relations, and as already mentioned, a large part of the Ossetians in Georgia lived in Tbilisi. Also, in the post-violence phase of the conflict, the conflict was never a big obstacle to the communication between the two communities. Until the closure of the Ergneti market in 2004, the relations between the two communities were close to normalising. All these factors indicate that unlike Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict was largely elite-driven and caused by an ethnic security dilemma rather than a pre-existing perceptions or myths. Unlike Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, there had not been serious appeals to the Communist Party on the status of the region during the Soviet period, which implies that the escalation of the conflict was largely spontaneous.

2.2.3. Escalation of the conflict in 1989

The South Ossetian secessionist movement emerged in late 1980s as a reaction to the independence movement in Georgia, in particular the language law of November 1988, and was led by the Popular Front Ademon Nykhas. It was formed in 1988 and was the major driving force behind the movement. Upon its founding, it enjoyed little public support in the South Ossetian parliament and society. In May 1989, the Ademon Nykhas issued a letter of support to Abkhaz people’s secession, in which it hinted at South Ossetia’s status within the USSR and expressed the hope that their success would set a precedent for other regions that wished to join Russia. The letter was immediately condemned by the South Ossetian Soviet as many Ossetians emphasised the historic friendship of Georgians and Ossets. It was however largely the programme to strengthen the position of Georgian language in South Ossetia that worked very much in favour of Adamon Nykhas and its ability to organise strikes in Tskhinvali.

Failing to reach a compromise with Tbilisi on the status of Georgian language, the South Ossetian Soviet in August 1989 voted to make Ossetian the official language in the autonomy. Following this, in November 1989 the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet appealed to Georgia and the USSR to upgrade its status to that of autonomous republic within Georgia. The appeal was not unconstitutional, since it was aimed at upgrading the status of the region within Georgia. Nevertheless, it led to increased tensions between the Georgian national movement.

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and South Ossetia; on 23rd November 30,000 demonstrators were mobilised to a protest
demonstration in Tskhinvali, and major clashes were only avoided as the Soviet security
forces impeded the demonstrators from entering the city. This was followed by talks
between Gamsakhurdia and the South Ossetian leader Kim Tsagolov, but with no progress.
Gamsakhurdia had allegedly demanded that Soviet flags are taken down in South Ossetia, but
was turned own. As a reaction to this demonstration, the Ademon Nykhas began to form the
first South Ossetian militia group. The cycle of events thereafter occurred in secessionist
rhetoric and much in favour of Ademon Nykhas. The South Ossetian national movement was
first aimed at the reunification with North Ossetia, but as North Ossetian elites followed the
official policy line of Moscow and rejected South Ossetia’s reunition bid, the national
movement in Tskhinvali reoriented itself towards independence.

The August 1990 electoral law of the Georgian Parliament banned the participation of groups
whose activities were confined to one region of Georgia only. Consequently both Abkhazia
and South Ossetia boycotted the elections. Further, the South Ossetian Soviet passed a law in
September 1990 proclaiming South Ossetia Democratic Soviet Republic and appealed to both
centers for recognition. In December 1990 elections to the South Ossetian Soviet were held,
which the newly elected Georgian Parliament recognised invalid. In response, the Georgian
Parliament abolished the autonomous status of the region and Gamsakhurdia suggested
reducing South Ossetia’s status to a ‘cultural autonomy’. In the meantime, Tbilisi
announced a state of emergency for South Ossetia and deployed the Interior ministry Forces
into the region. Afterwards, Tbilisi imposed an economic blockade on South Ossetia, cutting
off electricity and gas supplies, and in January 1991 sent a 5,000 Georgian National Guard to
Tskhinvali. The blockade was very fierce as it had left the region without heating and food,
by cutting off South Ossetia from North Ossetia.

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321 See Rachel Denber, Bloodshed in the Caucasus: violations of humanitarian law and human rights in the
322 During the talks Gamsakhurdia had threatened saying, ‘I shall bring a 200,000 army and no single Osset will
323 Accordingly, only parties that operated in the entire territory of Georgia were allowed to participate in the
elections. See Jonathan Aves, op. cit., p. 46. For the discussion on the Georgian ethnicity as a criterion for
political legitimacy, see Edward Ozhiganov, ‘The Republic of Georgia: conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia’,
in Alexei Arbatov, Abram Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes, Lara Olson eds., Managing conflict in the Former
324 See Alexei Zverev, op.
325 Christoph Zürcher, op. cit., p. 125.
326 See Pavel Baev, ‘Civil wars in Georgia’, in Jan Koehler and Christoph Zürcher eds, Potentials of disorder,
op. cit., p. 135.
327 Elizabeth Fuller, ‘South Ossetia: Analysis of a Permanent Crisis’, RFE/RL Report on the USSR, 15 February,
1991, No 7, p. 22. See also Julian Birch, ‘Ethnic Cleansing in the Caucasus’, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics,
vol. 1 no. 4, 1995.
In January 1991 Gorbachev issued a decree repealing both the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet’s decision to proclaim a sovereign republic and Georgia’s abolition of South Ossetia’s autonomy. In a referendum held on 19th January 1992 over 90% of those taking part voted to join Russia. The North Ossetian authorities disagreed with the vote.\textsuperscript{328} Opinion was divided in Russian political circles, but the majority was more critical of South Ossetia. Galina Stravoitova, adviser to President Yeltsin on the issue of nationalities and minority rights viewed the referendum as a precedent.\textsuperscript{329} The referendum got support from Russian hardliners defending the rights of the Russian-speaking minority in the near abroad.\textsuperscript{330}

2.2.4. Georgian-Ossetian war

In April 1992, Georgian artillery started daily missile attacks on the residential quarters of Tskhinvali.\textsuperscript{331} On 20th May 1992, unidentified gunmen massacred a bus of Ossetian refugees fleeing Tskhinvali. In response, North Ossetia cut off gas supply to Georgia.\textsuperscript{332} The Russian Government was at this stage urged by both the hardliners in the Duma and North Caucasus to take action to impose a cease-fire on the sides. Moreover, the influx of 40,000 South Ossetian refugees in North Ossetia forced it to intervene. The North Ossetian authorities had to provide shelter, food and services to the refugees. Having said that, it should be borne in mind that the North Ossetian authorities and in particular its leader Akhsarbek Galazov opposed the unilateral secessionist tendency of South Ossetian leaders and expressed more interest in the management of the conflict. On 13 June 1992, the Confederation of Mountain Peoples chairman Musa Shanibov brought an Abkhaz battalion to Vladikavkaz (capital of North Ossetia) to send it to fight in South Ossetia. However, North Ossetian leader Galazov refused to let it travel to Tskhinvali, fearing a regionalisation of the conflict and overall destabilisation.\textsuperscript{333}

The hostilities continued until June 1992 when a cease-fire agreement was reached in Dagomys between South Ossetia and Tbilisi with the participation of Moscow and North Ossetia that led to the deployment of Joint Control Commission, Joint Peacekeeping Force and OSCE observers. The cease-fire agreement prohibited the presence of military equipment within the conflict zone of 15 km radius around Tskhinvali. The Joint Control Commission comprising representatives from Georgia, South and North Ossetia, Russia and

\textsuperscript{328} Nezavisimaya gazeta, 21 January, 1992, quoted in Alexei Zverev.
\textsuperscript{329} Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 21 January, 1992, quoted in Alexei Zverev, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{330} See Alexei Zverev, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{331} See Natalya Pachegina, ‘Sovmestnoe zasedanie dvux Ossetiy otlozheno’, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 22nd May, 1992.
the OSCE supervised the observance of the ceasefire agreement and facilitated political dialogue. Its mandate also included drafting and implementing conflict resolution measures, promoting dialogue, carrying out measures to facilitate the refugees’ return, facilitating economic reconstruction in the zone of conflict and monitor human rights. It has three working groups: military and security matters, economic rehabilitation and establishing conditions for the return of refugees and IDPs. The cease-fire agreement also established a peacekeeping force of Georgian, Russian and Ossetian units through a bilateral accord reached between Georgia and Russia. It included one Russian airborne regiment of 950 men and three Georgian-Ossetian battalions of 1100 men, while another 1000 Georgian-Ossetian force is held in reserve. The mandate of the JPF was to report and punish any violation of the cease-fire, but in essence it has essentially frozen the situation. Some progress was reported in the peace process in mid 1990s. On 16 May 1996, the conflict parties signed a ‘Memorandum on measures to ensure security and reinforce mutual trust between the sides in the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict’ and in February 1997 ‘on the voluntary return of IDPs and refugees resulting from the Georgian-Ossetian conflict into their permanent places of residence’. In 2000, Russia and Georgia signed the ‘Intergovernmental agreement on economic rehabilitation in the Georgian-Ossetian zone of conflict’, according to which both countries were to assist the reconstruction of South Ossetia. Progress was reported at the OSCE Meeting of Experts in Baden On 11-13 July 2000, where the parties agreed on a ‘Draft Intermediary Document’, which included the basic principles for the resolution of the conflict. These included territorial integrity of Georgia, special links between South Ossetia and North Ossetia, the granting of a high level of autonomy to South Ossetia, international security guarantees, including the presence of Russian troops in South Ossetia. Like in Abkhazia, in South Ossetia too, certain groups have had no interest in the resolution of the conflict, benefitting from the status-quo. These groups benefitting from the unresolved character of the conflict have developed a vested interest in impeding a solution. Bearing in mind that South Ossetia does not have any strategic resources, smuggling has been the primary source of funding for the de facto authorities. It is beyond doubt that a resolution of the conflict would cut off the source of important profits gained from the trade.

beneficiaries of smuggling have included the South Ossetian authorities, but also criminal
groups and peacekeepers from both South Ossetia and North Ossetia.\textsuperscript{338} Georgia’s loss from
customs revenues due to smuggling from South Ossetia was estimated at 1.7 billion USD in
2001. However, the impact of smuggling in South Ossetia on the Georgian economy has been
largely exaggerated, and products smuggled from Azerbaijan, Turkey or Armenia have had a
bigger impact on the Georgian economy.\textsuperscript{339}

A settlement of the Ossetian conflict seemed viable under President Shevardnadze. Military
tension was very low, and relations between Georgians and South Ossetians had become
increasingly normalised after the cease-fire, with serious progress in trust-building.\textsuperscript{340} In
2002, interethnic relations had improved and normal human interaction had been largely
restored. Economic and social initiatives could continue on a pragmatic base bypassing the
unresolved and frozen status.\textsuperscript{341} There were joint markets as well as bus connections between
Tbilisi and Tskhinvali.

Since the change of government in Georgia, there have been periodic exchanges of artillery
fire, and widespread instability in the region that culminated in the August war of 2008.
Georgian and South Ossetian forces have regularly apprehended representatives of each other.
There was a serious of terrorist bombings in South Ossetia that the de facto leadership blamed
on Georgian intelligence. The rift between the Georgian and Ossetian communities has been
particularly large since the closure of the Ergneti market.

\textsuperscript{338} See Alexandre Kukhianidze, Aleko Kupatadze, Roman Gotsiridze, \textit{Smuggling through Abkhazia and
Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia}, (Tbilisi: American University Transnational Crime and Corruption Center,
2003). See also Jonathan Wheatley, ‘Georgia from national awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed transition in

\textsuperscript{339} See Daan van der Schriek, ‘Made in Russia, smuggled in South Ossetia’, \textit{Transitions Online}, 28 August,

\textsuperscript{340} See Dov Lynch, \textit{Engaging Eurasia’s Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and de Facto States},

\textsuperscript{341} See Anna Matveeva, ‘Georgia: Peace remains elusive in ethnic patchwork’, in Paul van Tongeren, Hans van
de Ween and Juliette Verhoeven, eds., \textit{Searching for peace in Europe and Eurasia: An overview of conflict
Map 3 South Ossetia

Source: International Crisis Group, Policy Briefing, Europe Briefing No 38, Georgia-South Ossetia: Refugee return the path to peace, Tbilisi/Brussels, 19 April, 2005.
2.2.5. 2004 crisis and follow-up

Change of administration in Georgia had its impact on the break-away regions, as the new administration set restoration of Georgia’s territorial integrity a high priority. When President Saakashvili came to power, much emphasis was put on the resolution of the South Ossetian conflict, since it did not seem hopeless at all at the time. Bearing in mind the normalisation of inter-ethnic relations and the fact that a large number of Georgian villages existed in South Ossetia and were in fact administered by Tbilisi, the resolution of the conflict by either peaceful means or threat of force seemed not to be a distant perspective. The Saakashvili Government first seemed disinterested in use of force, and pledged to apply economic incentives to win the hearts and minds of the peoples of the break-away regions.\(^\text{342}\) Initially, President Saakashvili spoke of South Ossetia’s gradual reintegration ‘without any shots being fired’.\(^\text{343}\) However, in July, 2004 President Saakashvili raised the issue of unilateral exit from the Dagomys agreement of 1992, which has so far been the legal basis of regulating the conflict.\(^\text{344}\) Tbilisi largely presented the conflict as a criminal one and pursued policies to cut off the authorities’ income. President Saakashvili put effort to isolate the de facto government.\(^\text{345}\) Encouraged by its success in the Ajarian crisis, the Georgian administration was convinced that an isolation of South Ossetia’s political administration would play a crucial role in the resolution of the conflict. Seeing smuggling as an incentive for further freezing the conflict, the strategy was to cut the revenues of the de facto Kokoity Government by closing down the Ergneti market at the Georgian-Russian border and offering the Ossetian and Georgian communities of South Ossetia humanitarian assistance.\(^\text{346}\)

The Georgian Government had allegedly also envisaged that a military intrusion into the province would be easy and quick to achieve, now that after the Ajaria success, Russia’s neutrality was secured. Moreover, Kokoity government did not enjoy high popularity at the

\(^{342}\) The Georgian Government never made such an official pledge, and according to Dov Lynch a Georgian Operation Storm for the secessionist regions was never dismissed, see Dov Lynch, ‘Why Georgia matters’, op. cit., p.39. As to the economic incentives, indeed at the initial period when the Georgian Government believed that a change in Russia’s strategy towards the regions was viable, a lot of emphasis was put on making Georgia an attractive place for the populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, see Giorgi Sepashvili, ‘Saakashvili sends reconciliatory signals to South Ossetia’, Civil Georgia, 1st June, 2004.

\(^{343}\) ‘Georgia talks tough with Russia over South Ossetia: South Osetia will be reintegrated gradually’, Civil Georgia, 11 July, 2004.


\(^{345}\) For an account of Georgia’s campaign in South Ossetia see Theresa Freese ‘Yet Another Rose Revolution? Georgia’s “Two Brothers” Campaign in South Ossetia’, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, June 2004, p. 3. See also Dov Lynch, ‘Why Georgia matters?’, op. cit., p. 41.

time. However, the Ajaria scenario had for a number of reasons been miscalculated for South Ossetia. Firstly, Tbilisi’s relations with Ajaria had never had an ethnic character, both Ajarian leadership and society always reiterated attachment to Georgia and being Georgian, so in this context there was never an ethnic or territorial dispute or politicisation of ethnic differences between the two. It had not declared independence from Tbilisi, neither had there ever been any use of violence between the two sides. It resembled more a private conflict between Shevardnadze and Abashidze competing for economic power and control, in which Abashidze had exploited the weakness of the Georgian state and refused to pay taxes to the centre. Further, over 80% of the population of South Ossetia is Russian and it borders on Russia as well.

The crisis leading to the freezing of the peace-process and exacerbation of the intercommunity relations started with the anti-smuggling operation of Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs in and around South Ossetia in late 2003, which culminated in the closure of the Ergneti market. Ergneti had begun to flourish in the early and mid-1990s when Georgian alcohol flowed into Russia. In 1998, most of the 50,000 litters went to Russia via South Ossetia, giving the South Ossetian authorities the chance to claim ‘customs toll’ from truck drivers. In spring 2004, under anti-smuggling operation Georgia dispatched armed units into the conflict zone, presumably with the aim of carrying out core anti-smuggling operations at the Georgian-Russian border and provoking the South Ossetian authorities. Although, as asserted by the Georgian Government, the aim was not a military intervention, the operations were perceived on the Ossetian side that Tbilisi was preparing for military action. South Ossetia retaliated by deploying a 2,000 police force to the area, who were joined by mercenaries from North Ossetia and from the Russian Cossack community. Georgia’s deployment of extra police forces in the conflict zone was also condemned by the JCC, regarding it a violation of the Dagomys agreement. As the first civilian deaths got recorded in August, and daily fire exchange occurred between the South Ossetian and Georgian police forces, resumption of

350 See Daan van der Schriek, ‘Made in Russia, Smuggled in South Ossetia’, Transitions Online, op. cit.
351 The Georgian Government also claimed that most of the fighting in South Ossetia had occurred in retaliation to the attacks of the South Ossetian militias. See Nino Khutsidze, ‘Government comes under fire from opposition over South Ossetia’, Civil Georgia, 17th September, 2004.
353 Ibid., p. 12.
military operations seemed probable. The JCC and JPKF were paralysed throughout the period so that a ‘joint’ peace-keeping seemed not to function.
In July 2004 an accord was reached between Georgia and South Ossetia mediated and guaranteed by Russia on the withdrawal of the armed units from the conflict zone. The crisis exacerbated the Russian-Georgian relations, and undermined the confidence-building between the Ossetian and Georgian communities. The Georgian administration had hoped that the closure of the Ergneti market would raise the dissatisfaction of the Ossetian society with the Kokoity regime, since Kokoity prior to the crisis did not enjoy widespread support. However, it just turned the other way round, that the closure of the market on the contrary strengthened the Kokoity regime and increased the opposition within the South Ossetian society against reintegration to Georgia; the market was vital for the trade of average South Ossetian, and it had acted as a meeting point for the Georgians and South Ossetians in the last 15 years.
Meanwhile, the closure of the market in June 2004 considerably increased the revenues of the Georgian customs, which Tbilisi had planned to spend on the humanitarian projects in the region. Tbilisi offered humanitarian assistance and pensions to the people of South Ossetia, cultural projects as Ossetian language television or restart of the Tskhinvali railway and accordingly allocated funds from the state budget. However, the Georgian plan to cut off the economic support base of the de-facto authorities in South Ossetia, to increase military pressure and bring the population closer to Georgia by offering an aid package all ended up in South Ossetia strengthening defence and getting closer to Russia.

2.2.6. The peace process
The peace process has been facilitated by the OSCE, and has involved North Ossetia and Russia actively. Since President Saakashvili came to power, the Georgian Government conveyed the message that it is not going to accept the status-quo, and accordingly the new administration, up to the South Ossetia crisis, was quite active working out peace plans. The potential for a resolution has been large, but a number of political obstacles have undermined it, and confidence building measures have been slow. Georgians have largely seen the conflict to be political and possibly territorial. The depiction of the conflict as political, not ethnic, and statements as to the non-existence of a conflict between the two communities has angered South Ossetians.
Like in Abkhazia, in South Ossetia, too, the Saakashvili Government has prioritised changing the peace-keeping force, and tried to describe the conflict as one between Georgia and Russia.

Tbilisi has suggested changing the make-up of the JCC by including in it representatives of the OSCE. Internationalising the conflict by involving Europe and US, presenting it as a Georgian-Russian one and Georgia as a victim of Russian neo-imperialism and rejecting the exclusive role for Russia as a guarantor have been high on the Georgian agenda. The Georgian Parliament accordingly passed a resolution on 18 July, 2006 calling for the Government to arrange for the suspension of the peace-keeping operation and the withdrawal of Russian peace-keepers from South Ossetia.\(^{355}\) The decision was condemned by the de facto authorities of South Ossetia, as they considered Russian presence a security guarantee.\(^{356}\) Meanwhile, the Georgian Government has stated its readiness to conclude an agreement on non-use of force once the Russian peacekeepers leave.

The de-facto authorities’ security concerns have been exacerbated by Georgia’s investment into its military sector, in particular into the 100,000 strong reserve forces, at the inauguration of which President Saakashvili stated it was ‘a clear message to the ill-wishers who challenge Georgia’s territorial integrity’.\(^{357}\) Tbilisi has explained its military spending by bringing the army closer to NATO standards. The Georgian administration has meanwhile demanded a full demilitarisation of the conflict zone and has called the existence of a ministry of defence in South Ossetia a contradiction to the peace plan. At the absence of a specific agreement on non-use of force, South Ossetian de-facto authorities refuse to disarm their forces.

Georgia has tried to manoeuvre the resolution of the conflict applying both hard and soft power and all available means, but so far without progress. Considering that the conflict is not as intense as the one in Abkhazia, its strategy has been to gain Ossetians by displaying an impressive economic development in the Georgian administered areas of South Ossetia. Tbilisi has attracted local investments into the area and has allocated funds from the state budget as high as 10 million laris (3 million Euros) for the connection of gas to the villages, renovation of schools and water infrastructure.\(^{358}\) However, Tbilisi has been reluctant to allocate direct funds for the renovation of the areas under the de facto authorities’ control. The economic rehabilitation of these areas has been possible largely due to the OSCE initiated Economic Rehabilitation Programme of June 2006. Apart from the EU and US, Russia has been a major economic donor and has renovated gas pipelines on the basis of the Russian-Georgian agreement of economic rehabilitation in South Ossetia of 2000. In October 2006,

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\(^{358}\) Ibid., p. 26.
Russia initiated the construction of a gas pipeline linking North and South Ossetia, which is to make Tskhinvali independent of Georgian gas. However, Russia’s assistance has largely been interpreted as an attempt to buy South Ossetia’s loyalty and to intervene into Georgia’s internal affairs. Since a large number of South Ossetia’s population have been naturalised by Russia, the Kremlin refers to its rights to provide humanitarian assistance to its citizens in the region.

a) Peace initiatives

President Saakashvili initiated a three-stage peace plan when he addressed a UN General Assembly session in September 2004. The first stage called for a demilitarization of the conflict zone; confidence-building, greater international role for South Ossetia and socio-economic rehabilitation measures constituted the second stage; a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict formed the third stage of the resolution process. Tbilisi basically agreed to the step-by-step settlement of the conflict, leaving the status issue to the end. Later, in January, 2005 Tbilisi presented another vision for the resolution of the conflict, which suggested a broader form of autonomy and freely and directly elected self-governance structures. The plan pledged to adopt a law on property restitution and to establish a special committee, including international organisations to deal with unresolved property issues. It envisaged language rights and preservation of cultural heritage, compensation for damages suffered during the war and South Ossetia’s representation in the central Government. However, Kokoity again dismissed Saakashvili’s offer on the grounds that he was ready for dialogue with Tbilisi ‘on equal terms’ only.

In July 2005, Saakashvili’s administration sponsored a conference in Batumi to promote a peace plan, in which South Ossetia’s leaders declined to participate. Tbilisi again offered to provide compensation of damages suffered throughout the conflict and create a truth commission to investigate alleged crimes against civilians and to establish simplified border regimes for South Ossetians residing along the border with Russia. The peace plan of the Batumi conference evolved in 2006 to offer the widest possible autonomy within Georgia, one larger than that of North Ossetia and that of Soviet era South Ossetia.

359 See ‘Russia launches South Ossetia gas pipeline construction, Civil Georgia, 27, October, 2006, at http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13964
360 See Liz Fuller, ‘Analysis: Abkhazia, South Ossetia reject Georgian President’s new peace plan’, RFE/RL, September 24, 2004. The Georgian-South Ossetian peace plan developed by the Government of Georgia, at http://georgiaupdate.gov.ge/en/tagliavinii/15c7ac9f9e93192bc30fbaewc887c7ob2103f7fc4a93a8a797f4d0c3ef0c63/8561c44da15720ff9208288a81069a8f
In October 2005, Tbilisi presented its action plan on South Ossetia at the OSCE Permanent Council, which included enacting a law on restitution, compensation for those who suffered in the 1989-1992 conflict, inviting refugees to return home from North Ossetia and a needs-assessment study to launch economic rehabilitation. Meanwhile, the de-facto president of South Ossetia proposed his own peace plan in December, 2005, which was quite similar to Tbilisi’s. It comprised three stages: demilitarisation, confidence-building, security-guarantees, social-economic rehabilitation and political settlement. No progress could be achieved in all the peace plans due to lack of political will and incentive, militarization on both sides and mutual mistrust.

South Ossetia has had an economic and social integration into North Ossetia and the Russian Federation. Its de facto authorities see their future unified with North Ossetia and have set it as their most ultimate goal. The region’s official language is Russian, its currency is rouble and 95% of the population are Russian nationals. Unlike in early 1990s, North Ossetia’s current leadership sees no alternative to the unification of the two Ossetias. Particularly, after the 2004 crisis, a lot of South Ossetians largely see their future in the Russian Federation. The South Ossetian administration has taken a harder position on the status of the region and has been firmly committed to either full independence or integration into the Russian Federation. On 5 June, 2004 the South Ossetian de facto Parliament appealed to the State Duma for its incorporation into the Russian Federation. The de facto ‘President’ Edward Kokoity, during his visit to Moscow in September, stated that ‘it was high time to stop dividing North and South Ossetia’. In December 2006, presidential elections and referendum on independence were held in South Ossetia, where a large majority voted for independence from Georgia, although civil society criticised the results of the polls.

The primary challenge to South Ossetia’s independence is the demographic problem. The province has a population of 40,000 people, who are mostly oriented towards North Ossetia for jobs and for education. A large number of Ossetians who have migrated to North Ossetia are no longer willing to return to the South.

b) Provisional Administration of South Ossetia

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363 See ‘South Ossetian Leader hopes next year will bring peace’, RFE/RL, 14 December, 2005.
The ‘People of South Ossetia for Peace’, an organisation comprising ethnic Ossetians critical of Kokoity was founded in October 2006. In October 2006, as South Ossetian de facto ‘president’ held presidential elections in the province, Sanokoev, the former defence and prime minister of South Ossetia and the leader of the organisation, organised parallel presidential elections and a referendum on starting negotiations with Tbilisi on a federal arrangement for South Ossetia. Initially the entity headed by Sanokoev was the ‘Alternative Government of South Ossetia’, but later in 2007 it received the status of Provisional Administration of South Ossetia. Sanokoev is primarily operating within the Georgian administered part of South Ossetia, but has claimed legitimacy for the whole of South Ossetia. He has stated his preparedness to integrate South Ossetia into Georgia proper under the term of a broad autonomy. However, South Ossetia and Russia have been opposed to expanding the negotiation format or internationalising the conflict.368

2.3. The Mountainous Karabakh conflict

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Mountainous Karabakh is one of the most complex and intractable disputes in the post-soviet space. It reflects political, legal, social and historic factors, ranging from a clash of two norms of international law-territorial integrity versus self-determination, contradictory narratives of history and self-perceptions, ethnic identities, past conflict, geopolitical engagement, to post war reconciliation and limits of international mediation. It acts both as an inter-state and an intra-state conflict with an ambiguous legal definition of the conflict parties. The conflict has now existed for almost 20 years in a state of ‘no war, no peace’, and despite systematic active international mediation the parties are still not close to reaching a compromise. It has acted as a political challenge to the state- and nation-building processes and economic development of both countries, and has had much impact on the development of the whole South Caucasus region. Armenia is isolated from regional projects and is economically suffering from an embargo by Azerbaijan and Turkey. 17% of Azerbaijan’s territory is under occupation, and the Azeri exclave Nakhchivan has no access to mainland Azerbaijan because of the closure of communication between the countries. The dispute has become a dominant symbol of nationhood and statehood, capable of harnessing tremendous emotional power.

The current conflict first emerged during the perestroika period of the Soviet Union as a dispute over the status of Mountainous Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, and rapidly

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368 The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had from the very onset opposed the idea of setting up ‘illegal’ alternative structures in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the grounds that it could undermine the securiity situation in the region. See ‘Russia warns against Tbilisi’s South Ossetia administration plan’, Civil Georgia, 29th March, 2007; ‘Lavrov: Russia respects the principle of territorial integrity’, Civil Georgia, 2nd April, 2008.
transformed into an ethnic conflict between Azeris and Armenians. The overwhelmingly Armenian populated Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast within Azerbaijan appealed to the central authorities in the Soviet Union to be transferred to Armenia. As both Azerbaijan and Politburo rejected the appeal, tensions rose in the region leading to pogroms and ethnic cleansing in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the conflict evolved into a full-scale war between Azerbaijan and the separatist mountainous Karabakh forces supported actively by Armenia. International mediation managed to broker a cease-fire between Azerbaijan and Karabakh forces/ Armenia in 1994, leaving Mountainous Karabakh and seven regions outside the autonomy under the occupation of Karabakh Armenian forces. Ethnic cleansing by both sides caused a large number of IDPs and refugees, over 850,000 Azeris mostly from the occupied regions outside Mountainous Karabakh and Armenia, and over 350,000 Armenians from Baku and Ganja.369 Despite peaceful cohabitation for 70 years, ethnic hatred in both countries is high, and interaction between the communities is limited to elite-led negotiations only. Although the parties have been close to reaching a deal in 1996 and 2001, the peace process is fragile and Azerbaijan is insistently intent on retaining the right to restore sovereignty over the occupied territories by use of force. There is as a result diplomatic and power struggle between the countries. The conflict has been the most ultimate priority in the foreign policies of both Azerbaijan and Armenia and has acted as a driving force behind the efforts to build alliances. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan are heavily investing into their military sectors, and continue making statements threatening each other. Azerbaijan is hoping to achieve a military imbalance through its oil revenues, and Armenia is hoping that international norms will change or the international community will not indulge Azerbaijan’s resort to force. In both countries Karabakh is closely related to the national identity, and has virtually become a taboo not open to public discussion, resulting in a unilateral interpretation of events. The conflict has become a symbol of self-identification of Azeris and Armenians. Azerbaijan insists on its territorial integrity and offers Mountainous Karabakh the highest possible autonomy, whereas Karabakh Armenians and Armenia demand full independence or incorporation into Armenia proper on the grounds of the self-determination of Mountainous Karabakh Armenians.

2.3.1. Background factors and roots of the conflict

a) Role of history: brief history of the region

Ancient historic claims are of no relevance to modern international law, and a nation’s history can in no way be used to justify change of borders or territorial claims. However, since

historic perceptions have been an important part of the current conflict, and both sides have referred to history in the negotiation process, reviewing the turning-points in the history of Mountainous Karabakh from both perspectives would make it easier to understand its causes. The main issue at stake seems to be who the indigenous people of the province were, and historians on both sides have developed theories to deny each other’s belonging to the Caucasus. Interestingly, the discourse between the historians does not focus on the twentieth century where most of the interethnic clashes took place, but rather on the ancient period, the period of Great Armenia and Caucasian Albania. Armenian historians on their part argue that Karabakh was a province (known as Artsakh) of the ancient Kingdom of Great Armenia in the fourth century BC, and has uninterruptedly been ruled by Armenian princes. They refer to the numerous churches in Mountainous Karabakh as an evidence of the Armenian origin of the area and stress the ancient roots of the Armenian population of the region. Azeri historians on their part claim that Karabakh was a part of Caucasian Albania, an ancient state in the Caucasus, which by its name is not related to Adriatic Albania. It emerged in the I Millennium in the area of today’s Azerbaijan and existed as an independent state until the Arab conquest in the IX century. Azeri historians claim that an important part of Azeris descend from Caucasian Albans, and the Christian churches found in Karabakh are not of Armenian origin, since Albanians were among the first peoples to adopt Christianity. Accordingly, Armenians’ appearance in the Caucasus is only in the XIX century and the ancient Kingdom of Armenia must have existed in Eastern Anatolia. Following Russian expansion to the Caucasus and Russian-Persian and Russian-Turkish wars, large numbers of Armenians were resettled in the Caucasus leading to demographic changes. According to the Russian census, the Armenian population of Karabakh represented 9% of the

total in 1823 (91 % registered as Muslims) and 35% in 1832. Only, in 1880 the Armenian population of mountainous Karabakh made up 53%, and even Yerevan province in 1826 had a large Muslim majority.\textsuperscript{373} However, numerous other sources confirm the coexistence of Armenian nobility in Karabakh in the Middle Ages. For example, as early as the XV century, a German traveller Johann Schiltberger spoke of the coexistence of Armenian and Muslim communities in Karabakh.\textsuperscript{374}

In the XVI century Karabakh became a part of the Savafid Empire, and later in 1747 a Muslim ruler established the Karabakh khanate. Like the other Muslim khanates in the Caucasus, Karabakh khanate accepted Russian vassalage in 1805 and the treaty concluded between the khan and Russian Emperor is often referred to by Azeri historians as a legally binding document between two independent units.\textsuperscript{375}

It was in the XX century that the first ethnic clashes between the two communities broke out in the Caucasus, and as Laitin und Suny note Karabakh is a twentieth century product.\textsuperscript{376} Ethnic clashes between Armenians and Muslims (Azeris) broke out in Baku, Nakhchivan, Shusha and Ganja in 1905-1907 leading to the massacre of tens of thousands of Muslims and Armenians.\textsuperscript{377} Causes of the clashes remain largely unknown; the Armenian revolutionary federation Dashnaksutiun is said to have been active in the area and terrorised the Muslim population, whereas Armenian sources claim that the Muslims provoked the fighting leading to an Armenian victory.\textsuperscript{378} According to Swietochovski ‘massive eruptions of violence in the form of mutual intercommunal massacres began with the 1905 Russian revolution, and would re-emerge each time the Russian state was in a condition of crisis’.\textsuperscript{379} Equally after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, violence re-emerged between Armenians and Azeris claiming over 20,000 deaths on both sides. Three day violence in Baku between Muslims and the

Bolsheviks, allegedly perpetrated by Dashnaksutiun, led to the massacre of 12,000 Muslims.\textsuperscript{380}

In 1918 as Armenians and Azeris established two independent states they still had border disputes mainly in Karabakh, Nakhchivan and Zangezur. In July 1918, the First Armenian Assembly of Karabakh declared the region self-governing and established a National Council.\textsuperscript{381} The Armenians of Karabakh refused to obey the authority of the central Government of Azerbaijan, which had declared sovereignty over the region. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the WW I, British troops entered Baku, and the Allied Powers recognised Azerbaijan’s authority over Karabakh. They confirmed the appointment of Azeri governor-general over the region pending a final decision.\textsuperscript{382} However, armed clashes continued between the two communities in Karabakh and Zangezur leading to the death of hundreds of people on both sides. Further fighting spread to Nakhchivan and Ganja and culminated in the massacre of Armenians in Shusha by the Azerbaijani Army in March 1920.\textsuperscript{383} In spite of widespread protest, the Armenian Assembly of Karabakh accepted Azerbaijani rule on 22 August 1919 in an agreement that stipulated that Azerbaijan Republic’s rule over Karabakh would continue until the issue was finally settled by the Paris Peace Conference.\textsuperscript{384} At the Paris Conference all three states in the South Caucasus were granted de facto recognition, but due to the occupation of Azerbaijan by Bolshevik Russia in April, 1920 its application to the League of Nations was dismissed.

The issue of mountainous Karabakh became an agenda for the Caucasian Bureau of the Soviet Communist Party. A statement of the Revolutionary Committee of Soviet Azerbaijan in November 1920 declared the transfer of Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhchivan to Armenia.\textsuperscript{385} On June 12, 1921 the National Council of the Azerbaijan SSR adopted a declaration proclaiming Nagorno-Karabakh a part of Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. However, the later developments indicate that the statement of the Azerbaijani Rev. Com. must have been made under intense pressure from the Russian communist party, since Azerbaijan was


unwilling to surrender Karabakh;\(^{386}\) Azerbaijan’s Rev. Com. Head Narimanov strongly opposed the transfer of Mountainous Karabakh to Armenia at the 4th July 1921 and other previous meetings of the Caucasus Bureau of the Communist Party, and the 1 December Declaration of the Azerbaijani Government on the establishment of Soviet Power in Armenia no longer used the term transfer, but instead referred to the right of Mountainous Karabakh for self-determination. Following many attempts by the Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee to raise Karabakh’s status at the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, the issue was discussed in an enlarged format on the 4th and 5th of July 1921. The first meeting made the decision to transfer Mountainous Karabakh to Armenia, but Narimanov’s opposition, discontent of Azerbaijani representatives, and their efforts to raise the issue at the Russian Communist Party urged a second meeting on the issue, which rescinded the previously adopted resolution. MK’s status got settled in favour of Azerbaijan in July 1921, leaving Karabakh within Azerbaijan.

The text of the resolution said:

*Proceeding from the necessity of national peace between the Muslims and Armenians, and economic links of the upland and lowland Karabakh, its constant link with Azerbaijan, to leave Mountainous Karabakh within the Azerbaijan SSR, having granted it a broad regional autonomy with the administrative center in the town of Shusha included in the autonomous region.*\(^{387}\)

The two other disputed regions, Zangezur remained a part of Armenia, and Nakhchivan, in a referendum voted to become an autonomous republic within Azerbaijan.\(^{388}\) In 1923 the Mountainous Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was established as an enclave in Azerbaijan with 93% Armenian majority with clear-cut borders of 4400 square km and central city Stepanakert. Throughout the Soviet period, Armenians of Karabakh raised the issue of Karabakh’s status and appealed for the transfer of the region to Armenian SSR. In 1963, a petition of 2500 Karabakh Armenians was sent to Khrushchev accusing Azeri nationalism and their economic policies designed to force Armenians to leave. The petition included a detailed description of accusations of discrimination against Baku and requested for unification with Armenia or Russia. The same year there were violent clashes in Stepanakert leading to

\(^{386}\) See Michael Croissant, op. cit., p. 19.


\(^{388}\) See Tim Potier, op. cit., p. 4. Nakhchivan’s designation within Azerbaijan’s territorial sovereignty was also an issue of agreement between Turkey and Russia in the Kars Treaty of 12th October, 1921, see Haig E. Asenbauer, *Zum Selbstbestimmungsrecht des armenischen Volkes von Berg-Karabach*, (Wien: Braumüller, 1993), p. 290.
18 deaths. Demonstrations in the Armenian capital Yerevan in 1965 and 1977 demanded the transfer of the region to Armenian control. 389

b) Socio-economic order in Mountainous Karabakh: Alleged discrimination

It is rather difficult to judge discrimination in the current conflict since Azerbaijan as a republican centre was not entirely autonomous and was equally subject to the rules of Moscow. Karabakh Armenians making 76% of Mountainous Karabakh complained in 1980s and previously that they were subject to cultural and economic discrimination by the Azerbaijani authorities. 390 They accused Baku of discrimination in education and employment, and of economic neglect. The complaints were roughly on two directions: socio-economic and demographic conditions. In particular, the Armenian population complained that financial resources were mainly put into the development of villages with predominant Azeri population, Armenian churches were closed to the public, genocide day was not marked, few books were published in Armenian, there was no Armenian TV in the region, the history of Armenia was not taught at Armenian schools, and the Azeri constitution used a formulation called the ‘language of the autonomous region’ rather than Armenian. In the political realm, decisions of MK could be revoked by the Presidium of Azerbaijan’s Supreme Soviet if they contradicted the law, appointments to professional positions had to be approved by Baku, and MK had no seat in the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan. MK’s economic rapprochement with Armenia was hindered and its trade with it made only 2% of the region’s overall trade. The only university in MK, the Pedagogic University had no courses for those interested to study Armenian literature and culture, which was considered to have led to the widespread use of Russian language. The 1963 petition to Khrushchev accused Baku; it regarded subordination of institutions and enterprises in Mountainous Karabakh to enterprises located in Aghdam or Barda regions outside the MKAO as discrimination. 391 Karabakh Armenians complained about the demographic changes in the region as well, seeing it as a threat. 392 The 93% Armenian majority in 1926 had decreased to 76%, and the diminution of the Armenian population of Nakhchivan served as an example.


390 According to the 1979 census, the population of Mountainous Karabakh was 162,000, comprising 123,000 (76%) Armenians and 23,000 Azeris (23%).


392 See Otto Luchterhand, op. cit.
The Azerbaijani side responded to the claim arguing that migration was a natural process, and it had had no impact on the migration of the Armenian population to Baku or Moscow. Besides, the 215,000 Armenian community of Baku was the most advantageous, having jobs and housing in the prestigious quarters of the city, while the urban Azeri minority in Armenia enjoyed far fewer rights. Mountainous Karabakh contained Armenian schools, cultural centres, and all the official writings were conducted in Armenian. MK was economically better off than Azerbaijan, which was amongst the poorest of the Soviet Republics. Moreover, the Azeri minority within MK had grievances of discrimination by the dominant Armenian majority.

The Armenian community of MK might have expected that the region’s socio-economic grievances would disappear if it united with the economically well-off Armenia. A number of statements made by high level officials confirmed some of the grievances of the Armenian population. In a conclusion of 1989, 20th October, the Presidium of the Soviet Union stated that Azerbaijan must provide firm and additional guarantees of the autonomous status and abide the legal interests of the Armenian part of the population. The presidium further recommended to Azerbaijan SSR on 28th November 1989 to take legislative measures within a short period to improve the real status of the autonomy, provide genuine guarantees for the Armenian population, and work out a new law on the status of the Autonomous Oblast. Gorbachev, too, in 1989 confirmed the existence of grievances, stating ‘any isolation of the Armenian population of Azerbaijan from Armenia in the sphere of culture, education, science, information and spiritual life as a whole is inconceivable’. That said, it is worthwhile to mention that half if not most of the complaints of Karabakh Armenians in late 1980s were identity related. Karabakh Armenians were frustrated about the disability to run the region as a distinctive Armenian territory, whereas Azerbaijan, viewing it as its own historic and judicial territory treated the region accordingly. It was this contradiction of notions of Karabakh that triggered the conflict.

c) Immediate causes of the conflict

According to the Soviet leader Gorbachev there were two major causes of the dispute: ‘on the one hand many mistakes committed in Karabakh itself, plus the emotional foundation, which sits in the Armenian people. Everything that has happened to this people in history remains

and so everything that worries them provokes a reaction like this." As it is evident from the passage, although the Armenian community of the autonomy did have their grievances and perceptions, it was largely other more complex factors that turned them into an ethnic conflict. In other words, Mountainous Karabakh conflict was to a large extent disputed on historic grounds, and to a lesser extent on the alleged discrimination of Karabakh Armenians or the alleged grievances. Two different perceptions of the region, past conflict, socio-economic grievances, state weakness, and inability to dialogue played a role in the escalation of the conflict. Although negative socio-economic conditions did play a role in the escalation of the conflict, but its outbreak owed largely to identity related factors, and the latter stimulated the formation of the former. As former Mountainous Karabakh movement leader and later Armenian President Kocharyan put it: ‘… even if it had been good in Azerbaijan, then these problems would have risen all the same. There is something more than good or bad life that people understand and that pushes those people towards independence.’ The ‘something’ is referred to as identity.

Despite Karabakh’s inclusion in Azerbaijan, Armenians in Karabakh, Armenia the proper and Diaspora had never accepted the ‘loss’ of their historic homeland and cradle of Armenian culture. Armenians of Karabakh regarded the province as an exclusively Armenian entity, where decisions should not be dictated by the Azeri centre. The idea that Karabakh was a part of a state that was run by Turks (Armenians identified the neighbouring Azeris as ethnic Turks), or the region was dictated by non-Armenians generated hardships in collective identity. This is partly because the massacre of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 left a deep trace on Armenian collective self-consciousness, and has had implications for their relations with Azerbaijan. In this context, tension between the two identities would rise everytime Azeris and Baku would regard Karabakh as their historic land, and treat it as their natural right. Making decisions for Karabakh aimed at emphasising the region as part of Azerbaijan was considered both judicially and morally completely normal in Baku and on the Azeri side, whereas on the Armenian side it was seen as an attempt to deprive the Armenians of what belonged to them. For example, in 1973, dispute arose between Baku and Stepanakert on the celebration format of the 50th anniversary of MKAO, as Baku reduced the number of guests from Moscow and Yerevan, and emphasised the region’s belonging to Azerbaijan. Past conflict in the form of mutual massacres in the Caucasus also played a role in the

397 Ibid., pp. 139-140.
398 Although the Turkish side also claims that an equal number of Turks were massacred by Armenian fighters during the period.
399 Ibid., p. 138.
generation of a stereotype between the two communities. Thus, the historic memory of both peoples facilitated the rapid escalation.

Many authors regard the decision of the Caucasian Bureau in 1921 as a cause of conflict. The decision of 1921 to leave MK within Azerbaijan has been perceived by Armenians as an historic error committed by Stalin. In contrast, Azerbaijan has taken the decision as a judicial act producing legal norms and implications for statehood. Moreover, Baku has insisted that the decision was morally just, taking into consideration that the 200,000 Azeris in Armenia had not been granted any autonomy, and that the other mixed populated region Zangezur was incorporated into Armenia. Furthermore, when speaking about socially unjust decisions, the Azerbaijani authorities often refer to the resettlements of thousands of Azeris from Armenian SSR to Azerbaijan SSR in 1948-1953 by Stalin’s decree.

The conflict was much contributed to by the inability of the Soviet Union to provide any direct negotiations between Armenians and Azeris on their grievances towards each other. Any claims had to be sent to Moscow, and communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the status of Karabakh went through the centre as well. This resulted in a unilateral interpretation of events within the authorities, intellectual elites and societies of both countries. As Kurkchiyan puts it, ‘poor reporting and inadequate mass communication forced people to rely on hearsay, while the lack of democratic means of public debate facilitated the rapid growth of stereotypes, prejudice, narrow vision and hostility’. Furthermore, it was during the political liberalisation of the perestroika period that a favourable moment appeared for the resolution of frozen problems and for raising the frozen claims. As Graham Smith notes, ‘Gorbachev’s reforms allowed political space for the genuine representation of ethnicity and nationalism and also stimulated elites to seek ethnic and national mobilisation for popular support’. Emergence of the conflict was therefore closely linked to liberalisation, and had a loosening of the centre’s control over the periphery occurred in 1970s, the conflict would have sparked off then.

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400 See Mark Weber, op. cit., p. 223.
Thus, the conflict was largely a result of the different and contradictory perceptions of Azeris and Armenians of Mountainous Karabakh, and its escalation owes more to correcting the historic mistake rather than improving the socio-economic grievances in the region. As Papazian puts it, there was a belief that ‘reunification would ... satisfy the primordial and instrumental needs for the population, as it would reunite the historically Armenian territories, would end foreign domination and would improve the material well being of the population’.

Map 4 Mountainous Karabakh and the occupied regions

2.3.2. Escalation of the conflict

As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, the emergence of the Karabakh conflict in late 1980s was facilitated by the perestroika led liberalisation process in the Soviet Union. In other words, once Soviet rule was established in the region in 1920s, the conflict got frozen, suppressed by force and later by the persuasion of the ideology. Once the communist ideology collapsed in 1980s, it gave way to nationalism, and nationalism became dominant in the

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elite’s ideology and perceptions. The liberalisation had for the first time in 70 years let national questions take precedence over the Soviet or communist ones, and this was a window of opportunity not to miss. In addition, the nationalistic rhetoric was complimented by a number of factors that contributed to the evolving conflict dynamics in a negative way. The mass deportation and beatings of the Azeri minority in Armenia, and the Sumgait events had already generated a security concern for Armenians. Thus, the 70 year old co-existence got in an instant undermined by the historic-nationalistic perceptions and security concerns, leading to ethnic hatred and finally a full-fledge war.

Armenia and Azerbaijan had completely different and unique paths to independence. As Dmirti Furman notes, unlike in Georgia, ‘in Armenia the urge for independence and national selfhood did not take the shape of a desire to free from Moscow’s control, but resulted in an attempt to find historic justice in the relations with its neighbours’.406 In Azerbaijan in contrast, the national movement was rather confused, and largely reactive to the Karabakh movement. Azeris’ self consciousness was much weaker than that of Armenians and therefore it was rather hard to be united around one national issue. It was largely MK problem that strengthened the Azeri national identity.407

The Karabakh movement started in late 1980s in the form of demonstrations in both Stepanakert and Yerevan demanding the transfer of the region, and was largely led by the Karabakh Committee.408 The first traces of the conflict became visible when in August 1987 the Armenian Academy of Sciences appealed to the Politburo for the transfer of both Mountainous Karabakh and Nakhchivan to Armenian SSR, although the latter’s composition comprised 97% Azeri.409 As the Soviet leader Gorbachev tried to upgrade the status of Karabakh to that of an autonomous Republic loosely tied with Azerbaijan SSR, the then MK Communist Party Chairman Pogossian rejected it; it was obvious that the centre had lost its

408 See Elizabeth Fuller, ‘Armenians demonstrate for return of territories from Azerbaijan’, RFE/RL Research Bulletin, 441/87, 20th October, 1987. It should be noted that initially the demonstrations in Yerevan were on environmental problems and only subsequently concentrated on MK.
control over the region. The situation was further complicated when in November 1987, Armenian academician and Gorbachev’s economic advisor Aganbekyan in an interview to the French newspaper L’humanité stated that MK would soon be transferred to the Armenian SSR.

The first clash between Armenians and Azeris occurred in the Azeri populated village of Chardakhly in MK. In October 1987 the regional administration of the Azerbaijani town of Chardakhly decided to transfer land from a collective farm administered by Armenians to a collective farm administered by Azeris. The Armenian workforce refused to comply and the regional branch of the communist party dismissed the Armenian director of the collective farm, appointing an Azeri national instead. This caused demonstrations by Armenian farmers and escalated into confrontation with security forces from Baku. As a result, the ecological demonstrations in Yerevan in January 1988 easily switched to political, nationalist agendas and demanded the transfer of Karabakh and Nakhchivan to Armenia. Further protests were held in MK central town Stepanakert with the demand of unification (miatsum) with Armenian SSR. On 20 February 1988, the MK Soviet passed a resolution appealing to the Supreme Soviets of Armenia, Azerbaijan and USSR for the transfer of the region. There were 350,000 Armenians living in Azerbaijan and 200,000 Azeris in Armenia at the time. The soured relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan led to the beatings and deportation of large number of Azeris from Armenia in January 1988.

The first clash of the conflict occurred on 26th February between Azeris and Armenians resulting in two Azeri deaths, and large numbers of wounded. Following the events in MK and Azeris’ fleeing from Armenia, angry crowds gathered in the tiny industrial city of Sumgait near Baku, where 14,000 Armenians had lived. On February 27-29, Azeri refugees arriving in Sumgait called for revenge on Armenians leading to brutal beatings and killings.

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416 See Cornell, Small nations and great powers, pp. 79-80.
burning houses and looting, known as Sumgait pogrom. The official death toll was recorded at 32, hence 26 Armenians and 6 Azeris. For the Armenians, Sumgait was like a reminder of the massacre of 1915 and it exacerbated their trust in the Soviet authorities and in Azerbaijan. It strengthened the resistance of Karabakh Armenians against Azerbaijan and raised widespread support in Yerevan for Karabakh. The events led to the migration of the 14,000 Armenian population of Sumgait, and it strengthened the Armenian perception that there was no way Armenians could live with Azeris together any more.\(^{417}\) Before Sumgait, the dispute was mainly identity related, but the pogroms added a new element to it, Armenians’ security concerns. However, until the very latest military phase of the conflict, there was still room to avoid the forthcoming violent phase of the conflict and despite the Sumgait events and beatings of Azeris in Armenia, there were still Azeris left in Armenia and Armenians in Azerbaijan.

\(\text{a) War of laws}\)

On 23 March, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union dismissed the appeal of MKAO to be joined to Armenian SSR, and on 13\(^{th}\) June, the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet rejected the appeal on the basis of article 78 of the USSR constitution. The Supreme Soviet’s decision led to the burning of 4 Azeri villages in Armenia and further deportations.\(^{418}\) At the same time a proposal was elaborated by Moscow and Baku to upgrade the region’s status to an autonomous republic with privileges, but it got turned down by the chairman of MK’s communist party at an early stage. On 15\(^{th}\) June, following the Armenian Supreme Soviet’s formal consent to MK’s joining it, the Regional Soviet of MKAO passed a resolution for the region’s unilateral secession from Azerbaijan, and renamed the region ‘Artsakh Armenian Autonomous Region’.\(^{419}\) In response, the USSR Supreme Soviet, on 18 July 1988, operating on the basis of Article 78 of the Soviet Constitution once again decided to leave MKAO within the Azerbaijan SSR.

Already in December 1988 hatred between the two sides was so high that even the earthquake in Armenia on 7\(^{th}\) December 1988 did not produce any short-term evasion. Earthquake survivors still kept speaking about the conflict to the visiting Russian and international journalists and aid workers on the site, and some even rejected Azerbaijan’s humanitarian aid, suspecting the latter of sending medicine to poison them.\(^{420}\) By this time, there were already refugees from Karabakh in both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

\(^{417}\) See Mutafian, op. cit., p. 150, See also Kaufman op. cit., p. 55.
\(^{420}\) See De Waal, op. cit., p. 64.
In the light of deterioration of intercommunity relations, the Soviet leadership, on 12th January 1989, applied direct rule in MK, subordinating the region to Moscow without changing the status of the region. A Special Administration committee was established under the leadership of Arkady Volsky and a programme was designed to ameliorate the economic and social grievances that the Armenian community had raised. The programme also included improving economic and cultural links between MKAO and Armenia. The direct rule calmed tensions down, but in November, 1989 Moscow handed over jurisdiction back to Azerbaijan, which seemingly angered people in Armenia and MK. In response, in December 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Armenia and the Soviet of MKAO took joint decision on the reunification of Karabakh and Armenia. Shortly afterwards, the Armenian Supreme Soviet on 13th February 1990 adopted another resolution on ‘the recognition of the decision of the Caucasus Bureau of the Communist Party as of 5th July 1925 unlawful’; it instead insisted on the lawfulness of the 4th July 1921 decision, which had accommodated MK within Armenia. The decision caused anger in Azerbaijan, leading to the cleansing of Armenian villages in Geranboy and Khanlar districts of Azerbaijan. This was followed by anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku on the 13th and 14th of January 1990 by Azeri refugees from Armenia. Like in Sumgait, the presence of Soviet militia did not change anything, and at least 88 Armenians reportedly got killed, and hundreds were beaten and forced to flee the city by planes to Yerevan and by ferry to Turkmenistan. The situation only exacerbated when the Soviet Special Forces marched into Baku, to cause what is known as the Baku massacre. On 20th January 1990, 29,000 Soviet troops under the banner of preventing the pogroms, entered Baku killing over 400 civilians. According to Human Rights Watch military action against civilians in Baku had been planned before the 13th of January. The later statements of the Soviet defence minister, too, made it obvious that the troops had entered Baku in order to stop the Popular Front of Azerbaijan to seize power from the Communist Party, rather than protect the Armenian population.

Following the August putsch Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence, and on 2nd September MKAO declared independence as well. MK’s strategy had changed from unification with Armenia to independence from Azerbaijan because it would put Yerevan in a  

423 See De Waal, p. 90.  
neutral position, and facilitate its support for the region’s secession. MK’s incorporation into the independent Armenian Republic would have caused international legal problems for the latter, and put it in a difficult position in a potential military confrontation with Azerbaijan. Following this, Baku annulled MK’s status as an autonomous oblast within Azerbaijan in November 1991 and MK held an independence referendum. Although the 22% Azeri population of the region boycotted it, the referendum turnout was 99.89% in favour of independence. Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning that NKAO Supreme Soviet chairman Grigoriy Petrossian had also sent an appeal to Moscow in late 1991 to incorporate MK into Russia.

b) War

The armed phase of the conflict started with a joint Soviet-Azerbaijani military and police operation in areas adjacent to MK. The operation, codenamed ‘Operation Ring’ was supposed to be a passport checking exercise in Azerbaijani villages adjacent to MK where the Armenian paramilitary groups had been hiding and terrorising the Armenian population and threatening the Azeri community. The operation, which mostly involved the 4th Soviet Army located in Ganja and the Azerbaijani police force, was aimed at the Armenian paramilitaries in the region. However, it led to 30 deaths in the region and deportation of 5000 Armenians from 24 villages outside MK with a systematic violation of human rights. The events also led to certain change within the Karabakh Armenian movement, and on 19th June, 1991, the Regional Soviet passed a resolution to change the course ‘from policy of confrontation to a policy of negotiation’, which raised hopes for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. A delegation of Karabakh Armenians led by Valery Grigorian headed to Baku for negotiations on 20th July, but Grigorian was shot dead in Stepanakert on 10th August. This was a golden opportunity that might have prevented the violent phase of the conflict, but got spared due to coincidental factors. What followed next was a brutal war with over 25,000 deaths, fought between the Karabakh armed forces, assisted by Armenia’s armed forces and Azerbaijani army. Both sides received support from various international volunteers and mercenaries as well as patron

426 Cornell, Small nations and great powers, p. 91
427 See Alexei Zverev, op. cit.
429 See de Waal, p. 118.
states. There remained a significant ex-Soviet military presence in the proximity to the conflict: the 127th division of the Russian army at the Armenian-Turkish border, the 366th Motor Rifle Regiment in Stepanakert and the 104th Airborne Division in Ganja in Azerbaijan, all of which were allegedly involved in the war.

The war was rich in atrocities committed by both sides, tens of bus, underground and ferry explosions in Baku, massacres in Khojaly, Kalbajar, Maraghar, etc. The brutal episodes included the Azerbaijani Government’s shelling of Stepanakert in 1992, and the Khojaly massacre of 613 Azeri civilians, distinguished for its brutality against the civilian population comprising mostly elderly, women and children. The massacre committed by the active support of the 366th Motor Rifle Division in MK, is today referred to as genocide in Azerbaijan.431

The war left 7 Azeri populated regions of Azerbaijan adjacent to MK occupied by the de facto MK forces, and caused some 650,000 IDPs within Azerbaijan.432 Mountainous Karabakh received land access to Armenia through the occupation of the Lachin region and ended its 70 year enclave nature. The occupation of the regions was condemned by UN Resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884, which mentioned the deterioration of the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and called on the Karabakh Armenian forces namely, to release the regions. Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity was supported in all resolutions, and most explicitly in resolution 822; nevertheless, Azerbaijan was disappointed with the absence of an explicit recognition of Armenia as an aggressor state. In spite of condemnation by all international organisations and leading states, the resolutions have not been fulfilled.

The war ended with an unlimited cease-fire brokered by Russia between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Karabakh Armenians, leaving the 7 regions outside MK ethnically cleansed, and in control of the Karabakh Armenian forces. It led to Azerbaijan’s embargo on Armenia in 1992, which Turkey joined in 1993 following the Karabakh Armed Forces’ occupation of large areas outside Mountainous Karabakh.433 The embargo produced negative implications for Azerbaijan, too; it led to the adoption of the 907 Section to the Freedom Support Act by the Congress in 1992 under the influence of the Armenian lobby, depriving Azerbaijan of any US

432 See MacFarlane and Minear, p. 32.
433 Armenia under the pragmatic President Petrossian did move to soften relations with Turkey in early 1990s. President Petrossian’s rhetoric was that Turkey had over the 70 years had changed and no longer posed a threat to the Armenian people. Yerevan was intent on improving relations with Ankara, but MK factor was the primary reason why the relations could not improve. Later with the developments and coming to power of Dashnaktsutyun in Armenia in 1998, Armenia went tough on demanding Turkey’s apology for the massacre before any normalisation of relations. See Shireen Hunter, Transcaucasus in transition: nation-building and conflict, (Washington DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), p. 30.
aid because of its blockade of Armenia and Mountainous Karabakh. The section’s adoption had partly to blame on Azerbaijan’s inability to deliver its part of the story to the West, since the text of the Section had clear misjudgement and misinformation errors. It was waived by President Bush in 2002, due to Azerbaijan’s cooperation in the war on terror. As Armenia became the second largest per capita beneficiary of US aid, Azerbaijan received no aid from the US during the war. Azerbaijan suffered from coups, bus and underground explosions in Baku, government changes and political instabilities throughout the war.

The conflict produced an economic, humanitarian and political catastrophe for both countries. Azerbaijan with its vast number of internally displaced people until the recent years seemed to live through a humanitarian crisis. Most of the IDPs from the occupied regions outside MK lived in run down tents, train wagons or mud houses short of basic human needs. There are on both sides younger and elderly generations of refugee and IDP children still waiting in temporary premises to return to their homes. The blockade of Azerbaijan and Turkey on Armenia had catastrophic consequences for Yerevan in the immediate aftermath of gaining independence, and still impedes Armenia from participating in regional projects.

A World Bank study in 2003 concluded that the lifting of the embargo would let Armenian GDP rise by 30%. Both countries are formally in a state of war and are spending vast resources on their military sectors, and have in the past continuously threatened each other with a resumption of military operations.

c) Definition of the conflict parties

As Köhler acknowledged, ‘the question of a starting point in space and time for the conflict became as disputed as the question of what the conflict is over and who is fighting’. The formal conflict parties recognised in the UNSC resolutions include Azerbaijan and Karabakh.

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435 Like in Abkhazia, war-nationalism in Armenia played a crucial role in the ideological motivation of the armed forces during the war and overall political stability in the country. The relative stability in Armenia during the war years is partly to explain on the perceived existential threat, but equally on the fact that Armenians were politically and militarily a lot better organised than Azeris, see Jan Köhler, Christopher Zürcher, ‘The Art of Losing the state’, in Potentials of disorder, op. cit., p. 157. see N. Dudwick, ‘Political transformations in postcommunist Armenia: image and realities’, in Karen Dawisha, Bruce Parrott eds., Conflict, cleavage, and change in Central Asia and the Caucasus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 69-109.


437 See Evgeniy Polyakov, ‘Changing trade patterns after conflict resolution in the South Caucasus’, (Washington DC: World Bank, 2000), p. 6. Meanwhile, the Armenian Government since 1998 has shared the view that a resolution of the conflict would not substantially change the position of the Armenian economy, see Arman Griorian, op. cit., p. 137.

Armenian Forces, but in reality Armenia has from the very onset acted as a crucial force behind. Due to a number of factors, the wording of the UNSC Resolutions avoided defining the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but mentioned the deteriorating relations between the two in the context of the Karabakh conflict. The armed forces of the Republic of Armenia took an active and crucial part in the military operations, and Armenian soldiers were involved in the war on non-voluntary basis. Moreover, a number of attacks on Nakhchivan (which had no land border with MK) and a number of other regions were launched from Armenia. As put by the Human Rights Watch, ‘as a matter of law, Armenian troop involvement in Azerbaijan makes Armenia a party to the conflict, and makes the war an international armed conflict’. The conflict transformed its nature from an internal to an internationalised armed conflict at a very early stage.

In the post war period, Karabakh and Armenia have even been more actively integrated. The role of Karabakh in Armenian domestic politics even increased partly due to the fact that since 1998 the leading posts in Armenia have been occupied by Karabakh Armenians. Moreover, MK issue is a link between Armenia and the Diaspora. Armenia and Karabakh have a common budget, and both act as a single economic and financial entity. In 1994, over 60% of MK’s budget was compensated by Armenia. In terms of security, Yerevan has made it clear that in case Azerbaijan tries to restore sovereignty over MK, including the occupied regions, the former will find itself in war with Armenia. Moreover, Armenian presidents and politicians have often stated that the future of MK is only with Armenia and there is no way to split the two. Although, Armenia has not recognised MK’s independence, in a number of sessions of administrative character, the Armenian Government has referred to MK as an administrative region. Consequently, certain international organisations today regard Armenia as a secondary conflict party and the conflict being of inter-state character.

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440 See ‘Azerbaijan: Seven years of conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh’, p. 73.


443 See ‘The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference’ PACE Resolution 1416, at http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/tab05/ERES1416.htm
2.3.3. The peace process and challenges

The peace process, facilitated by the OSCE has been uninterrupted, systematic and closed to the public. International involvement has been larger than in both Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts, and has included both state and non-state actors. The parties have received at least four proposals for a settlement and have been close to reaching a deal, but a number of obstacles have braked the process. Lack of compromise and political will, identity related challenges, state weakness, and absence of democratic institutions in both countries, and last but not least, geopolitical constellations in the region have undermined the peace process. Both parties have used various international platforms as the Council of Europe, OSCE parliamentary Assembly and UN to discredit each other, and prove their narratives. Both sides are influenced by any development in each other. Armenia is concerned about the oil and gas revenues of Azerbaijan and its economic development, considering it a threat. Azerbaijan is concerned about the armament in Armenia, and reacts by increasing its military spending. Since the cease-fire Armenia has been hoping for changes in international norms that would legitimise the fait accompli, and Azerbaijan has hoped for the oil revenues to strengthen Baku’s position in the process. This has in MacFarlane and Minear’s words led to lack of urgency in the peace process. It is currently the status of MK and Lachin regions that have caused a deadlock in the peace process.

a) OSCE mediation efforts

After unsuccessful mediation attempts by Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia in the early period of the conflict, the cease-fire got finally achieved in 1994 by Russian mediation. Since March 1992, the CSCE mediation process was to be the first ever international organisation’s effort to resolve a military conflict in the former Soviet Union. The CSCE Council meeting in March 1992 called for a peace conference to be held in Minsk once a political agreement is achieved between the parties. The Minsk conference has not up to date been held because such an agreement has never been reached, but a Minsk group has been the major mediator of the conflict. The Minsk group currently comprises 13 states: Russia, France, the US, Belarus, Germany, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Budapest Summit of the OSCE in 1994 established a co-chairmanship for the Minsk group represented by Russia as a permanent co-chairman and Finland as a rotating one. Previously, the OSCE efforts were not welcomed by Russia and consequently there were dual

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444 See MacFarlane and Minear, op. cit., p. 88.
445 According to Olivier Paye and Eric Remacle, an important impediment to calling the Minsk conference was because of disagreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the status of Karabakh Armenians, see Olivier Paye and Eric Remacle, ‘UN and CSCE policies in Transcaucasia’, in Bruno Coppieters ed., Contested Borders in the Caucasus, (Brussels: VUB, 1996), pp. 116-118.
track of negotiations, which got resolved by the designation of Minsk group permanent co-chairmanship. The cease-fire was actually negotiated by Russia as the OSCE representatives were still visiting the region. The group was first dominated by Finland, Italy and Sweden, those states with no strategic interests in the region, and acting as genuine mediators, but meanwhile no means to influence the conflict parties. In 1997, as France became a permanent co-chair, it caused discontent in Azerbaijan for the latter’s alleged pro-Armenian position, and therefore the US had to be added as a permanent co-chair. The Budapest Summit also resolved the issue of peace-keeping in Mountainous Karabakh. Russia had insisted on the composition of the peace-keeping contingent of Russian or CIS only troops, which Azerbaijan and Western countries rejected. Finally, compromise was reached that the peace-keeping force should comprise 3,000 men with no country providing more than 30%. At Russia’s insistence, it was agreed that the force would only be deployed after a political settlement is reached, making the deployment practically impossible.

The OSCE’s preliminary peace efforts were aimed at the reconciliation of the two principles—Azerbaijan’s territorial sovereignty and the right for self-determination of the Armenian population of Karabakh. The OSCE Lisbon Summit in 1996 called for a settlement of the conflict based on Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and the highest degree of self-government for Karabakh within Azerbaijan added by security guarantees for Karabakh’s population. The proposal was supported by all OSCE member states, but finally Armenia vetoed it, so the proposal became an OSCE Chairman in Office Statement. Refusing to recognise Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, Armenia argued, ‘the proposal predetermined the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, contradicting the decision of the OSCE Ministerial Council of 1992, which referred this issue to the competence of the OSCE Minsk Conference, to be convened after the conclusion of a political agreement’. The preliminary negotiations had set Azerbaijan’s territorial sovereignty as primary criteria, i.e. MK would be de iure within Azerbaijan, but de facto independent; however the situation changed after the Armenian political crisis in

446 See Rexane Dehdashti, Internationale Organisationen als Vermittler in inner-staatlichen Konflikten: Die OSZE und der Berg-Karabach Konflikt, (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000), p. 246. According to ambassador Maresca, Russia was from the onset set to restrict international involvement in the Minsk Group, see John Maresca, in Kreikemeyer, et al, p. 194.
1997, leading to the resignation of the liberal Ter-Petrossian, and election of Karabakh’s former President Robert Kocharyan as the president of Armenia. Since the political shift in Armenian politics in 1998, the right for the self-determination of the Armenian population of MK has been prioritised; this became visible in the push of the international community for the status of the region to be defined in a referendum, which Azerbaijan has continuously rejected. The negotiations shifted to concentrate on non-hierarchical relations between Azerbaijan and MK.

The OSCE has made three peace proposals: step-by-step approach (1993-1997), package solution (1997-2003) and finally the common state proposal (1998). The step-by-step approach envisaged two agendas: firstly, ending the conflict, Armenia’s troop withdrawals from 6 occupied regions outside MK, leaving Lachin corridor under international observation, opening of communication lines as well as lifting the embargo on Armenia, deployment of peacekeepers in MK, return of the displaced population and security guarantees; at a secondary stage, it would focus on Karabakh’s final status and return of IDPs to MK itself. The proposal was accepted by the Armenian President Ter-Petrossian in 1997, but rejected by MK de facto authorities and finally by Armenia’s new administration on the grounds that MK’s political status and independence be secured first. The plan implied withdrawal from the occupied regions first before proceeding to the status of the region, thus postponing an agreement on the final status of MK to the indefinite future, addressing all other issues instead. MK would be given an interim status, and the question of Lachin corridor linking Armenia and MK was moved to the second phase. Armenia was recognized a guarantor of the security of the population of Mountainous Karabakh, and as such assumed a range of important obligations: to facilitate the deployment of peacekeeping forces, the return of IDPs, ensuring the reopening of communication routes, and economic cooperation. Under the current scheme Armenia would lose its main bargaining chip-the buffer zone, would postpone an agreement on the final status of Mountainous-Karabakh to the indefinite future and focus instead on a peace agreement addressing all other issues without defining the political status of the region.

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The package proposal suggested settling all issues at stake, including the final status of MK in a single comprehensive agreement. The scheme implied MK would become de jure part of Azerbaijan, de facto independent. Karabakh would become fully self-governing and a free economic zone with a right to its own currency, budget and tax-raising. A provision of the proposal defined Karabakh as ‘a state and a territorial formation within the confines of Azerbaijan’, but provided unprecedented privileges. It would have its own constitution, its own flag, anthem and would independently form its own legislative, executive and judicial bodies, enjoy the right to maintain direct relations with foreign states and international organisations on economic and humanitarian matters. It would have the right to have its own police force and national guard, and Azerbaijani law would be valid in MK as long as it did not contradict the latter’s constitution and laws. The Azerbaijani security forces would only be allowed to enter the region by the latter’s prior authorisation. The proposal in spite of all the privileges was rejected by MK Armenians on the grounds that it was based upon the Lisbon principles.455

In 1998 the OSCE Minsk Group’s next proposal suggested a common state. It was in fact a modification of the package approach, suggesting a looser de jure association of MK with Azerbaijan. It proposed an abstract common state of Azerbaijan and MK, suggesting horizontal relations between the two. The text stated, ‘Nagorno-Karabakh is a state and territorial entity in the form of a Republic, which constitutes a common state with Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders’.456 The proposal included less privileges than the package deal, was nevertheless warmly accepted in MK and Armenia, but rejected by Azerbaijan on the grounds it violated its territorial integrity.

b) Land swap

The land swap proposal was first proposed by Paul Goble in 1990s and later revived during direct talks between the Armenian and Azeri Presidents in 2000.457 The essence of the deal is the exchange of Karabakh and Lachin corridor for the Meghri region of Armenia which connects Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhchivan. The plan would not only resolve the conflict, but also remove the risk of future conflict and was easy to carry out in technical terms. The proposal was dismissed both in Azerbaijan and Armenia, the latter disinterested because such a swap would deprive Armenia of its border on the strategic neighbour of Iran. It also led to

455 Ibid., p. 79-81.; See also the speech of former Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian at the parliamentary hearings in Yerevan, Armenpress, March 29, 2005.
456 Ibid., p. 82.
the resignation of four key positions in Azerbaijan as a sign of protest, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs.\footnote{\textit{Bruno Coppieters}, \textit{Federalism and conflict in the Caucasus}, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects series, 2001), page 3.}

The current peace process is a mixture of both step-by-step and package approaches. The confidentiality was broken in June, 2006 when the US co-chairman of the Minsk Group Matthew Bryza stated that the peace process included ‘the phased redeployment of Armenian troops from Azerbaijani territories around MK, with special modalities for Kalbajar and Lachin followed by a demilitarisation of the territories and deployment of an international peace-keeping force. A referendum or popular vote would be agreed on to determine the final legal status of NK at an unspecified future date’.\footnote{\textit{Liz Fuller}, ‘Nagarno-Karabakh: Mediators Take the Process Public’, \textit{RFE/RL}, 30, June, 2006.}

c) MK’s and Armenia’s position

MK de facto authorities have reiterated that they would not accept any vertical relationship with Azerbaijan, and might initially seek de facto independence rather than de jure.\footnote{\textit{MacFarlane and Minear}, p. 99.} Accordingly, the starting point of the negotiations must be two independent states in the territory of the former Azerbaijan Soviet Republic.\footnote{See Tim Potier, op. cit., p. 86. For a detailed view of MK’s position see ‘Karabakh Leader: Independence or Unification with Armenia’, \textit{RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report}, April 5, 2001.} Switzerland and Liechtenstein have been suggested as models. MK authorities’ true position however, is dubious. On the one hand, it demands de jure recognition as a subject of international law, and on the other hand, the authorities speak of unification with Armenia as the long-term strategy.\footnote{Just like in Abkhazia, in Mountainous Karabakh too, the unexpected conditions resulting from secession have led to the replacement of strategic goals by tactical goals. In the case of MK, the strategic goal of unification with Armenia got adapted to the circumstances and replaced by the tactical goal of independence. See ‘Karabakh Leader: Independence or Unification with Armenia’, \textit{RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report}, April 5, 2001. For public opinion on the future of MK see International Crisis Group Europe Report No 166, \textit{Nagorno-Karabakh: Viewing the conflict from the ground}, 14th September, 2005, p. 4.} Although Armenia has not recognised MK’s independence, various statements have been made by senior Armenian senior politicians and MK ‘de facto president’ unification as a long-term solution to the problem.\footnote{Levon Zourabian, ‘Nagorno-Karabakh settlement revisited. Is peace achievable?’, \textit{Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization}, vol. 14, no 2, Spring, 2006.}

Until President Petrossian’s resignation in 1997, Armenia’s position could be coined as \textit{land for peace}, hence withdrawing from the occupied regions around MK for any deal that would give the region self-rule and security guarantees.\footnote{\textit{Levon Zourabian}, ‘Nagorno-Karabakh settlement revisited. Is peace achievable?’} In 1997, there was a serious dissent between Armenia and the MK authority, due to the latter’s compromising position in the peace process. Then, President Petrossian publicly stated Armenia was no longer in a position to resist the OSCE Lisbon principles and retain MK and the occupied regions. Referring to
Armenia’s economic plight and international pressure, he had agreed to the step-by-step plan for the MK conflict. His statement raised allegations both within his cabinet and in the public that he was betraying Karabakh. The political crisis got resolved through the election of Karabakh’s former President and the then Armenian Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan as the president of Armenia. During President Kocharyan’s term, Armenia’s and MK’s position have been identical and tended to dissent on minor issues. Both have held the so called territory for status position, offering to withdraw from the buffer zone in exchange for Azerbaijan’s granting of independence to MK. The reluctance to withdraw from the buffer zone before the region’s status is defined, is explained by Karabakh Armenians’ security concerns: Azerbaijan, returning the regions adjacent to Karabakh will have an upper hand, and might resort to use of force later. This belief has strengthened as a result of Azerbaijan’s militaristic rhetoric and insistence on granting Karabakh internal self-rule instead of independence. Armenia’s position became even clearer during the latter years of President Kocharyan’s term. During the Paris, Key West and Florida meetings of Azerbaijanii and Armenian presidents, the Armenian Parliament put forward three principles reflecting the country’s position: 1) no subordination of MK to the central Azerbaijani Government; 2) ‘no enclavisation’-that is establishment of a permanent territorial corridor between MK and Armenian through the Lachin corridor; 3) internationally guaranteed rights for Karabakh Armenians which would include the right of Armenia to intervene militarily if necessary. Concerning the status of the region, the Armenian Foreign Minister stated in October 2004 that there could be no compromise on the independence status of MK, since ‘every inch of Armenia is priceless, including Karabakh’. Armenia considers its readiness to return 5 of the 7 regions adjacent to MK as compromise, and expects understanding from Azerbaijan on the status of the region. Yerevan and MK authorities consider the buffer zone as an important guarantee for the military and political security of MK, and therefore any demilitarisation is rejected before the political status of the region is secured. In addition, both Armenia and MK consider Lachin to be part of Karabakh, and insist it should not be subject to negotiation, although the region was not included in the MKAO, and was largely settled by Azeris before

the conflict. In 2006, the Armenian Foreign Minister stated that the problem can only be resolved by the self-determination of the MK people, which is to be achieved either by unification with Armenia or by MK’s independence. Armenia has continuously rejected the Azeri proposal for the highest autonomy for MK within Azerbaijan, stating that autonomy is ‘a stage which is over’ for Karabakh Armenians, since Azerbaijan through the war, has lost its moral right over the region.

d) Azerbaijan’s position

In the negotiation process, Azerbaijan’s position is mainly based upon its international legal right of territorial sovereignty and any form of solution based on that. Baku has offered MK the highest autonomy in the form of less than independence, but more than autonomy that would pledge the region de facto independence. In fact, Azerbaijan’s consent to the package solution of the OSCE showed that Baku was considering granting the region an unprecedented level of self-rule. It is mainly the issue of its territorial sovereignty rather than the rule of MK that concerns Azerbaijan, and the issue is seen to be vital for Azerbaijan’s statehood. Azerbaijan refuses to recognise MK’s independence or any form of confederation of two independent subjects, and has often referred to the practice of the Aland isles rather than Bosnia for a solution. Azerbaijan’s position is roughly, first the demilitarisation of the occupied territories, trust-building and then status definition. Baku insists on the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied regions, to be followed by repatriation of Azeri IDPs, opening of communications and development of economic integration. And only in 15-20 years’ time should the status of MK be settled. Meanwhile, Baku under Article 51 of UN Charter often refers to a military option to free the occupied territories. This has also had domestic political implications: any government that would abandon the military rhetoric while the occupation continues with large numbers of IDPs would be deemed to have domestic instability.

Baku has argued that Karabakh Armenians’ status in the negotiations cannot equal that of Minsk Group participating states, and therefore it should treat MK Armenians as an interested

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party, rather than a conflict party in the negotiations. It refuses to recognise MK as a conflict party because that could legitimise the Mountainous Karabakh Armenians’ claim to independent statehood and the mono-ethnic composition of Mountainous Karabakh achieved by ethnic cleansing. Moreover, bilateral talks with MK could allow Armenia to withdraw from the peace process and avoid responsibility, while still supporting the self-proclaimed Karabakh Armenian authorities. Azerbaijan argues it will not hold direct negotiations with MK Armenians as long as the occupation of its territory continues, and Armenia is involved. Baku demands an equal status for the MK’s Azeri community and treats the de facto authorities as MK Armenian community only. As Armenia has defended the right of MK Armenians for self-determination, Azerbaijan has paralleled the same right for the Azeri community of MK.

Karabakh de facto authorities are still present in all negotiations, but only as an interested party and not the official conflict party. Such a format of negotiations complicated the peace process during President Petrossian’s term. That said, since 1998 key Armenian posts have been held by former officials of MK authorities, so MK is de facto represented in the process. Nevertheless, Karabakh de facto authorities stress the existence of dissent in the positions of Mountainous Karabakh and Armenia and direct negotiations could fasten the process. As a matter of fact, between 1993 and 1997 Stepanakert took part in the negotiations, but after direct negotiations between the two presidents, its participation was barred.

In the current stage of negotiations, it is the issues of Armenia’s withdrawal from Lachin and Kelbajar and referendum to define the region’s status that have driven both parties to a deadlock. Armenia demands a referendum to be held in MK only in a specified period of time, whereas Azerbaijan is keen on a referendum in the whole of Azerbaijan on the status of MK and desires to postpone the issue to an unspecified period.

e) Buffer zone and Lachin corridor

472 Armenia and Azerbaijan have been treated as the principal parties in the negotiations, while the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of MK are the interested parties. Such a definition of the conflict parties was first suggested by US Secretary of State James Baker in 1992 as a compromise to the negotiation format and was widely accepted by the international community today. See Adil Baguirov, ‘Nagorno-Karabakh: Basis and Reality of Soviet-era Legal and Economic Claims Used to Justify the Armenia-Azerbaijan War’, Caucasian Review of International Affairs, vol. 2, issue 1, pp. 19-20.


Lachin and Kelbajar are the two of the 7 regions from which Armenia is reluctant to withdraw before any political settlement is reached on the status. In the words of the ICG, ‘Yerevan’s main concern is that once Azerbaijan regains control over Kelbajar, it might not proceed with the referendum. A crucial bargaining chip would thus be lost, and Nagorno-Karabakh would be militarily disadvantaged’.\(^{475}\) Armenia argues that once Azerbaijan regains control of Lachin and Kelbajar, which would cut MK off the Armenian mainland, Armenia would be in a weaker position to defend the region if Azerbaijan attacked. However, Azerbaijan has pledged to renounce use of force and deploy peace-keepers in the region once the occupied regions are freed. Moreover, the deployment of peace-keepers in the region would make use of force practically impossible.\(^{476}\) However, it is the issue of Lachin rather than Kelbajar that has driven the parties to a deadlock. The Lachin corridor is essential to any political solution because without it MK would become an enclave again. It is therefore vital for MK’s security, since it is the only access to Armenia. It is one of the issues causing stalemate in the negotiations: Stepanakert and Yerevan do not agree to MK’s enclavisation, and Baku does not agree to any territorial revision. Azerbaijan has offered a joint use of the corridor to be observed by international peacekeepers on condition that it remains under Azerbaijan’s jurisdiction. MK and Armenia consider Lachin for all purposes part of Mountainous Karabakh and emphasize that the very existence of MK is dependent upon Lachin. Therefore, the de facto authorities have carried on with measures to make the return of the Azeri population impossible; the demographic structure of Lachin has changed, 10,000 Armenians have been resettled in the region.\(^{477}\) As one Karabakh Armenian official stated, ‘Whatever happens to the occupied territories, the Lachin Corridor stays with us. The sooner reconstruction proceeds there, the sooner the Azeris will accept it’.\(^{478}\)

Another issue that has deepened the mistrust between the parties is the buffer zone of 6 (plus Lachin) regions around MK. Armenia refuses to withdraw from the occupied regions for security and political reasons: as long as the military rhetoric continues in Azerbaijan and Baku refuses to grant MK independence, Yerevan deems it necessary to retain the regions as a security zone; the buffer zone is also used as a guarantee of MK’s political status. Azerbaijan has raised grievances on the destruction process, systematic fires and resettlements in the


\(^{476}\) Ibid.


\(^{478}\) MacFarlane and Minear, p. 86.
occupied regions. Various voices within Armenia and MK have in the past called for retaining the buffer zone, regarding them as ‘historic Armenian land’ and have accordingly encouraged settlements there. The fact-finding mission of the OSCE visited the areas and concluded that between 9,000 and 12,000 people had been settled, that the MK authorities had created various incentives to settle: providing homes, infrastructure, tax exemptions and free utilities. Settlers are attracted from the diaspora, being offered loans, credits and other financial aid.\footnote{See ‘Report of the OSCE Fact-Finding Mission to the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan Surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), 2005’, at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/id/dsca20050413_08/dsca20050413_08en.pdf}

Regarding the return of Azeri IDPs to MK, mainly to Shusha, Yerevan has stated their return must be held equal to the return of Armenians to Azerbaijan and can only be regulated in the last stage of the conflict, after confidence building is completed.\footnote{Serge Sarkissian interview to Yerkir agency, 22 February, 2005.}

\textit{f) Identity related challenges}

Identity related challenges to the peace process are observed both within the negotiating elites and within the societies. It should be taken into consideration that there is no reconciliation process between the societies going on. Given the confidentiality of the peace process and absence of communication between the societies, unilateral interpretation of events is strong in both societies. Throughout the peace process, at least two peace initiatives were accepted by the presidents, but rejected by their cabinets. The ultimate result of an isolated peace process is hatred towards each other, and nationalism is still very high in both societies and even political circles. In 2004, a young Armenian officer attending NATO courses in Budapest was killed by his Azerbaijani counterpart, the latter being publicly defended and supported in Azerbaijan as a hero. In 2003, during his speech at Moscow State University Armenian President referring to the relations, spoke of an ethnic incompatibility.\footnote{Artur Terian, ‘Kocharian Says Armenians, Azeris ‘Ethnically Incompatible’, Armenia Liberty, 16th January, 2003, at http://www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2003/01/4B1EBB47-69C0-40AF-83DB-24E810DA88E4.ASP.}

\begin{itemize}
\item The mutual \textit{feindbild} was even more obvious when the Armenian speaker proudly stated ‘we killed 25,000 Azeris in the Karabakh war’.\footnote{Elkhan Mehtiyev, op. cit., p. 7.}
\item Equally Azeri politicians and society continuously see the conflict as a part of the plan to restore the Great Armenia of ancient times, while Armenians refer to their Azeri counterparts as inspired by Pan-Turkish goals.\footnote{See Kurkchiyan Marina, ‘The Karabakh Conflict,’ in Edmund Herzig and Marina Kurkchiyan eds., ‘The Armenians: past and present in the making of national identity’, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), p. 153.}
\end{itemize}

The mutual sufferings in each other’s hands have been the focus of contemporary nationalist narratives of Armenian cruelty versus Turkish savagery. Both sides have rejectionist positions, rejecting each other’s rights and historic presence. Azeris see Armenians as late
comers to the Caucasus, settled in Azeri lands by the Russian Empire and desperate to restore Great Armenia. Armenians on the other hand, see Azeris as a new phenomenon as a nation. Most Armenian patriotic ideology is built upon the notion that Azeris are not indigenous to the region and had been there only three or four centuries. In February 1988, the Armenian writer Zori Balayan pointed out: ‘We can understand the terms Georgia, Russia, Armenia, but not Azerbaijan. By using such term we confirm the existence of such country’.484 According to Gahramanova, ‘the logic of the statement is widely reflected in the public opinion in Armenia that Azerbaijanis as recent creature have fewer historic rights’.485

The conflict has become a problem of self-identification of Azeris and Armenians and both sides share the belief that being without MK equals having an incomplete national identity, a wounded state and nationhood. Both sides think that any concession would endanger their security, sense of identity and survival. There is a widespread belief in Azerbaijan that conceding MK to Armenia will bring about new demands in the face of Nakhchivan, as the province is still commemorated in Armenia and the diaspora as ‘historic Armenian land’. As polls suggest, Azerbaijani grievances against Armenians are associated with territorial issues, with the fact of occupation of their lands by Armenians, which prevents them from returning home. Armenian grievances are more associated with the ‘ancient hatred’ factor. Azerbaijani IDPs agree to live next to Armenians despite the personal risks and the experienced horrors of the war.486

Karabakh means different things for Armenian and Azeri national identities. Azeris regard MK as their cultural and historic centre, the birthplace of poets and composers, while their primary association is with Shusha, the historic centre of Karabakh, where 91% of Karabakh Azeris lived before the conflict.487 As Emirbayov writes, ‘The return of the Shusha region to Azerbaijani control could contribute greatly to Azerbaijanis’ willingness to accept certain concessions as part of a comprehensive peace settlement’.488 For Armenians, Karabakh is a part of their national and religious heritage to an unprecedented level. A group of Armenian historians even think that while Armenians and Armenian culture in other regions were

485 Gahramanova, op. cit., p. 16
assimilated, it was in Mountainous Karabakh that they preserved their identity. From the very onset of the conflict, ideological factors have had a heavier weight on the Armenian side, which also explained the high motivation of the army during the war. The importance of Karabakh in Armenian national identity was obvious in the 1997 political crisis in Armenia leading to the resignation of President Ter-Petrossian. Statement by Karabakh’s de facto ‘President’ Gukassian demonstrated the preference in Armenian politics of identity related interests to welfare related ones: ‘however badly the people live, there are holy things, there are positions that they will never surrender under any circumstances’.

There are still identity related real and virtual security concerns for Armenians. Most Armenians still see Turkey as a real threat and equate Azeris with Turks; interpreting Azeri hatred and nationalism as Pan-Turkism, Armenians ignore the Karabakh factor’s causality of hatred in Azerbaijan. As defence minister Sarkissian puts it, ‘the issues of genocide of Armenians and Karabakh are associated so that the security preconditions of Karabakh emanate from the historic memory of the Armenian people’. Armenians have cultivated a victim complex, and the fear of further victimisation is used to justify the control of MK and hatred of Azeris. Thus, the problem starts with the Armenians’ equation of Azeris to the Ottoman Turks, and the Azeris’ refusal to recognise Armenians’ security concerns emanating from history. As the ICG report puts it, ‘where Armenians claim that the main goal of Turks and Azeris is to exterminate them as a people, Azeris believe that Armenians aim to take more of their land’. Within both societies there is very little glimpse of dialogue or tendency to communication with each other. This may differ outside the societies; Armenians and Azeris living and working together in Georgia and Russia enjoy normal relations, a factor which has been referred to as an antithesis to the ethnic incompatibility of the two peoples.

Identity related emotional factors are very firm in the conflict and have many times become a major obstacle to the peace process. The conflict parties have at least twice been close to reaching a breakthrough, but on all occasions pressure within the society and the ruling elite has restrained the respective presidents. In various periods, the readiness to reach a compromise has been accompanied by identity related political instabilities in both countries.

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490 However, there were also pragmatic reasons why the Armenian Government and Society failed to support Petrossian’s deal bid. See Arman Grigorian, op. cit. 135.
491 Quoted in Thomas de Waal, op cit., p. 260.
492 See Serge Sarkissian interview, op. cit.
493 ‘Nagorno-Karabakh: viewing the conflict from the ground’, p.29.
494 Ibid.
At least twice, has identity-related opposition impeded reaching an agreement; in 1997 as President Petrossian agreed to a modus vivendi basically, this ended up in his resignation in February 1998; and in 1999 when the Azerbaijani and Armenian elites (Armenian Parliamentary speaker Vazghen Sarkisian) were close to agreement, it ended up in shootings in the Armenian Parliament and finally killing of the parliamentary speaker. A further complicating factor in Armenia is the role of diaspora, which has often taken a harsher position than the Armenian Government and at times refused to consider the hardships in Armenia emanating from lack of resolution.

2.3.4. De facto ‘statehood’ in Mountainous Karabakh

Mountainous Karabakh de facto independence has not been recognised by any state or international organisation. Moreover, there have been condemnations by the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the UN and a number of states on the conduction of elections, adoption of a constitution, etc. The position of the international community vis-à-vis the conflict is straightforward: MK is recognised within the territorial sovereignty of Azerbaijan and both Armenia and MK are condemned for the attempt to change boundaries by use of force. In April 2007, a US State Department’s Report on the region emphasised the occupation of MK and adjacent regions by Armenia. Equally, all UNSC permanent members have refused to recognise the region’s independence and reiterated Azerbaijan’s territorial sovereignty over the region. Such a position derives from the four UNSC Resolutions supporting Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and the existing international legal order. The fact that the de facto authorities have undertaken reconstruction projects in the region and demonstrated effective government has not produced any political or legal implications for the international community yet. The international legal doctrine ex injuria ius non oritur (illegal acts cannot produce legal results), reflected in UN resolutions, makes all the passed laws in the region invalid. The de facto authorities have initiated long-term settlement and land distribution in Shusha and Lachin, reconstruction projects. In particular, land privatisation in Lachin is legally contradictory, since Lachin was not included in the Mountainous Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and was populated by Azeris. Since 2000, over 5,300 families have been

resettled in MK, and a massive population resettlement programme is supposed to ensure a demographic increase of 300,000 by 2010.\textsuperscript{499} The real population of MK today, including the occupied regions does not exceed 60,000 people.

Among all the secessionist provinces in the region MK has the most advanced de facto statehood. The region adopted its own constitution in 2006 and has held two presidential elections and is currently pursuing the policy of \textit{democratisation for recognition}. Although, the de facto Government in the 18 years of existence has proven effective governance over the region, it is still highly dependent on Armenia for its military security and economic survival: over half its army are believed to be Armenia citizens, and Yerevan covers 50\% of the budget through an interstate loan, which is interest free and unlikely to be paid back.\textsuperscript{500} Due to its better relations with the diaspora, and descent of Armenian president and prime minister both from MK, the latter has more leverage over Armenia and can impose its decisions on Yerevan, rather than the other way round. Karabakh Armenians have, from the very onset demonstrated political autonomy vis-à-vis Yerevan and never agreed to any political subordination. As Edmund Herzig elucidates it, ‘[I]f Yerevan and Stepanakert are parts of the same animal, it is clearly the Karabagh tail that has been wagging the Armenian dog’.\textsuperscript{501} Even today, there is still dissent in Stepanakert for unification with Armenia.\textsuperscript{502} Dissent exists with Yerevan on minor issues in the negotiations, relating to the referendum to be held and Lachin corridor, but in de facto ‘President’ Gukassian’s words, ‘they are issues within the internal kitchen’.\textsuperscript{503}

\textbf{Concluding remarks}

As already mentioned escalation of ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus was facilitated by the perestroika reforms of late 1980s. Perestroika created a platform and opportunities for the historic perceptions and grievances of Armenians in Mountainous Karabakh and Abkhazians that had remained frozen under the Soviet nationalities policies since 1920s. Most of the grievances of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century had failed to be discussed or come to terms with between the conflict parties. Instead, like in all colonial territories, the ethno-territorial questions had been settled by the centre and to a certain extent arbitrarily. So,
in this context, Mountainous Karabakh and Abkhazia were the irrational explosions of accumulated grievances and negative energy. That said, it should be taken into consideration that perestroika per se or Moscow were not the source of conflict. At least in the Georgian-Abkhaz relations and in the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations did there exist certain conflict potential. This potential had tacitly risen throughout the 70-year Soviet rule, but had been largely suppressed by communist ideology and coercive power.

A primary factor for the deterioration of inter-community relations in Georgia was the Georgian national movement, in particular the minorities’ perceptions of it. Abkhazia’s grievances during the Stalin era had already generated a prejudice in Abkhaz society towards Tbilisi so that Georgia’s independence movement in late 1980s was perceived as a threat to the ethnic and cultural survival of the Abkhaz. The objective factor of fear of extinction as a separate ethnic community was complicated by further factors. Thus, in the case of Abkhazia the grievances against Georgians left from 1930s were only aggravated by the Georgian national movement. Such a scenario was less acute in the case of South Ossetia, where conflict emerged basically out of an ethnic security dilemma. The South Ossetian conflict grew largely due to the incapacity of the Georgian national movement to handle it. As to the MK conflict, it was the identity related perceptions or rather misperceptions that triggered the escalation of the conflict. Here, too past perceptions and grievances from Soviet era were added by inter-community violence such as the Sumgait events. And as the conflict went on, both societies changed dramatically and the conflict got tied up to societal identity, making a resolution intractable.

Unlike Abkhazia and Mountainous Karabakh, South Ossetia during the Soviet period had never expressed the desire for separation from Georgia, and even in the preliminary period of the conflict its de facto authorities did not set independence as the end goal. In other words, the conflict first started as a political one, aimed at guaranteeing the cultural and territorial security of the region. However, in the years to come South Ossetia’s economic isolation from Georgia proper and integration into the economic space of the Russian North Caucasus as well as slow trust-building measures have added an ethnic element to it. An Ossetian ethnic identity based upon Alania (a unified South and North Ossetia) has developed and reduced the potential for the region’s return to a status within Georgia.

All three conflicts, at least their violent phases might have been avoided, or at least today’s *fait accompli* might have been otherwise. Political immaturity of elites, irrational behaviour on the side of both conflict parties, maximalist positions all drew the room for *modus vivendi* narrower and narrower. Both Azerbaijan’s and Armenia’s positions were closer in early 1990s
than now, but this failed to produce any political implications for the peace process. Equally, no matter how much the Abkhaz disliked and blamed Georgians, initially they did not insist on full independence. They insisted on their security concerns, in particular the fear of extinction. The picture was even more optimistic for the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, chances for a modus vivendi for whom were realistic until the 2008 Georgian-Ossetian crisis. Thus, in all three conflicts, the escalation of the conflicts into violent phases was often caused by coincidental factors such as the murder of an influential leader, decisions made by immature ministers, lack of experience in state apparatus or weak statehood.

Another point worth mentioning and that is directly linked to the research question of this study is Russia’s role in the emergence of these conflicts. There is no evidence at all to blame to emergence of the three conflicts on Russia. When these conflicts arose in late 1980s, the Central Committee of the Communist Party was largely surprised and confused over how to react. Therefore, the divide and rule accusation against Russia is not well-founded. Russia got involved in the conflicts, in particular its manipulation started at a lot later stage. In the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, Russia’s involvement in the very initial stages of the conflict caused a deterrence of large scale violence. Moreover, the attempt to describe the minorities as a pawn of Russia has been a further complicating factor for the conflict resolution period. For a rather long period, the Georgian Government has described both conflicts as instigated and enlivened by Russia. What is more, both conflicts at this current stage, in particular the Georgian-Abkhaz one would not be resolved automatically if Russia left the region.
Chapter 3
Russia’s strategic interests in the South Caucasus since 1991

3.1. Evolution of Russian foreign policy after 1991 and implications for the South Caucasus

One of the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union for Russian foreign policy has been defining its strategy and tactics from scratch towards those states that had nearly uninterruptedly existed under Russian rule for the last 200 years. Lacking in experience and strategy of dealing with an independent South Caucasus, Russian policies have been subject to much confusion and contradiction. Its political elite has unanimously shared the general perception that the South Caucasus is of relevance to Russia’s security and larger geopolitical interests, but meanwhile has failed to define strategically what those interests would be, and gone ahead with their own agendas undermining some of the proclaimed interests of the state.

As a consequence, certain policies of the preliminary period (1991-1993) were occasionally either at odds with the official position or contradictory to Russia’s proclaimed strategic interests. This phenomenon was a product of a number of factors: weakness of state institutions and foreign policy decision-making and competing bureaucracies. The general political uncertainty at the preliminary period (1991-1992) had implications for Russia’s foreign policy towards its south, too. Therefore, the incoherence in foreign policy decision-making in the preliminary period requires an evaluation of the broader processes of foreign policy formation in Russia in 1990s. Further evolution of Russian foreign policy towards the South Caucasus has been closely connected to Russia’s self-perception and view of the larger international system. Russia’s perception of itself as a great power and its perception of the West and NATO, in particular have had a correlation with its interests towards the near abroad, and therefore require elaboration.

This chapter is an attempt to identify Russia’s interests towards the South Caucasus region throughout the 1991-2008 period. It starts by examining the evolution of Russian foreign policy in the early 1990s and the relevance of the South Caucasus region to Russia’s strategic interests. It tries to answer the question what strategic interests of Russia have acted as the driving force behind its complex policies towards the secessionist conflicts and whether the

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504 All these indicators are attributed to weak states in international relations. There was much discussion of Russia being a weak state in 1990s and its potential implications for both the the West and near abroad. However, Russia was rather in a process of transformation from an empire to a nation-state or to a new form of state. For a typology of weak states, see Georg Sorensen, ‘State transformation and new security dilemmas’, in Mathias Albert, Bernhard Moltmann, Bruno Schoch ed., Die Entgrenzung der Politik, (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2004).
policies have matched the interests. Whether there is a continuity of interests throughout the 1991-2008 period is explored further.

3.2. Russian identity crisis and formation of Russian foreign policy

The ultimate result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union for Russia, among other things, was the identity crisis at the political circles and the according inconsistency that had its impact upon the country’s foreign policy.505 Under the new circumstances it was not clear who the Russians would be or what kind of state Russia would become after two years of imperial and 70 years of a uniform collective identity. The crisis was partly to blame on the fact that Russia was a not a nation-state;506 in fact, the nation had almost never been defined explicitly in Russia and the state had always been identified with the nation. Russia’s identity and statehood had since the times of Peter the Great developed with its empire simultaneously, and now what remained out of it, was according to Hosking, the ‘bleeding hulk of an empire’.507 Russian imperial identity had largely been inclusive amongst the Slavic population, making no distinction between Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians.508 It was therefore not clear what kind of state Russia would be building, whether it would be a civic multinational state in the form of derzhava or an ethnic nation-state; the kind of multinational state and where its boundaries would lie were far from clear either.509 Its ruling elite and society were put before a task of transforming their self-perception once Russia had suddenly overnight gone back to its pre-Petrine borders. For all these reasons, in domestic Russian political discourse, there was at least six groups of defining Russia’s identity as a state, each with implications for the country’s foreign policy with the near abroad:510 1. Russia would be defined linguistically to include all Russian speakers of the Former Soviet Union.2. Russia would be defined ethnic to include ethnic Russians only. This would imply hierarchical relations with the non-Russians or transformation of the boundaries. 3. Russia would become a Slavic entity to include northern Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine only. 4. Russia would be...
an imperial union with a mission. This was identical to Russia’s medieval mission as Third Rome, but required a redefining of the Russian idea. And finally, civic state based upon the concept of Rossiyskiy rather than Russkiy. All the above-mentioned factors had implications for the foreign policy priorities of the country.

Involvement of a large number of actors in the already uncertain decision-making process, and weakness of state institutions were the factors that produced the foreign policy incoherence. There was therefore no broad consensus on what Russia’s national interests should be. For a period of time in early 1991, there appeared roughly two opposite camps of thought on Russia’s foreign policy, the Atlanticists and Eurasianists. The Atlanticists argued that Russia’s priority task should be integration to the countries of the West, or in Yeltsin’s words join in forming ‘a strategic community from Vancouver to Vladivostok’. They advocated close relations with Euroatlantic institutions as NATO and EU, spoke in favour of Russia abandoning its historic great power traditions and its special role in the CIS. They treated the international system as benign and Russia as a liberal state, their world outlook quite peaceful, cosmopolitan, anti-hegemonic with firm beliefs in cooperation and respect for international institutions. They were advocating secondary relations with

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511 The Russian idea was used by the 19th century philosopher Vladimir Solovyov to refer to the historic mission of the Russian people, see Peter G. Cohen, ‘Russian philosophy is given its head’, The New York Times, 13th March, 1999, in Nicole Jackson, op. cit., p. 28. See also Peter J.S. Duncan, Russian messianism: third Rome, holy revolution, communism and after, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 17.


513 For instance, in a dialogue foreign minister Kozyrev had asked former President Nixon, ‘if you...can advise us on how to define our national interests, I will be very grateful to you’. See Dmitri Simes, ‘The Results of 1997: No Dramatic Upheavals’, International Affairs, 1998, vol. 44, No 1, 28.

514 Some authors have identified three major trends in foreign policy thinking in Russia: Liberal Westerniser, Pragmatic Nationalist and Fundamental nationalist. Fundamental nationalists argued in favour of re-establishing Russian hegemony in the FSU and were marked by their hostility towards the West. They believed that the West was to blame for the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their foreign policy agenda was reviving ‘Great’ Russia, referring to the Tsarist Empire and Soviet Union as a model. Pragmatic nationalists developed as a reaction to the pro-Westerner tendency in Russia finally becoming the prevailing consensus of Russian foreign policy. They per se did not reject market economy, democracy, but preferred to stick to Russia’s great power status and Russia’s role in the CIS. Their thinking is strongly rooted in geopolitics; although they reject the reestablishment of the SU, they favour integrationist policy towards successor states. See Roy Allison, Margot Light, Steven White, Putin’s Russia and the enlarged Europe, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2006), p. 12.


516 See Margot Light, ‘Foreign Policy Making’, p. 46.

the former Soviet states, based upon nothing more than good neighbourliness and non-intervention in domestic affairs. In contrast, Eurasianists, which included pragmatic and fundamental nationalists, argued that Russia’s primary concern should be nearer home, within the Former Soviet Union. It should focus on the pieces of what had been the Russian empire and Soviet Union and worry about reconstructing its position among and within these new states on its borders. Pragmatic nationalists on most issues pursued a rather different tactics than strategy from the Atlanticists. They did not oppose market economy or democracy per se, but emphasised Russia’s great power status and re-establishing its regional hegemony. In fact, the identity crisis had deeper historic background, dating back to at least the 19th century, when the division had manifested itself in Russian political thinking as a debate between the Slavophiles and Westernisers over the belonging of Russia, and every time the Russian state experienced transformation, this question arose.

Early Russian foreign policy was based on transatlantic or liberal orientation. Russia's perception of her own identity and interests departed from imperialism and communist ideology. Accordingly, President Yeltsin had acquired Gorbachev’s ‘common house of Europe’ and the ‘New Thinking’ paradigm. He and foreign minister Kozyrev both supported the liberal internationalist trend in foreign policy, rejecting Marxist-Leninist class

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522 In a provocative paper, Robert English argued that the liberalisation in the Soviet Union in late 1980s was less to do with the personality of Gorbachev, and in fact the derivation of New Thinking dated back to the 1950s and 60s and has to do more with domestic changes, see Robert English, ‘Power, Ideas and New Evidence on the Cold War’s End’, International Security, vol. 26, issue 4, Spring 2002, pp. 78-82. Other authors have acknowledged that Gorbachev’s New Thinking was a result of the victory of liberals over conservatives in the Soviet Union, and some have linked the new policies to changes in the West, see Celeste A. Wallander, ‘Opportunity, Incrementalism, and Learning in the extension of Soviet Global Commitments’, Security Studies, 1, Spring, 1992; For a detailed account of changes in Gorbachev’s foreign policy, see Archie Brown, The Gorbachev Factor, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Deborah W. Larson, Alexei Shevchenko, ‘Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy’, International Organization, vol. 57, Winter, 2003, pp. 77-109.
model as an explanation of international relations and declaring their readiness to integrate Russia into the democratic West. In autumn 1991, Kozyrev formulated this position, declaring that ‘Russia should be transformed from the sick and dangerous giant of Eurasia into the participant of the Western sphere of co-prosperity’. This implied fundamental changes not only in the foreign policy, but also in the almost 200 year old system of values. Abandoning imperialism and geopolitics, and prioritising free market economy and individual liberty were advocated to serve the purpose of bringing Russia in pace with the advanced modern states of the West.

The CIS was not a priority, and was even seen as an obstacle to Russia’s prosperity and Westernisation. The Former Soviet Union was recognised to have been a burden on Russia, as Russia had had to subsidize it mostly. The Soviet experience was not treated as something positive. However, although the CIS was not a priority in the initial period, it was never wiped off the political agenda either, and Russia was not prepared to break off all of its relations. It was widely expected that the common history and values would make these states quite friendly and supportive of Russia. Under the new agenda, Russia was to undertake as little responsibility as possible, in one analyst’s words, ‘it was committed to reducing the imperial burden’. This meant reducing the subsidies to the FSU countries and preferring multilateralism in conflict management. However, Russia kept on mediating between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Tbilisi and Abkhazia as well as the latter and South Ossetia. The dominance of Atlanticism in Russian foreign policy did not genuinely end the securitisation of the South Caucasus in Russia, largely for the reason because of Russia’s domestic security concerns in the region.

Russia committed itself to cuts in defence spending and nuclear arms on the grounds that neither the US, nor NATO posed a threat any more. In December 1991, Kozyrev stated that Russia ‘does not regard NATO as an aggressive military bloc, but as one of the mechanisms

526 Yeltsin during various political crises in early 1990s, insisted that any limits on free press and individual liberty for the sake of a strong state are inadmissible, see ‘Yeltsin: Kakie libo ogranichemy glasnosti, svobody pechati ne depostimy’, Rossiyskie Vesti, 24 April, 1992.
for stability in Europe and in the world as a whole’. Presumably, Kozyrev’s initial idea was Russia’s economic, political and even military integration to the West. President Yeltsin sent a letter to the leaders of NATO states, declaring Russia’s NATO membership as a long term goal. At the Oslo Summit in June 1992, Russia did not oppose the intention of NATO to become a major pan-European security institution under Chapter VIII of UN Charter. Moreover, the Russian elite were convinced that Russia should think less about military power, and instead focus on modernising its economy and political system. An important part of Russia’s political elite had adhered to the thrust that the country’s future lay in Europe and it should do its best to adapt to that system. According to Yeltsin’s foreign policy advisor Gennady Burbulus, the Kremlin believed that ‘none of the pressing domestic problems of the Russian Federation would be solved without learning from the European experience’. In his address to the UNSC in January 1992, Yeltsin even went further than Gorbachev’s ‘New thinking’, stating that he regarded the Western powers not just as partners, but as allies, ‘Moscow shares the main Western values, which are the primacy of human rights, freedom, rule of law and high morality’. Russia supported UNSC sanctions against Iraq, Libya, even Serbia, and made unilateral concessions to the US on arms control and reduction. Russia seemed to start its foreign policy from scratch, forgetting its 200 year old geopolitical rivalries, allies and spheres of influence.

3.2.1. End of romanticism: Russia’s return to geopolitics and neo-imperialism

However, the period of Western romanticism in Russian foreign policy could for obvious reasons not last long, and as early as late 1992 Russian president and foreign minister were making statements contrary to their liberal rhetoric in early 90s. The government’s pro-Western policy came increasingly to be seen as humiliating unilateral concessions for very little reason. The unsuccessful privatisation of public assets, which made a few rich, the

531 According to Martin Smith, this gesture was more to express Russia’s desecuritisation of NATO rather than seeking genuine membership there, see Martin A. Smith, ‘A bumpy road to an unkown destination? NATO-Russia relations, 1991-2002’, European Security, vol. 11, issue 4, 2002, p. 60.
535 In April, 1992, the political opposition vociferously criticised Yeltsin’s Euro-Atlantic foreign policy and inaction to restore Russia’s Great Power status. See ‘VI Syezd Narodnih Deputatov Rossiskoy Federatsii’, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 8 April, 1992, p. 5.
country’s economic failure, indebtedness, deterioration of living standards, corruption and Chechen crisis all raised the substantiality of the Western liberal democracy and free market economy trend; this resulted in calls in the Russian political circles and society for Russia’s return to its previous ideologies as centralisation policy vis-à-vis its regions and balance of power policies vis-à-vis the West.\footnote{Since most of Russia’s radical reforms under Yeltsin were linked to Russia’s strategic partnership with the West, it became rather easy to blame most of the failures on imbalanced relations with the West. Moreover, the failure of the West to provide the expected economic assistance in the country’s transition made the position of liberals vulnerable in the discussion over which way Russia should go and how it should perceive the West.} The West, too, had failed to embrace Russia and give it a special role, causing disillusionment in the Russian political elite. Most Western powers had expressed readiness to stop considering Russia as an enemy, but rejected ambitious appeals to become instant allies.\footnote{Henry Kissinger, ‘The new Russian question’, \textit{Newsweek}, 10\textsuperscript{th} February, 1992. For the subsequent discussion, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, ‘The premature Partnership’, \textit{Foreign Affairs}, vol. 73 No 2, March-April 1994, pp. 72-73. Senior Russian officials also made informal appeals to US colleagues on the potential of Russia’s membership of NATO, which was allegedly answered negatively. See ‘The Debate on NATO Enlargement’, (Washington DC: US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Oct./Nov. 1997), Martin A. Smith, ‘A bumpy road to an unknown destination? NATO-Russia relations, 1991-2002’, \textit{European Security}, vol. 11, issue 4, 2002, p.75.} Russia’s desire to turn the CSCE into a major regional security organisation, where it would have a major responsibility was turned down.\footnote{Kreikemeyer suggests that Russia was actually suggesting an UN-isation of the CSCE, see Anne Kreikemeyer, ‘Renaissance of Hegemony and Spheres of Influence-The Evolution of the Yeltsin Doctrine’, in Erhart et al, op. cit, p. 110.} As the victor of the Cold War, the US political elite perceived their country to be the sole power centre in Eurasia and the international system. It refused to recognise Russia as an equal great power and was more intent on reinforcing unipolar hegemony. Moreover, mistrust of certain post-Soviet states of Russia’s intentions had cast doubts over the legitimacy of its desire for an exclusive role in the post-Soviet space.\footnote{This included the Baltic states, Georgia and Moldova.} The uncertainty in the West about Russia’s future further prevented the US from recognising Russia’s claim. Russia did not succeed to become a member of G7, and NATO seemed disinterested in consulting Russia before taking action in the Balkans. Moreover, Russia was given a seat in the Partnership for Peace Programme of NATO on the same level as Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The failure of the West to give Russia a special role supported most of the foreign policy thinking’s shift towards statism and assertiveness, assuming that respect and recognition can emanate from strength and power only.\footnote{For Russia’s growing disappointment with the West, see Andrei Kozyrev, ‘The lagging partnership’, \textit{Foreign Affairs}, May-June 1994, pp. 59-70.} As Margot Light acknowledges, once it soon became clear that accession to free market economy would not be accompanied by free access to Western markets and economic assistance to Russia, and Russia would not be treated at least a regional great power in Euro-Atlantic security institutions, a large number of adherents of Atlanticist trend in the foreign
policy debate joined the pragmatic nationalists. In the subsequent years up to the South Ossetia crisis the more Russia was isolated and ignored, the more its leadership got obsessed in realpolitik perception of the international system. This has mainly manifested itself in balancing strategy vis-a-vis the West, which has often included the South Caucasus as a testing ground.

It is meanwhile difficult to judge whether the West’s recognition of Russia as a great power and its treatment as a coequal ally would have impeded Russia’s return to geopolitics and neo-imperial thinking. There were many other direct reasons why Russia should gradually abandon the liberal trend in its foreign policy. Firstly, Russia had never ceased its great power rhetoric, and Atlanticism had never been a goal or strategy on its own. It was rather a tactics of achieving certain national interests, such as welfare and international recognition. Even Kozyrev and most liberals had stressed that Russia is and should remain a great power and it should be the dominant force in the CIS.

Moreover, liberal Westernism in Russia had never been firmly established, it was only a project in the minds of certain romantics as Kozyrev and Gaidar, who themselves were far from being certain about their visions. In fact, the period of liberal Westernism in Russia was very brief, and temporary to replace the ideology vacuum. After 70 years of mistrust and over 200 years of empire-building, an important portion of the Russian elite unanimously believed that Russia’s ultimate future would be in geopolitics and great power politics. It would not be easy to change the historic legacy and symbolic memory in Russia’s self-perception and in its relations with the near abroad. It was rather difficult for many Russian circles to accept the divorce of Russia from the other republics, some of which were continuously seen as Russia’s historic legacy. As Mark Weber puts it, in the post-communist period, ‘the historic legacy of Soviet and Russian imperial rule has shaped Russia’s foreign policies, and the very fact that Russia refers to the CIS as its near abroad implied that Russians still considered it as a legitimate sphere of influence’.

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541 See Margot Light, ‘Foreign Policy Making’, pp.72, 84. See also Suzanne Crow, ‘Why has Russian foreign policy changed?’, RFE/RL Research Report, 3, No 18, 6th May 1994, pp. 3-5.
544 See McFaul, ‘Russia’s many foreign policies’, op. cit.
545 This was characteristic for post-imperial states, almost all of which would try to find a new role and a new platform for their relations with their former clients. This process was more difficult in the case of Russia, because the territories were contagious and Russia had too long and too tightly socially and economically integrated with these states. This factor also created a challenge for Russia’s self-identification.
546 Mark Weber, op. cit. p. 16.
easy for the failure of the liberal project was the fact that the identity crisis was going on, with questions on where Russia should belong.\textsuperscript{547}

However, as mentioned already the shift in Russian foreign policy thinking was not revolutionary, and only gradually came to effect. In contrast to most perceptions that Kozyrev was a pure Western liberal and Primakov a Eurasian, there was much continuity between Kozyrev’s and Primakov’s tenures, and it would not be completely correct to argue that the latter’s period was dramatically revolutionary or realist in terms of foreign policy strategy. Russia still prioritised cooperation with the West and recognised its financial and know-how dependence on it.\textsuperscript{548} For a number of factors that formed a trade-off, Russia in all its policies, including its opposition to NATO enlargement and Kosovo crisis was careful not to spoil its relations with the West. This also included Russia’s policies in the Former Soviet Union, and as Andranik Migranyan notes, under Kozyrev’s tenure, it was widely believed that Russia’s violation of certain international norms in the conflicts in the CIS and its overall hegemonic behaviour would have implications for Russia’s relations with the West.\textsuperscript{549} Equally on the issue of NATO enlargement, although it was widely argued that enlargement was not desired, it was widely believed that any confrontation with the NATO states would not be in Russia’s national interests.\textsuperscript{550} Thus, as Allen Lynch puts it, the objective of Russian foreign policy at the period was ‘to craft Russian policy in such a way that Russia need not have to choose between its parallel claims to strategic partnership with the West on the one hand, and to the say and weight appropriate to a great power on the other’.\textsuperscript{551}

\textsuperscript{547} See Vladimir Baranovsky, ‘Russia: Insider or Outsider?’, \textit{International Affairs} (Moscow), vol. 46, no. 3, July 2000, pp. 443-445.
\textsuperscript{548} On the importance of relations between Russia and the West, see Allen Lynch, ‘The realism of Russian foreign policy’, \textit{Europe-Asia Studies}, volume 53, no 1, 2001, pp. 7-31.
\textsuperscript{551} Allen Lynch, op. cit., p. 15.
3.2.2. Implications for the South Caucasus

As to the implications of the shift for the South Caucasus region, the region had never disappeared from the rhetoric of the liberal Westernisers. As mentioned already, the CIS and also the South Caucasus was not a priority for Russia, compared to its relations with the West. However, this never meant Russia’s retreat from the region either. Throughout 1992, Kozyrev repeatedly stressed that the Caucasus is a traditional sphere of Russian interests and Russia was not going to leave it. Initially, he accentuated Russia’s security concerns in the region, concentrating on peace efforts and conflict management only. He advocated that Russia should remain, strengthen its influence there not by use of force, coercion or imperial methods, but rather by the peace efforts of a great democratic power.\footnote{See Andrei Kozyrev, ‘Kavkazskiy region imeet strategicheskoе znachenie dlya Rossii’, Rossiyskie Vesti, 8th September, 1992.} However, as the foreign policy shift enlarged, Kozyrev concentrated more on broader geopolitical concerns including the rights of these states to enjoy sovereign relations with Western states, in particular in the sphere of oil and gas production and transport, and military presence in the CIS.\footnote{See ‘Kozyrev za voennoe prosutsvie v sosednikh gosudarstvakh’, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 19 January, 1994.}

Russia’s policies in the post-Soviet space, especially in the South Caucasus enjoyed certain autonomy from its engagement at the systemic level, so it is not entirely clear how a possible engagement of Russia by the West would have had implications for its south. Its policies...
towards the secessionist conflicts in 1990s were caused by factors as weak statehood, competing bureaucracies, absence of a clear strategy, will for physical presence in the South Caucasus and shortage of resources. And it was largely on the issue of weak statehood that the West did not press Russia to observe important international norms in the South Caucasus or in any other area of its foreign policy, with the purpose of not alienating Russia and sustaining its engagement.

3.2.3. Foreign policy concepts

The shift in Russian foreign policy in favour of Eurasianism manifested itself in both official policy guidelines and in declaratory statements. In less than two years later, joining the West and establishing indivisible security system to unite Eurasia and the Euro-Atlantic had silenced, and instead Yeltsin stressed Russia’s ‘need to strike a balance in the foreign policy relations with the West’. 554 Starting from late 1992, Yeltsin’s foreign policy agenda was dominated by the problem of maintaining or re-establishing Moscow’s influence and hegemony over the post-Soviet region. Foreign minister Kozyrev at the CSCE Stockholm Summit in December 1992 denounced Western interference in the Baltic states, telling the organisation to keep out of the CIS, demanding an end to UNSC sanctions against Serbia, and stating that Belgrade could count on full military support from Russia. He shocked the conference participants stating that the ‘territory of the FSU cannot be considered a zone in which the CSCE norms are wholly applicable’. He further stated ‘……it was in essence a post-imperial area in which Russia had to protect its own interests by use of all available means, including military and economic’. 555 Although, he later came up to say that he had only pretended to be a hardliner to demonstrate what would happen if Yeltsin were defeated by the domestic opposition, but as Adomeit notes, ‘Kozyrev throughout 1993 and 1994 repeated such statements in all seriousness’. 556 In October 1993, Kozyrev’s rhetoric was geopolitically motivated, when he spoke about conflict management in the Former Soviet Union: ‘…we need to establish effective peacekeeping and Russia must be the dominant force in the international efforts to support peace. Our incapacity to pursue a rapid peace operation creates a vacuum which can be filled out by terrorists, as it happened in Abkhazia. Moreover, there is the threat of losing the geopolitical positions which it took us centuries to gain. We have a few neighbours in Asia, which would be prepared to inject fighters and weapons into

555 Craig Whitney, ‘Russia carries on like in the bad old days, then says it was all a ruse’, New York Times, 15th December 1992.
the FSU under the banner of peacekeeping. As soon as we leave these areas, the ensuing vacuum will immediately be filled by other forces, possibly not always friendly and perhaps even hostile to Russian interests. These states, and not the US as our patriots claim, have the goal to wipe off Russia from the region and limit its influence’. Kozyrev’s interview exposed among other things that Russia’s interest in the effective management of regional conflicts stemmed from the desire not to ‘lose geopolitical positions that took centuries to conquer’.557

Thus, by 1993 in terms of conceptual approach, the Russian establishment had arrived at broad consensus that Russian foreign policy should be based on a geopolitical calculation of national interests. This meant assertiveness in the former Soviet space and guaranteeing the country’s status as an equal great power. To a lesser extent, was cooperation with the West prioritised, but the consensus was that Moscow should avoid any confrontation with the US; although, its hegemonic assertiveness in the CIS and global great power ambitions were in tension with the former. By early 1993 Russia had managed to establish its foreign policy concept (in fact successive concepts), indicating that differences between various groups were becoming narrow on the issues of its strategic interests.558 The consensus reached was that near abroad should be top priority and that Russia should not pull back to its own borders, but maintain the old Soviet borders in the Caucasus and Central Asia.559 Draft of the foreign ministry ‘concerning the basic points of the concept of foreign policy of the Russian Federation’, submitted to the Russian Duma, was approved in October 1992 and published in early 1993.560 Another concept was developed by the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy and published in August 1992.561 The final concept entitled ‘basic principles of a foreign policy concept of the Russian federation’ published in April 1993 acted as the final official strategy.562 All three concepts emphasised Russia’s great power status and the priority of its presence in the CIS. Major principles included creation of an effective system of collective

562 See a summary of the ‘Osnovniye polozheniya konseptsiy vneshnoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii’ in Vladislav Chernov, ‘Natsionalnie interesi Rossi i ugrozi dlya ee bezopastnosti’, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 29 April, 1993. The final concept was prepared by the Security Council, which was equally in charge of defining Russia’s foreign policy interests at the time. In fact, until Primakov’s appointment as foreign minister, authority on foreign policy making was enjoyed by both the Foreign Ministry and the Security Council.
defence, protecting the rights of the 25 million Russian speaking minority, ensuring the status of Russia as the single nuclear power in the CIS, strengthening of the external borders of the CIS, establishing military security for its members and promoting the integration of the CIS. Cross-border smuggling and criminality as well as spread of ideologies were also stressed. The military doctrine warned Russia of the potential that the external powers could take advantage of Russia’s weakness and inattentiveness to establish strategic positions at the disadvantage of Russia. 563

a) Exclusive role in the CIS

Exclusive role for Russia as a peacekeeper and a UN mandate for it were among priorities as well. Kozyrev and Yeltsin accordingly tried to get recognition from international organisations for Russia as the chief responsible for the CIS. He appealed in March 1993 to the UN and CSCE to grant Russia special powers as guarantor of peace and stability in the FSU, claiming exclusive rights and obligations. The Russian President had however also formally invited the West to participate in peacekeeping in the CIS. Such a stance is ambiguous because at the time Russia obviously had no intention to internationalise peacekeeping in the CIS. The fact that the Foreign Policy Concept of April, 1993 and the draft military doctrine had rejected foreign troops’ involvement in the conflicts in the CIS implies that Russia was more instrumentalising the idea of Western presence in peace support in the CIS. 564 Russia’s position according to Zagorski, was ‘either the Russian troops have to be the crucial element of peacekeeping in the CIS or Russia should admit international institutions only after its capabilities have exhausted’. 565 The later developments also show that Russia had no intention of letting outside mediation and foreign troops into the CIS. 566 As one analyst noted, Russia’s position henceforth was that ‘no international body except the CIS can carry out effective peacekeeping operation and no peacekeeping operation will be a success without Russia participating in it’. 567 Another reason, as was the case in the CSCE 1994 Budapest Summit decision on peacekeeping in Mountainous Karabakh conflict, was that the

567 Emilia Krivchikova, ‘Peacekeeping operations on the territory of the Former Soviet Union’, in Erhart et al, p. 162. Russia’s position on international presence in the South Caucasus became even clearer when Russia at the UNSC traded US involvement in Haiti for US abstention from involving peacekeepers in Abkhazia, see John Maresca, in Kreikemeyer et al., p. 197.
conflicting sides often preferred an international peacekeeping format rather than Russian only. In March 1993, Kozyrev presented the UNGA with a document outlining the need for a regional peacekeeping mechanism in the CIS. The proposal was immediately rejected by the Ukraine, Baltic states and Moldova on the grounds that Russia’s intentions were imperialistic rather than humanitarian. Western leaders too were worried at the time that Russian leaders might see peacekeeping as a tool of neo-imperialism.

Trying to preclude third party presence in the former soviet space, the Russian political elite argued that Russia should develop its own Monroe doctrine to protect its vital interests in the near abroad. Throughout 1993, Russia made it clear that it not only prioritised relations with the former Soviet states, but also desired for exclusive military and political presence. This was reflected in the 3rd March 1993 ‘conceptual principles’ on foreign policy issued by the Russian Security Council, which emphasised Russia’s security interest in maintaining peace within the borders of the SU, but added special emphasis to defending the external borders of the CIS, warning that Russia will actively oppose any attempts to increase the military-political presence of third states in the countries contiguous with Russia. The rhetoric used by the Russian President and foreign and defence ministries echoed the desire to view the post-Soviet space as a sphere of influence, and called for a possible reintegration of the independent republics into a structure where Russia would play a special role.

In May 1996, a paper of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy set domestic stability and relations with the near abroad as the strategic interests of Russia. Later, at the March 1997 CIS Summit, President Yeltsin reiterated Russia’s concerns, saying that ‘we have no interest in seeing the former Soviet Union’s territory dominated by anyone, particularly in the

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568 The issue of peace-keeping contingent in MK conflict is touched upon on page 108.
571 The term was coined by Ambartsumov, who was chairman of the Duma’s Committee on International Affairs and Foreign Economic Relations. He argued that Russia must base its foreign policy on a doctrine that would regard the geopolitical space of the Former Soviet Union to be a sphere of vital interests. Russia should accordingly secure from the international community the role of political and military guarantor of stability in the FSU. See Evgeniy Ambartsumov, ‘Sami sebya zagonali v ugol, sami iz nego I vixodit’, Rossiysakya Gazeta, 13 April, 1992. See also Andranik Migranyan, ‘Rossiya i blizhnee zarubezhe’, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 12 January, 1994.
574 See Sergei Karaganov, Vladimir Tretyakov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 23 May, 1996.
military-political sphere or in seeing any country playing the role of buffer against Russia’. The position was more straightforwardly put by the then chairman of the Duma CIS Affairs Committee Zatulin, ‘…with all due respect for these states, many of them are doomed to become our satellites or die. I see their territorial integrity in precisely these terms.’

President Yeltsin stated that his ultimate goal would be the integration of the near abroad with Russia in either a confederation or even a new union. In June 1994 he proposed a CIS military structure similar to NATO, and a decree of September, 1995 ‘on approving the Russian federation’s strategic course in relations with CIS member states’ called for a defence union based on common interests and military political goals. The latter defined the basic task of Russia’s relations with the CIS as the strengthening of Russia. The decree also claimed a right by Russia to limit external engagement in the CIS. The Russian government urged that more attention should be paid to ensuring security and developing military cooperation in view of unceasing attempts to establish power-centres in the post-soviet space, and that the consolidation of anti-Russian tendencies is absolutely unacceptable.

### 3.2.4. Russia’s great power status

Although there is scarcely consensus in international relations as to the definition of great powers, it is widely accepted that a great power meets two criteria: material capabilities and formal recognition of that status by others. Beyond that broad definition, the one given by Buzan and Waever is more relevant to explaining Russia’s interests. The relevant criterion of a great power is the polarity in the regional security complex, so that a great power should be the only pole in its regional security complex. Any alliance which produces new poles would alter the status of the great power. That attitude was taken up by the Russian Foreign Ministry as early as 1992, when official guidelines viewed the modified international system as one of regional-power centre tendencies, necessitating Russia to dominate in its regional ‘shell’ and reinforce its regional hegemony. For that reason, the Kremlin took on measures to deepen the relative autonomy of the CIS regional security complex and insisted that it

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576 Igor Rotar, ‘Stat nashimi satelitami ili umeret’, *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 5 May, 1994
581 See Buzan and Waever, op. cit., p. 458.
should be the dominant international legal regime for resolving disputes and regulating relations in the post-soviet space. It has constantly reacted with irritation to the balancing efforts of CIS states and emergence of potential new poles.

Russia’s great power status is the one issue that has been part of any foreign policy, national security or military concept of the country. The idea has also received widespread support among the public. The idea of great power was also a quick solution to the identity crisis in Russia both in its foreign and domestic politics. Ever since its return to Eurasianism, Russia has tried to act as a great power, but also expected itself to be recognised as a great power. Yeltsin’s statement in early 90s ‘Russia is rightfully a great power by virtue of its history, of its place in the world, and of its material and spiritual potential’ exposed the Kremlin’s resistance to admit that Russia lacked economic, technological and human resources to be a great power. The essence of the argument was, even though Russia is underdeveloped according to Western standards, it is the relevant and metropolitan power of the CIS and Eurasia. In his state of the nation address in 1995, President Yeltsin referred to some external forces interested in undermining and undercutting Russia’s international role and argued for a new integration in the CIS. There were also forces in Russia interested in identifying Russia’s great power status with neo-imperialism and derzhava. In 1992, vice President Alexandr Rutskoi claimed that ‘the historic consciousness of the Russians will not allow anybody to equate mechanically Russia’s borders with those of the Russian federation and to take away what constituted the glorious pages of Russian history. Great power status and insistence upon multilateralism in international affairs became a priority of Primakov’s foreign policy. His concept of recovering Russia as a great power revolved around balancing the US unipolarism by a strategic concert of states (mainly China and India) and more integration within the CIS. He declared that Russia would reject both the antiwesternism of the Soviet Union and the early romanticism, in favour of Russia’s status

584 Almost all political forces in Russia were unanimous that it should retain its great powers status. The issue had become a unifying factor in Russian foreign policy, which had implications for its domestic politics. It also touched upon defining Russian identity and statehood. See Margot Light, ‘Foreign Policy thinking’, op. cit., p. 40. There are also analysts who argue that great power status is a matter of complex for Russia rather than an interest or principle, see Andrei Piotkovsky, ‘Season of discontent’, Moscow Times, 24th June, 1999.
as great power and an equal partnership with both the US and Europe.\textsuperscript{589} Primakov’s stress on geopolitics in Russian foreign policy implied more Russian control over the CIS, in particular guaranteeing military-political and economic presence there and Russia’s subsidisation of integration within the CIS. During Putin’s term, Russia’s great power status was even held equal to the survival of the state. In his 2003 message to the Federal Council the then President Putin stated that ‘such a country as Russia can survive and develop within the existing borders only if it stays as a great power. During all of its times of weakness Russia was invariably confronted with the threat of disintegration’.\textsuperscript{590}

In the last decades, Russia’s foreign policy has been dominated by its efforts to free itself from the decline of late 1980s and 1990s and create internal and external resources for returning to its real great power status of the last century. The desire to restore influence over the former Soviet states and prevent the intrusion of external powers, and control the developments in the region that may have negative implications for Russia itself has been a constant issue in Russian politics. It is to limit further losses and promote conditions that would enable Russia to re-emerge as a great power in the international system. The 2000 foreign policy concept emphasised this as well:

‘Ensuring reliable security of the country and preserving and strengthening its sovereignty and territorial integrity and its strong and authoritative position in the world community, as would to the greatest extent promote the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power, and one of the most influential centres in the modern world, is necessary to the growth of its political, economic, intellectual, and spiritual potential’.\textsuperscript{591}

Although Russia’s great power status has been mostly regional, Moscow has refused to limit itself to a regional great power only.\textsuperscript{592} Moscow has emphasised its responsibilities for the management of the international system and this has mostly emerged in the form of opposition to the uni-polarism of the US. Being a permanent member of the UNSC, Russia has stressed the importance of the UNSC in the management of international affairs.\textsuperscript{593}

\textsuperscript{589} Primakov’s primary condition for cooperation with the West was one of absolute equality in both security-political and economic realms. Such a position was also stressed in the 1997 National Security Concept. See Leon Aron, ‘The Foreign Policy Doctrine of Postcommunist Russia and its Domestic Context’, \textit{The New Russian Foreign Policy}, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998), pp. 29-30.


\textsuperscript{593} Russia’s emphasis on multi-polarity and pluralism in international governance is partly connected to its own capacity as great power, since only in a pluralist international system can Russia survive as a great power. In this context, its support for the UNSC is conditioned by its own membership as it sees it as a means of guaranteeing multi-polarity.
Since the last few years, Russia’s attachment to multi-polarism has manifested itself in the form of balancing the US. The 1997 national security concept characterised the international political system as multipolar and warned against ‘attempts to create a structure of international relations based upon unilateral solutions of the key problems of world politics’. This referred to perceived American ambitions to create a unipolar world. The 2000 national security concept equally defined the attempts of other states to hinder the strengthening of Russia as a centre of influence in the multi-polar world as a threat and again warned against ‘unipolar structure of the world with US economic and military domination’. Again the reference was made to the US and its perceived weakening of Russia’s positions in the CIS. The 2000 foreign policy concept identified the systemic tendency towards unipolarity and US unilateralism as significant threats to Russia and declared that ‘Russia shall seek to achieve a multi-polar system of international relations’.

In his March 2007 speech at the 43rd Security Conference in Munich, President Putin criticised not only the US unilateral use of force and anti-missile shield in Eastern Europe, but also the eastward enlargement of the EU. Russia increasingly adopted a self-perception of an international actor struggling to restore its great power status of the last decade. At least until very recently, Russia has not been recognised as an equal great power by the West, and has to a large extent been ignored in a number of important decisions. Having lost its empire, and its influence over Eastern Europe, having been ignored in decisions on the Balkans and on NATO enlargement, the Russian elite has become increasingly obsessed. As MacFarlane puts it, ‘the gap between Russia’s self-image as a coequal great power and the apparent reality that others did not treat it as an equal partner produced a condition akin to resentment’.

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594 In contrast Tsygankov argues that Russia does not view the US as a threat and the more self-confident Russia under Putin, never pursued balancing policies against the US. Accordingly, balancing was a strategy in Primakov’s foreign policy, but not in Putin’s. Russia prefers partnership with the US and EU to southern countries, see Andrei Tsygankov, ‘Vladimir Putin’s Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power’, Post-Soviet Affairs, vol. 21, no 2.


Every time Russia has attempted to secure its great power status in its interaction with the West, this has had implications for the South Caucasus region. Prioritisation of its interests in the ‘near abroad’ coincided with the emphasis of Russian political forces on the country’s great power status. In fact, Russian perception of its great power status made up at least one of the factors that acted as the driving force behind its geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus. Thus, throughout the post-soviet period, great power status has been linked on the one hand to Russia’s influence and hegemony over the CIS, and on the other hand the ability to promote multilateralism. Its core strategy for the CIS has been preventing any outside actor from undermining Russian interests.600 While strengthening its positions in the international system, Russia has intended to save its backyard from unauthorised interference.

3.2.5. NATO Enlargement

Although NATO enlargement had been a potential source of tension between Russia and NATO even during the early period of Atlanticism, the Kremlin never prioritised the issue until mid 1990s.601 Initially, as Russia desecuritised the Cold War image of NATO, it did not come to consider the issue of enlargement seriously.602 Russia did not either oppose to or encourage the eastward enlargement of NATO at the time of its liberal Westernist foreign policy. Enlargement became an issue of concern only when it got clear that NATO and the West were not intent on treating Russia as a coequal or giving it the special role it was requesting at the CSCE. Moreover, Russia had in the course of 1991 and 1992 reiterated the need for a special relationship between NATO and Russia, that would be much heavier than that between the former and Eastern European countries, which would also take into consideration Russia’s great power status. In this context, enlargement became a concern in Russian foreign policy in 1993, with the reorientation of Russian foreign policy towards the Eurasianist trend, but even then, Russia did not immediately oppose the issue. President Yeltsin throughout 1992 and 1993 endorsed his acquiesce to Poland’s membership of NATO.603 A detailed examination of Russia’s position at the period implies that Moscow had set certain conditions to be fulfilled before Poland would join NATO, but was not principally

601 The Russian military was sensitive to any communication between NATO and FSU states, in particular the Baltic states. In December, 1992, Marshal Shaposhnikov, commander of the Joint Armed Forces of the CIS states expressed discontent with NATO’s increasing cooperation with CIS states, see Martin A. Smith, Russia and NATO since 1991: From Cold War through Cold Peace to Partnership, (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p. 53.
602 Martin Smith draws attention to the point that there had not been any public debate in Russia during the intial years of Yeltsin’s term on NATO enlargement, so the issue was presumably not treated as urgent and serious, see Martin A. Smith, Russia and NATO since 1991: From Cold War through Cold Peace to Partnership, (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p. 54.
opposed to it. In early September, 1993, the Russian foreign ministry proclaimed its position on the enlargement issue, saying that although the former Warsaw Pact members had the right to join NATO, it was opposed against a rapid enlargement. Further, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued that the CSCE and North Atlantic Cooperation Council should be strengthened, and Russia’s relationship with NATO as a great power or continuing superpower should be clarified before any enlargement could take place. The ministry had previously expressed its opposition of NATO’s treatment of Russia in a similar status to that of Armenia or Bulgaria, and was hoping for a ‘special status’ that would take into consideration explicitly Russia’s great power status.604

An important concern for Russia with regard to NATO enlargement in 1990s was Russia’s isolation as a great power. The enlargement was seen as a threat to Russia’s global position, since a pan European organisation would emerge that would in charge of European security, from which Russia would be isolated. Kozyrev emphasised that any enlargement should take into account Russia’s special status as a nuclear great power.605

Beginning from late 1993, once it became apparent how serious East European and Baltic states were intent on joining NATO and that the West was not prepared to give Russia a special role at least in the CSCE, did Russia express its dismay and opposition to the process. A shift in Yeltsin’s position was also partly due to the pressure of the Russian military and of the hardliners, as well as certain moderates.606 Back in mid 1993, a report prepared by the Foreign Intelligent Service under the leadership of Primakov, called ‘Perspectives on the Enlargement of NATO and Russian interests’ argued that in terms of Russian interests in the CIS, enlargement would be viewed as extending NATO’s zone of responsibility towards the borders of the Russian Federation, internationalising local conflicts in the CIS and potentially undermining the Collective Security Treaty.607 The military doctrine of November, 1993, too, determined the expansion of military alliances to the detriment of Russia’s security interests as a basic threat.608 As a result, President Yeltsin in his subsequent statements and guidelines, distanced himself from his early position on NATO enlargement, and by stressing the

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606 Certain hardliners’ prejudice vis-a-vis NATO only strengthened once Russia could not get a clear answer from the bloc on the status of its relations with it. Certain liberals and moderates changed their positions towards the bloc once no serious answer was given on the issue of Russia’s potential membership of NATO. See Sergei Karaganov’s position on the issue in Martin A. Smith, ‘A bumpy road to an unkown destination? NATO-Russia relations, 1991-2002’, European Security, vol. 11, issue 4, 2002, p. 61.
importance of indivisibility of security in Europe, expressed the risk of isolating Russia.⁶⁰⁹ In the Summer of 1993, Russia vetoed the arms embargo on Bosnia in the UNSC in a strategy to balance the US presence in the region, and became a member of the Contact Group on Yugoslavia, with the major interest of reassuring its great power position. In 1994, President Yeltsin declared that with the eastward enlargement of NATO, there was the risk of ‘plunging into a Cold Peace’.⁶¹⁰ In 1995, Kozyrev speaking to the Federation Council, had stressed that Russia was making efforts to fight the tendency by some CIS states to join NATO.⁶¹¹ In November 1995, defence minister Grachev warned that NATO enlargement would compel Russia to seek allies outside the CIS.⁶¹² Further in 1995, the decision by NATO to deploy a Rapid Reaction Force in Bosnia following air raid on Bosnian Serb weapons depot caused anger in both the Duma and the Kremlin for the failure to consult Russia in advance.⁶¹³ In 1997, Russia without much alternative reluctantly signed the final act accepting the Czech Republic’s, Hungary’s and Poland’s entry to NATO.⁶¹⁴

The decision to expand NATO excluding Russia from the process strengthened Russia’s perception of the West as playing power games and attempting to take advantage of Russia’s temporary weakness.⁶¹⁵ Most of the enlargement sensitive to Russia took place at a time when Russian statehood was still vulnerable.⁶¹⁶ Since NATO was seen by the new members, especially the Baltic States as a guarantee against Russia, that factor contributed to the exacerbation of Russia’s mistrust and growing belief in realpolitik. Russia’s feindbild of NATO further deteriorated through its acting without UN mandate in Kosovo.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁴ NATO enlargement was largely criticised in Russia also by certain Westernisers and liberals. Anatoliy Chubais called it the biggest mistake made in Western policy in the last 50 years. See Larry Elliott, ‘Ignore Moscow at your peril, warns Chubais’, The Guardian, 4th February, 1997.
⁶¹⁶ Russian policymakers vociferously opposed the accession of the Baltic states into NATO and did not expect the process to take place as swiftly as it was. See Aleksei Pushkov, ‘A Compromise with NATO?’, International Affairs (Moscow), vol. 43, no. 3, 1997, p. 19.
⁶¹⁷ NATO intervention in Kosovo had a huge long-term, non-immediate impact upon Russian-Western relations. It was perceived in Russia as an attempt to minimise the role of the UN and act unilaterally wherever possibly, including the Former Soviet Space. The Russian leaders perceived post-cold war transformation of NATO in two directions: expansion and acting without UN mandate beyond its boundaries. For a Russia short of capacity and
Subsequently, the Russian elite treated every step of NATO and Western engagement in the post-Soviet space as aimed at containing Russian influence or driving Russia into a corner. The sense of rivalry and mistrust were deepened by the adoption of NATO’s New Strategic Concept in March 1999, which proclaimed the alliance’s willingness to ‘intervene anywhere in Europe in order to uphold stability and human rights’. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs defined NATO’s right to wage military operations outside its traditional responsibility zone and under conditions without seeking a UN SC authorisation a major security threat. Such a position was conditioned by the fact that Russia being excluded from NATO, felt isolated, and this was immediately linked to the efforts to undermine Russia as a global force. Secondly, this was a blow to Russia’s campaigning for multipolarism in international affairs.

As a senior diplomat following the Kosovo crisis put it referring to the shift in NATO Strategy,

*The developments in Kosovo has demonstrated how this will be applied in practice: a group of states will use force at their own will and without limitations to destroy the economic potentials and cultural values of any country….the only world leader has appropriated the right to pass judgement and interfere into domestic affairs. It seems that it is expected to resolve all crises by force.*

In an influential article in the Financial Times, the Russian Government’s opposition to NATO enlargement and the new new strategy manifested itself in Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov’s opposition to a NATO centred world.

According to the 1997 national security concept ‘the threat of large-scale aggression against Russia is virtually absent in the foreseeable future’. Instead, NATO eastward enlargement was presented as a primary threat. This was also reflected in the 2000 military doctrine of Russia, which defined the expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of military security of Russia as a basic threat. The 2000 national security concept was more direct, stating ‘NATO’s eastward expansion and the possible emergence of foreign military bases and major military presences in the immediate proximity of Russian borders’ as


619 Dmitri Trenin, ‘Russia-NATO relations: Time to pick up the pieces’, *NATO Review*, vol. 48, no1, Spring-Summer 2000, pp. 19-22. The shift in NATO strategy as well as its intervention in Kosovo left a deep trace upon Russia’s perception of NATO, which today still impact the Russian-NATO relations. The negative air in Russian-NATO relations also affects the Russian-Western relations.


fundamental national security threats. It further identified a new military threat arising from NATO’s use of military force outside its zone of responsibility and without UNSC resolution. A defence ministry study in October 2003 left no doubt that the US and NATO are still perceived as enemy. This was reflected in public opinion as well.

3.2.6. Russian-US détente after 9/11

Hopes arose for détente between Russia and the West following the 9/11 attacks. Following the terror attacks, Russia supported the US led military operations in Afghanistan and acted as a new ally of Washington. President Putin did not raise objections to US military presence in the CIS either. Russia for a second time since the end of the Cold War hoped to regain its great power status through active engagement and cooperation with the West. Its political elite firstly expressed solidarity with the US, identifying terrorism a common phenomenon for both states. President Putin hoped that the common interest of fighting terrorism would curtail Russia’s differences with the US. And it was expected that on this common ground, intense cooperation would continue helping Russia achieve its objectives. According to the Russian political elite, the right moment had now emerged for Russia’s turn; Moscow had seemingly hoped that through an active engagement, it would get recognition of a great power status by the US, and Washington would finally give up a unipolar approach to the international system and come down to the multi-polarism that Russia has been insisting on for years. In particular, the Kremlin anticipated softening of the West’s stance on Russia’s demarche to Chechnya, agreement on security issues (ABM treaty and Ballistic missile

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627 Although the conservative members of his establishment raised concern, expressing mistrust and sceptism about any potential engagement of Russia by the US on equal basis. See Yevgeni Primakov, Mir posle 11 sentyabrya, (Moscow: Mysl, 2002), pp. 100-110.
628 According to Rick Fawn there was also an ideational part of the détente: The 9/11 attacks had fitted the clash of civilisations thesis from which Russia was allegedly suffering. In his thesis, Huntington had described Russia as a separate civilisation and recommended to the West to grant Russia its sphere of influence and improve relations. See Rick Fawn, ‘Realignments in Russian foreign policy: An introduction’, in Rick Fawn ed., Realignments in Russian foreign policy, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 4.
defence) and a possible postponement of NATO enlargement towards the east. Above all, it was the recognition of Russia’s exclusive hegemony for the CIS that it was mostly concerned about. However, for subjective and objective reasons, hopes in the Kremlin did not approve. Following US unilateralism in Iraq and its withdrawal from the 1972 Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty in December 2001, Russian policy makers got convinced that the US was intent on unilateral hegemony in the world, and supporting the US, Russia would only give up its weight in the international system. Meanwhile, it became clear that NATO enlargement would take place to include the Baltic States. By deploying military experts to Georgia, the US refused to recognise the CIS as Russia’s exclusive zone of responsibility. Since the collapse of the SU, US administrations had encouraged actor pluralism in the former Soviet space and supported the CIS states’ consolidation of their sovereignties. The US had become an alternative great power by which certain CIS states tried to balance Russia’s power in the region. And now Russia was asking the United States to coordinate its presence in the CIS, so that security questions lie outside Western engagement. Moreover, the US as a superpower would not be interested in limiting its influence over any region at all. Apart from that, Russia’s hegemony in the last few years had allegedly only provided negative implications for certain CIS states, which were desperate to delegitimise it. Taking into consideration all the above-mentioned factors, it would be incomprehensible that the US would limit its presence in the CIS. The US position was well elucidated in the interview of the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who claimed that ‘the US has legitimate interests in the CIS and it is intent to carry on with its own interaction with these states, even if they had once been a part of the SU.

Thus, President Putin’s foreign policy agenda had initially combined both pragmatic nationalism and to a certain extent liberal Westernism, but over time as hopes for a Russian-US partnership faded and the rift between the West and Russia grew over a number of security-political issues, the Russian leadership gave more weight to pragmatic nationalism.

In a speech in 2002, Putin emphasised his commitment to realpolitik and statism by stressing that the norm of the international community and the modern world is a tough competition. Russia’s policies of nuclear cooperation with Iran despite Western protest, its decision to sell anti-aircraft missiles to Tehran and its hosting of Palestine’s Hamas Government in Moscow

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when the US and EU had included it in the list of terrorist organisations all indicate that Russia is struggling to re-emerge not only as a major global power, but as an alternative to the US. In other words, Russia’s political elite is now trying to present it as an alternative to the West, to both CIS states and those states which are discontent with US policies. Russia is trying to align with Venezuela, Middle Eastern and those African states that are opposed to the US. This has two objectives: to undermine unipolar hegemony and reassert its great power status, and not just a great power, but an alternative to the US. A further objective, in particular in its relations with Venezuela is to revenge the US for intruding into its backyard.

3.2.7. Spheres of interest

In the aftermath of the South Ossetian crisis in August 2008, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev laid down principles that would guide Russian foreign policy in the future. The rhetoric implied that Russian foreign policy following the crisis and international reaction to Russia, would be more assertive and intransigent. The principles acted like a more explicit reiteration of the previously established foreign policy priorities. Reference was made to the primacy of international law, but meanwhile it was argued that Georgia’s attack on South Ossetia in August put off Russia’s commitments to international law, and required that it defends its citizens there. The major point of the document that caused controversy was the Kremlin’s desire to establish geographic spheres ‘of privileged interest’ on or near its borders. President Medvedev stated that ‘Russia, just like other countries in the world, has regions where it has privileged interests’. Another controversial point of the principles argued that Russia would protect its citizens ‘wherever they are’, which sent mixed signals to the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and other states in the CIS with large Russian minorities because it argued that. The document also shed light on Russia’s relations with the West and sent a warning message that Russia should not be treaded upon: ‘….as regards the future, it depends not just on us. It also depends on our friends, our partners in the international community. They have a choice’. Thus, the essence of Medvedev’s principles is an end to hegemonic international system and return to spheres of influence.

3.3. Russia’s regional interests in the South Caucasus

The South Caucasus has been a region of vital importance to Russia since the 17th century. Through its expansion and incorporation of the South Caucasus in the 18th century, Russia established a buffer zone against its muslim rivals Turkey and Iran. The region gained in economic importance after oil reserves were discovered in Baku, but its primary importance remained largely geopolitical. The South Caucasus had also an identity based importance for

Russia featuring in its literature far more than the Baltic or Ukraine. In the 19th century as the colonisation of the Caucasus by Russia was completed, Moscow undertook power consolidation in the region. It employed military-political means as well as instruments of soft power such as the dissemination of the values of European enlightenment. Russian language and literature were preached as a means of communication with the enlightened Europe and later once communism was established, Russia was the centre of the right political ideology for these states. In the post-independence period, Russia has been disinterested in leaving the South Caucasus and has linked its physical presence in the region to Russia’s national security and strategic interests.

3.3.1. Security interests

a) Interconnection of threats in the Caucasus

The Caucasus region is a security complex in a sense that ethnicity and security are both interconnected and conflict in the South Caucasus can easily spill-over to the North Caucasus because of the ethnic relations and geographic proximity. The spill-over potential of the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts into the North Caucasus was substantial during the armed phase of both conflicts. Russia was, at the time, suffering from weak statehood, regionalisation of its policies and inability to control the borders. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are ethnically and politically related to the North Caucasus (Abkhazia to Adygee and South Ossetia to North Ossetia), and throughout the armed phase, both regions received large numbers of volunteers from various regions of the North. In early 1990s, most regional elites all over the North Caucasus enabled the mobilisation of the volunteers from the North Caucasus to fight in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia. Ossetians in North Ossetia have been much concerned about the suffering of their kin in South Ossetia, but also anxious that renewed large-scale hostilities could result in new waves of refugees. During the armed phase of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, North Ossetia received large numbers of refugees from South Ossetia and other parts of Georgia. The Ossetian refugees in their turn were drawn into another conflict, the Ingush-Ossetian conflict over Prigorodniy rayon, which culminated in the withdrawal of the Ingush from the disputed Prigorodniy district of North Ossetia and some minor casualties. Dispute over Prigorodniy

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639 For Caucasus as a mini complex see Buzan and Waever, ‘Regions and powers’, p.420.

raion resembled the conflicts in the South Caucasus in a way that it was also about historic resettlements. In 1944, the region populated largely by Ingush, was transferred to North Ossetia following the deportation of almost the entire Ingush people to Central Asia, and in 1991 the Ingush claimed their rights to the district by virtue of the Soviet law of 26th April 1991 on territorial rehabilitation of repressed people. The conflict evolved into a brief ethnic war in 1992 between the Ingush and Ossetian paramilitary units, ending up in 600 Ingush casualties and expulsion of 50,000 Ingush.

Both conflicts strengthened the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (that included all 7 Peoples of the North Caucasus), whose political loyalty to Russia was very much in doubt at the time. The CMPC’s initial project was to integrate the North Caucasus including Abkhazia and South Ossetia and subsequently establish a union that would not be subordinated to Russia or Georgia. The idea that the territories of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus were annexed by Russia and Georgia was stated at the first Assembly in Sukhumi, Abkhazia in August 1989.

Being a Caucasian state itself, Russia has had security interests in this region since the break up of the Soviet Union. From the very onset the Russian elite was alarmingly concerned about the ethno-territorial conflicts in Russia’s vicinity and their spill-over potential into the North Caucasus. The first of the two foreign policy ‘guidelines’ in December 1992, established that ‘the most important foreign policy tasks, requiring the coordinated and constant efforts of all state structures are curtailing and regulating armed conflicts around Russia, preventing their spread to our territory and guaranteeing strict observation in the near abroad of human and minority rights, particularly of Russians and Russian speaking population’. Export of separatism from the South Caucasus and spill-over of instability, and subsequent destabilisation of the Russian North Caucasus was a major concern of the Yeltsin administration. Both the foreign policy concept and the military doctrine of 1993 stressed the threat of ethnic conflicts in the vicinity of Russian borders and their potential spill-over. In his 1993 speech to the National Security Council, Yeltsin suggested that Russia should be granted

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643 Yusup A. Soslambekov, ‘Protracted walk on the brink of an abyss: towards the history of one annexation’, Kavkaz, 1 October: No 1, 1990, quoted in Chervonnaya, Conflict in the Caucasus, op. cit., p. 201.
644 See Roeder, op. cit., p. 227.
special rights and privileges to stop ethnic conflicts in the Former Soviet Union. 645 Yeltsin’s deputy prime minister for nationalities and federal affairs observed that the civil war in Georgia ‘must be regarded as a direct challenge to the vital interests of Russian security’. 646 In this context, Russia’s unilateral support for Georgia’s territorial integrity, and status-quo in the region was interrelated with separatism in the North Caucasus. This view gradually changed after the second Chechen campaign, and Russian leaders today no longer see any link between secessionism in the South Caucasus and Chechnya. Russia’s subordination of Chechnya has obviously created extra resources for the Kremlin’s policies towards the secessionist conflicts in the South Caucasus.

Russia’s position that there should be no armed conflict in its vicinity has remained unchanged under successive Russian governments, and its leaders see this as the country’s legitimate security interest, which every other state has. The 2000 National Security Concept defined ethnic conflicts close to Russian borders as a national security threat. For this reason, Russia has alluded to Georgia and Azerbaijan that any military solution to the conflicts in the region should be out of question. 647 Russia has been oversensitive to any change of military balance in the region and has expressed a vested interest in preserving the current status-quo. In 2004, as Georgian soldiers concentrated on Georgia’s internal border with South Ossetia, allegedly for large scale intervention, Russia warned Tbilisi against attempts to intervene into South Ossetia by use of force. The Russian Government argued that many inhabitants of South Ossetia had acquired Russian citizenship and Russia would not remain indifferent if their lives were threatened. 648 Granting citizenship to an overwhelming majority of the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Kremlin has acquired a disputed right for humanitarian intervention and has accordingly continuously referred to it in declaratory statements and policies. The Kremlin’s message became even more obvious during the 2008 August crisis in South Ossetia through which Russia basically made it clear to Azerbaijan as well, that any military rhetoric in the South Caucasus is deemed to fail. 649 Recognising both regions’ independence, foreign minister Lavrov stated, ‘we can no longer allow ourselves, as

648 For the MFA statement on the constitutional obligations of Russia, see Vladimir Socor, ‘Russia’s Strange “Peacekeeping” Operation In Abkhazia’, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 5, Issue 85, May 4, 2008.
we did in the past, simply to wait for the beginning of another blitzkrieg by Tbilisi against South Ossetia or Abkhazia’. The Russian MFA has largely seen its peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as a guarantee of non-resumption of hostilities, therefore it has continuously rejected the Georgian calls for their withdrawal. It has accordingly expressed its interest in a binding treaty on non-resumption of military operations by Tbilisi.

b) Spill-over effect

Both the 2004 and the 2008 crises in South Ossetia demonstrated that any conflict in this region would raise concern in the North Caucasus and produce instability for Russia’s domestic politics. Taking into consideration the sensitivity of the South Ossetian conflict to North Ossetia it is obvious that no Russian leader could ignore the fate of the South Ossetians. It has therefore been beyond doubt that in case of military intervention by Tbilisi, Russia would provide all the necessary political and military support.

Having said that, spill-over effect is no longer the focal point of Russia’s concerns for the South Caucasus, and it has to a large extent been instrumentalised. Russia has become a centralised state where consistent foreign policy decisions are taken in the Kremlin, and not in the North Caucasus. Besides, Russia has more than once taken decisions that might have hurt the regional elites in the North Caucasus. There were several cases in 1990s when Moscow either defied the opinion of the regional elites on certain decisions or, on the contrary the regional elites were reluctant to get involved in the conflicts. In 1994 and 1996 Russia applied land and marine blockade on Abkhazia cutting off the telephone lines and refusing to recognise Abkhaz passports. The same scenario was repeated in 2004 during the presidential elections in Abkhazia, when Russia irritated by the election results, closed the border through the Psou river.

Whereas in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia’s security concerns can be linked to the potential spill-over of conflict, that in the case of Mountainous Karabakh conflict is clearly absent. The only spill-over that Karabakh conflict might have produced by now was Turkey’s involvement in early 1990s, which today is out of question.

c) Controlled instability

Although Russia is explicitly not interested in the existence of any armed conflict in its south, it is, meanwhile not interested in the immediate resolution of these conflicts either. It sees no

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urgency in disturbing the status-quo. It is instead interested in retaining the status-quo and a form of controlled instability. Moscow has for various reasons seen the conflicts in its south as a lever against the parent states and a guarantee of its political and physical presence in the region. The conflicts have, in particular since the West’s active engagement in the region and Kosovo’s independence, served as a stake in Russia’s interaction with the West and its control over the South Caucasus. An assessment of 1997 concluded that ‘any stable political arrangement for… Abkhazia would weaken Russia’s position, reduce its influence on future developments and call into question the rational for its military presence’ is still valid today.654

Russia’s policies towards both Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be viewed in two contexts: in the context of Russian-Georgian bilateral relations, related to Russia’s geopolitical interests; and in the context of Russia’s domestic security interests. Policies within the bilateral relations spectre are closely linked to Russia’s great power interests: certain Russian policies towards the conflicts under Putin and Medvedev have been the result of deteriorating Georgian-Russian relations and Georgia’s efforts to integrate to NATO and align with the US. Russian policymakers have argued that these efforts will only exacerbate the conflict resolution processes in Georgia.655 The Georgian Government on its turn has argued that previous alignment with Russia did not give Tbilisi anything, and currently, too, bandwagoning does not promise Georgia anything. Russia’s inaction in both Georgian conflicts was to a certain extent to blame on Russia’s incapacity as a state during Yeltsin’s term. One of the central arguments of the Russian Government during Putin’s term has been that had Georgia tried to accommodate Russia’s interests and gain its trust, this would have had positive implications for the peace process at least in South Ossetia. Since, Russia’s consolidation of statehood and capacity coincided with a deterioration of the bilateral relations, it is rather difficult to judge the likelihood of such a scenario. The second context, Russia’s security interests are independent of the bilateral relations.

All three conflicts (including Mountainous Karabakh) in the region have served Russian interest of hegemony and control in the post-soviet decade. In the preliminary period of Russian foreign policy, the secessionist conflicts happened to be important resources for a Kremlin short of policy instruments to provide its interests in the region. This was especially true for early and mid 90s, when crisis-stricken Russia did not have the serious resources to compete in the economic sphere with the West in the region and viewed the conflicts as the only sources of leverage over the region. Back in October 1992, Sergei Karaganov, an

654 Pavel Baev, Russia’s policies in the Caucasus, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1997), p. 58.
655 Author’s interview at the Russian Duma, Moscow, 27th March, 2008.
influential member of the Presidential Council, introduced the term *post-imperial* policy. Russia, he argued, ‘is compelled to play an active post-imperial role... Russia must return to its traditional role, bribe local princes, send troops to save someone, and so on. It is an ungrateful job, but it is our history and we partially ourselves led us to it’. Thus, for both domestic security and broader power-political reasons Russia will not agree to leave South Ossetia or Abkhazia. Leaving this region could imply instability in the whole Caucasus. In other words, it has domestic security interests in this region, but it is not security that acts as the driving force behind its policies, but rather its broader power-political interests. The disinterest to see armed conflict in its south reflects its domestic security interest, whereas the disinterest to assist the resolution of these conflicts by either activating its efforts or ceasing creating incentives for the secessionist entities reflects its power-political interests.

The resolution of the conflicts in Georgia depends to a large extent as mentioned above on Russian-Georgian bilateral relations. It is by virtue of these conflicts Russia has secured that Georgia does not become a NATO member state, since most NATO states would be reluctant to accept troubled Georgia into NATO. Both conflicts guarantee Russia’s political and military presence in the region, now that Russia has no military presence in Georgia. Russia’s long term interest in the South Caucasus is above all security and peace, and as indicated in the Stability Pact for the Caucasus, any economic prosperity in the south would have implications for the North Caucasus. Thus, controlled instability is in no way an interest itself, but just a policy instrument.

### 3.3.2. Broader Geo-political interests

The Kremlin’s perceived strategic interests here since 1991 have included exclusive political and military presence, exclusive peacekeeping, deployment of border guards on the external borders of the three states, monopolisation of the production and transport of Caspian hydrocarbon resources, and securing relative autonomy from the international system. Further, like in the 19th century, for Russia, the South Caucasus was perceived to be important in terms of control over the North Caucasus.

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656 See Yuri Fedorov, ‘Russia’s policies towards Caspian region oil: Neo-imperial or pragmatic?’, *Perspectives on Central Asia*, vol.1, no 3, October, 1996, Eisenhower Institute, Centre for political and strategic studies. Sergei Karaganov had also later come to criticise implicitly Russia’s consent to leaving Crimea within Ukraine and the Russian populated areas of Kazakhstan.

a) Political and military presence

The interest in exclusive political and military presence was expressed in early 90s as containing the influence of the regional actors of Turkey and Iran to secure Russia’s exclusive hegemony in the region. Russia had waged a tri-polar contest with Turkey and Iran over influence in the Caucasus since the 16th century and had only managed to establish its nearly uninterrupted control over the region in the 19th century. Turkey in particular through its ethnic and linguistic similarity to Azerbaijan was viewed as a potential actor to fill the power vacuum if Russia were to leave.658 There existed the potential of Turkey’s involvement in the Mountainous Karabakh conflict in early 1992 following the Khojaly massacre, and once Nakhchivan became subject to a short-term assault by Armenia, Turkey raised its obligations under the Kars treaty of providing the exclave’s security.659 Russia saw Turkey as a rival in the Balkans, too, since Turkey lobbied the interests of Bosnian muslims at Euro-Atlantic institutions, and above all Turkey was a NATO ally. Turkey’s restrictions on the passing of large tankers through the straits and its historic role in the Caucasus and the Balkans had contributed to the generation of a rival perception of Ankara in Moscow. In this context, Russia pressed hard to strengthen the relative autonomy of the South Caucasus region and warned against any Western or Turkish presence in the region. To prevent any potential Turkish opportunism at the preliminary period, head of the joint armed forces of the CIS Marshal Shaposhnikov warned of a third world war if Turkey were to interfere in the Mountainous Karabakh conflict.660 In March 1993, defence minister Grachev made Russia’s own military cooperation with Turkey conditional on Ankara’s neutral position in the MK conflict.661

Throughout the Post-Soviet period Russia developed a vested interest in political and in military presence in the region. This involved both Russia’s security interests in the Caucasus and the desire not to let the region off control. The Kremlin implemented its potential control via military bases in the region, peace-keeping forces and border guards to guard the external

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659 See Roger E. Kanet, Russia: re-emerging great power, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 142. The Kars treaty of 13th October 1921 established Turkey as the guarantor of the autonomy and security of Nakhchivan, see William Reese, Turkish claims to a say in the status of Nakhichevan, RFE/RL, March 28, 1988.


661 Ibid.
borders of the CIS. The latter interest was conditioned by effective border control in the CIS to safeguard Russia’s own borders and prevent drug trafficking. Soviet borders were properly demarcated, equipped and manned, whereas Russia’s new borders in the south were not. Moreover, Russia’s presence on Armenia’s and Georgia’s border with Turkey, and Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s border with Iran would also symbolise Russia’s physical presence. At a joint meeting of foreign and defense ministers of the CIS states in 1994, Kozyrev argued that ‘Russia has an historic duty to guard the border because it is a frontier of the CIS’.  

b) Military bases

Russia’s military presence in the region has primarily served its interest of physical presence and ability to influence the region politically. The desire for military presence in Armenia produced a stable strategic alliance between the latter and Russia, making Yerevan Russia’s most loyal partner in the CIS. In Azerbaijan, Russia’s push for border guards or military bases was continuously rejected on the grounds that Russian presence, like in the case of Georgia, would not bring any favour to the country’s ailing problems. Improvement of relations in 2002 led to Azerbaijan’s lease of the Gabala radar station to Russia for a 10 year period. In the case of Georgia, Russian military presence was secured through the four military bases in Batumi, Akhalkalaki, Vaziani, Gudauta and peacekeeping missions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Interest in military presence in Georgia was more pressing in early 1990s. By early 1993 Grachev affirmed that, ‘Georgia’s Black Sea Coast is an area of strategic importance for the Russian army. We must take every measure to ensure that our troops remain there, otherwise we shall lose the Black Sea’. He also referred to Abkhazia as the only warm water port that Russia could use. Having secured its presence in Abkhazia, Russia since the last few years no longer considers the military bases in mainland Georgia to be as important as before. In 2005, President Putin reacted to Georgia’s request for the withdrawal of military bases, saying ‘from the standpoint of our security and strategic interests, [these bases] do not present any particular interest’. Although the bases had a symbolic meaning and their withdrawal upon Georgia’s insistence and pressure by all available means did have a negative impact upon Georgian-Russian relations. As President Putin put it, ‘Is it a good thing or a bad thing that we’re leaving Georgia? Politically speaking is it good or bad? I believe it is not very good because it means our military presence is no longer desired by our neighbors and I don’t

663 Elizabeth Fuller, ‘Russian strategy in the Caucasus since the demise of the USSR’, op.cit., p. 11. See also Mikhael Zinin, ‘MID nakonech to nameren zoyovit o svoim ponimaniem vneshnoy politiki’, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 25th February, 1993.
Meanwhile, Russia insisted that its withdrawal should not be accompanied by the deployment of the military bases of other states, in particular the US.  

**c) Peacekeeping forces**

Peacekeeping became a central issue in the 1993 military doctrine, which allowed for the legal use of armed forces in peacekeeping operations within the former Soviet space. This was also confirmed by the defence minister Grachev, who saw peacekeeping operations as a primary task of the Russian military amidst threats coming from the armed conflicts in the post-Soviet states. Russia was also concerned that unless it has strong peacekeeping presence in the region, the vacuum will be filled by others. Since 1993, Russian policymakers have expressed the view that Russia should be the sole peacekeeper in the CIS. Presence in the form of peace-keeping forces in all three conflicts has been equally important for Russia. In the case of Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts, peacekeeping has served both security and geopolitical interests, in the case of Mountainous Karabakh conflict, future potential peacekeeping would serve only geopolitical interests since MK was never a domestic security threat to Russia the way Abkhazia and South Ossetia were. Although Russian peace-keeping in Georgia has been partial and at times ineffective, it has generally managed to prevent the outbreak of large-scale armed conflict with a spill-over potential.  

Russia has made it clear to both the EU and NATO that peace-keeping in this region cannot be shared. Obviously, the Kremlin has seen sharing peacekeeping as an indicator of Russia’s incapacity and weakness as a great power to resolve problems in its own regional shell. Moreover, it has seen Western attempts to internationalise the peacekeeping in Georgia as a sign of attempt to intrude into the CIS and undermine Russia’s hegemony there. Therefore, throughout 2006-2008 Georgia’s attempts to internationalise the peacekeeping in its territory was perceived by Russian policymakers as aimed at replacing Russia by NATO.

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665 ‘Putin: Military Presence in Georgia not important for Russia’, Civil Georgia, 23 May, 2005.  
670 Russia profile 8.9.2006. Although Russia is not as opposed to the EU and cooperation within its ESDP as to NATO, it does not view the presence of the EU, especially the enlarged EU with potential mistrustful states of Russia, in any peacekeeping in the CIS positively. No matter how trustful Russia can be of the EU, security-political issues in the CIS should remain outside its cooperation.
although the latter had never expressed readiness to commit itself to such a task. An internationalisation of peacekeeping in Abkhazia or South Ossetia might have accelerated the peace processes, it would also improve Georgia’s trust of Russia as a mediator. Russia for a number of reasons is not prepared to share peacekeeping or internationalise mediation process in Georgia’s secessionist conflicts. This is because it has its own agendas in the region, which can be disturbed by a shift to peacekeeping: its political and military presence in the South Caucasus is guaranteed through its presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as peacekeepers, and an internationalisation would in Russian perception undermine Russia’s mediating capacity. Moreover, Moscow has seen internationalisation of peacekeeping largely in power-political terms, as if it would be targeted at limiting Russia’s role in the region. Certain Russian policymakers have raised the argument that overall the goal of Georgia and the West is US presence near Russia’s southern borders allegedly for the purpose of destabilising Russian North Caucasus. Last, but not least, an internationalisation of peacekeeping would make it harder for Russia to carry on with its policies of tacit support to the regions, and would undermine its policy of controlled instability.

To secure exclusivity, foreign minister Kozyrev undertook efforts in 1993 to get Russia recognised as the sole peace-keeper in the CIS in an institutionalised form. Both Russia’s desire for unlimited peace-keeping and its involvement in the Abkhaz conflict undermined its appeal, and at the Prague CSCE Summit in 1994, the organisation accepted the idea of its peacekeeping subject to two conditions: that all sides should agree and peace-keeping forces should have a timeframe. Equally in the case of the Mountainous Karabakh conflict, Russia initially was reluctant to indulge its internationalisation, and got reconciled to the idea of permanent Minsk Group members only after it was guaranteed a co-chair status. Its mediation efforts were accompanied by the request for the return of Russian troops to Azerbaijan, who had left at Baku’s insistence in 1992.

d) Resistance to US presence

Russian policymakers have been increasingly concerned about Western engagement in the South Caucasus, in particular since the 1994 oil contract. The Kremlin has seen US engagement in the region as a blow to its global and regional position and as an attempt to decrease Russia’s influence in the CIS. Since the deterioration of Russian-US relations, US presence has largely been seen to be at the cost of Russia’s restriction from the region. The 1994 oil contract, the Istanbul Summit oil and gas pipeline deals, agreement to close its military bases in Georgia, the emergence of US train and equip programme in Georgia,

671 See ‘Lavrov: Russia respects principle of territorial integrity’, Civil Georgia, 2nd April, 2008.
672 See Leszek Buzsynskki, op. cit., p. 109.
Georgia’s NATO application were all seen as Western efforts to weaken Russia’s position in the CIS and the international system. Back in 1998, Stanislav Cherniavski from Russian MFA stated that ‘the Transcaucasus is turning into a US sphere of strategic interests’. In other words, since Russia’s hegemony is limited and since disturbing its hegemony is desired by certain CIS states, Russia’s policymakers blame all those processes of perceived erosion of power on the US and the West. Policymakers in the Kremlin refuse to see the above-mentioned processes as an outcome of their own policies towards the region. Instead, they argue traditionally that it is not politically or economically profitable for those CIS states to seek alternative alignments.

Russia’s interest to keep NATO and the West out of its regional shell is related to its self-image as a great power. Speaking at the influential Russian think-tank the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy in 2007, the Russian minister of foreign affairs Lavrov accused the United States of ‘playing games’ in the CIS, saying, ‘one should inform our Western partners that attempts to contain Russia in her regional ‘shell’ are hopeless’. The Kremlin insists that the states to its south should coordinate their foreign policies, with respect to the West, with it. In particular, it has expressed its interest in a neutral Georgia to its south and has tried to persuade the Georgian administration to give up its application for NATO. In 2004 in the course of the negotiations between Georgia and Russia, on the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia, Russia demanded guarantees from Georgia that its withdrawal will not be accompanied by the presence of a third state’s military presence.

International presence near Russia’s borders is also associated with instability in the North Caucasus. In 2004, during the Beslan crisis Putin stated that ‘there are certain people who want us to be focused on our internal problems and they pull strings here so that we don’t raise our heads internationally’.

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674 See ‘Gosduma namerena zashitit interesy Rossii na Kavkaze’
676 ‘Moscow wants a neutral Georgia’, *Civil Georgia*, 30 August, 2007.
677 See ‘Georgia is a bridgehead for US offensive against the Russian Caucasus’, *Pravda*, 4th June, 2005.
perception in the Kremlin that the West is intent on eliminating Russia as an international force by disturbing its hegemony in the CIS and destabilising the North Caucasus. During the South Ossetia crisis too, certain policymakers were of the view that if Russia does not respond, the next step will be Russia’s North Caucasus.

e) Erosion of values and Russia’s soft power

Russia was antipathetic to the coloured revolutions in the CIS seeing them as greater international engagement in its backyard and a threat to its soft power. With the rose revolution, Russia observed a shift of values and an end to the Soviet bureaucracies in the relevant countries. The coloured revolutions brought to power younger elites looking to the West with hope and admiration, for whom Western model of political and economic management was a preference.

The revolutions and democratisations in the CIS were seen as a challenge to Russia both internally and externally. In 2005, in an interview the then defence minister Sergei Ivanov described Russia’s two major challenges as interference in Russia’s internal affairs by foreign states, through the structures they support, and violent assault on the constitutional order of some post-Soviet states. The external challenge was Russia’s perception that the West through democratisation is intervening into Moscow’s exclusive zone. The coloured revolutions were therefore seen to have been manufactured by the West externally. In 2007, the then President Putin stated that Moscow would continue to influence affairs in former Soviet states, despite Western attempts to produce democracy in what it considers to be its own strategic backyard.

For a while, Russia seemed to have no soft power to offer the CIS states, but within a short period, it realised that its policies in the region suffered from ideological vacuum and skillfully developed its own alternative, called ‘sovereign democracy.’ The concept of ‘sovereign

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679 Soft power as a concept was developed by Joseph Nye initially to explain US foreign policy. Whereas hard power implies the ability to coerce, soft power derives from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political system, values and legitimacy of foreign policies. It is a resource for influencing the decisions and behaviours of other states by getting them to acquire your values. See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). For an excellent analysis of both hard and soft power see Felix Berenskoetter, Michael J. Williams eds., *Power in world politics*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).


684 For a more detailed view on Russia’s soft power, see Andrei Tsygankov, ‘If Not by Tanks, then by Banks? The role of Soft Power in Putin’s foreign policy’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 58, issue 7, 2006, pp. 1079-99.
democracy’ has been suitable for most CIS states, due to their political nature. It revolves around two main ideas: the West’s non-interference in the domestic affairs of the post-soviet states and a post-soviet interpretation of democracy emanating from the region’s historic experience. The coloured revolutions were seen by the Kremlin to be externally orchestrated, aimed at alienating the relevant states from Russia and preaching them certain values for their own ends. Russian political elite accordingly argued that the West’s democratisation and human rights preaching was only a pretext for its geopolitical interests, and post-soviet states, due to their specific historic experiences, should evolve their own paths of democratisation.

The concept of sovereign democracy soon after its presentation became an attractive alternative for the authoritarian regimes in the region. Moreover, Russian version of governance following the coloured revolutions became an important model, and Russia a value partner for most CIS states. Prioritising non-intervention in domestic affairs and stability, sovereign democracy became a popular concept used all over the SU to curtail limits on individual liberties, to censor newspapers and NGOs.

Concluding remarks

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia defined the South Caucasus region to be strategically important to both its domestic security interests and its broader geopolitical interests in the CIS. It has had a vested interest in non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, linking conflict in both regions to stability in the North Caucasus. Until the restoration of its rule in Chechnya, most Russian policymakers were of the view that control over the North Caucasus first requires control over the South. Control over the region has largely been seen as physical presence in the form of peacekeeping or military bases. This however has not always been welcomed by the parent states and at times both Azerbaijan and Georgia had found difficult to comply with Russian demands without getting much benefit. Paradoxically most of these states’ balancing (less valid for Azerbaijan currently) efforts have been caused by Russia’s own policies.


688 For the argument that Russia is using ist soft power to restore its influence over the FSU by all means, see Steven Lee Myers, ‘Putin Uses Soft Power to Restore the Russian Empire’, New York Times, 14 November, 2004.
A peculiar feature of Russia’s interests in the South Caucasus is that their linkage to both Russia’s domestic politics and foreign policy. For example, changing the format of peacekeepers in Georgia has been perceived in Russia to be harmful for its domestic security concerns in the South Caucasus that once it leaves the situation can deteriorate to a serious extent to destabilise the Russian North Caucasus. Meanwhile, the issue has also been seen as an tempt of the West to undermine Russia’s great power status via Georgia. Russia has from the onset been opposed to the internationalisation of peacekeeping and mediation in the conflicts in the near abroad. The Kremlin has been convinced that there should be no poles in the CIS and more international involvement alludes to Russia’s incapacity as a regional power to manage the conflicts. In the Georgian case, Russia’s opposition to the internationalisation of peacekeeping in the region is also stipulated by Russia’s disinterest in the resolution of both conflicts.

Growing deterioration of Russian-Western relations over NATO enlargement to include Russia unfriendly states, US unilateralism in Iraq, Western criticism over Russia’s de marche into Chechnya as well its engagement in the conflicts in the region, Western view of Russia’s policies towards the South Caucasus in the context of neo-imperialism have only harshened Russia’s stance on the security problems in the South Caucasus. This has led to the formation of a perception in that most Western engagement in the region occurs in the context of power-politics, and emergence of NATO OR US military bases in its vicinity can generate extra problems for its domestic security as well. Thus, the decreasing trust of Russia in diplomacy and international institutions as a means of regulating inter-state behaviour has implications for its engagement in the South Caucasus region.

Although Russia’s long-term interests in the South Caucasus are stability and resolution of the conflicts, this is slightly different in terms of its short term interests. At present, Russia does not seem to be interested in a long-term resolution or modus vivendi in the conflicts in Georgia. Its policies are therefore rendered to meet its short-term interests, not long-term interests. Russia’s short term interests are instead satisfied with non-resumption of hostilities, which seemingly suits Russia’s both domestic security concerns and broader geopolitical interests.
Chapter 4

Russia’s policies towards the ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus

4.1. Russia’s engagement in the South Caucasus in the post-communist period

Russia’s policies towards the South Caucasus under successive Russian Governments have been marked by inconsistence, confusion, contradictions, pragmatism, shortage and overestimation of resources. Russia has from the very onset, for its domestic security concerns and broader geopolitical interests been crucially involved in all three secessionist conflicts in the region and acted both as a mediator and peacekeeper, and a tacit supporter of the status-quo favourable to the secessionists. Its peacekeeping in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been national interest based and has tended to safeguard the breakaway regions’ survival.689 Its peacekeeping has not met standard norms of peacekeeping.690 Peacekeepers in both regions have allowed the secessionist elites to pursue state-building projects, while impeding the parent states from attempting to regain control of the regions by use of force. Russia has at times imposed economic embargoes on the secessionist regions and endorsed confederative solutions, but at other times manipulated the situation for its own strategic ends. It has until recently acted as a status-quo power in the South Caucasus, disinterested in instability near its borders, but at the same time has expressed the desire for stabilising the current power balances in the region and preserving the deadlocks. As Baev puts it, Russia’s policies are ‘an extraordinary complex and incoherent combination of unsustainable aspirations, incompatible

689 In contrast, Russian military expert Alexander Golts argues that breach of internal norms of peacekeeping by Russia in the conflict zones was more due to the inexperience of its officers, rather than imperial ambitions. See Alexander Golts, ‘Voennoe mirotvorchestvo Rossii’, Pro et contra, Jurnal Rossiyskoy vnutrenney i vneshney politiki, No 5-6, vol. 34, 2006, pp. 65-76.

interests and uncoordinated activities. It has had a dubious attitude to conflict resolution; while stability has been declared as the main goal, there are serious concerns that a long-term peace could erode Russia’s influence in the region and leave it with only symbolic leverage. It has therefore until recently preferred a situation, where recognising Georgia’s territorial integrity, in fact tacitly supported the survival of the separatist entities and enjoyed the privilege of being the sole peace-keeper.

4.1.1. Policy incoherence: multiplicity of actors

The inconsistency of Russia’s policies towards the region has been partly caused by the multiple actors involved in the conflicts and their incompatible interests, and partly by a shortage of resources and weakness of state institutions. During the Yeltsin administration, the multiplicity of actors in the South Caucasus included the Russian President, MFA, the military and successive Russian Parliaments. The Russian military was very influential in deciding Russia’s policies towards the near abroad in early 90s and dominated most of the decisions made towards the Caucasus. The collapse of the SU had led to a loosening of the central state in Russia, resulting in civilian officials and military commanders of all ranks taking a more independent stance and serving their own individual interests. The defence minister made decisions on a wide range of issues relating to the situation in the Caucasus without consulting the president. Often various actors pursued policies contrary to the Kremlin’s official stance, making the impression that either Russia’s real policies have been contrary to its official statements, or it is not controlling the situation. For example, at a time when the Russian MFA fully supported Georgia’s territorial integrity during Yeltsin’s term, the Duma and certain Russian politicians as the Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov still retained their earlier positions of sympathy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia and acted

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691 Pavel Baev, ‘Russia’s policies in the North and South Caucasus’, in The South Caucasus: a challenge for the EU, Dov Lynch ed., Chaillot Paper 65, December, 2003, p. 41. For a detailed account of Russia’s policies in the South Caucasus during Yeltsin’s term see Pavel Baev, Russia’s policies in the Caucasus, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1997).

692 This was made easier by the presence of the Transcaucasus Military District, which remained in the region after the Soviet collapse. At the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union there were 20,000 ground troops in Georgia, added by the Black Sea Fleet. For details see Elizabeth Fuller ‘Paramilitary forces dominate fighting in Transcaucasus’, RFE/RL research report, special issue on post-Soviet armies, vol. 2, no 25, 18 June, 1993, p. 75, 82. For a role of the Russian military see Dmitri Trenin, ‘Russia’s security policies and interests in the Caucasus region’, in Bruno Coppieters ed., Contested borders in the Caucasus, (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996), p. 98. See Yuriy Gladkevich, ‘Prolog k bolshevoy voine’, Krasnaya Zvezda, 1992, 7th October 1992.

693 It should be borne in mind that the forces of the Transcaucasus military district were stationed all over the region making it rather easy to act. For an account of the role of military in Russia, see Alexander Golts, ‘Main obstacles to military reform-Russian militarism’, Pro et contra, vol. 8, no 3, 2004, p. 56.
accordingly. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of actors in Russia’s policies towards the South Caucasus would in no case imply that Russia’s policies were only executed by private groups, and that as a state it had no conscious involvement in the region. Quite the contrary, there were several occasions in all three conflicts where the involvement of the Russian military on either side of the conflict parties seemed to suit Russia’s hegemonic aspirations.

4.1.2. Shortage of resources

Another problem that Russia faced in the South Caucasus was shortage of resources. The identity crisis, weakness of state institutions and immaturity of foreign policy towards the FSU, the Chechen crisis and last, but not least economic difficulties were all related to a shortage of resources and overall incapacity. At such a time, the conflicts in its south seemed to be potential points of leverage, some of which today still serve Russia’s perceived strategic interests in the region. It is widely believed that for much of the Yeltsin period, Russian policy-makers were attached to the view that persistence of conflict gave Russia leverage over the region’s affairs and its governments. Russia was too weak in 1990s to become a point of attraction for its neighbours and did not have the resources to offer them. The most efficient way to maintain influence in the Caucasus appeared to be through the manipulation of the ongoing conflicts, so this became the main direction of its policy in the region. The view was further strengthened once the West began to penetrate the region, and at the OSCE Istanbul Summit, amidst surprising, and to some, humiliating consent of Russia to Western demands on the Caucasus, the conflicts seemed to be a major policy resource.

Until recently, Russian foreign policy was considered not to have much leeway potential due to the shortage of resources. This was documented in the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, which stated that the top priority was to ‘create favourable external conditions for a steady development of Russia, for improving its economy’. The picture changed gradually during Putin’s term in office. Under Putin the Russian foreign policy obtained continuity, the political system got internally centralised and externally readapted to

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695 This point is further elaborated by Allen Lynch, who argues that Russian foreign policy starting from 1993, was far from being incoherent and ineffective. On all cases of foreign policy priority, Russian foreign policy establishment proved to have a coherent strategic line and effectiveness. This was evident in Russia’s policies towards Abkhazia, Moldova, Bosnia and NATO campaign in Kosovo. See Allen Lynch, ‘The realism of Russian foreign policy’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, volume 53, no 1, 2001, pp. 7-31.
great power politics. Consolidation of the presidential administration helped overcome competing bureaucracies and resulting policy incoherence. Putin forced tycoons to demonstrate loyalty to the state, made the Duma and Federation Council more dependent upon the president, suppressed the private media of the oligarchs and brought security staff into Kremlin. On the issues in the South Caucasus, the Putin Administration ended the two Russias, that of the President and MFA versus the Duma, military and the regional elites. Russian foreign policy under Putin became more coherent than under his predecessor and consequently easier to analyse and assess.699

The evolution of a single Russian foreign policy line vis-à-vis the South Caucasus region was conditioned by a number of factors. Firstly, during the early years of his presidency, Putin managed to centralise the power and decision-making mechanism of the Kremlin, and limited the free will of the regional elites including those in the North Caucasus. Putin pressed hard to establish the strong hand of the Kremlin over all structures of the state, filling civilian positions with security staff (siloviki).700 Secondly, when Putin came to power, the Kremlin had no option but to pursue a consistent policy for the South Caucasus, as from 1994 the West driven by its economic interests had started to penetrate the region and compete for influence.701 Certain analysts were convinced that Russia’s policies and its weakening security presence in the region as well as its domestic problems would end up in ‘strategic retreat’ from the Caucasus.702 At the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999, Russia had had to close two of its military bases and negotiate on the other in Georgia which would end up its


military presence there (except for peacekeepers) and agree to the construction of a rival pipeline to transport Caspian hydrocarbon resources to Western markets bypassing Russia. Moreover, Putin came to the Kremlin after a serious defeat of Russian foreign policy, the military intervention in Kosovo notwithstanding Russia’s veto at the UNSC.703

Today, Russia no longer experiences a shortage of resources for its interests in the South Caucasus. Spill-over of secessionism from the south is no longer a concern; the Chechen crisis that limited Russia’s ability for manoeuvre in the South Caucasus was put off. Previously, separatism in the South Caucasus was seen to have spill-over potential to the North Caucasus and therefore both Georgia and Azerbaijan had received unilateral support for their territorial integrity from Moscow.704 Now, Russia no longer feels that the Chechen factor should be a constraint on its policies towards the secessionist entities in the region. Russia through its economic recovery partly due to a rise in oil and gas prices and monopolisation of energy in Europe, is no longer short of resources for its foreign policy objectives.705 Russia has paid off its foreign debt and has had steady growth since 1999.706 Moreover, the international political situation is favourable to Russia; the US has had difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan, the EU is adapting to the challenges of enlargement, and is above all dependent upon Russia’s energy supply. Unlike 2000, in his 2004 address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin claimed that ‘the growth of the economy, political stability and the strengthening of the state have had a beneficial effect on Russia’s international position’.707

As Trenin notes, the Russian leadership ‘came to the conclusion that the withdrawal has

703 A fundamental difference between Russia’s approach to the South Caucasus under Yeltsin and Putin administrations was that Russia became more assertive towards the region under Putin, this was partly to blame on the aspiration to correct the ‘mistakes’ of the Yeltsin Executive that had indulged Western penetration into the region, but partly because Putin did not share his predecessor’s early conviction to liberalism and the right of these states to choose the model of statehood they wanted to develop or the partnership and alliances they wished to join in their external relations. This point is well formulated by James Sherr that ‘in Yeltsin’s time the right of these states to develop according to their own models and with partners of their own choice was disputed in principle, but in practice conceded for a complex of reasons, of which weakness was only one. Any concessions during the early years of Putin’s presidency were the product of weakness alone’. See James Sherr, ‘Culpabilities and consequences’, Chatham House Report BN 08/01, September, 2008.

704 Russia accordingly adopted a very limited interpretation of the right for self-determination and was very cautious to discourage secession in the FSU by all hazards. This was also reflected in the 1997 National Security Concept of Russia. Comparing Russia’s rhetoric in Georgia’s ethnic conflicts, it is interesting to observe the dramatic change. See Yevgeni Primakov, ‘Russia: reforms and foreign policy’, International Affairs (Moscow), August 1998, p.3. Although it should be noted meanwhile, that until Kosovo’s recognition, Russia was committed to the primacy of the principle of territorial integrity in the Former Soviet space, see ‘Lavrov: Russia respects principle of territorial integrity’, Civil Georgia, 2nd April, 2008.


ended, and it is time to counter-attack… it is time to re-establish a great power, and that the CIS is the space where Russian economic, political, and informational dominance should be established. 708

Russia’s tendency to retain positions in the post-Soviet space has led to its tactical policies supportive of the secessionist regions and in this way it has acquired leverage over the potentially unfriendly states. Although, Russia has more resources today, the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia still serve as a foreign policy tool and at this current stage it is seemingly not very interested in their resolution. A shift to its ‘security’ setting in the South Caucasus is highly securitised, and Russia has invested in maintaining the status-quo. The Kremlin has sought to preserve its exclusive role in the resolution of the ethno-territorial conflicts and will resist any internationalisation of the peace processes in both regions. Although the causal variables of all three conflicts do not lie in Russia, its policies have been a complicating factor, and any peace deal in the region is deemed to fail without Russia’s support.

There is need for a differentiation of Russia’s approaches to the three conflicts under both Yeltsin’s and Putin’s terms in office. Both Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts are linked to Russia’s domestic security concerns in the Caucasus and can produce certain implications for Russia’s domestic politics. Meanwhile, both conflicts have, since the deterioration of Georgian-Russian and Russian-US relations in the last few years been largely seen in Moscow as a key vehicle against Western expansionism in the South Caucasus and as a guarantee of Russian presence in the South Caucasus. 709 The picture is slightly different in the Mountainous Karabakh conflict: here Russia has no domestic security concerns, but only broader power-political and hegemonic interests, and unlike in the above-mentioned conflicts, the Kremlin during Putin’s term in office has been satisfied with its bilateral relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, Russian-Western relations do not cross here the way they do in the Georgian-Russian relations.

Within the last decade, both conflicts in Georgia have become concentrated on Georgian-Russian relations. This is partly a result of Tbilisi’s strategy to describe them Russian-Georgian with the intent of changing the negotiations and peacekeeping formats. The Georgian Government claims that Russia is not a neutral player and therefore cannot play a useful role. Russia on its part has been more openly involved in the conflicts, either by its

naturalisation of both regions’ residents and more direct engagement in the conflict zones. In April 2008, President Putin’s decision to increase the status of relations between Russia and the conflict regions is evident. Russia has issued loans, provided energy to both regions creating important incentives and making their reintegration with Georgia proper impossible and their positions intransigent. Without Russia’s support, the secessionist regions would have fewer chances of survival. In this context, Russia has become a de facto party to the conflicts, sensitive to developments in the regions.

4.2. Russia’s policies towards the ethno-territorial conflicts in Georgia

Interest groups in the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts

The forces defining Russia’s policies towards both conflicts include the siloviki close to the Kremlin, military and security staff, the Russian Duma and the elites of North Caucasian republics. The most powerful among all groups has been the siloviki close to the Kremlin, who have predominantly seen the conflicts as a key vehicle against Western expansion in the South Caucasus. The military and security ministries support both regions, for the purpose of creating a buffer zone between Russia and the unfriendly and mistrustful Georgia. They see NATO membership of Georgia as an end to Russia’s great power status and even a challenge to Russia’s North Caucasus. The Russian Duma, which during Yeltsin’s term dominated most of the policies towards the secessionist conflicts in Georgia, is still an actor. Nationalist forces in the Duma including Zatulin, Baburin and Zhirinovski are the key figures. And last only are the North Caucasus elites. North Caucasus elites play a bigger economic role in the Abkhaz economy, rather than in the Ossetian economy. North Ossetians are concerned about the fate of their ethnic brethren and the North Ossetian president has repeatedly advocated the unification of two Ossetias. Overall, North Caucasian elites do not play such a big role as they used to.

4.2. Russia’s policies towards the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict

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710 ‘Russia Moves to Legalize Ties with Abkhazia, S.Ossetia’, Civil Georgia, 16th April, 2008.
712 The value of the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia has risen with a number of ‘failures’ of Russia in the CIS, such as the coloured revolutions, Georgia’s ever closer rapprochement with the West and closure of its military bases in Georgia. See Stanislav Belkovskiy, ‘Posle imperii: nachalo tragedii’, Vedomosti, 12 May, 2004; Dmitri Rogozin, ‘Vpered k imperii’, Zavtra, 25 January, 2006.
714 See Nicole Jackson, op. cit., p. 125, 132.
Russia’s policies towards the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict have circulated around three major issues: its domestic security interests in the North Caucasus, boarder geopolitical interests and its incapacity. Security concerns remained largely unchanged under both Yeltsin and Putin Governments and still play an important role in Russia’s approach to the region. In terms of incapacity, at various stages of the conflict Russia’s incapacity has varied to certain degrees, resulting in Russia’s failure to impose conditions on the de facto authorities. On the other hand, it is difficult to identify Russia’s incapacity during Yeltsin’s term, because its pressure was never applied in a strict sense. This was partly because Russia’s domestic problems at the time never allowed the Kremlin to follow a strict embargo. The sanctions against Abkhazia were from the very beginning challenged by the Duma and the Caucasian elites.717

Because the new period of consolidated Russian statehood was accompanied by a deterioration of relations between Georgia and Russia, and the latter’s active economic and political engagement in the region, no pressure has been applied on Abkhazia to come to peace. The fact that in 2004 during the presidential elections in Abkhazia, Moscow applied leverage to end the crisis by warning to close the border on Abkhazia, and the Abkhaz elite immediately submitted, imply that in the recent period Russia does have certain leverage vis-à-vis Abkhazia.718 Vis-à-vis the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, Russia had a lot larger capacity and potential to explore than in any other conflict in the Caucasus, taking into consideration that until the closure of the Ergneti market, communication existed between the Georgian and Ossetian communities and the conflict was more of an elite driven character.

4.2.1. Policies during President Yeltsin’s term of office

Russia’s policies towards the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict during Yeltsin’s term varied between support to both sides, manipulation of the conflict for geopolitical ends, as well as certain efforts for conflict resolution. Given the fact that there was more than one Russian bureaucracy involved in the preliminary period, it was not clear what Russia’s interests would be, and how Moscow should react. The competing agendas of the Russian president and MFA on the one hand, and of the military commanders in the region, the Russian Duma and regional elites of the North Caucasus on the other, often led to puzzlement and confusion on who Russia is actually represented by and which actions are on behalf of the state. As Moscow endorsed Georgia’s territorial integrity, Russian arms found their way into Abkhaz hands, Russian planes bombed targets in Georgian controlled territory and Russian military

717 Why the sanctions failed to provide the desired effect was also blamed on dual power and inconsistence in Russia by the then foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev. See ‘Polgoda nazad Rutskoi skazal mne: ‘Ya ikh nenavizhu, etikh krasno-korichnevikh’, Izvestiya, 8 October 1993.

718 For an account of the presidential elections in Abkhazia, see Anatoliy Gordienko, Natalia Melikova, ‘Samoprovozglashenniy Falstart’, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 5th October, 2004.
vessels shelled the Georgian held Sukhumi. Through 1992-1993, Russia had no single policy towards the conflict, it was not clear whether Russia wanted a strong, united Georgia or a weak one.

a) Initial reaction

Initially, the Russian state’s position was neutrality, and was more inclined towards sympathy for Georgia.\textsuperscript{719} In 1992, foreign minister Kozyrev uttered the strategic interests of Russia saying, ‘Russia needs an integral, stable and democratic Georgia, a guarantee for stability in the North Caucasus. Russia believes that to ensure the lawful rights of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria as part of Georgia answers the interests of stability in Georgia and in the Caucasus as a whole’.\textsuperscript{720} Furthermore, in compliance with the Tashkent Treaty of May 1992, which provided for the distribution of the military hardware of the former USSR among CIS members, the Russian government had, shortly before the outbreak of the conflict in August, turned over to Georgia large military facilities causing Georgia’s military superiority over the Abkhaz forces.\textsuperscript{721} Actually, Georgia continued to receive weapons from the Transcaucasian military district throughout March 1993, although no agreement had been reached on the status of Russian troops in Georgia yet.\textsuperscript{722} There are even allegations that with the Dagomys cease-fire in South Ossetia, Russia had provided politico-military support to Georgia to launch military operations in Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{723} In autumn 1992, the Abkhaz possessed only 8 tanks and 30 armoured vehicles, whereas just one Russian division handed over 108 tanks to Georgia.\textsuperscript{724}

As the conflict evolved into a military stage, the Russian president and minister of foreign affairs supported Georgia’s territorial integrity and put efforts for mediation. In fact, the 1992 September cease-fire agreement between Abkhazia and Georgia, which seemed not to meet the interests of the Abkhaz, was only signed due to Russian pressure on Ardzinba.\textsuperscript{725} The latter, under strong pressure from Russia, was compelled to sign a document, which authorised the presence of Georgian troops on Abkhaz territory and did not make any mention


\textsuperscript{720} See Liz Fuller, Russian strategy in the Caucasus since the demise of the USSR, op. cit., p. 12.

\textsuperscript{721} For a detailed account see Richard Woff, op. cit., p. 310. See also Zverev op. cit., p. 53


\textsuperscript{725} See Lakoba, ‘Abxaziya de facto ili Gruziya de yure’, p.48.
of a federal structure for Georgia. Therefore, it was no surprise that large-scale military operations continued after the 3rd September agreement for another 13 months. In the 3rd September meeting the President Yeltsin made it clear that Russia desired the preservation of the Georgian state, presumably considering that secessionism in the South Caucasus could become a challenge for Russia’s own territorial integrity in the North Caucasus. In fact, after the outbreak of the conflict in 1992, the Russian foreign ministry did send a letter to the Georgian Government, supporting Georgia’s ‘fight against terrorists’. Thus, the ceasefire only lasted until the Abkhaz, assisted by North Caucasus volunteers attacked Georgian controlled Gagra in north-western Abkhazia and retook it on 6th October, taking control of the Abkhaz-Russian border. The Russian Black Sea Fleet evacuated thousands of Georgians from the city. Shevardnadze immediately appealed to the Secretary General of NATO for assistance and stated that the 3rd September ceasefire had been a trap, alluding to an accusation of Russia. Meanwhile, in November, Shevardnadze rejected the idea of federal relations between Georgia and Abkhazia.

Another and seemingly most influential voice of Russia in the conflict was its military, who initially acted on their own initiative. Defence minister Grachev supported Yeltsin’s policy of non-interference, but warned that the Russian troops would retaliate against any attacks to acquire equipment. Although, from the very onset, Grachev had instructed the Russian field commanders in Abkhazia to keep neutral, the Russian military sympathised with the Abkhaz and in this way played a far more crucial role than the official mediation. The primary reason for the sympathy of the Russian military for Abkhazia was their disliking of Shevardnadze, blaming him for the breakup of the Soviet Union and early withdrawal from Eastern Europe. It seems that at the initial stage of the conflict, the Abkhaz access to Russian arms was made possible by the field commanders acting on their own initiative.

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728 Author’s interview with a Russian diplomat, Moscow, 11th March, 2008.
730 Ibid.
732 See Zverev, op. cit., p. 53
The Abkhaz forces, far less in number and lightly armed at the beginning had often accessed Russian weapons by theft from the military bases in Gudauta or by deals with the officers. However, after a certain period, especially once it became clear that Georgia was not intent on joining the CIS, Russia’s military involvement seems to have been sanctioned at the state level. The sudden presence of armor, tanks, heavy artillery, grad rocket launchers leaves the conclusion that after a certain stage of the conflict, weapons delivery to the Abkhaz was a consistent policy of the armed forces at the central level. The scale of Russian military assistance in the conflict was of crucial importance: within a short period of time after the start of the conflict the Abkhaz side managed to access 100,000 landmines and some heavy weapons, neither of which existed in Abkhazia before the outbreak of the conflict.

In addition, Abkhazia received sympathy from the peoples and elites of the North Caucasus and the Russian Parliament. As the war broke out volunteer armies of the Caucasus Mountain Peoples Confederation began to be formed in the major cities of the North Caucasus and dispatched to the region. Support received from the Confederation of Mountain Peoples in the Caucasus, International Circassian Association and Congress of the Kabardan People was a crucial factor making Abkhaz victory in the war possible. As the conflict proceeded, it rebound the whole region of the North Caucasus, and demonstrations were organised in all North Caucasian Republics. Meanwhile, the Abkhaz conflict also helped Moscow shift the concentration of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples from seeking independence from Russia to defending Abkhazia from Georgia. The Confederation of Mountain peoples of the Caucasus that had been established prior to the outbreak of conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, initially campaigned for sovereignty from Russia. The outbreak of conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and involvement of Chechens and other North Caucasians in them potenially removed the centre of attention from the Russian North Caucasus to Georgia. It is worth mentioning that President Gamsakhurdia was one of the first to suggest and campaign for the idea of the unity of the North and South Caucasus in early 1990s. He

739 See Nicole Jackson, op. cit., p. 129.
had enjoyed good relations with the Chechen leader and other North Caucasian elites until the outbreak of conflict in South Ossetia.\textsuperscript{740} Politically there were differences between different confederate groups; Shanibov, the chairman enjoyed good relations with the Russian Duma, whereas, the CCMP commander in Abkhazia Shamil Basaev spoke out against Russian domination in the Caucasus. In August 1992, the Russian Ministry of Justice banned the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus on the grounds that it had sent troops to Abkhazia and issued a statement on 18th August 1992, on the inadmissibility of intervention in the internal affairs of Georgia.\textsuperscript{741}

\textit{b) Russia’s incentives for assistance to the Abkhaz side}

Initially the Russian president and minister of foreign affairs tried to hold neutrality and sympathised with Georgia’s territorial integrity, but for a number of domestic political and external factors, both were soon inclined to change their positions. Emanating from Georgia’s independent-mindedness and mistrust of Georgia in Russia, parts of the Russian public and various groups in the Russian parliament had from the early days expressed sympathy towards Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{742} These groups were calling for Russia’s historic duty to safeguard the autonomies and minorities in the Caucasus, and viewed the Abkhaz cause as a national-independence movement.\textsuperscript{743} This was even strengthened when on 14th December 1992, a Russian army helicopter evacuating Abkhaz civilians from the besieged town of Tkvarcheli to Gudauta was shot down, causing 64 casualties, including 25 children.\textsuperscript{744} Moreover, Georgia had refused to join the CIS, and there was no sign that Georgia would join it in the near future and comply with the Russian demands of hosting border guards and military bases in its territory. According to Stanislav Lakoba, Russia’s position vis-à-vis Abkhazia changed for Georgia’s disadvantage after it became clear that Shevardnadze had no intention of joining the CIS.\textsuperscript{745} Moreover, at a very initial stage of the conflict, at a time when the Russian Government had a pro-Georgian stance, the Georgian Government accused Russia of siding with the Abkhaz. Last but, not least came the factor of the North Caucasus elites and societies, which played the


\textsuperscript{744} \textit{RFE/RL News Briefs}, December 10-23, 1992, p. 10, quoted in Human Rights Watch report, op. cit.. This event caused a lot of outrage towards Georgia and provoked public discussion on what policies Russia should be pursuing vis-à-vis Georgia to safeguard Russian interests and the lives of Russian peacekeepers. See also V.Litovkin, ‘V sbitom Rossiiiskom vertolete pogibli vse’, \textit{Ivestia}, 15 December, 1992.

\textsuperscript{745} Lakoba, ‘Abkhazia de facto ili, Gruziya de yure’ p. 52.
most crucial role in the course of fighting. Indeed, at least half of the fighters in Abkhazia against Georgian forces were volunteers from the North Caucasus, without which victory of the Abkhaz side would be unthinkable.746 The volunteers were stimulated by a feeling of solidarity and compassion for their ethnic kin in the south. Taking into consideration the fragility of Russian rule over the North Caucasus at the time, had the Kremlin attempted to stop the volunteers from entering Abkhazia, it might have caused tension in the North Caucasus. In fact, the leader of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the North Caucasus Musa Shanibov, openly threatened Russia, that in case it supported Georgia, the North Caucasus republics would follow the Chechen lead and declare independence.747 The Caucasus Confederation at the beginning was enraged by the arms transfer to Georgia, blaming Russia for inaction and approval of the war.748 Taking into consideration all the above-mentioned factors, starting from early 1993, the Abkhaz conflict was seen as a lever against Georgia, in particular in bringing Georgia to Russian conditions. However, Russia’s involvement in the conflict was always seen as tactical, not strategic, serving certain objectives temporarily.

c) Scale of Russia’s assistance

On many occasions throughout 1993, Russian fighter planes bombed Georgian controlled parts of Abkhazia under the banner of retaliation to Georgia’s bombing of Russia’s positions.749 In March 1993, Izvestia reported that Abkhaz forces had received assistance from Russian military advisers, listing the arms supplies.750 On February 20, the Russian defence minister sent an aircraft to bomb Sukhumi in retaliation to Georgian bombing of Russia’s defence research centre and important laboratory in Eshera, Abkhazia.751 Russia’s involvement on the Abkhaz side became even more obvious when Georgian forces downed an SU-27 fighter-bomber on March 27, 1993, and the plane upon inspection by a UN military

746 Baev, ‘Civil wars in Georgia: corruption breeds violence’, op.cit., p. 139.
747 Author’s interview at the Russian Duma, 27th March, 2008.
748 As one commentator wrote, initially Russia wanted to avoid separatism by not supporting Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but its support for Georgia, on the contrary to what was planned, led to separatism and discontent in the North Caucasus. On many occasions the CCMP called on the governments of the North Caucasus to denounce the Russian position on Abkhazia. See Petr Akopov, ‘Kavkaz: Trudnie ispitaniya rossiyskoy politiki’, Rossiyskie Vestsi, 06 October, 1992.
749 Retaliation in self-defence in Russian peacekeeping activities should be differentiated from acts of assistance to the conflict parties. Both Russian minister of defence and Russian colonels in the the region had from the very early days of violence in Abkhazia warned that Russian peacekeepers and military bases would retaliate to any attacks. There were cases of pure reprisals by the Russian military against mostly Georgian attacks. See P. Felgenhauer, Segodnya, 21 September, 1993.
observer was established to belong to the Russian air force and the pilot to be a major in the Air Forces. In April, June and July 1993, when Abkhaz attacks were renewed, the Georgian Government claimed that MI 24 helicopters, SU-25s and some 500 Russian advisors were involved on the Abkhaz side. Interestingly, this was not denied by the foreign minister Kozyrev. In response, Georgia refused the Russian defence minister Grachev’s plan to deploy two Russian divisions and one brigade as peacekeeping forces. However, as Roy Allison puts it, ‘even without this level of Russian commitment, the effect of Russian mediation was to confirm the Georgian defeat and retreat from Abkhazia’.

**d) Cease-fire**

On 27th July 1993, amidst heavy fighting around Sukhumi, Ochamchire and Tkvarcheli regions of Abkhazia, a fragile cease-fire was reached in Sochi by Russia’s pressure and mediation. The Sochi agreement provided for the withdrawal of the Georgian army from Abkhazia and mutual demilitarisation by the belligerents, to be followed by the return of a ‘legal government’. Russia undertook the role of guarantor of the agreement. In early August, Georgia slowly removed heavy military equipment from the zone of conflict to the port of Poti and from there further to the Black Sea coast. However, the implementation of the disarmament was not carried out by the Abkhaz forces resulting in military imbalance. Once again, Russia’s monitoring of the compliance of the agreement seemed to be assymetric and raised doubts on its partiality. The failure to monitor the cease-fire duely was also a result of Russia’s incapacity as a peacekeeper.

Although thousands of civilians returned to Sukhumi, the cease-fire led to widespread disappointment among the population of Georgia, enabling the ousted President Gamsakhurdia and his supporters to re-emerge in Western Mingrelia to ‘rescue’ Georgia. After Gamsakhurdia’s adherents launched an offensive against the Georgian Government troops in Samtredi on 15th September 1993, the Abkhaz forces taking advantage of this

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752 Ibid.
758 Moderates like Kozyrev had argued that overall weakness of the executive and existence of dual power centres in Russia (Pro-status quo executive and revisionist parliament supporting Abkhazia), rather than Russia’s impartiality or neo-imperialism was the main cause of the failure to monitor the cease-fire. See Andrei Kozyrev, ‘Polgoda nazad Rutskoi skazal mnie: ‘Ya ikh nenavizhu, etikh krasno-korichnevikh’, Izvestiya, 8 October 1993.
window of opportunity started an offensive against the Georgian forces. The Abkhaz side justified their action on Georgia’s failure to achieve a complete withdrawal of its weapons and troops from the conflict zone. On September 17, Russian peacekeepers returned to Georgian forces the parts taken from their artillery pieces pursuant to the cease-fire agreement. The Russian Government seemed surprised by the Abkhaz breach of the cease-fire and denounced Sukhumi for it. It called on the Abkhaz authorities to stop the offensive and human rights violations at once, and supported UNSC resolutions condemning them. Russia applied sanctions on Abkhazia, cut off electricity and phone lines and closed its border on the Psou river. The Russian MFA meanwhile criticised Georgia for refusing to negotiate. The Abkhaz forces drove the Georgian army from Abkhazia and captured Sukhumi on 27th September. Appeals by Shevardnadze to Russia as a guarantor of the Sochi agreement to restore the status-quo went unanswered. Grachev refused to use the Russian troops on the ground to stop the Abkhaz offensive. According to Lakoba, had the Russian troops tried to stop the Abkhaz offensive, this would have led to fighting between them and the Abkhaz/North Caucasian forces.

e) Civil war and acquiesce to CIS membership

The consequence for Georgia was dramatic, the state was on the verge of collapse, and civil war continued. Zviadist offensive was continuing in Mingrelia, whose adherents had in early October captured Poti and blocked railway and food supplies to Tbilisi. At this stage, Shevardnadze appealed to Moscow for support to both end the violence in Abkhazia and fight the Zviadists. On October 19, 1993, Grachev responded stating that Russia could not offer military assistance to Georgia since it was not part of the CIS and added that any other action might be interpreted as interference in the domestic affairs of the state. Russia hinted at its previously set conditions for any support: Georgia’s accession to the CIS, Russian military bases and deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the Abkhaz conflict zone. Once the Georgian Parliament endorsed CIS membership on 8th October, Russia sent troops to put down the insurgency in Mingrelia and protect the main railway lines. On 9th October, a Georgian-Russian agreement was signed on the status of Russian troops in Georgia, which also gave Russia joint use of all Georgian ports and airfields. Further on February 3, 1994 Yeltsin and Shevardnadze signed a treaty of friendship, cooperation and good neighbourhood.

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760 See Alexei Zverev, op. cit.
761 Ibid.
relations. The treaty also allowed Russia to establish three military bases in Georgia for a twenty-five period. According to the friendship and cooperation treaty between Georgia and Russia on 3 February 1994, Russia declared its support for Georgia’s territorial integrity, but Yeltsin called for a special status for both Abkhazia and South Ossetia in a new Georgian constitution. The Russian parliament however, criticising President Yeltsin’s move, refused to ratify the treaty on the grounds that it provided support to one side of an ongoing conflict; the Duma drew attention to article 3 of the agreement stipulating Russian assistance to improve Georgia’s armed forces, including transfer of weapons and equipment. The committee on CIS affairs argued that the agreement could destabilise the situation in the Caucasus whole, because it encouraged Georgia’s use of force. Under the agreement Russia would undertake to close its borders for preventing volunteers from the North Caucasus entering Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The 3 February statement by the Duma objected to the treaty on the grounds that 1) Georgia had unilaterally infringed international agreements on the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict; 2) Georgian aggression against Abkhazia was continuing, and to conclude a treaty with a warring country was to abet aggression; 3) the treaty would provoke negative reactions in the North Caucasus, in Russia as a whole and in all the countries inhabited by the Circassian diaspora; 4) the treaty provided for assistance in the formation of Georgian armed forces, their equipment and the purchase of military hardware and technology, which contravened the law.

On 1 December 1993, the first round of talks between Georgia and Abkhazia under UN auspices and with Russia as facilitator, ended in Geneva with the signing of a memorandum of understanding. Both sides agreed not to use force or the threat of force for the period of negotiations, to exchange prisoners and create conditions for the voluntary and safe return of refugees. After the signing of the December 1 memorandum, Abkhazia seemed to have made concessions on the issue of return of refugees, and Russia partially lifted the sanctions against it imposed after the latter’s breach of the Sochi accord. However, the subsequent developments showed the unwillingness of Abkhaz authorities to implement the pledge. On 10 March, while Shevardnadze was in the United States, the Georgian parliament dismissed the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia, annulling all its decisions. The Abkhazian Supreme Soviet

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765 At the time the Georgian Government had basically agreed to all conditions of Russia and the Russian ambassador to Georgia Valeriy Abdadze had formulated the relations as ‘Georgia’s independence depends to a great extent on Russia’s position. Georgia will be independent if Russia wants it’. See Valeriy Abdadze Obshaya Gazeta, no 10, 24th September, 1993.
766 See Antonenko, op. cit., p. 219. See also Zverev, op.c it., p. 10.
immediately cancelled all the plans for the return of the refugees. At the end of March, fighting in Abkhazian Svaneti flared up again, and Russia issued an appeal to both sides to resume negotiations. Major breakthrough was reported on 4th April, 1994, when both sides with Russia’s mediation and UN/OSCE participation, signed the Moscow Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Both sides agreed on federal and confederative relations in the agreement. The declaration was accompanied by an agreement on the voluntary return of refugees and displaced people with the exception of those Georgians involved in war crimes. It further stipulated that Abkhazia would have its own constitution and legislation, as well as its national anthem, coat of arms and flag. The sides reached an agreement on joint powers in fields as foreign policy, foreign trade, border service and customs. However, it did not lead to any substantial rapprochement between the sides. The agreement had opposite interpretations in Tbilisi and Sukhumi: the Abkhaz side saw it as a step towards the recognition of both sides as equal and sovereign subjects delegating powers to each other. And Shevardnadze pointed out that contrary to Abkhaz claims, the statement of 4th April did not speak of Abkhazia as a subject of international law, nor did it contain any mention of confederal status for Abkhazia.

After Georgia’s consent to Russia’s conditions, the Kremlin mounted a blockade of Abkhazia in 1994 in order to pressure the Abkhaz government to compromise on the political status of the region. The embargo permitted the direct import of only food products, medical supplies, petroleum products and household items, and restricted the travel of men to Russia between the ages 16 and 60. Transport and postal links between Abkhazia and Russia were cancelled and Russia refused to recognise Soviet passports from people with Abkhazian resident status, phone lines were cut off. This led to softening in the Abkhaz position and abandonment of its insistence on full independence in the Moscow talks in November 1994. Later, Georgia’s support to Russia during the Chechen war led to the adoption of a more institutionalised embargo on Abkhazia at the CIS level on January 31, 1996. However,
Russia’s pressure failed to produce any tangible results partly because of inconsistency in Russia itself; the Russian parliament and North Caucasus elites still sympathised with Abkhazia and defied the embargo, the blockade was never implemented in a strict sense of the word and was challenged by cross-border trade with Georgia proper through smuggling chains involving Russian, Georgian and Abkhaz officers. Abkhazia had signed agreements with most of the North Caucasus republics to avoid isolation, and in 1997 a year after the launch of the embargo, agricultural products from Abkhazia were exported to Russia.

Another factor worth considering is that Russia had seriously overestimated its resources in the Abkhaz conflict. In July 1994, as the Russian officials pressured the Abkhaz to accept the return of Georgian IDPs to the Gali region, the Abkhaz authorities, insisting on a gradual return, threatened the Russian peacekeeping forces who were to assist the return of the IDPs, and in September, the Abkhaz forces entered the security zone, forcing the Russian peacekeepers to retreat. In early July, the Abkhaz leader Ardzinba refused to meet Kozyrev during the latter’s visit to the conflict zone, bringing sharp criticism from the Russian MFA. On 25 August, the Russian peacekeepers set up road-blocks and briefly disarmed the Abkhaz police in Gudauta after a reported shooting at a Russian military sanatorium. Throughout the period, the Abkhaz repeatedly defied the Russian peace-keepers on the issues of return of IDPs. In mid-September, the Abkhaz and Russian peacekeepers were on the brink of open hostilities because of a mass crossing of Georgian refugees, due to start on 14th September. The Abkhaz mobilised their tanks and anti-aircraft forces and moved them into the neutral zone, leading to the cancellation of the planned crossing. Throughout that period, Moscow pressured Tbilisi to accept a federal model within an asymmetric federation and repeatedly stated that Abkhazia had no chance of becoming an independent state or subject of the Russian Federation.

The presence of CIS peacekeepers in Abkhazia has made a new large-scale war improbable. It has played a complimentary role to the UNOMIG whose proper functioning required the peacekeepers. However, it has been far from being impartial and has tended to consolidate the status-quo in the region. Russia’s primary concern in peacekeeping has been preventing a

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780 See Zverev, op. cit., p. 11.
resumption of armed conflict, and it has been unwilling to transform the mandate of the PKF into peace enforcement. The impartiality has to a certain extent owed to its incapacity to enforce peace, but also to the dubious policies and intentions of Moscow in the region. The CISPKF has on certain occasions done nothing to safeguard the Georgian returnees to Abkhazia. The armed clashes in the Gali region in 1998 demonstrated that the PKF could not maintain law and order in the area of its responsibility. In the 1998 crisis, the Russian Government refused to allow the peacekeepers to intervene to protect the Georgian population, although both sides were prevented from bringing heavy weapons into the security zone.\textsuperscript{781} Thus, the peacekeeping has had a basic character of keeping the sides apart.\textsuperscript{782}

3.2.2. Russian policies under Putin administration

As mentioned elsewhere in this study, under President Putin, Russia’s policies towards the conflict have been better organised and coordinated, so that one can speak of Russia as a single actor. With the centralisation of power and strengthening of state institutions, competing bureaucracies have been marginalised and policies have uniformly been carried out by the Kremlin.

Russia’s commitment to Georgia’s territorial integrity gradually shifted and eroded towards the end of Putin’s term. One of the first steps of President Putin in 1999 was to cancel the trade, transport and travel embargo of 1996. This was conditioned by a number of factors; firstly, 1999 saw a gradual deterioration in the Georgian-Russian relations, as Tbilisi refused its assistance to Russia during the Chechen campaign and was accused by Moscow of hosting Chechen terrorists in the Pankisi Gorge.\textsuperscript{783} Moreover, the Georgian elite convinced that Moscow was not intent on resolving the conflict, sought outside support, appealing to NATO and the US for strategic cooperation. Russian-Georgian relations deteriorated further during the incursion of Chechen fighters and Georgian security forces into the Kodori gorge in 2001. Accordingly, Russia backed the Abkhaz demand for the withdrawal of Georgian forces from Kodori and carried out air strikes on the area. A small number of Russian troops were deployed into the gorge as well, until in February 2002 Georgian troops withdrew. The Russian MFA has continuously raised concern over the issue of Georgian deployment in the Kodori gorge, regarding it as a violation of the 1994, May 14, Moscow agreement.

\textsuperscript{781} See ‘Abkhaz expel Georgian Guerrillas from Gali’, \textit{RFE/RL Newsline}, vol 2., No 100, 27\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998.

\textsuperscript{782} As Andrei Kortunov argues, Russian diplomacy and mediation, including peacekeeping was quite immature at the time the conflicts broke out. See Andrei Kortunov, ‘Relations between Former Soviet Republics’, \textit{Society}, vol. 30, No. 3, 1993, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{783} See Matveeva, op. cit., p. 421.
Moscow’s position on Georgia’s territorial sovereignty changed rapidly as the bilateral relations aggravated to an unprecedented level with the arrest of alleged Russian spies by Tbilisi in October 2006 and concrete steps by Tbilisi for NATO application. Back in early 2006 for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had assured Georgia that Russia would never consider recognising Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence or their incorporation into Russia. There were even numerous statements in 2004 during the temporary improvement of relations between Georgia and Russia that the latter would be prepared to assist Georgia restore its territorial sovereignty, by peaceful means albeit. Finally, the deterioration of bilateral relations to an unprecedented level, and certain external factors led to Russia’s recognition of the region’s independence.

In addition to the deterioration of bilateral relations, geopolitics played a role in the shift towards a more active engagement in Abkhazia. It has been stated elsewhere in this chapter, that when Putin came to power Western influence was already set in the South Caucasus: Georgia was aspiring towards NATO membership and received US backing at the OSCE Istanbul Summit for the the closure of the four Russian military bases in Georgia, Western companies were exploring the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea and a pipeline bypassing Russia was to be built. Geopolitical considerations became even graver with the appearance of US military trainers in Georgia to assist the Georgian army fight terrorism in the Pankisi gorge. US military presence and overall Western presence in the region was perceived to be aimed at limiting Russia’s influence in the region. Although initially Putin had no objection to the GTEP programme, the later developments in the South Ossetia crisis in August 2008 showed that, from the very onset the Russian government had seen it as US support and assistance for Georgia’s military intervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Back in April 2003, the Russian Duma had adopted a resolution condemning the ‘status of forces agreement’ between the US and Georgia. As concern grew in various Russian political circles over the US and European engagement in the South Caucasus, Abkhazia and South Ossetia increasingly became a buffer zone between Russia and a Western oriented Georgia. Furthermore, both regions became potential allies of Russia in a region of its strategic interests. Georgia’s further attempts to internationalise the conflict and replace the CISPKF

with a force of a Western oriented state as the Ukraine or the Baltic states was further seen as an attempt to contain Russia in her own region.

Russia’s strategic interest in not having any armed conflict in the South Caucasus has remained unchanged under Putin. As a result, ever since Saakashvili’s rise to power, Russian officials have repeatedly stated that Russia would not tolerate any solution involving use of force, since this would seemingly destabilise the Russian North Caucasus. Putin’s policies in contrast to the limited engagement of previous years have tended towards an active engagement in Abkhazia by various means and as a matter of fact created serious disincentives for Abkhazia’s reintegration into Georgia.

a) Naturalisation of residents

Starting in 1999 Russia pursued a state policy of granting en masse citizenship to Abkhazia’s population, so that in 2005 over 80% were holding Russian passports. Moscow justified its policies on purely humanitarian grounds about the residents of Abkhazia, hence to enable the residents to travel abroad and to better protect them socially. This interpretation however has from the very onset been flawed and the passportisation has gone far more beyond mere humanitarian gesture. Russia has continuously referred to its right for humanitarian intervention to defend its nationals, and Abkhaz nationals have voted in Russian Presidential elections. The Russian MFA has continuously invoked the clauses of the constitution that stipulate that Russia should protect its nationals no matter where they are. Besides, Russia had actually encouraged the population of the region to acquire Russian passports rather than the residents appealing to Moscow. In May 2005, Russian political parties visiting the Georgian populated Gali region, encouraged the population to acquire Russian passports, promising privileges. Taking into consideration the circumstances, it is not clear whether the naturalisation would produce any legal rights or obligations for Russia. The massive passportisation was a breach of international-legal norms and the act contradicts Georgia’s legislation. Georgia does not have dual citizenship, so if the population of Abkhazia are Russian nationals, on what legal grounds do they reside in Abkhazia then? The fact that Georgia will be facing Russian nationals in its disputed territory transformed the conflict’s legal essence. Since passportisation was carried out in contravention of existing laws, Russia’s right to protect its citizens is questionable as well. Why Russia has granted passports

788 In 2004 Russia adopted a new nationality law easing the procedure for applying for Russian citizenship. This was a lot more complicated under the previous law and President Putin had repeatedly refused to grant citizenship to Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s residents on the grounds that this would involve Russia in other countries’ conflicts. See ‘Zakon o grazhdanstve: uzhestocenie pravil na fone voiny v Abkhazii’, Kavkazkiy Uzel, 18 October, 2001.
to the populations of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains a further puzzle. Russia’s domestic security interests in the Caucasus might have urged the government to create a right of intervention into the region in case of Georgia’s military takeover. On the other hand, Russia might be interested in legitimising and stabilising its physical presence in the South Caucasus.

b) Alleged support to the de facto authorities

Russia has tended to provide both economic and political support to the Abkhaz authorities within the last few years. Support has been in the form of training military forces and providing military equipment as well as economic subsidies. Russia has also allegedly interfered in the domestic affairs of the province. It endorsed the presidential elections and the crucial referendum on Abkhazia’s status. The tenth anniversary celebrations of Abkhaz victory in the 1992-1993 war were attended by Russian governors with economic interests in Abkhazia and senior members of the Duma. Russia has also allegedly interfered in the domestic affairs of the province. It endorsed the presidential elections and the crucial referendum on Abkhazia’s status. The tenth anniversary celebrations of Abkhaz victory in the 1992-1993 war were attended by Russian governors with economic interests in Abkhazia and senior members of the Duma. Moreover, the staff in the local intelligence services and defence ministries in Abkhazia are headed by retired Russian generals and officers, and the political elite is closely linked with the Russian intelligence services. The Abkhaz prime minister in 2004-2005 Nodar Khashba came from the Russian ministry of emergency situations, and defence minister is a Russian general. Russia is the most important trading partner of Abkhazia. Its energy companies provide subsidised energy to the region, and its banks issue long-term credits. Abkhazia’s tax revenues are raised from trade along the Psou river. Apparently, most, if not all of the private investment is encouraged by the Russian state and this investment has rebuilt most of Abkhazia’s resort areas. Several Russian regions have concluded agreements with Abkhazia on touristic services, ship repair facilities, trade of timber and fruits. Abkhazia annually receives hundreds of thousands of Russian tourists. On 25th December, 2002, to avoid the isolation of Abkhazia, Russia reopened a rail link between Sochi and Sukhumi. In response to Georgian protests, Moscow claimed that this was a privately operated railroad over which it had no influence, though it is hardly imaginable in today’s Russia. Russia pays pensions in Abkhazia, which are higher than in Georgia, creating the incentive for the region to keep out of Tbilisi’s control. Russia’s economic activities in Abkhazia are essential for sustaining the de facto authorities there.

c) Active engagement

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790 In 2005 deputy chairman of Russian Duma participated in the celebrations in Sukhumi and openly stated ‘It is not only your, but also our, Russian holiday. Abkhazia was and remains the pride and hope of all Russia’, see ‘Abkhazia-eto geopoliticheskai realism’, IA Regnum, 30 September, 2005.


792 See Antonenko, op. cit., p. 245-249.

793 ‘Railway Route Between Russia and Breakaway Abkhazia Restored’, Civil Georgia, 26th December, 2002.
On March 6, 2008, Russia officially quitted the CIS embargo on the grounds it had not produced any result to resolve the conflict. The Foreign Ministry argued that ‘at the time, its purpose was to induce Abkhazia to take a more flexible position, primarily on the issue of the return of refugees, and most Georgian refugees have returned to the Gali region’. The statement indicated that further progress on the return of Georgian refugees is impeded by Georgia’s rejection of their registration. In the last few years, Russia had repeatedly stated that economic sanctions against Abkhazia are counterproductive and cause self-reliance and resistance. The sanctions had actually strengthened Abkhazia’s resistance and left it impoverished. Therefore, Russian officials have urged Tbilisi that lifting the economic sanctions would create favourable conditions for conflict resolution. Moreover, Russia based its decision on humanitarian and economic grounds.

On March 21, 2008, the Russian Duma adopted a resolution in which the president and government were called to recognise the two regions. With another decree in April 2008, President Putin gave instructions to the government to legalise relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia with the alleged purpose of taking care of the interests of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including Russian citizens. At the same time, in reaction to Georgia’s plans to mass 1,500 soldiers and police force in the upper Kodori Gorge area, Russia increased the number of peacekeepers in the Abkhaz conflict zone within the limits set by agreements. Foreign minister Lavrov warned that Russia was not preparing for war, but would retaliate against any attack. Throughout April, interaction between Tbilisi and Moscow was full of misunderstandings and accusations. On 20 April, a Russian jet shot down a Georgian unmanned spy plane flying over Abkhazia. Georgian interior ministry officials exposed the BBC video footage, which showed Russian troops deploying heavy military hardware in the breakaway region of Abkhazia. According to Georgia, ‘it proved the Russians were a fighting force, not just peacekeepers.’ In addition, in June 2008, Russia deployed unarmed railway forces to Abkhazia to repair the Abkhaz side of the railway. The Russian government received major criticism from the international community and from Tbilisi on

794 О выходе Российской Федерации из режима ограничений, установленных в 1996 году для Абхазии, at http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/648830C5AF867590C32574040046B653
796 Ibid.
799 ‘Russia moves to legalise ties with Abkhazia, South Ossetia’, Civil Georgia, 16th April, 2008.
800 Russia shot down Georgia drone, BBC News, 21st April, 208.
this, on the grounds that it had no mandate, whereas Moscow insisted on the humanitarian side of its action.

d) Attachment to the peace process

Russia’s approach to the peace process has been undermined by its perceived strategic interests in the region on the one hand, and on the other hand its incapacity to impose conditions upon Abkhazia. It has by and large endorsed all the peace initiatives, but it is difficult to judge how genuine its commitment to the peace process and leverage over Abkhazia has been. For example, on May 31, 2008, Russian Prime Minister Putin approved the Georgian plan of autonomy for Abkhazia, on condition that Abkhazia agrees to it. The plan was largely a reflection of the previous peace proposals Tbilisi had initiated.\footnote{‘Putin backs Abkhazia autonomy, Russian troops sent’, \textit{Reuters}, May 31, 2008.}

The strategy before the South Ossetia crisis was if the sides come to an agreement Russia will support and be a guarantor of it, but will not impose any deal upon Abkhazia. One major concern of the Russian Government that has remained unchanged over years is that any peace must be negotiated by Russia or include it as the main peacekeeper. Similarly, during the Boden initiative, Russia after hard negotiations within the Group of Friends of the Secretary General, conveyed its formal support to the Boden document and stated that it attempted to convince the Abkhaz side to accept it as a starting point for negotiations.\footnote{See Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, 10 July, 2002 and 14th October, 2002.} It meanwhile stated that it had no intention of pressuring the Abkhaz to start negotiations on the constitutional status of the region as long as there is dissent between Tbilisi and Moscow on key political questions.\footnote{See Coppieters, ‘The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict’, op. cit., pp. 203-208.} Thus seemingly, Moscow never supported the Boden initiative wholeheartedly, and in the UNSC 26th January, 2006 meeting, withheld support from defining Abkhazia’s status within Georgia and rejected the usual reference to the Boden paper in the final resolution. It declared that the Boden paper could no longer be basis for the negotiations.\footnote{See Vladimir Socor, ‘Moscow kills Boden paper, threatens to terminate UNOMIG in Georgia’, \textit{Eurasia Daily Monitor}, vol. 3, issue 26, 6th February, 2006.}

Russia has formally endorsed the UN led peace process, but has at times also offered its own mediation on the grounds that the latter is not effective. For example, in an effort to circumvent the UN led Geneva process, President Putin in January 2003 proposed a draft of measures, later known as the Sochi process, to unfreeze the relations between Tbilisi and Abkhazia. Establishing rail links between Sochi and Tbilisi via Abkhazia, renovation of the Inguri hydropower station servicing both sides, and upon Georgia’s insistence only, the return
of IDPs to Gali region were a part of the so called Sochi process. With the Sochi process, Russia in compliance with its perceived strategic interests again became the key mediator, pushing for the implementation of economic projects to avoid confrontation. President Putin once again supported Georgia’s territorial integrity, but failed to provide any assurance on the return of Georgian IDPs. Abkhazians insisted that the sides should first register those who had already returned to Gali district. Finally, the Sochi process collapsed because of lack of progress on basically all the issues that were in the package. Nevertheless, Russia unilaterally went ahead with its economic projects, raising questions on the overall objective of the parallel peace process.

Under Yeltsin, Russia did make certain efforts to impose the return of Georgian refugees and IDPs to Abkhazia, but this is no longer an issue for Moscow today. One of the beliefs in Russian political circles is that the return of Georgian IDPs would destabilise the region, since it would lead to redistribution of property. Russia therefore rejected outright the right for the return of Georgia’s refugees to Abkhazia in German Foreign Minister Steinmeier’s peace plan, insisting that this can happen only at the end of the whole process, once the sides have restored confidence. Instead, for its domestic security concerns, Russia has been insisting that Georgia should sign a binding agreement on non-use of force with Abkhazia. President Medvedev put it as a precondition for Steinmeier’s plan in 2008. Georgia has refused to sign it, on the grounds that the signatories are not clear, and has further argued that Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia are incapable of acting as guarantors of a non-use-force agreement. Tbilisi also demanded firm guarantees and timeframe for the return of refugees.

Georgia has been raising the issue of border monitoring and has requested to be allowed to establish joint checkpoints on the customs points of Abkhazia. This however was rejected by Russia. During the second Russian intervention in Chechnya, Georgia had agreed to Russian calls for joint control of the Chechen sector of the Russian-Georgian border and Georgia requested the reciprocity. The Georgian Government believed that presence of customs officers and border guards would tackle the problem of smuggling. The issue has exacerbated Georgia’s accusations of Russia’s partiality.

805 See Antonenko, op. cit., p. 242.
As the Georgian Government got convinced that Russia is in no way intent on facilitating the resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, it increasingly lobbied for the internationalisation of the peacekeeping format. In October 2002, the Georgian Parliament adopted a resolution calling for the withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping forces from Abkhazia. This has been seen by the Russian Government as an attempt by the West, primarily using Georgia, to weaken its influence in a region of its legitimate interests. Therefore, Russia has resisted all efforts to internationalise mediation, negotiation and peacekeeping in the conflict zones.

e) Involvement in the domestic affairs of the region

Russia’s engagement became more obvious during the 2004 ‘presidential’ elections in Abkhazia, when Moscow tried to shape the outcome of the elections for its own ends. The elections showed the extent to which Russia is interested in control and influence over Abkhazia and how limited its resources can be. Russia’s involvement, besides its recognition of the outcome, was also in contravention to its position as peacekeeper and mediator. It also defied the UNSC resolution 1255.809 The paradox is, as the crisis went on in Sukhumi, the Russian Foreign Ministry took part in the Geneva negotiations, formally supporting Georgia’s territorial sovereignty.

Russian political circles did their best in the elections to make sure that a pro-Moscow candidate is elected. Moscow intervened into the election process, supported at all levels Raul Khajimba, the last premier of Abkhazia under Ardzinba, and used economic leverage as opening the rail link and bus service between Sukhumi and Sochi. A group of Russian politicians, deputy prosecutor general, Duma members and popular singers publicly campaigned for Raul Khajimba. According to Antonenko, they even threatened to cut economic ties with Abkhazia in case Khajimba was not elected.810 The election results appeared in favour of another candidate Sergei Bagapsh, who had not spoken out against Russian influence over Abkhazia, but was known to be independent-minded. A crisis broke out when Khajimba refused to accept the election results, and Russia stepped in and primarily tried to delegitimize Bagapsh, but then mediated between the two candidates. Also, Russia applied economic leverage. The governor of the Krasnodar region and adviser to the Russian Prime Minister, Bukaev repeatedly threatened to close the border in case Bagapsh went forward with his inauguration. Train service was suspended between

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809 For a detailed review of Russia’s engagement, see Anatoliy Gordienko, Natalia Melikova, ‘Samoprovozglashenniy Falstart’, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 5th October, 2004. UNSC Resolution 1255 considered the holding of self-styled elections in Abkhazia unacceptable.

Sochi and Sukhumi, and border crossing was restricted. Final compromise was reached in December 2004 as Bagapsh was stepped forward as ‘president’ and Khajimba as ‘vice-president’.

In many cases, Russia’s policies have created serious disincentives and served as a major obstacle for any conflict resolution. Under the current circumstances, it is only natural that Abkhazia keeps the conflict unresolved. All these measures indicate that Russia is not interested in a durable resolution of the conflict, and preservation of the post-armed conflict status-quo suits it the best. The Kremlin has successfully securitised the status-quo in Georgia’s both regions and sees any internationalisation of the peace process as a threat. The situation has benefitted both Russia and Abkhazia, as Russian presence and influence in the South Caucasus has increasingly strengthened, while Abkhazia has consolidated de-facto statehood. Russia’s policy has also prevented a further destabilisation of its North Caucasus. Now that Abkhazia’s independence has been recognised by Russia, the current situation is leading to Abkhazia becoming an associated member of the Russian Federation. Considering that the Russian rouble is used as the currency in Abkhazia and major trade is with Russia, most residents are its nationals and the political elite is integrated with various institutions in Moscow, Abkhazia is currently a de facto continuation of the Krasnodar province, despite repeated statements by the Abkhaz leader Bagapsh, that Abkhazia does not consider incorporation into Russia. The current picture contradicts the original agenda and principles of Abkhaz national movement in early 1990s and the once political sovereignty seeking elite has now de facto become an agent of Moscow in the region’. Despite the fact that Abkhazia, unlike South Ossetia has proven to express a stronger political will vis-à-vis Moscow at times, it is in fact economically and socially very vulnerable towards any Russian pressure.

4.3. Russia’s policies towards the Georgian-Ossetian conflict

Russia under Yeltsin had a less active engagement in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict than in the Georgian-Abkhaz one. Bearing in mind that the conflict broke out just at a time when Russia was experiencing its identity crisis, it did not have a clear strategy on how to react. On the other hand, the relative stability in the region since signing the cease-fire agreement between the parties in Dagomys in 1992 did not require that much third party intervention. During the armed phase of the conflict, Russia’s involvement in South Ossetia took place mainly through the engagement of North Ossetia and the Russian Duma, in particular its speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and deputy speaker Alexander Rutskoi. North Ossetian

Abkhaz officials have since the escalation of the conflict always stressed that Abkhazia is not Russia’s pawn and its sovereignty is non-negotiable with anybody including Russia. See Nicu Popescu, ‘Abkhaziya i Yuzhnaya Ossetiya: nezavisimost ili vizhivanie?’, op. cit., p. 51.
leadership and society, too, expressed solidarity with their ethnic kin, providing both military and humanitarian support. Moreover, with the influx of a large number of refugees in North Ossetia, its authorities pressed Moscow for a more active engagement in the conflict and pressure on Georgia. On 21st May, 1992, the North Ossetian Parliament passed a resolution calling upon Moscow to ‘use force to stop genocide’. At the initial stage, North Ossetia carried on lobbying for South Ossetia in Moscow and managed to get the sympathy of the Russian Duma as well as the military. The Duma chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov was the key figure who advocated South Ossetia’s incorporation into the Russian Federation, although the appeal was repeatedly rejected.

In March 1992, Shevardnadze visited Tskhinvali and Vladikavkaz and secured a cease-fire. However, Shevardnadze was unable to control the paramilitary forces making the Georgian army, and artillery attacks on Tskhinvali restarted in April, 1992. As Ossetian refugees on a bus to Vladikavkaz were massacred in May, this caused rage in North Ossetia and the Russian public as well. The Russian Duma speaker threatened Georgia with action, and in June 1992, Russian troops were relocated to North Ossetia from other parts of the federation. The same month the North Ossetian Government cut off a pipeline carrying natural gas from Russia to Georgia and made strong lobbying efforts in Moscow. In addition to North Ossetia, the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus sent in fighter battalions. Finally, on 22nd June 1992, Georgia signed a cease-fire with South Ossetia, while Russia and North Ossetia became the guarantors. Three weeks later, in compliance with the treaty, joint peacekeeping force of Georgian, Russian and North and South Ossetian peacekeepers were deployed to monitor the cease-fire, withdrawal of armed units, to dissolve self-defence units and ensure security in the region.

During Yeltsin’s term, certain leverage was applied by Moscow on South Ossetia in 1994-1996 to come to terms with Georgia; the Russian Government unilaterally rejected South Ossetia’s appeal for unification with North Ossetia or independence. Such a move was seen to set precedent for secession, and a unified Ossetia-Alania might become a bigger headache for Russia. However, Tbilisi’s intransigence towards South Ossetia’s demand for more rights, and the fact that all three parties during Shevardnadze’s term enjoyed benefits from the

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contraband trade made the status-quo favourable to Russia.\textsuperscript{817} Moscow took some half-hearted measures for the resolution of the conflict such as the 1996 and 2000 agreements. In May 1996, ‘Memorandum on measures for providing security and strengthening mutual trust’ was signed and on 3\textsuperscript{rd} December, 2000 the Russian-Georgian agreement on cooperation in restoring the economy in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and on the return of refugees was signed.\textsuperscript{818} In June 2004, Russia’s Constitutional Court responded to an inquiry about the legality of South Ossetia’s appeal for incorporation into the Russian Federation, rejecting it, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated its official stance that it respects Georgia’s territorial sovereignty. It stressed that the status of South Ossetia should be resolved within the framework of the ongoing Russian-Georgian-Ossetian peace talks.\textsuperscript{819} In July 2004, at the CIS Summit, President Putin assured to his Georgian counterpart that Russia supports Georgia’s territorial integrity.\textsuperscript{820} Moreover, in 2005, at the OSCE Lyublyana Summit, Moscow gave consent to Tbilisi’s peace initiative of three stages: demilitarisation of Tskhinvali, socio-economic rehabilitation of the region and finally political regulation, hence search for a favourable solution. Foreign minister Lavrov stated that Russian support was achieved by direct negotiations, leading to rapprochement of Georgia’s and Russia’s positions. Later, however, Moscow failed to acquire the support of the South Ossetian leadership, which raised doubts over Russia’s capacity in the conflict. Like in Abkhazia, until the South Ossetia crisis, successive Russian presidents have stated that if the sides come to an agreement and preferably on confederative status, Russia will become the guarantor of it.

4.3.1. Deterioration of relations in light of Georgia’s reintegration attempts

President Saakashvili linked his political destiny close to the resolution of the conflict, causing Russia’s security concerns to deteriorate. As the Georgian Government in 2004 grew increasingly impatient with the status-quo and believed that the Ajarian scenario was repeatable in South Ossetia, President Putin and other Russian officials repeatedly warned Georgia over use of force and potential retaliation, making it clear that Russia would not remain indifferent to the fate of its nationals. Through May to August 2004, the Georgian Government tried to solve the conflict by a mixture of humanitarian offensive and military intimidation. In August some low intensive war broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia, as the latter bombarded Tskhinvali and tried to retake it. On 8 August, 2004 the

\textsuperscript{818} See \textit{Diplomatskiy vestnik}, 2001, No 2, pp. 43-44.
\textsuperscript{820} See ‘Saakashvili Upbeat After Talks with Putin’, \textit{Civil Georgia}, 10\textsuperscript{th} June, 2007.
Russian Duma unanimously criticised Georgia and said that due to the presence of Russian citizens in South Ossetia, ‘there appear to be circumstances that infringe upon Russian sovereignty’.821

First, in May Tbilisi with the purpose of putting an end to smuggling, established control posts in South Ossetia and blocked the delivery of goods from Russia to the region, cutting the primary source of income for the region’s inhabitants. At the same time, the Georgian interior ministry moved troops into the conflict zone, reserved for peacekeepers, and South Ossetian forces blocked the highway between Georgia and Russia. Tension grew between Georgia and Russia as well; Tbilisi accused Russia of supplying weapons to South Ossetians and Georgian interior ministry forces seized 300 unguided missiles for helicopters belonging to Russian peacekeepers.822 The Russian foreign and defence ministries condemned this, stating that a previous JCC agreement authorised the resupply shipment. In retaliation, the South Ossetian authorities detained some 50 Georgian peacekeepers in the Georgian-populated village of Vanati inside the South Ossetian zone of conflict. Only, after strong pressure from the US and EU, Saakashvili withdrew his troops above the allowed limit of 500 from the conflict zone.

It seems that the Georgian Government did not expect such an extent of Russia’s reaction and had believed that improvement in the bilateral relations in the first half of President Saakashvili’s term would lead to changes in Russia’s approach to the conflict resolution process. Therefore, previously President Saakashvili had described the conflict as an internal one, but once it became clear that Russia was intent on not indulging any use of force, he changed his strategy, stating ‘crisis in South Ossetia is not a problem between Georgians and Ossetians, this is a problem between Georgia and Russia’.823 Like in Abkhazia, Tbilisi got convinced that Russia will not facilitate the resolution of the conflict, and therefore internationalising peacekeeping in South Ossetia became the only available solution. In February, 2006 the Georgian Parliament adopted a resolution on the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from the conflict zone and called on the Government to take measures to replace the peacekeepers with an international force. The resolution characterised the performance of the JPKF as extremely negative and Russia’s policies as a permanent attempt to annex the region.824 Tbilisi argued that the peacekeepers in South Ossetia largely fail to meet their mandate to disarm armed formations and observe withdrawal of heavy military

equipment. The Russian MFA immediately responded, stating that the resolution contradicts the conditions of the Dagomys treaty; it made it clear that Russia had no intention of withdrawing its peacekeepers from South Ossetia, and on the contrary sees them as a stabilising factor for the North Caucasus. Like in Abkhazia, Georgia’s attempts to internationalise the mediation and peacekeeping in the conflict exacerbated further mistrust of Tbilisi in Moscow, seeing it as an effort by the West and US to drive Russia out of the region.

a) Alleged impartiality

The Georgian Government and international community have accused Russia of sustaining the de facto authorities in South Ossetia. Like in Abkhazia, the population of South Ossetia is overwhelmingly composed of Russian nationals and the region’s economic and social life is even more tightly integrated into Russia. With the closure of the Ergneti market in 2004 and restriction of movement between the two communities, South Ossetia has become fully dependent on Russia, its economy and social life are exclusively oriented towards North Ossetia. Russia has issued financial aid, and pays pensions to the residents. The Russian government has founded its financial and humanitarian assistance to the region by the Georgian-Russian bilateral agreement of December 3, 2000 and accused Georgia of never fulfilling its part of the agreement to contribute funds to South Ossetia's economic development. Russia has pledged investment and opened banks in Tskhinvali, while also financing the restoration of a road between Tskhinvali and Vladikavkaz. Moscow has also pledged to construct a separate gas pipeline to South Ossetia that would bypass the existing Georgian gas pipeline. Currently, the region receives its gas from Russia via Georgia. Key figures in the region as the leadership of security ministries are composed of active Russian intelligence officers of FSB. Defence minister and interior ministers and chief of intelligence of South Ossetia are all active Russian civil servants from various ministries. Georgia accuses Russia of providing military equipment including tanks, fuel and training by Russian army officers to South Ossetia in contravention of the Dagomys accord. The Russian commanders

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825 The Russian minister of foreign affairs had repeatedly stressed that withdrawal of the Russian peacekeepers needed to be evaluated in the context of overall security problems in the Caucasus region rather than in Georgia only. See Alla Alekseevna Yazikova, ‘Gruziya kak faktor stabilnosti dlya Severnogo Kavkaza’, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 27th February, 2006.
and general of the JPF have made statements sympathising with the de facto authorities.\textsuperscript{829} In 2006, as Tbilisi set up an alternative administration in the Georgian controlled part of the region, Russia warned Georgia and put efforts to undermine its legitimacy before international organisations.

\textit{b) Roki tunnel}

The Russian government has for various reasons not taken any measures to prevent the smuggling of goods through the Roki tunnel. Shortly after the September 2004 Beslan massacre, Russia closed the border on Georgia as an anti-terrorist measure, but kept the Roki tunnel open.\textsuperscript{830} Following Georgia’s closure of the Ergneti market, Russia preferred circumventing the blockade and increasing assistance to the region, ignoring Saakashvili’s proposal to develop a new market. Moscow has repeatedly refused to accept the Georgian contingent in the joint control of the Roki tunnel; the Foreign Ministry rejected calls by the US and EU for joint Georgian-Russian control over the Roki tunnel.\textsuperscript{831} The tunnel seemingly serves more as a non-controllable gateway of Russia to the region, and presence of Georgian checkpoints would put an end to both trade and arms delivery. Until the late August crisis, Russia’s position was that as long as the conflict remains unresolved, the population should be given the opportunity to trade with Russia.

\textit{c) Calls for Russia’s recognition of the region’s independence}

As Georgian-Russian relations aggravated throughout 2004 to 2008, the number of interest groups calling for Russia’s incorporation of South Ossetia grew.\textsuperscript{832} Some of them based their arguments on securing Russia’s southern flank, while others argued in power political terms. In March 2006, North Ossetia and South Ossetia held a joint cabinet session in Vladikavkaz, focusing on ways to boost economic integration between the two Ossetias. The sides discussed the possibility of building a highway that would link Vladikavkaz to the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali. Referring to Kosovo becoming a precedent, an aide to Russian Prime Minister Fradkov, allegedly told the cabinet session on the plans to merge the two Ossetias to be called Alania.\textsuperscript{833} Shortly afterwards, an all Ossetian assembly bringing together 500 ethnic Ossetians from 11 countries in Tskhinvali called on the Russian Government to

\textsuperscript{829} When the commander of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in South Ossetia was asked whether the population of South Ossetia took part in smuggling, the response was ‘what else should they live on?’, causing anger in Tbilisi, see Alla Alekseevna Yazikova, ‘Gruziya kak faktor stabilnosti dlya Severnogo Kavkaza’, \textit{Nezavisimaya Gazeta}, 27th February, 2006.

\textsuperscript{830} See ‘Georgia: avoiding war in South Ossetia’, op. cit. p. 17


recognise the region’s independence. The president of North Ossetia Teimuraz Mamsurov has also publicly advocated the unification of the two regions.

d) Incapacity

Until the South Ossetia crisis, Russia had comparatively larger capacity for conflict resolution in the current conflict than either in MK or in Abkhazia. This conflict tended to be less of ethnic character, and the scale of fighting had been less than in either of the conflicts. Therefore, societal reconciliation seemed to be viable. This was particularly true during Yeltsin’s term, when the South Ossetian political elite and society did not categorically rule out integration with Georgia. In fact, until the closure of the Ergneti market and crisis of 2004, communication between the two communities had had a tremendous effect upon the trust-building process. As mentioned elsewhere, the failure to utilise this potential for the conflict resolution has been partly due to Russia’s inaction as the major mediator and peacekeeper, but also partly to Georgia’s failure to eliminate the causes of the conflict and emphasise trust-building more.

The Ossetian case namely, demonstrates a major contradiction in Moscow’s approach to the South Caucasus. On the one hand, the Russian government has reiterated that if the parties come to an agreement it will support and act as a guarantor, but in the mean time, Russia has through its support to South Ossetia generated disincentives for the peace process. How such tactics suit Russia’s proclaimed strategic interests of long-term stability in the South Caucasus is not clear.

4.3.3. South Ossetia crisis and Russia’s recognition of both regions’ independence

a) Background

Fighting and sabotage in South Ossetia had become more intensive since the last few years, and finally culminated in the August war of 2008. The first skirmishes occurred in June and July 2008, when the South Ossetian capital was subjected to grenade launchers and machine guns. In response, the South Ossetian capital in July had evacuated women, children and the elderly from Tskhinvali to North Ossetia. Prior to that, on July 28th the Ossetian forces had attempted to regain control of the Sarabuk heights, which Georgian forces had occupied on 3rd July by removing a post of the Joint Peacekeeping Force deployed in the conflict zone.

The Russian Government and military had become more alert and sensitive to developments in South Ossetia after the 2004 incident. On the eve of the crisis Moscow had sent a number of warning messages to Tbilisi allegedly with the purpose of deterrence. On 7-8 July, 2008 following the detainment of four Georgian servicemen by the South Ossetian authorities,

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834 ‘Assembly in Tskhinvali Calls on Russia to Recognize S.Ossetia’, Civil Georgia, 27 September, 2007
Tbilisi threatened to launch military action to secure their release. In response, Russian military aircraft conducted a brief flight over South Ossetia to ‘cool hot heads’ in Tbilisi and warn against military intrusion.\textsuperscript{836} Such incidents had acquired a regular character in Georgian-Russian relations since the 2004 crisis.

Map 5 JPKF Map of Georgian controlled areas in South Ossetia


\textbf{b) Outbreak of fighting in South Ossetia}

In July and August, Georgian forces in the Georgian controlled areas of South Ossetia had been subject to increased provocations including shelling of Georgian villages. Fighting broke out on 5\textsuperscript{th} August between villages in South Ossetia and Georgia proper, leading to the death of six Ossetians and five Georgians. Both sides accused each other of initiating the hostilities, and the peacekeeping forces largely failed to prevent them. Although, on 5\textsuperscript{th} August both sides agreed to hold meetings in the presence of the Russian chief negotiator Yuri Popov, a

\textsuperscript{836} ‘Russia confirms its aircraft intruded into Georgia’, \textit{Civil Georgia}, 10\textsuperscript{th} July, 2008.
day later the South Ossetian side refused to participate in the talks, demanding a JCC session instead. Tbilisi had withdrawn from the JCC in March, demanding the format to include the EU, the OSCE and the Provisional Administrative Entity of South Ossetia led by Sanokoyev. Meanwhile, the Georgian government appeared to have concentrated a significant number of troops and equipment to the South Ossetian border in early August allegedly to provide support for the exchange of fire with South Ossetian formations. Research by the International Institute for Strategic Studies shows Georgia had massed about 12,000 troops and 75 tanks on the South Ossetian border by 7th August. On the night of 6/7 August, the Russian peacekeeping forces identified eight aircraft heading to South Ossetia from Georgia. Georgian military observers left the headquarters of the joint Russian-Georgian peacekeeping forces and all control points where they should be stationed according to the existing agreements. As attempts for a cease-fire failed, Georgian president later on the 7th August announced that Georgian villages were being shelled, and vowed to restore Tbilisi's control and constitutional order by force. President Saakashvili said the objective was to curb the attacks and the Russian build up of troops in the region, and with the slogan ‘we have to save our country’ ordered a full-scale mobilisation of military reservists. In the night of 7th to 8th August, Georgian forces began a major assault on Tskhinvali, leading to a fierce battle with Ossetian militia and the Russian peacekeeping battalion, which killed 15 peacekeepers. Georgia meanwhile officially informed the peacekeeping forces that it was launching military actions in South Ossetia.

c) Russia’s response

Russia’s response to Georgia’s intrusion was both harsh and humiliating. On 8th August, Russia sent both military aircraft and tanks to South Ossetia via the Roki tunnel. Russian Air Force launched strikes on Georgia's logistical infrastructure, and special units prevented Georgian forces from blowing up the Roki Tunnel, which could have hindered the delivery of reinforcements to South Ossetia. On 9th August, Russian military planes bombarded the Georgian port Poti and its military base in Senaki as well as the military airport in Kutaisi. Fierce fighting took place on 9th August between Georgian forces and Russian and Ossetian

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837 ‘Russia’s rapid reaction’, *IISS Strategic Comments*, vol. 14, issue 07, September, 2008, Georgia crisis special issue.
839 Ibid.
840 ‘Georgia decided to restore constitutional order’, *Civil Georgia*, 08 August, 2008.
forces in Tskhinvali. 843 By the end of 10th August South Ossetia was completely cleared of Georgian forces, who retreated to Gori.844 In Gori, Russian air force launched bombings on military and government positions, as well as residential buildings leaving 60 people dead, mainly civilians. Georgia described Russia’s reaction as a full-scale military invasion. The Russian air force meanwhile bombed the Georgian aircraft factory in Zugdidi, and Black Sea Fleet reached Georgian waters. On 10th of August, the Fleet sank one Georgian patroller and blockaded Georgia’s coast in Abkhazia on the grounds that Georgian ships had violated the security zone of the Fleet and therefore, the action was in accordance with international law.845 Following this, the remaining Georgian ships withdrew to a nearby harbor. Russian air force also bombed the outskirts of Tbilisi as well as its international airport. Despite international efforts cease-fire could not be reached, and on 11th August, Georgian forces renewed bombardment of South Ossetia. On 13th August, Russian units moved into Gori and stayed there until the 22nd August, allegedly to remove the military hardware and ammunition from an arms depot. Russian troop advancement into inner Georgia continued, allegedly to destroy the potential military units from which Georgia might re-launch attacks against South Ossetia.846 On 14th August, Russian ground forces entered the port city of Poti and sank several Georgian naval vessels in the harbour.

Amidst fierce fighting a second front was opened in Abkhazia on 9th August, where Russia deployed additional forces from the North Caucasus. On 10th August, Georgian police units in the Kodori gorge that were deployed in the summer of 2006 in breach of the 1994 Moscow agreement came under attack from Abkhaz forces and Russian fighter jets.


d) Humanitarian dimension

Overall, the Ossetian forces claimed 2000 deaths. UNHCR confirmed that about 2,400 people, mostly Georgians fled South Ossetia to other parts of Georgia, while 4000 people fled to Russia. Many Georgian villages in South Ossetia were burnt down. According to HRW, there were documented cases of arbitrary detention, forced labour, torture and extrajudicial executions of Georgian civilians and soldiers by the South Ossetian forces. In its 17 August report, HRW described how armed South Ossetian militias attacked Georgian cars and

844 See Mikhail Barabanov, op.cit.
846 See Mikhail Barabanov, op.cit.
kidnapped civilians as people tried to flee in response to militia attacks on their homes following the Russian advance into the area.847

e) Cease fire

On the 10th of August, the Georgian government called for a cease-fire, while shelling of Georgian cities continued on the grounds that Georgian forces were still firing at the Russian forces and South Ossetian troops in Tskhinvali. The European Union and the United States expressed willingness to send a joint delegation to try and negotiate a ceasefire in early August. Russia, however, ruled out peace talks with Georgia until the latter withdrew from South Ossetia and signed a legally binding pact renouncing use of force against South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The UNSC failed to agree on the wording of a statement calling for a cease-fire; UK, France and the US blamed Russia, while Moscow insisted the crisis was on Georgia to blame. Finally, on 12th August, Russia and Georgia agreed to a six point peace plan proposed by the French President. Initially, the plan envisaged a return to the pre 6th August status-quo for both sides, but once Russia recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s independence on the 26th August, the situation changed. The international community was compelled to develop a new peace plan on 8th September envisioning Russia’s withdrawal from the security zones and check points in Georgian territory excluding the two regions.848 Meanwhile, on 9 September 2008, Russia officially announced that its troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia would be considered foreign troops stationed in independent states under bilateral agreements. Moreover, in contravention to the widespread expectation that the EU Observer Mission’s mandate would also be envisaged for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia insisted that this was outside the agreement.849

Despite numerous calls for a quick withdrawal from Georgia, Russian troops occupied some parts of Georgia proper for about two more months. In late August, some troops were withdrawn, but Russian troops and checkpoints remained near Gori and Poti, as well as in the so called security zones around Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It referred to its troops in Georgia’s Black Sea port of Poti and in a seven-kilometre buffer zone around the breakaway states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as peacekeepers. Withdrawal from Georgia was only completed when control was handed over to an EU observer mission on 9 October.

f) motivation of Russian behaviour

848 ‘A deal for now: Europe shores up the Russian-Georgian cease-fire agreement’, The Economist, 9th September, 2008.
The Russian government accommodated its intervention within a humanitarian context: peace enforcement to protect its peacekeepers and humanitarian intervention to rescue the South Ossetian people from Georgian aggression. Russia claimed to have acted in response to an attack on its peacekeepers and on South Ossetian civilians, which it called ‘genocide’ by Georgian forces.\(^{850}\) Moscow invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter and addressed a special note to the UN Security Council before acting. It referred to its rights and obligations as an internationally agreed peacekeeping force.\(^{851}\) It also characterised its intrusion as humanitarian intervention to stop ethnic cleansing and genocide in a zone of exclusive responsibility established by the Dagomys cease-fire treaty. At the very beginning of the conflict, President Medvedev stated that his country’s goal was to push Georgia into peace and that he had had no other alternative, but to send in reinforcements to prevent further casualties among the peacekeepers and civilians.\(^{852}\) Thus, the Kremlin’s official statements all indicated its security and humanitarian concerns as the primary driving force behind intervention. That is partly true; given the volatility of the North Caucasus, Russia’s security considerations could not be underestimated, and Russia destroyed the infrastructure of the Georgian army in order to make the Georgian side less capable of making an effort at a military solution in the future. Had Russia failed to protect its peacekeepers and let Georgia off, this could produce both domestic and external implications for Russia. It would have been seen as a precedent that Georgia would follow in Abkhazia, and it would recognise Russia’s weakened position in the CIS. However, motivation of Russia’s intervention was far more complex than what Russian officials claim a simple ‘humanitarian desire’ to rescue South Ossetian civilians from Georgian aggression. It was deeply rooted in power-political objectives. These included Russia’s reassertion as a great power and sending a message to the West, that it still counts and it should not have been ignored over Kosovo;\(^{853}\) punishing Georgia for rapprochement with the US and its potential NATO membership; undermining the Caucasus as a transit route for the energy pipelines; sending a message to the other potentially pro-western CIS states as the Ukraine and Azerbaijan.

Russia’s perception of the West, in particular the US and its great power position played a key role. Confrontations escalated between the US/Europe and Russia over Kosovo’s unilateral


\(^{852}\) See ‘Zayavlenie prezidenta Rossii Dmitriya Medvedeva v svyazi s situaciiy v Yuzhnnoj Ossetii’, *Vremya*, No 143, 8th August, 2008.

\(^{853}\) In fact, Russia’s envoy to the UN did reiterate at the UNSC the linkage between Kosovo and Russia’s intervention, ‘…..The call to respect ‘territorial integrity’ is invoked in support of a U.S. ally - Georgia - but deliberately overlooked in the case of a Russian ally - Serbia’, see Andrew Reding, ‘That Caucasus Hypocrisy’, *The Globe and Mail*, August, 28.
declaration of independence and promises of NATO membership action plans for Georgia and Ukraine. The Russian elite regarded its response in South Ossetia as some form of recovery as a great power and regional hegemon as well as resistance to US unipolarism and penetration into the CIS. As Russia had lacked resources in the last decade, it had hardly been able to prevent certain undesired effects that were seen harmful to its perceived interests. Its political elite had insisted on Russia being an international force, and disagreed with the West on certain issues as NATO enlargement, ABM treaty, NATO intervention in Kosovo, missile defence in Eastern Europe. The Russian Government were set to remind the West of its ignorance of Russia’s concerns at the US intervention in Bosnia in 1993 and NATO in Kosovo in 1999.\(^{854}\) Previously, since Russia had lacked capacity to enforce its interests, its objections had only remained in words and its concerns had largely been ignored. As it happened after the Kosovo crisis of 1999, previously Russia had never managed to express its opposition genuinely because of its own fear of isolation, impotence and lack of self-confidence. However, this time Russia had restored its capacity and was willing to demonstrate it both within the CIS and to the West.\(^{855}\) Through its response, Russia was basically sending a message that then it was too weak to have been listened to, but now it has the resources and capacity, and it matters.\(^{856}\) Russia demonstrated by use of force that it is going to insist on its spheres of influence, and will claim relative autonomy for the CIS, and multilateralism in international politics.\(^{857}\) As a Russian chief diplomat put it, ‘no retreatment further: Russia has been retreating since Gorbachev, with the hope of being treated as an equal partner, and in the end its liberalism has been regarded as weakness. The West has ignored Russia by recognising Kosovo, admitting the Baltic states into NATO, US missile defence in Czech and Poland, now Georgia’s membership of NATO’.\(^{858}\) Russia thus came to the conclusion that trying to follow the games of the rule will not bring it any respect or help

\(^{854}\) On both cases, Russia’s reaction and overall securitisation of both US intervention in Bosnia and especially NATO intervention in Kosovo was closely associated with its great power status and interests rather than identity or religious based alliance with Serbia. See Allen Lynch, ‘The realism of Russian foreign policy’, Europe-Asia Studies, volume 53, no 1, 2001, pp. 7-31.

\(^{855}\) A large part of the foreign policy concept in 2008 was dedicated to Russia’s new capacity and its assertion. See The foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation, 12 July, 2008, at http://www.norway.mid.ru/news_fp/news_fp_84_eng.html

\(^{856}\) See Dmitry Trenin ‘Russia tells the world, Don’t tread on me!’, RFE/RL, August 11, 2008.

\(^{857}\) Foreign minister Lavrov in a later elaboration of Russia’s foreign policy agenda once again stressed Russia’s dismay of US geopolitical presence in the CIS, claiming that this region is exclusively exempt from such engagement. The statement, ‘….for us, the CIS is not a chessboard for playing geopolitical games. It is a common civilization space that preserves the historic and spiritual inheritance of all the nations living here’, produced two major implications: Russia has the common history and culture with this region, which the West does not possess, which is why it cannot resolve this region’s problems; and any engagement in this region is disregard to Russia. This got clearer by ‘The most important thing is that nobody should get in our way by creating artificial obstacles for the sake of their selfish interests’. See Daisy Sindelar, ‘Once Diplomat's Diplomat, Lavrov Now Kremlin's Advance Guard’, RFE/RL 24th September, 2008.

\(^{858}\) Author’s interview with a veteran Russian Diplomat, Berlin, 14 August, 2008.
it achieve its regional and global ambitions that are closely related to the survival of the Russian state overall and therefore opted for a more power-political scenario. The crisis also served as a pretext for sending messages to the West. The fact that, shortly following the crisis, President Medvedev issued Russia’s privileged regions and in a message to the US, stated ‘we will not step back in the Caucasus’, alluded that Russia will no longer tolerate US behaviour in its regions of interest. The official statements too, indicated that Russia treated its response in a broader context of Russian-Western relations, in particular the US presence in the CIS and Russia’s claim for a regional hegemon. All these geopolitical factors demonstrate the determination of the Russian ruling elite to restore the Russian derzhava, a state that needs spheres of influence.

Russian policymakers also saw a certain percentage of US culpability for the crisis. Medvedev blamed the US government for provoking the August war. Shortly after the crisis, foreign minister Lavrov, outlining Moscow’s foreign policy, referred to US unipolarism as a condition, that has been too long and dangerous and which has ‘manifested itself in anti-Russian provocations, including Tbilisi’s aggression against South Ossetia’. The fact that the Georgian army that led the attack on Tskhinvali had taken part in the Georgian exercises along with 1,000 American troops caused Russia to accuse the United States of assisting Georgia’s attack preparations. He even went further to suggest that US humanitarian cargoes to Tbilisi included weapons.

Moreover, the Russian President accused NATO of taking advantage of the war to advance its military expansion. Referring to the deployment of NATO ships in the Black Sea and US missile defence systems in eastern Europe, he said ‘the conflict in the Caucasus was used as a pretext for bringing NATO warships into the Black Sea and for placing US missile defence...

860 Derzhava is a multinational great power uniting diverse nationalities, which is to hold international equilibrium of power. Derzhava is rather an ideology in Russia. Interestingly, the concept of derzhava was also a component element of the Soviet identity. See Boris Dubin, ‘Counterweight: Symbolism of the West in Contemporary Russia’, Pro et Contra, vol. 8, no 3, 2004, pp. 24-25.
861 Certain political circles in Russia even entertained the perception that Georgia’s intrusion was supported by the West (EU/US) because any instability in the South Caucasus would destabilise the North Caucasus, so Russia would be weakened. This view had been expressed since the Rose Revolution, see Alla Aleekseevna Yazikova, ‘Vneshnepoliticheskaya khaltura’, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 18 January, 2005.
862 As the US support for Georgia grew during the crisis, the Russian government blamed the US for provoking the conflict, although the Bush administration had previously urged Georgia not to undertake any military activities. See James Nixey, ‘US-Russia relations after the events of August, 2008’, Chatham House Report BN 08/05, September, 2008. See also Matthew Chance ‘Putin accuses U.S. of orchestrating Georgia war’, CNN Europe News, 28th August, 2008.
864 See ‘Russia’s rapid reaction’, op. cit., p. 2.
systems in Europe. In response, in November 2008 the Kremlin decided to deploy short-range Iskander missile launchers in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, nestled between Poland and Lithuania, to ‘neutralise’ a planned US missile defence system. Previously in 2007, President Putin had warned that Russia would be forced to target parts of a US missile-defense system if they were installed in Poland and the Czech Republic. Russia also warned Turkey that the NATO Ships could not stay in the Black Sea for more than 21 days according to the Monreux Agreement.

As to Georgia, Russia’s punitive behaviour served the purpose of teaching Georgia a lesson for its rapprochement with the US, its aspiration to NATO membership, and exacerbation of bilateral relations. The NATO Summit in Bucharest marked a turning-point after which Moscow was prepared to take every measure to prevent any further losses in the CIS. Russian policymakers had repeatedly warned that Georgia’s NATO membership would lead to a geopolitical disaster. Back in March 2008, Russian foreign minister Lavrov had stated that Russia would take all measures not to let Kiev and Tbilisi to NATO. For Russia, Georgia’s aspiration to NATO membership and the West’s protection posed an existential threat. Most of Russia’s political circles see Georgia’s NATO membership as an effort by the US and certain CIS states to balance Russia and diminish its role in its own regional shell. This in Russian political thought would have implications not only for its great power position and capability as a regional hegemon, but also internal stability. Russian policymakers are attached to the conviction that presence of NATO near its borders will on the one hand disturb its regional hegemony, but on the other hand its internal stability in the volatile North Caucasus. Previously, at the NATO Bucharest Summit, President Putin had defined NATO membership as an ‘immediate threat’ to its security, adding that ‘the presence of a powerful military bloc on our borders, whose members are guided by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty will be seen as direct threat to our national security’. Thus, through its response, Russia undermined Georgia’s chances of NATO membership, since most alliance members

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867 ‘Russian President Lashes Out At U.S. In First National Address’, op. cit.
868 The Russian president’s decision to deploy short-range Iskander missile launchers in westernmost territory was not a complete surprise. President Putin had in February 2007 warned that Russia would ‘be forced’ to target parts of a U.S. missile-defense system if they were installed in Poland and the Czech Republic. See ‘West lambasts Russia plan’, BBC World News, 6th November, 2008.
869 See Abbas Djavadi, ‘Russia turns up the pressure on Turkey’, RFE/RL, 1st September, 2008.
870 See Johnson’s Russia list, 26, November, 2006.
872 Author’s interview with an expert of the Russian Ministry of Defence, Moscow 23rd March, 2008. During the Beslan crisis Putin did refer to the outside powers interested in destabilising Russian North Caucasus as a means of weakening Russia, so that it is preoccupied with its domestic problems only. See Jonathan Steele, ‘Candid Putin offers praise and blame’, The Guardian, 8th September, 2004.
would now not be prepared to accept a country with territorial conflicts and political problems.

It would meanwhile remind all other CIS states, in particular Ukraine and Azerbaijan to rethink their relations with the West and not repeat Georgia’s mistakes. Employment of the components of the Black Sea Fleet and statements about the Ukraine’s rights in Sevastopol were strong messages to Kiev. Russia punished and silenced the only and most anti Russian voice in the region and undermined in this way any efforts by the CIS states to balance it.

Last, but not least, Russia’s intervention also served the purpose to control and monopolise energy export from the Caspian Sea. Moscow has greatly benefitted from the increase in oil and gas prices and from the increased dependence of Europe on Russia’s supply. The Caucasus route has been essential to reducing EU’s energy dependence on Russia via the existing pipelines or the forthcoming Nabucco pipeline. In this way, the Caucasus route, if joined by Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as well, might become a challenge for Russia’s energy monopoly. Moscow has through its bilateral agreements with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan secured its monopoly over the transport of oil and gas from the Caspian. Although, it did not attack the Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines directly, it undermined the viability of the South Caucasus as a transit route. Moreover, Moscow has tried to convince the Azerbaijani Government to sell its gas to Russia for further delivery to Europe. Azerbaijan, now convinced that any military solution to the Mountainous-Karabakh conflict is not viable and having seen Russia’s might in the region, might be discouraged to carry on with projects that could undermine Russia’s energy power.

4) Had Russia planned it?

Thus, although both sides accuse each other of initiating the hostilities, the crisis broke out by Georgia’s attempt to regain control of South Ossetia’s capital Tskhinvali by an overnight large-scale military operation. In a commentary in the Wall street journal of 2nd December, President Saakashvili argued that he did order military action, but as a self-defence reaction to the shelling of Georgian villages by the South Ossetian forces. He later argued that he had ordered military action in South Ossetia because Russia had massed thousands of troops on the border and for a week in early August, South Ossetian forces had engaged in a series of bombing Georgian villages within the sites controlled by Russian peace-keepers.

874 For an evaluation of the regional implications of the crisis, see S. Neil MacFarlane, ‘The paradoxical regional implications of Russia’s actions in Georgia’, Chatham House Report, BN 08/03.


876 See S. Neil MacFarlane, ‘The crisis in Georgia’, Strategic Datalink, No 3, August, 2008. For the discussion on why Georgia went into war over South Ossetia, see Dmitri Trenin, ‘Russia tells the world, Don’t tread on me!’, op. cit.
Russian military exercises in the North Caucasus in the last few years had simulated assisting the peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In fact, less than a month ago, Russia’s army units, which played a key role in the conflict, had taken part in military manoeuvres in the North Caucasus. The sequence of measures taken after the NATO Bucharest Summit, the combat readiness of the 58th army and provocations by the South Ossetian forces indicate that the crisis was time-wise and in view of the circumstances quite correct. It was correctly calculated that Georgia’s incapacity and the West’s divisions would enable Russia to transform the political landscape in the CIS without sanction or serious response. Russia had seemingly weighed potential consequences for its relations with the West during its intervention. Its policymakers knew that the international political system is very much to their advantage and that there is no balance to its policies in the Caucasus. It was obvious that the West would not afford to isolate it; the US would need Russia’s cooperation in its negotiations with Iran and North Korea and Europe would be too divided over Russia. Therefore, the impression is, had Georgia not attacked the region, some other pretext would have been found to demonstrate that Russia was intent on emphasising its power to dictate the rules of the game in its backyard. Whether it was planned or not, Georgia’s incursion seems to have enabled the Kremlin meet its objectives in the region, which no other event could do as perfectly as it did. Russia seemingly shot many birds by a single bullet.

The crisis produced important political implications not only for Georgia, but the whole region and demonstrated the Kremlin’s manoeuvre potential in the Caucasus. It showed that Russia is the relevant power in the region and has the ability to shape its security setting. Most importantly, the crisis indicated the impossibility of any military settlement of the conflicts in the region without Russia’s consent. In terms of regional implications of the crisis, Russia has demonstrated how serious it is in its intentions in the Caucasus and that no other great power has the ability to exert influence over this tiny region’s security issues. Although the existing oil and gas pipelines were outside the bombing area, their survival throughout the crisis has indicated that the Kremlin has given tribute to its commitment with Azerbaijan and Turkey, and its military operations served a peculiar goal, rather than the broad agenda of destabilising the region or overthrowing the Georgian Government.

h) Recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

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On 26th August, President Medvedev recognised both Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence and went ahead with bilateral agreements on the stationing of military bases in the region. The official justification was ensuring the security of these nations; deputy foreign minister cited Russia’s domestic security interests in the region and added that Russia would not let any titular nation in the FSU to monopolise or resent the minorities.\footnote{Interview zamestitelya inostrannix del Rossi G.B. Karasina po Yugo-Osetinskoy problematike, opublikovanoe v jurnale ‘Ogonek’ No 43, 20-26 oktyabrya 2008’, 20 October, 2008, at www.mid.ru} Foreign minister Lavrov in his interview to Radio Liberty said that there was no prospect of persuading South Ossetia and Abkhazia to reintegrate into the Georgian state, ‘one should now forget about Georgia’s territorial integrity’.\footnote{David Nowak and Christopher Torchia, ‘Russia: Georgia can forget regaining provinces’, \textit{Huftingpost}, 14th August, 2008.} He further argued that Russia ‘can no longer allow itself, as it did in the past, simply to wait for the beginning of another blitzkrieg by Tbilisi against South Ossetia or Abkhazia’.\footnote{Daisy Sindelar, ‘Once Diplomat’s Diplomat, Lavrov Now Kremlin’s Advance Guard’, 24th September, 2008.} Although, beginning from March the Russian Duma and Ministry of Foreign Affairs had entertained the idea of Russia’s recognition of both regions, such a step caused a big surprise.\footnote{See ‘Russia: Duma votes to back separatist efforts in Georgia’, 22 March, 2008, op. cit.} The Kremlin for the first time revised the boundaries it had accepted at the dissolution of the Soviet Union and demonstrated that it is somehow no longer a status-quo power. Interestingly enough, President Medvedev referred the act to the UN Charter, 1970 Friendly Relations Declaration and CSCE Helsinki Final Act.\footnote{Statement by President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, 26th August, 2008, at http://eng.kremlin.ru/speeches/2008/08/26/1543_type82912_205752.shtml} In an article in the Financial Times, he immediately made an analogy with Kosovo, as if Russia had been pushed to recognition by the West:

‘......ignoring Russia’s warnings, western countries rushed to recognise Kosovo’s illegal declaration of independence from Serbia. We argued consistently that it would be impossible, after that, to tell the Abkhazians and Ossetians (and dozens of other groups around the world) that what was good for the Kosovo Albanians was not good for them’.\footnote{See Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Why I had to recognise Georgia’s breakaway regions’, \textit{The Financial Times}, 26th August, 2008.}

Another aspect of Russia’s recognition was that it occurred not because of Russia’s commitment to international norms as self-determination or humanitarianism, but rather out of its power-political and to a lesser extent domestic security considerations. Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia only and not of Mountainous Karabakh indicates that the act was a product of bilateral relations with Georgia. Russia has assured Azerbaijan that despite the decision it continues to respect its territorial integrity. Furthermore, the recognition was an element of an asymmetric response it gave to Kosovo’s independence and
Western support for it. Therefore, Russia’s recognition is in no case a confirmation of the right to self-determination or humanitarian based.

Moscow’s recognition was not a strategic decision, it occurred more as a reaction to the West’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence. Lacking any mid-term strategy for the secessionist regions, recognition was borne out of the strategy vacuum in the Kremlin and lack of broader strategic thinking on many aspects of its foreign policy. Meanwhile, the step to recognise the regions might have been caused by the dilemma in Russian politics that if Russia supports the resolution of the conflict, it would lose the ’security architecture’ it has build in the region, the so called geopolitical monopoly in both regions, but if it fails to gain progress in the mediation processes, it might be risking internationalisation of the mediation and peacekeeping in both regions and a potential replacement by other actors that would be willing or able to achieve progress. It is not clear what implications it will produce. Both regions’ incorporation into Russia would be seen as annexation and intention to restore the Russian empire. This would foremost appeal to Ukraine, which is worried about Russian pretensions to the Crimea and Donbas, since in May the Russian Duma voted to renegotiate the bilateral treaty on the border between the two countries. The international community’s recognition of the regions’ independence is no option for the time being. It seems that the recognition’s only implications will be for Russia’s interaction with both regions, especially its presence there.

i) Broader implications

The South Ossetia crisis has had implications both for Georgia and the South Caucasus and CIS as well as Russian-Western relations. The direct implications for Georgia are, its chances of restoring territorial sovereignty over both regions are seriously undermined now. Improvement in the bilateral relations between Tbilisi and Moscow might lead to a resumption of talks on the status of both regions, but this would at maximum end up in a

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Sergei Markedonov, ‘A Russian Perspective: Forging Peace in the Caucasus’, Russia and the ’Frozen’ Conflicts of Georgia, Russian Analytical Digest No, 40, 8 May, 2008. During the course of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia’s consent to the inclusion of Crimea within the independent Ukraine, which was largely populated by ethnic Rusians, conditioned among other factors (identity crisis and dominance of Euratlanticism, rejecting territorial expansion), by the existence of nuclear arsenal. So, Moscow repudiated its claims over the region in exchange for acquiring Ukraine’s nuclear arsenal. Ukraine’s cultural or historic right to exist as an independent state has been questioned by pragmatic nationalists as well. See Egor Gaidar, Gibel Imperii: Uroki dlya sovremennoy Rossii, (Moscow: Rossiyskaya Politicheskaia Enciklopedia, 2006). According to Trenin, there were efforts for passportisation of the Crimea as well. See Trenin, ‘Casus Kosovo’, p. 20. See also David W. Rivera, ‘Engagement, Containment and the International Politics of Eurasia’, Political Science Quarterly, vol. 118, No 1, 2003, p. 89.
loose confederation or alliance of sovereign states. So, return to a status-quo ante is not possible any more. Georgia’s NATO prospects have diminished, since most European states would see its accession to NATO as a burden on the alliance.

The crisis has had a regional dimension for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Firstly, it demonstrated the difficulty of resolving the MK conflict by use of force. Having seen Russia’s response, the Azerbaijani Government is now less inclined to refer to a military solution of its territorial sovereignty or make loud statements of being a regional power. The crisis revealed the vulnerability of Azerbaijan’s balanced foreign policy in a sense that, should the rift between Russia and the West grow bigger, Baku would have to make a choice between the two poles. Baku refrained from making any comments on the situation during the crisis, but sent in humanitarian assistance to Georgia. The fragility of Georgia’s political stability also put under question Azerbaijan’s export routes and aspirations to become a transit country for the transportation of fossil fuel reserves from the Caspian Sea. As an ultimate result of the crisis, the Azerbaijani Government is now seemingly more inclined to warm up its relations with Russia further, and is less enthusiastic about providing gas for Nabucco pipeline.

As to Armenia, although Yerevan was primarily happy with Russia’s reaction, it was disappointed when Russia rejected to recognise MK’s independence and reassured Azerbaijan of its support for the latter’s territorial integrity. The crisis demonstrated Armenia’s vulnerability when Russia stopped its gas deliveries and railway connection to Georgia. This in its turn brought about some softening in the Armenian government’s position towards Turkey with the hope of opening the border between the two countries.

Another implication of the crisis is, Russia is keen on strengthening the relative autonomy of the CIS and is less inclined about international norms. This was demonstrated by its previous suspension of the CFE Treaty in December 2007, which indicated that Moscow does not desire any limit to its military presence in the CIS.889 In fact, defending the fragmentation of Europe to spheres of interest and claiming a sphere where its exclusive norms would apply, Russia in fact challenged the post-cold war security architecture of Europe. The crisis demonstrated that Russia is now prioritising its hegemony in the post-soviet space and less worries about relations with the West. Through its recognition, and veto of the OSCE mission in South Ossetia, Russia has demonstrated that it sees its conduct in both regions as autonomous from the international system. Thus, the post-crisis picture is not one of another cold war, since ideology and rules of the game are absent, but, with the recognition of both regions’ status, a

new Russia has appeared in the CIS, which is much intent on coercive, rather than cooperative hegemony.890

4.4. Russia’s policies towards the Mountainous Karabakh conflict

As the most regional and destructive of all three disputes, the MK conflict has for years acted as a policy resource for Russia’s perceived power political interests in the region. Since MK has no geographic proximity or ethnic affiliation to the Russian North Caucasus, this conflict has not been related to Russia’s domestic security concerns, and Moscow’s interests here have mainly been power-political. The conflict has been used to get concessions from both countries, to guarantee Russia’s presence and hegemony in the South Caucasus and to undermine regional cooperation.

At various stages, Russia’s military support to Armenia and indirect transfer of that support to MK has made Armenia’s position in the peace process intransigent.891 During the late Soviet era, Moscow initially sided with Azerbaijan because of the loyalty of the latter. Azerbaijan advocated status-quo in the Soviet Union, and its public and the ruling elite were reluctant to independence until the August coup of 1991. The Armenian Government had initially sought maximal sovereignty, distancing itself from Russia. However, the later circumstances, in particular Yerevan’s involvement in warfare pushed Armenia towards becoming the most loyal and strategic ally of Russia in the CIS.892

4.4.1. Russia’s engagement

Russian policy at the start of the Karabakh conflict was inconsistent and Russia had no clear strategy. That inconsistency was reflected in the alleged Russian involvement (participation of the 366 motor-rifle division located in MK) in the Khojaly massacre, leading to the departure of the Kremlin loyal political elite in Azerbaijan.893 The massacre of Azerbaijani civilians by Armenian forces in Khojaly (a town in the Mountainous Karabakh region) caused outrage in Baku, which led to Mutallibov’s resignation, and subsequent instalment of an anti-Russian, pro-Turkish and pro-Western Government under President Elcibey.894 This occurred at a time

890 The discourse on Russia becoming a revisionist state is not new. It was quite relevant in 1990s, when it had to accept new territorial arrangements, see Richard Sakwa, Russian politics and society, (London: Routlegde, 1993), p. 365.
892 See Dmitry Trenin, ‘Kasus Kosovo’, Pro et contra: Jurnal Rossiyaskoy vnitreniy i vneshny politiki, No 5-6, 34, 2006, p. 12.
894 Ayaz Mutallibov had a pro-Russian stance and was accused during the massacre of inaction and incompetence, see Shireen Hunter, ‘Searching for New Neighbours’, in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds, New States,
when Russia was still in the process of elaborating a strategy for the South Caucasus. Therefore that period is the starting point of a continuous strategy by the Kremlin towards the conflict. In this context, alleged Russian assistance to the Armenian side at the start of the conflict (before the adoption of the foreign policy concept) was more identity rather than strategic interest driven and not executed at a state level. Russian public figures sympathised with Armenia during the ‘Operation ring’, and the local army officers stationed in Karabakh expressed solidarity with Armenia based upon religious fraternity. Moreover, Armenians had integrated Russia much better than Azeris, which was a factor during the lobbying efforts in Moscow.

a) Russian military engagement

Russia’s military support to Armenia and MK dates to the post 1992 period, when President Elcibey openly distanced himself from Russia, refused to join the CIS and CSTO. He sought greater engagement of Turkey in Azerbaijan and the region, and asked Russian border guards in Azerbaijan to leave. Russia viewed the calls in the Turkish society and public for intervention with alarm, in particular following the Khojaly massacre and occupation of Kelbajar, which caused large IDP influx. In 1993, Russian defence minister Grachev warned Turkey that in case of intervention, this would lead to retaliation by Russia. In early 1993, the Azerbaijani MFA claimed that Armenian offensives were being assisted by Russian servicemen from the 7th army in Armenia. Elcibey declared in the Parliament that the Russian military gave Azerbaijan an ultimatum to accept the continued presence of Russian forces. Azeri rejection allegedly resulted in the participation of the 7th Army units in the Armenian attacks in Karabakh.

According to Safer World, the largest share of weapons, technology and ammunition was concentrated in Azerbaijan, and Russia stopped the handover of weapons from the 4th army to the now ‘anti-Russian’ Azerbaijan Government. As a result, the new Azeri administration under Aliyev in 1993 did their best to warm up relations with Moscow; Azerbaijan joined the CIS and signed the Collective Security Treaty and pledged to return Russian border guards to Azerbaijan. Furthermore, Azerbaijani leadership was hopeful that by rejecting the

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uncompromising attitude of their predecessors on the crucial issue of Azerbaijan’s cooperation with Russia in the Caspian, they could invite Russia to review and change its position toward the Mountainous Karabakh problem.  

For a while the Russian side made allusions that that was exactly what was going to happen. In 1994, Yuri Shafrannik, the Russian Minister for Fuel and Energy, referring to the 1994 oil contract in Baku stated that ‘….the signing of the treaty between Moscow and Baku will have an effect on solving the Karabakh conflict’.  

Azerbaijan accordingly offered the Russian oil company Lukoil a 10% share in the 1994 contract. Russia’s linkage of energy interests to the security problems in the region was also admitted by a senior Russian diplomat, saying ‘…the oil factor, the problem of security of states, and the settlement of conflicts prove to be interconnected in one way or another…..at stake are our vital, long-term interests’.  

In 1997, it was revealed that Russia had systematically delivered arms worth 1 billion USD to Armenia in 1993-1997. The weapons delivered were not a part of the division of Soviet property in Armenia. Initially, the minister for CIS affairs Aman Tuliyev stated that the ministry of defence had passed weapons to Armenia without the prior knowledge of the president. This was also confirmed by the minister of defence. Later, the Russian Government explained it on the grounds of bilateral agreements with Armenia. Russia’s arms delivery to Armenia and military relations continued throughout, generating a delicate balance of power between Azerbaijan and the latter, possibly to prevent any outbreak of conflict in the future. Although, Azerbaijan had received a larger quantity of weapons during the division of Soviet property in early 1990s, this deal made Armenia militarily better equipped.

4.4.2. Russia’s attachment to the peace process

In April 1992, Kozyrev suggested a two stage plan: cease-fire agreement and deployment of peace-keepers; only in the second stage the negotiations would focus on the status of MK. The plan complimented a CIS Summit decision on 20th March 1992 in Kiev to send peacekeepers and observers to the region. A special commission was suggested to be deployed in Karabakh and along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan.  

Russia under Kozyrev was even prepared to share the peacekeeping with the OSCE and accentuated cease-
fire rather than peace-keeping. As peace became more complicated and difficult to achieve, Russia proposed another plan: first cease-fire, then a peace-troop to guarantee the cease-fire, followed by a treaty on non-use of force to include security guarantees for MK and its withdrawal from the occupied regions, and finally decide on the status of the region. Initially, Baku insisted on Armenian troop withdrawal as a precondition for the cease-fire, but after its unsuccessful counter-offensive in winter 1994, Azerbaijan risked losing a larger portion of its territory, and so gave up. The dissent between the conflict parties led to three different cease-fires to be signed, one in Baku, another one in Stepanakert and another in Yerevan. On 16th May, 1994 Russian defence minister met with the defence ministers of the two countries plus MK and suggested the deployment of a peace-keeping force on the contact line between the parties: Russia wanted the military bases in Armenia to be deployed as a peacekeeping force in MK. The plan was accepted by Armenia and MK, but rejected by Azerbaijan on the grounds that it would freeze Armenian territorial gains from Azerbaijan. President Aliyev instead preferred the deployment of Russian peacekeepers within the CSCE framework. Overall, Azerbaijan was suspicious of Russian peacekeeping, and resisted the redeployment of regular Russian troops in its territory. At the CIS Summit of 15th April 1994, President Aliyev objected to the Russian peace plan that entailed the introduction of Russian peace-keeping forces. Initially, Russia supported a step by step plan, but in 1996 foreign minister Primakov suggested a package deal, that suggested apart from the ceasefire agreement on the cessation of hostilities, a memorandum on the basic elements of MK’s status, which would exclude the decisions made by MK, Armenia and Azerbaijan previously. On the basis of this agreement, a special agreement should be prepared later on the status of MK, which would on the one hand stipulate Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and on the other hand offer MK self-rule. This

903 Ibid.
904 Ibid.
906 Vladimir Kazimirov, ‘Bishkekski protokol’, at http://vn.kazimirov.ru/x013.htm The cease-fire was achieved by Russian mediation and not the CSCE Minsk Group mediation. Some refer to this point to validate the argument that Russia from the very onset was not genuinely reconciled with the CSCE mediation role in Mountainous Karabakh conflict and used this opportunity. As Elizabeth Fuller notes, ‘it is not clear whether the Russian leadership was playing a double game- that is whether Kozyrev and Kazimirov deliberately misled or lied to Eliasson when they assured him earlier than there was no competition between Russia and the CSCE to mediate a settlement- or whether as appeared to be the case in Abkhazia in September 1993, the Russian Foreign Ministry and the military are pursuing separate and contradictory policies’, see Elizabeth Fuller, ‘The Karabakh Mediation Process: Grachev versus the CSCE?’, RFE/RL Research Report, vol. 3, no 23, 10th June, 1994, p. 17.
became a part of the OSCE proposal in 2006, which got accepted by Armenia, but declined by Azerbaijan and MK. With the emergence of the Karabakh clan in Armenian politics, the negotiations returned to a package deal.

Russia’s position is, it supports Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, but *status quo ante* is not possible. Within the last few years, Russia has activated its mediation efforts and would genuinely be prepared to support any decision that the conflict parties reach. Azerbaijan sees the whole of MK and 7 regions as occupied territories, whereas Russia says, MK’s status should be left to the end, since *a status-quo ante* for the 7 regions is not applicable to MK.

From mid 1990s until the last few years, Russia did not undertake any serious measures for the resolution of the conflict, since the status quo seemed to suit it the best. The conflict had made Armenia completely dependent upon Russia in all sectors. It was largely seen as a lever against an independent-minded and potentially mistrustful Azerbaijan, a means of providing Russia’s interests amidst lack of resources. Throughout 1996 the Russian government unsuccessfully lobbied for the return of Russian military bases to Azerbaijan.909

4.4.3. Russia’s incapacity

Russia’s capacity to resolve the MK conflict is limited by a number of factors. Overall, Russia’s influence over the conflict is not comparable to that over Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Mountainous-Karabakh issue is much more complex to resolve. Taking into consideration that Armenia’s and MK’s military superiority and economy are completely dependent upon Russia, and Yerevan is isolated and not in a good bargaining position, one could assume, it would not be difficult for Russia to pressure Armenia to come to terms on an interim status deal. However, pressuring Armenia to give up the buffer zone would spoil relations with its most loyal and historic ally in the region. MK is an extremely sensitive issue to Armenian society and political elite and any pressure would alienate Armenia. Under such a scenario, Russia would lose its most tried strategic ally and partner.

Russia’s current position on the conflict

Improvement of bilateral relations between Baku and Moscow has had an impact on the MK peace process. This was visible when Russia recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but rejected MK despite appeals from Armenia. Moreover, the Moscow Declaration signed in September 2008 was another sign that Russia is actually no longer opposed to the resolution of the conflict. Azerbaijan’s foreign minister throughout 2007 and 2008 stated that Azerbaijan

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was satisfied with Russia’s position. The Kremlin’s position is, if any deal is reached, it should be reached by its mediation and exclusive role, including exclusive peacekeeping. So any model that would exclude Russia or minimise its influence upon the region would not be welcome. In this regard, the territorial swap model which envisaged a once for all resolution of the conflict was never approved by Moscow, since a unilateral resolution of the conflict would reduce Russia’s leeway in the region.

As of today, the resources of the MK conflict are to a large extent exhausted and it has been largely manipulated. Russia’s military presence in Armenia is through its bilateral treaties guaranteed for 25 years, and economic presence is secured through the purchase of assets. Therefore, the resolution of the conflict might get Azerbaijan closer to Russia and enable new regional projects to emerge.

Russia has repeatedly stated that any military solution to the conflict would be a disaster for the region, although it hardly has any security concerns in this conflict. A war between Armenia and Azerbaijan would have much bigger implications than the South Ossetian one. It would be regional and involve outside actors as Russia, Turkey and even Iran. Moreover, the multi-billion investments in Azerbaijan’s oil sector might urge Western governments to take action, since both Yerevan and the MK authorities have repeatedly stated that in case of Azerbaijan’ resort to use of force, Azerbaijan’s oil and gas infrastructure would be potential targets.

Concluding remarks

Russia’s engagement in all three conflicts has overall complicated the resolution of the conflicts. Initially Russia was neutral to all three conflicts, however, once Azerbaijan and Georgia began to go their own ways, all three conflicts became sticks and resources for a resource poor Kremlin. Azerbaijan opted for a too close partnership with Turkey, while refusing to join the CIS or permit Russian military presence, which raised geopolitical concerns in Russia. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict was used as leverage against an independent-minded, anti-Russian Georgia, and to get Georgia into the CIS and agree to Russian military presence in its territory. Both Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts had another strategic importance for Russia. Their outbreak removed the

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911 Ratification of the agreement on Russian military bases by the Armenian parliament in April 1997 confirmed the Russian right to locate a military base at Gumri for the 127th Motorised Rifle Division and a command group and motorised rifle regiment in Yerevan for twenty five years. See Roy Allison, ‘The military and political security landscape in Russia and the South’, in Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: The 21st century security environment, Rajan Menon, Yuri E. Fedorov and Ghia Nodia eds, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 50.
concentration of the Confederation of Caucasus Peoples from seceding from Russia to fighting the Georgians. So, in this way outburst of the Chechen conflict was delayed. Abkhazia and South Ossetia gathered all the negative energy accumulated against Russia in the North Caucasus.

In mid 1990s, once Georgia agreed to all Russia’s demands, the latter made it clear in declaratory statements to both secessionist regions that they did not stand a chance of independence. Moscow applied sanctions against Abkhazia, but these sanctions failed to break the resistance of the region. This was largely due to the inconsistence in Russia itself caused by weak statehood, which made a strict observance of the sanctions nearly impossible. The sanctions had led to certain softening in Abkhaz position, but not complete withdrawal from seeking political independence. Another reason why the sanctions failed to produce results was because of the resistance within the Abkhaz society to reintegration into Georgia under Georgia’s demands. Previous efforts to impose conditions on Abkhazia vis-à-vis the repatriation of Georgian IDPs for example had also largely failed, indicating Russia’s incapacity to impose *pax Russica* in the region.

The second period of Russia’s engagement in the South Caucasus, namely from 1999 onwards coincided with changes both in Russia and Georgian-Russian relations. The changes in Russia primarily comprised increased capacity of Russia both in the near abroad and in the international system. This capacity however did not produce any serious implications for Russia’s policies towards both conflicts in Georgia. Changes in Russia’s capacity and in Abkhazia’s dependence on Russia were accompanied by a gradual deterioration of Georgian-Russian relations and development of strategic geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia in the Caspian region, of which the South Caucasus is an important part. Russia had agreed to a number of concessions at the OSCE Istanbul Summit, and therefore during the early years of President’s Putin’s term, Russia seemed to be in strategic retreat. Therefore, the conflicts were seen as an important source of leverage that Russia would be interested to utilise amidst shortage of resources.

Increased capacity of the Russian state, in particular the re-establishment of Russia’s strong hand over Chechnya and limiting the regional elites’ influence led to Russia’s desecuritisation of secessionism in the South Caucasus and increased political and economic engagement in both regions. Starting from 2000, Russia’s tacit engagement in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia became more and more explicit, which finally culminated in the recognition of both regions’ independence in August 2008. A number of factors such as Russian-Georgian bilateral relations and Russian-Western relations played a primary role behind this move.
Russia’s approach to the MK conflict has been slightly different from its approach to the two other disputes and the split started during the latter part of Putin’s tenure. During Yeltsin’s term Russia did manipulate the conflict for its own ends, and it seemed that the conflict was an efficient lever and leeway for the Kremlin’s broader geopolitical interests in the region. The recent change has occurred due to a number of factors of which the Russian-Azerbaijan relations and exhaustion of the conflict as a policy resource play a role. A fundamental difference between MK conflicts and ones in Georgia is the absence of domestic security concerns in Mountinaeous Karabakh. Although a large number of analysts have by and large linked all three conflicts to Russia’s geopolitical interests to an equal extent, the next chapters on the interaction between Russia’s bilateral relations and engagement in the region, and on Russia’s strategic interests will explain that the picture may slightly be different.

Overall, Russia’s engagement, in particular tacit support for the secessionist regions has varied to certain extents, but has remained stable at least in Abkhazia and South Ossetia for the entire post-Soviet era. Russian policymakers and certain analysts have often invoked Russia’s incapacity to assist the resolution of conflict for defending its position of inaction or tacit support for the break-away regimes. On the contrary, Russia during Yeltsin’s term had a large capacity for the resolution of at least the South Ossetian conflict. Whereas pressure on Abkhazia did not produce any effect due to weak statehood and actor plurality or strong Abkhaz resistance, in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict most of these factors were absent. As mentioned elsewhere, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict was initially a political conflict, that later transformed into an ethno-territorial one. Therefore, its resolution did not require as much pressure upon Tskhinvali as it would have been required in Abkhazia, neither did the regional elites with interests in Abkhaz de facto independence play a role in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The ethnically mixed nature of the region and existence of inter-ethnic community relations could have facilitated the peace process.

However, with regard to nearly all three conflicts (to a lesser extent MK), Russia was in no position to force the populations to a particular condition. Such a scenario under Yeltsin would have caused instability in the Russian North Caucasus. Therefore, when speaking about Russia’s capacity and leeway, it is only thought for a modus vivendi, which the international community has been supporting in all three conflicts. In the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, it was the Boden Plan and in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict various such models had been worked out.

To sum up, regarding Russia’s engagement and leeway in all three conflicts, Russia’s increased capacity and higher dependence of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia on Russia
would make it easier to reach a compromise in both conflicts. It has however no interest at present in the resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. It is in contrast, supportive of a modus vivendi in the MK conflict.

Chapter 5

Interaction between Russia’s bilateral relations with the South Caucasus states and its policies towards the ethno-territorial conflicts

5.1. Impact of Russia’s bilateral relations with Georgia on the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts

Georgia’s bilateral relations with Russia have had a significant impact on the conflict dynamics in the region. The relations have been sour since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and gradually deteriorated in 2006, reaching a culmination with Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia’s independence in 2008. A number of factors have contributed to the deterioration in the bilateral relations, but it is mainly the ethno-territorial conflicts that Georgia’s interaction and discontent with Russia mostly occurs on.\textsuperscript{912} The message of the Russian Government has been that it has no ultimate solution that it can impose upon both conflict regions and that Georgia needs to gain the regions’ trust first. The Russian Government has also indicated that mistrust and insecurity need to be overcome in the bilateral relations. Although, there were many attempts to thaw the tension in the relations, Tbilisi has been insisting that Russia’s involvement in the conflicts has not been constructive and its policies are neo-imperialist. Convinced that any cooperation with Moscow will not bring about shift in the latter’s position to Georgia’s security problems, it has opted for alignment with Euro-Atlantic institutions and balancing Russia. Georgia has indicated that it prefers the European normative space as a foundation for its bilateral relations with Russia, while Russia seems to prefer a CIS-based normative regime.

\textsuperscript{912} For an indepth analysis of Russian-Georgian interests in a regional context, see Alexander Rondeli, ‘Russia and Georgia: Relations are still tense’, \textit{Central Asia and the Caucasus}, vol. 1, issue 1, 2006.
The challenging question to answer is to what extent Russia’s support and overall policies towards the secessionist conflicts have been associated with its bilateral relations with Georgia, in other words would any rapprochement of Tbilisi and Moscow lead to breakthrough in either of Georgia’s territorial conflicts. The dominant concept in Georgian society among both academics and public figures has been that no matter what Georgia does, Russia will not change its position to both secessionist conflicts, and therefore the best option is balancing rather than bandwagoning.\(^9\) This is documented with the Georgian Government’s attempts in 1994-1995 of rapprochement with Russia by supporting all its initiatives in the region.\(^9\) President Shevardnadze had agreed to get Georgia into the CIS and CST, host Russia’s military bases as well as border guards, and had assisted Russia during its first Chechen campaign. This had a certain level of impact on Russia’s approach to Tbilisi and its policies towards the secessionist conflicts. Russia applied sanctions on both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and assured to both regions that they would not have any chances of becoming independent. However, for both power-political and domestic political reasons, Russia failed to hold its sanctions strictly or carry out active peace-making between the parties. It failed to mediate a resolution model between Georgia and South Ossetia, where unlike in Abkhazia, reconciliation would not require huge efforts. Shevardnadze invited Russia to serve as peacekeepers in both regions and signed an agreement on Russia’s military bases, allowed Russian border troops to control its border. For all these concessions, Shevardnadze did not get anything tangible in return, and finally applied for NATO membership and co-established GUUAM to balance the CIS. However, Shevardnadze’s attempts to resolve the security problems of Georgia by engaging the West went largely unanswered. The US and EU interests in the region did not go beyond the oil and gas concentrated economic interests.

On the other hand, Shevardnadze’s concessions to Russia had not changed the deeply rooted mistrust of Georgia in Russian political circles owing to a number of factors. Although a large portion of this mistrust owed to the policies of Gamsakhurdia, his departure and exile did not soften the tension either, as it were structural.\(^9\) Georgia’s ruling elite had consolidated their power seeking distancing from the dominant power. A resistance identity dating back to the 18th century, implying territorial, cultural and religious separation from the Russian empire

\(^9\) See Ghia Nodia, ‘Have Russian-Georgian relations hit bottom or will they continue to deteriorate?’, *Russian Analytical Digest*, No 13, 16 January, 2007.
had strengthened in Georgia in 1980s. By gaining independence, the grievances accumulated since the time of the Russian Empire, led to the identification of Georgia’s interests as incompatible with Russia’s. The resistance identity went too far to blame every failure on Russia, starting from earthquakes to its ethno-national problems with the minorities. In this context, there is a consensus on Russia in the Georgian society, which only strengthened during Saakashvili’s term. Never has there been any serious movement either rejecting Euro-Atlantic integration or advocating warmer relations with Moscow.

5.1.1 Deterioration of Georgian-Russian relations

Towards the end of Shevardnadze’s second term, Georgian-Russian relations experienced a deterioration leading to a number of implications for Russia’s policies in the region. Starting from 1995, dissatisfied with Russia’s mediating role in both conflicts, the Georgian political leadership shifted their orientation from bandwagoning to balancing, seeking greater engagement of the US and EU in the region. As Georgia’s expectations of recovering territorial integrity through cooperation with Russia largely failed, the US, after its intervention in Bosnia and its effective role during the Dayton agreement, began to be regarded as a potential alternative to Russia in mediation and peacekeeping. Georgia’s discontent with Russia became more obvious during the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999, when it reached an agreement on the withdrawal of Russian military bases and endorsed the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyhan pipeline, a rival route for the transport of Caspian oil resources to Western markets.

In 1997 GUUAM alliance was established at NATO’s 50th anniversary summit. Although the alliance’s power was much exaggerated, GUUAM’s birth was a result of the rising discontent with Russian hegemony in the CIS, and all the signatory states were intent to balance it. Russia was enraged in the first years of GUUAM’s existence as it viewed GUAM as a US and NATO initiated quasi-alliance to balance and limit Russia’s influence in the CIS. Certain Russian circles still see GUUAM as an effort to disintegrate the CIS and create an alternative to it. The establishment of a peacekeeping contingent of the organisation, albeit quite symbolic, was seen in the Kremlin to undermine the CIS peacekeeping. The organisation has no economic or military functions, just joint platform at international organisations.

5.1.2. Impact of failed cooperation in the II Chechen war

918 The Social Party of Georgia is usually known for its pro-Russian stance, however, it has at times of crisis refused to take a pro-Russian stance and has also supported Georgia’s leave of the CIS.
Georgia refused to cooperate with Russia during the second Chechen war. Russia, trying to secure the Georgian side of the Georgian-Russian border had in late 1999 asked for consent to fly missions from the military bases in Georgia, but had been turned down. Russian officials requested the use of Georgian territory to launch military attacks on Chechnya and permission to deploy Russian Special Forces in Pankisi gorge, a region in Georgia populated by ethnic Chechens, and where additional 7,000 Chechens had sought refuge. Apart from refugees, the gorge had also become a safe haven for criminals and combatants. A crisis emerged, when Russia accused Georgia of hosting Chechen terrorists and potential combatants in the gorge in 2001. The crisis reached its culmination in September 2002 when Russia issued an ultimatum to Tbilisi and started planning for military strikes. Tbilisi had difficulty bringing law and order into the region and Russian defence minister threatened with military intervention. In 1999 and 2002, there were repeated violations of Georgia’s air space on the border; Moscow allegedly launched missiles and mined gorges in northern Georgia and on 23rd August, Russian jets bombed the Georgian territory adjacent to the Chechen sector of the Russian border. The crisis got finally resolved when in April 2002, the US offered military assistance to Georgia in the form of Georgia Train and Equip Programme, which envisaged dispatching some 200 military instructors to Tbilisi to train the Georgian army against counterinsurgency. Although, initially President Putin welcomed the move, US military presence in Georgia later seemingly caused anger in Russian political circles, which increasingly regarded it to be aimed at pushing Russia out of the Caucasus. Moreover, the Russian elite saw the programme as US attempt to improve Georgia’s combat potential for intrusion into South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

922 Russian accusations of Georgia’s hosting and supporting chechen terrorists continued during the Saakashvili Government as well. See ‘Russia accuses Georgia of harbouring terrorists’, Civil Georgia, 13 February, 2005.
924 See Liz Fuller, ‘Unknown fighters again violate Georgian air space’, RFE/RL Newsline, August 23rd Tracey German, ‘The Pankisi Gorge: Georgia’s Achilles heel in its relations with Russia?’, Central Asian Survey, vol. 23, issue 1, March 2004, pp. 27-39. It should be noted however that Russia due to the war in Chechnya, had limited many military means at its disposal, and air strikes were the only available option. See Mikhail Khodarenok, ‘Threat and forget’, Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie, 4 October, 2002, quoted in Pavel Baev, ‘Russian policies in the North Caucasus’, op. cit., p. 48.
Although, the dispatch of US GTEP to Georgia did deter the threat of potential Russian military intrusion into Georgia, Russia was still not satisfied with the level of Georgian law enforcement in Pankisi Gorge and desired joint military action in the gorge. In response, the Georgian Government in August, 2002 carried out anti-criminal operation, detaining criminals and restoring order in the gorge.\textsuperscript{927} However, this still did not satisfy the Russian government, and in September 2002, President Putin referred to Russia’s right to use preemptive force against Pankisi, and asked the UN to recognise Russia’s right to self-defence.\textsuperscript{928} It is not clear whether Russia did it for its dissatisfaction with law enforcement in Pankisi, hence because it was suffering from security threats in Chechnya and Daghestan or it was manipulating the situation on the ground to exert pressure on Tbilisi.\textsuperscript{929}

5.1.3. Russian-Georgian relations after the Rose-Revolution

In January 2004, the Georgian Parliament speaker and acting President Nino Burjanadze expressed hope that Georgia’s willingness to normalise relations with Russia would lead to a regulation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Russian-Georgian relations shortly improved in the first half of 2004, as President Saakashvili pledged to start everything from scratch.\textsuperscript{930} The Georgian Government offered Russian firms new perspectives in the country’s energy and transport sectors and declared willingness to jointly control certain parts of the Russian-Georgian border. Russia’s economic presence became more conspicuous than ever since independence.\textsuperscript{931} All these raised questions in Moscow as how to respond to the changes in

\textsuperscript{928} See Jaba Devdariani, ‘Georgian security operation in Pankisi Gorge’, Eurasia Insight, 3\textsuperscript{rd} September, 2002.
\textsuperscript{929} Pavel Baev argued for example that ‘a careful examination of the mini crisis confirms that Moscow was not so much confronting a terrorist challenge as exploiting it to put pressure on Georgia’, see Pavel Baev, ‘Russia’s policies in the North and South Caucasus’, in The South Caucasus: a challenge for the EU, Dov Lynch ed., Chaillot Paper 65, December, 2003, p.44. For Russia’s use of terrorist attacks to expand its influence, see Martha Brill Olcott, ‘State-building and security threats in Central Asia’, in Andrew C. Kuchins Russia after the Fall (Washington: CEIP, 2002), pp. 221-241.
\textsuperscript{931} This has been a critical issue for Russia’s security concerns in the North Caucasus, as Russia kept warning Georgia over the passage of militants from Georgia into Chechnya. Until December 2004, the Georgian-Russian border had been monitored by the Border Monitor Mission of the OSCE, but in December, 2004 Russia vetoed it. According to Dov Lynch, Russia’s vetoing of the BMO was due to the fact that the mission was not monitoring the border effectively and militants passed through the border easily. See Dov Lynch, ‘Why Georgia matters’, p. 47.
Georgia, in particular regarding the secessionist regions. The first alleged reciprocal sign from Russia was its support to Georgia during the Ajaria crisis. Once Saakashvili’s forces had entered Ajaria, on 6th May 2004, Igor Ivanov stepped in to facilitate Abashidze’s exile to Moscow. However, Russia’s support in this crisis was not very clear, and it seemed that Russia had had no choice; it was too late to change anything at all because of the population’s support for the central Government. Back on 20th January, 2004 the Russian foreign ministry had condemned ‘extremist minded forces’ in Ajaria seeking Abashidze’s resignation. Moscow may have drawn the conclusion that support for Abashidze was so low that propping him up would have been too costly politically.

\[a)\] Russian military bases

The Russian Government expected that its support during the Ajaria crisis would be seen a sign of its preparedness to resolve Georgia’s security problems. Russia had therefore expected some political gratitude, so President Putin was allegedly angered and surprised when a day after Abashidze’s exile, Georgian Government repeated the previous demands for the removal of the remaining Russian bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki. Meanwhile, President Saakashvili stated that Tbilisi acknowledged Russia’s security interests in the region and would be prepared to offer cooperation as establishing a joint Russian-Georgian anti-terrorist centre in exchange for the military bases. In an interview with the Time magazine in January 2004, Saakashvili went further to state that the bases served more to bolster imperial


933 Ajaria is an autonomous region on the Black Sea in Georgia, which is populated by Georgian muslims. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Tbilisi’s control over the region diminished, its leadership led by Aslan Abashidze defied the central government on a number of issues including customs and tax-collections. Ajaria’s relations with the centre resembled those in a loose federation, and were based upon a de facto personalised power-sharing arrangement between Abashidze and Shevardnadze. Ajaria was also immune from the Georgian civil war. During Shevardnadze’s term in office, Tbilisi’s sovereignty over Ajaria was only nominal. The primary difference between Ajaria and the other conflict regions, is it never aspired to independence and never fought an armed conflict with the central authority. After Saakashvili’s election, the Ajarian leader refused to recognise the new Georgian leadership and blocked the administrative border with the rest of Georgia. See Saakashvili’s Ajaria success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia?’, *Europe Briefing*, 18 August, 2004.

934 See ‘Saakashvili’s Ajaria success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia?’, *Europe Briefing*, 18 August, 2004. The siloviki in the Kremlin also defended the position that Russia should support Ajaria and not let Saakashvili intrude in, see Stanislav Belkovskiy, ‘Rossiya dolzhna bilo spasti Ajariu’, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 17 May, 2004.

935 See Tsygankov, *Russia’s foreign policy*, p. 155. Saakashvili had first mentioned Russia’s withdrawal in his inauguration speech, stating ‘...we acknowledge Russia’s security interests in the region, but these can be served better by means other than the bases’. The base in Batumi was largely welcomed by the then Ajarian leader Abashidze, whose regime viewed it as military support to rely upon for the survival of its autonomy. Equally the base in Akhalkalaki, a region populated by ethnic Armenians, enjoyed high popularity among the local residents, the closure of which was initially thought to generate unrest in the region. See Vladimir Socor: ‘Russian Military Bases in Georgia: No Negotiations, New Complications’, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. I, No. 34, 18 June 2004 and ‘Russia Turning back the Clock on Georgia Policy’, ibid., vol. I, No. 36, 22 June 2004.

self-confidence than Russia’s genuine security. At the Istanbul Summit, Russia had agreed to close down the Vaziani and Gudauta (in Abkhazia) bases by 2001 and negotiate the withdrawal from the two bases of Batumi and Akhaltsikhe. The first two bases were closed down in 2001 and in June 2002, and OSCE military experts inspected both of them and confirmed the withdrawal of Russian arms and personnel. As to the other bases in Akhaltsikhe and Batumi, there was no deadline set for them and their withdrawal was subject to bilateral negotiations. Back in December 2003, at the OSCE Maastricht Summit, Russia had claimed that it had no obligation to withdraw its troops from Georgia and Moldova. Russia had refused to link the CFE and its withdrawal from the bases. As Georgia pressed for the closure of the bases, Russia hardened its stance and set longer terms for its withdrawal, arguing that at the Istanbul Summit it had only expressed an ‘intention to leave’. Once progress could not be achieved in the negotiations, in 2005 January the Georgian Parliament initiated a resolution instructing the Government to outlaw the Russian presence in Georgia and seek forceful removal of the troops. The same decision instructed the government to blockade and cut off utilities to the bases until Russia agrees to a timeline. Finally, on May 30, 2005, Russia agreed to a withdrawal by the end of 2008, without receiving any guarantee on the deployment of foreign troops.

b) Gas crisis and spy row

Relations between Georgia and Russia gravely deteriorated throughout 2006 to 2008. Throughout 2005, Russia accused Georgia of indulging terrorists to attack Russia from Georgian territory and claimed the right to carry out preventive strikes. The deputy minister of foreign affairs Valery Loshinin and the minister of defence Sergei Ivanov both argued that terrorists remain in Pankisi and threaten Russia’s stability. In October 2006, Putin referred to Georgia’s preparation for a forceful way to a possible solution of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as the only reason for the deterioration of relations between Tbilisi and Moscow, stressing the admissibility of only peaceful ways of coexistence. The then Russian

940 Russia very much desired the ratification of the CFE treaty by NATO states, so that it would restrict the deployment of allied forces in the Baltic states, see Vladimir Socor, ‘Moscow pressing for CFE Treaty Ratification Despite its own non-compliance’, Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol. 3, issue 96, May 16, 2006.
943 Certain analysts argued that terrorism was just a pretext for Russia to put pressure on the unfriendly to Russia Georgian Government and for invading it. See Vladimir Socor, ‘Georgia under growing Russian pressure ahead of Bush-Clinton Summit’, Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol. 2, issue 32, 14 February, 2005.
president assured that the only goal of their aspirations in the South Caucasus was to prevent bloodshed.\textsuperscript{944} 

The mistrust in Georgian-Russian relations often led to the politicisation of economic and social issues. On 22\textsuperscript{nd} January 2006, explosions on the Mozdok-Tbilisi gas pipeline from Russia to Georgia caused a cut off in heating supplies in Georgia and Armenia. Georgia experienced a severe energy crisis for two weeks. The Georgian government immediately blamed Russia for the alleged sabotage. The accusation infuriated many in the Kremlin and aggravated mistrust of Georgia in Russian politics. President Putin responded, saying ‘Russian engineers worked hard in a temperature of minus 30 degrees to restore the pipeline, Russia only got accusations’.\textsuperscript{945} Later, in May 2006, President Saakashvili drew attention in Russia when he attended the opening of a museum of Soviet occupation in Tbilisi. The term occupation implied the subjugation of Georgia to Soviet Russia, therefore raised negative reaction in Moscow. In response, President Putin in an interview in July 2006, inquired ‘who occupied whom’ when under Stalin, the entire leadership of the Soviet Union was made up of Georgians.\textsuperscript{946} Further in December 2006, as the Russian Government took the economic decision to stop subsidising gas deliveries to CIS states and accordingly raised the gas price to Georgia to 230 per one thousand cubic meters, Tbilisi accused it of using its energy resources as leverage. Russian authorities responded that an increase in the gas prices was not an attempt of gaining leverage over the neighbours, but a simple transition to market principles.\textsuperscript{947} Later, in April 2006 Russia banned the import of wine and water products from Georgia to Russia on sanitary grounds.\textsuperscript{948} In response, in September, Tbilisi started its intensive dialogue with NATO, and the next day Saakashvili at the UNGA in a speech accused Russia of ‘bandit occupation’ and ‘annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia’.

Relations deteriorated critically after Georgia in October 2006 arrested in a humiliating way Russian military officers in Tbilisi accused of spying. Russia in response suspended air and rail transport, postal links, money transfers to Georgia. Georgian citizens all over Russia were deported and Georgian business and mafia in Moscow was targeted. Having said that, President Putin, rejected the deportation of Georgians as reprisal, arguing ‘in the deportation cases, for example, Russia deported 15,300 citizens of one country, 13 400 citizens of another

\textsuperscript{945} ‘Gruziya naplevala na Rossiyu. Putin obidelsya?’, \textit{Internet Reporter}, at http://rep-ua.com/ru/22839.html
\textsuperscript{946} See Erik R. Scott, ‘Russia and Georgia After Empire’, \textit{Russian analytical digest}, No 13, 16\textsuperscript{th} January, 2007.
\textsuperscript{947} ‘Tbilisi says Russia’s plan to double gas price politically motivated’, \textit{Civil Georgia}, 2 November, 2006.
country were deported, and the number of deported citizens of Georgian is only 5000.\footnote{\textit{Putin comments on Georgia in Nationwide Q&A Session}, \textit{Civil Georgia}, 2 November, 2006.} Obviously, he referred to the gradual deportation of non-Russians, ignoring the fact that no ethnic group had previously been so inexorably deported from Russia.

Tbilisi’s efforts to change the peacekeeping format have largely been seen as an attempt to get the Russian peacekeepers out and accommodate NATO forces. The Georgian parliament had several times adopted a resolution outlawing peacekeepers, but they did not leave. Russian authorities have repeatedly stated that they have no special interests in Abkhazia, but have to remain there as peacekeepers for security reasons.\footnote{See Zamministrina inostrannix del RF Grigoriy Karasin- o politike Rossii na prostranstve SNG, \textit{News Georgia}, 19 April, 2006.} Moscow was further angered when Tbilisi linked Russia’s WTO entry to its policies to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, referring to both conflicts as Georgia’s internal problems not to be linked to the issue.

\subsection*{c) Prospects of Russian-Georgian relations}

The Russian authorities delivered various messages in 2007 to improve relations with Tbilisi. In August 2007, Russian Foreign ministry stated it wanted a friendly, sovereign and neutral Georgia, presumably requesting Tbilisi to withdraw its NATO application. It further stated, if Tbilisi takes steps towards real normalisation of relations, Russia’s constructive response will not be delayed.\footnote{See ‘Moscow wants a neutral Georgia’, \textit{Civil Georgia}, 30 August, 2007.} With regard to the conflicts, the message has been that Russia cannot impose any peace deal upon South Ossetia and Abkhazia forcefully and the populations do not desire any reintegration.

In February 2007, the Russian Ambassador to Georgia set conditions for the improvement of bilateral relations.\footnote{Such messages had been sent to the Georgian government previously in 2005 by Sergei Karaganov, who evaluated the socio-economic advantages of a normalisation of Georgian-Russian relations. See Sergei Karaganov, ‘Moskva i Tbilisi, Nachat snachala’, \textit{Rossiya v globalnoy politike}, No 1, January-February, 2004.} Accordingly, Russia wished an end to the anti-Russian rhetoric and propaganda in Georgia. On the conflicts, he stated that Russia supports Georgia’s territorial integrity, but with the protection of the interests of all peoples living there. Russia is interested in the resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Ossetian conflicts and its approach is ‘you negotiate with each other and Russia will accept anything you will agree on’.\footnote{‘Russian diplomat outlines conditions for improving ties’, \textit{Civil Georgia}, 6\textsuperscript{th} February, 2007.} Moscow accordingly would see trust-building between the parties and opening of economic ties as a good start. In all the above-mentioned statements, however, Russian policymakers did not shed light upon the fact that as long as Russia provides the tacit support for both regions, there will be no incentives for them to agree to any deal with Georgia, since status-quo suits them quite well.

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In contrast to the Russian ambassador, President Putin set Georgia’s relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia as the primary condition for an improvement in bilateral relations. He said on October 25 that the only reason behind Russo-Georgian tensions is Tbilisi’s plan to forcefully regain control over its breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.\(^\text{954}\) Russia’s conditions were even more clearly elaborated by Sergei Karaganov in an article, called ‘Farewell to Georgia?’. He argued that unless the new government of Georgia cooperates more closely, Russia should officially recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Accordingly, if Georgia keeps its unfriendly stance, Russia might need buffer states.\(^\text{955}\) Russia had suggested Georgia to restore railway in Abkhazia involving all three parties and economic ties in South Ossetia. He further argued that the initiate to aggravate relations belongs to Tbilisi because of the latter’s interest to resolve its conflicts by use of force.

**Table 4 Compatibility of interests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Georgian interests</th>
<th>Russian interests</th>
<th>Incompatible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restoring sovereignty over Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a part of its state-building process</td>
<td>Security-political presence in the region for stability in the North Caucasus and for power-political interests;</td>
<td>Incompatible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term resolution of the conflicts</td>
<td>Leverage against an unfriendly Georgia and self-interested US;</td>
<td>Incompatible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO membership, integration to Euratlantic institutions.(^\text{956})</td>
<td>Disinterest in the emergence of poles in the CIS, threats to stability in the North Caucasus, strategic partnership with Georgia(^\text{957})</td>
<td>Incompatible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military intrusion into the</td>
<td>Domestic security interests:</td>
<td>Incompatible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{954}\) See ‘Putin comments on Georgia in Nationwide Q&A Session’, *Civil Georgia*, 2 November, 2006.


\(^{956}\) Georgia has set NATO membership and integration to Euratlantic institutions its strategic goal, see ‘National Security Concept of Georgia’, Tbilisi, 2005.

\(^{957}\) Russian policy-makers have argued that Georgia’s strategic partner should be Russia and not the US or EU, strategic partnership with Russia would be desirable and beneficial for Georgia’s security interests as well, see A. Chigorin, ‘Rossiysko-Gruzinskie otnosheniya. Chto dalshe?’, *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn*, No. 5, 2003, pp. 40-60.
regions | spill-over of conflict into the North Caucasus
---|---
Internationalisation of peacekeeping | No undermining of its great power status | Incompatible
Economic integration with Abkhazia and South Ossetia | Has been encouraging | Incompatible
Confederative models for the regions | Has been supportive of | Incompatible
Long-term stability in the region | Stability/Absence of military conflict in the South Caucasus | Compatible

5.2. Impact of bilateral relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan on Russia’s policies towards the MK conflict

Like in the above-mentioned conflicts, bilateral relations between Russia and Armenia on the one hand and Russia and Azerbaijan on the other have had a significant impact on its policies towards the MK conflict. Throughout the 20th century Armenian society and elite have largely seen Russia as an ally and protectorate. In the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Armenia became a strategic and the most loyal ally of Russia in the South Caucasus and the CIS. Various Russian policymakers have seen Russia’s military presence in Armenia as a stabilising factor.\textsuperscript{958} In 1991, as the conflict with Azerbaijan intensified, Yerevan was quick to withdraw its demand for the closure of Russian military bases, and ever since has opted for larger Russian engagement in its political and economic life. As early as May 1992, Armenia entered a mutual defence pact with Russia, although this was not invoked over MK. In keeping with the Tashkent treaty, which provided for the distribution of the military hardware of the USSR among the CIS states, Armenia and Azerbaijan were to receive an equal share of weapons.\textsuperscript{959} Part of Azerbaijan’s quota was appropriated by the MKR army,

\textsuperscript{959} According to Zverev, the largest portion of Soviet weaponry was located in Azerbaijan, which made Azerbaijan militarily better off at the initial stages of the conflict. See Zverev, op. cit. However, although the Azeri Parliament declared that the weapons in its territory should be regarded as the property of Azerbaijan, the Russian military, in particular after the Popular Front came to power resisted the handover and decided to withdraw a large number of the strategic weapons. Throughout 1992, Azeri weapons acquisitions occurred either by theft from the Soviet arms dumps or by paying bribes to the Russian commanders in the region. See Arif
and Armenia allegedly received additional weapons in large quantities from Russia between 1993 and 1996, some of which were transferred to MK.

While Armenia expressed more interest in accommodating Russia’s interests in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Russia were critical throughout the period. Relations between Azerbaijan and Russia relatively improved after Azerbaijan joined the CIS and Collective Security Treaty in 1993. In September 1993, an understanding was reached between Presidents Aliyev and Yeltsin that Russia would guard Azerbaijan’s borders with Turkey and Iran. However, by the end of 1994, Aliyev was reluctant to let Russian border guards in. This was important for Russia to prevent drug dealers, armed criminals and Afghan mujahedeen travel to the north Caucasus. In 1994, Azerbaijan offered Russian Oil Company of Lukoil a 10% share in the contract for the exploration of oil in the Azeri sector of the Caspian Sea. This however did not lead to any breakthrough in the peace process and Azerbaijan until the last few years was increasingly critical of Russia’s intentions in the region. Moreover, in August 1997 Armenia signed a treaty of friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation and mutual defence arrangements with Russia. Just before Putin came to power, Armenia and Russia had 40 bilateral accords on military cooperation. Russia’s security-political alliance with Armenia led in late 1990s to the activation of more efforts by Azerbaijan to balance Russia in the region. As a result, in 1999 Azerbaijan left the CSTO and co-established the GUUAM alliance and opted for integration into Western security political institutions. However, Moscow has insisted that its bilateral relations with Armenia should be detached from its policies towards the conflict.

Relations between Baku and Moscow improved substantially after Putin’s election in 2000. In 2002, Azerbaijan agreed to lease the strategically important Gabala radar station for a 10 year period. With the construction of the BTJ and BTE oil and gas pipelines that could act as an alternative to the existing Russian pipelines, Baku has acted as a potential rival to Russia’s


964 For a detailed analysis, see Pavel Baev, ‘Russia’s policies in the Southern Caucasus and the Caspian Area’, European Security, vol 10, no 2, Summer 2001, pp. 95-110.
energy monopoly. In 2006, as Russia raised the price of gas for Azerbaijan, Baku rejected Russian gas overall and reduced the amount of oil transported via the Baku Novorossiysk pipeline from 4.4 million to 2.5 million tons.\textsuperscript{965} Nevertheless, Russia has in recent years increasingly seen Azerbaijan as an important trade partner in the CIS.

The entire Armenian energy sector is currently under Russian control. A series of equity for debt deals since 2003 have transferred a number of plants in Armenia including the critical nuclear power plant and six hydroelectric plants to Russian companies. Through the assets for debts scheme, Russia has bought significant assets in Armenia’s energy, industry, telecommunication and banking sectors. Russia is the largest foreign investor in the Armenian economy, its investments made over 1 billion USD in 2008.\textsuperscript{966} Yerevan is to a large extent economically dependent upon Russia’s investments and Russia’s military bases. In 2006, Russia raised gas prices to Armenia causing discontent, but this was balanced through cheaper military sales.

Improvement in the bilateral relations between Russia and Azerbaijan has had its impact on Russia’s position towards the MK conflict. Whereas Russia’s policymakers have been arguing that Kosovo’s recognition should make a precedent for the conflicts in the CIS, MK is excluded from the list. As it became clear during the South Ossetia crisis, Moscow treats the conflict in a separate context. Thus, difference in Moscow’s approach to MK is more associated with its policies rather than differences between the conflicts. Contrary to expectations in Armenia and Mountainous Karabakh, Russia refused to invite MK to the special hearings on secessionist conflicts in the Russian Duma in March 2008. The official viewpoint of the Duma’s CIS Committee was that there are no Russians living in MK, there is no territorial continuity in this conflict, there are no Russian investments to protect.\textsuperscript{967} The reason was however, Russia is not interested in satisfying Armenia at the cost of spoiling its relations with Azerbaijan. Thus, Russia does not satisfy all Armenia’s wishes on the conflict and it would not support a solution that would make Baku discontent.\textsuperscript{968} Although improvement in the bilateral relations between Moscow and Baku has had an impact on the


\textsuperscript{967} ‘Nagorno-Karabakh will try to use Kosovo precedent’, \textit{Armenian Daily}, 10\textsuperscript{th} November, 2005.

\textsuperscript{968} Moscow insists that it does actually have a balanced approach in its relations to all three states in the South Caucasus both on a bilateral level and within frameworks as the CIS, CSTO. This however, does not preclude Russia from enjoying warmer relations with those member states that are aspiring to it. Author’s interview with a senior Russian diplomat, Moscow, 9\textsuperscript{th} March, 2008. See also Stanislav Cherniavskiy, ‘Kavkazskoe napravlenie vneshnoy politiki Rossii’, \textit{Mezhdunarodnoe Zhizn}, 2000, No 8-9, pp. 106-117.
conflict dynamics, for obvious reasons Russia’s policymakers will not make pressure on the conflict parties or impose any deal upon them.

5.3. Continuity of interests vis-a-vis the conflict regions

5.3.1. Russia’s engagement in the Mountainous Karabakh conflict

a) Disinterest in the resolution of the conflict

There were a number of factors that stipulated Russia’s support to Armenia and MK and overall secessionism in the region during Yeltsin’s term. These included: Russian-Azerbaijani bilateral relations during Elchibey Government, Russia’s mistrust and perception of Turkey as a rival, and perception of the conflict as a means of leverage against Azerbaijan, especially in its potential rapprochement with Turkey. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, under Yeltsin, Russia with limited resources viewed the conflict as a resource for its politico-military presence in the region, for its strategic alliance with Armenia and for leverage against an independent-minded and partly mistrustful Azerbaijan. Although, Azerbaijan became a member of the CIS and CSTO in 1993, it left the latter in 1999 and was the founding member of GUUAM alliance, which was perceived in Russia with mistrust. Azerbaijan also refused to let the Russian border guards in, who had left at the request of President Elchibey in 1993. Baku since 1993 pursued a balanced foreign policy, but was more inclined towards cooperation with the West due to the widespread perception that Russia is attached to its geopolitical interests, which will never indulge a resolution of the conflict.

b) Improvement of bilateral relations with Azerbaijan and change in Russia’s strategy

With the arrival of Vladimir Putin, certain changes were observed in both Russia and Azerbaijan. The primary change in Russia was the strengthening of the state and consolidation of elites, and restriction of parallel and crossing individualist activities of various institutions in the conflict. Putin established a strong hand of the Kremlin over the Duma, North Caucasian elites, and promoted the security staff. This and economic stabilisation of Russia contributed to the promotion of Russia’s self-confidence. The improvement in Russia’s capacity was accompanied by the will in Azerbaijan to improve relations with Moscow. This was intiated by President Putin’s first official visit to Azerbaijan in 2001 and followed by the lease of the then important Gabala Radar station to Russia in 2002 for a 10 year period in. Azerbaijan also made pledges not to apply for NATO membership or host US military bases in its territory.

The improvement in bilateral relations was conditioned by a number of factors on both sides. On the Russian side as mentioned earlier, emergence of a strong leader and improvement in the state capacity necessitated a rethinking of Russia’s strategy. Another factor for Russia was
the rising economic importance of Azerbaijan, especially in the energy sector. After the launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyhan and -Erzurum oil and gas pipelines in 2005 and afterwards, Azerbaijan became a potential fossil fuel exporting country in the region. Since Russia was itself an energy exporting country and most of its economic stability was built upon its energy monopoly in Europe, a larger need appeared for the coordination of certain activities with Baku.

On Azerbaijan’s side, improvement of bilateral relations was conditioned by various factors as well. Azerbaijan starting from late 1990s had given certain primacy to its relations with the West. Like Tbilisi, Baku had expected in 1993 that joining the CIS and the CSTO would produce implications for the resolution of the conflict. Once convinced that Yeltsin’s Russia was not intent on supporting the resolution of the conflict and was making it actually more complicated by weapons deliveries to Armenia and military cooperation agreements, Azerbaijan left the CSTO and joined efforts with Georgia in balancing Russia. Azerbaijan by engaging the US and Europe in its oil and gas sector had hoped to engage these powers in the resolution of the conflict, in particular to use their leverage over Armenia. According to a neorealist logic, balancing should have been successful because the conditions were there, however, it became soon clear that neither the US nor the EU would be able or willing to pressure Armenia to reach modus vivendi with Azerbaijan. Baku had a choice between a superpower US with large capabilities all over the world and willing to support the resolution of the conflict, but limited by its domestic political system and relative power distribution in the CIS region to exert any pressure for the resolution of the conflict. Baku had hoped that its balanced foreign policy would lead to certain agreement between Washington and Moscow on the resolution of the conflict. The alternative for Baku after Putin’s arrival was to opt for a relevant power with limited capabilities in the international system, but large capabilities in its own regional complex, and ability to pressure Armenia to reach a modus vivendi. Disillusioned with the lack of engagement of the West, Azerbaijan starting from 2002 shifted towards bandwagoning again.

Another factor for the improvement of bilateral relations was Azerbaijan’s alienation from the West due to its level of democracy. President Heydar Aliyev enjoyed good relations with President Putin and secured Russia’s support to the succession of his son Ilham Aliyev in 2003. At a time when the West criticised Azerbaijan over human rights abuses and moving backwards towards authoritarianism, Russia was quick to convey its support for what was sold out as intervention into domestic affairs. Moreover, the governments of both Azerbaijan and Russia increasingly came to share common values and perceptions on state-building and
governance. Last, but not least, change in Russia’s strategy was caused above all by the factor that the conflict as a resource was largely exhausted and had in the last years become an impediment for Russia’s relations with Azerbaijan.

Another factor worth mentioning is the change of attitude towards Turkey in the Kremlin. Whereas Turkey during Yeltsin’s term was perceived as an historic rival of Russia and Russia was concerned about Ankara’s increasing role in the Turkic states in Central Asia and in Azerbaijan, this perception is no longer valid today. Turkey’s failure to join the EU and tension in its relations with the US, and increasing economic interdependence between Turkey and Russia has had implications for the bilateral relations. Turkey has a large trade turnover with Russia and Russia accounts for more than 70 % of Turkish gas imports. Moreover, Russia has been convinced that today’s Turkey is not intent on expansionism in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Whereas in 1990s it was argued that the resolution of the conflict would end up Russia’s economic monopoly in Armenia and question the military bases in its territory, this is no longer an issue. Russia firstly has secured economic and military presence in Armenia for the next decade at least. Since Russia no longer views Turkey as a rival in the Caucasus, it welcomes the opening of its border with Armenia. Russia’s and Turkey’s interests have largely converged in the region in the last few years.

Figure 3: Russia’s engagement in the MK conflict

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969 See Fiona Hill, Omer Taspinar, ‘Russia and Turkey in the Caucasus: Moving together to preserve status-quo’, *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no 8, January 2006, Ifri Research Programme Russia/NIS.
5.3.2. The Georgian-Abkhaz and the Georgian-Ossetian conflicts

There has for certain reasons not been a major change in Russia’s position towards the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. The Kremlin still views them as a guarantee of physical presence in the South Caucasus. Russia has largely seen both regions to be closely related to its domestic security concerns in the North Caucasus. Moreover, there has not been any fundamental improvement in the bilateral relations since the change of government in Russia. On the contrary, Russian-Georgian relations have constantly deteriorated. This has on the one hand to do with Georgian discontent with Russia’s peacekeeping and mediating role in both conflicts, and on the other hand Tbilisi’s integration to Western security-political organisations. The fundamental difference between Russia’s engagement in the MK conflict and its engagement in the conflicts in Georgia is the absence of security interconnectedness in the case of MK. The North Caucasus factor was especially conspicuous during the times of state weakness in Russia. That said, Russia just like in Abkhazia and South Ossetia strongly opposes Azerbaijan’s intrusion into MK or the buffer zone by use of force.
Concluding remarks
Bilateral relations with the South Caucasus states and their geopolitical orientations have had a significant impact upon Russia’s policies towards all three secessionist conflicts in the South Caucasus. In the case of Mountainous Karabakh conflict, the strategic nature of Russian-Armenian relations did have an impact upon the former’s approach to the conflict more inclined towards Armenia. However, since the last few years, improvement in the relations between Baku and Moscow and the former’s rejection of NATO membership or security-political rapprochement with the US has caused Russia to pursue a more balanced approach to the conflict. Improvement in the bilateral relations between Moscow and Baku has had a more tangible character since early 2000, so that Baku unlike previous years now has stressed that its satisfied with Russia’s position on the conflict. Russia’s new balanced approach to the conflict does not allow any substantial changes in its tactical approach to the conflict; hence Moscow has made it clear that it is not intent on spoiling its relations with either Armenia or Azerbaijan for the sake of deepening ties with one of them. This might seem to some analysts and policymakers as an evidence of no change in Russia’s policies to the conflict at all, implying that Moscow is still intent on not interested in a resolution. Certain changes in Russian interests, the regional dynamics and in the bilateral relations have led to changes in Russian strategy and as a matter of fact unlike in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Moscow is strategically interested in the resolution of the conflicts. Unlike, the Yeltsin period, the Kremlin now has at least developed a desire to end up the frozen status of the conflict, but its capacity to impose peace is also limited by its balanced approach that emantes above all from its regional interests.

The situation is different in Russia’s approach to the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. Here, level of bilateral relations (including Georgia’s strategic choices) is only one dimension of Russia’s engagement. The other dimension-linkage of both conflicts to Russia’s domestic security concerns is equally important and the Kremlin’s interest in this dimension has remained unchanged in the entire post-Soviet period. In this context, the Georgian Government would need to find a scheme where it could accommodate its own interests with both dimensions of Russia’s interests in the region. in the first dimension, Georgian-Russian relations have been the poorest within the CIS since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Some of Gamsakhurdia’s policies left deep mistrust in Russia, which still cannot be healed and requires more efforts to improve. Georgia’s initial reluctance under Shevardnadze to join the CIS did not change Russia’s perception of Georgia either. In 1994-1997, Georgia bandwagoned with Russia with the hope of getting its support to restore sovereignty over
Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, Russia was unable to approve Georgia’s expectations. All that Georgia received in response was sanctions against Abkhazia and declaratory statements accusing separatism in Georgia. According to Georgian rhetoric Russia failed to help reintegrate the least intractable South Ossetia during the period of Tbilisi’s bandwagoning. The response of Russian policymakers was that Russia did what it could, and beyond that it did not have the capacity. This argument is understandable in the case of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, but not in the case of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Georgian-Russian relations only deteriorated during President Putin’s term. President Shevardnadze sought not only to balance Russia, but refused to cooperate on the critical issues of Chechen-Georgian border and presence of Chechen fighters in Pankisi gorge. Tbilisi’s position reflected the echo that since it did not get any benefit from bandwagoning with Russia, there is no reason why it should take measures to please Moscow. Deterioration of relations became deadly for both conflicts during the presidency of Michael Saakashvili. Saakashvili continued some of the foreign policy rhetoric started under Shevardnadze, but meanwhile pledged to start everything from scratch. He went on demanding the closure of the remaining Russian military bases in Georgia, but offered economic incentives meanwhile. Although Saakashvili’s calling outreached hand to Russia did cause confusion in Moscow over how to react, the Kremlin preferred a strategy of wait and see vis-à-vis the secessionist conflicts. The mistrust of Georgia in Russia on the one hand and Russia’s mistrust of the West’s steps in the region caused Russia not to hurry up to give up its tacit support that the conflict regions had enjoyed since 2000. Georgian-Russian relations started to deteriorate since the July 2004 attempt of the Georgian Government to take over South Ossetia and Russia’s response. This touched upon the domestic security dimension of the conflict dynamics, causing a sharp reaction from major Russia. The relations onwards only deteriorated throughout 2006 and 2008 to an unprecedented level, resulting in the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia’s recognition was to a large extent tied to its bilateral interests with Georgia and power-political interests with the West. In this context, a balancing strategy ended up fatally for Georgia and the bilateral relations are far from being normalised at present. The question often arises whether Saakashvili Government had any opportunity or leeway to change Russia’s approach to the secessionist provinces. In other words, why did the Georgian Government not try to bandwagon with Russia instead of applying for NATO membership and attempting to change the peacekeeping format in both regions? As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, when Putin was elected, a lot of circles in the Kremlin (in particular the
siloviki) viewed the conflicts as a means of leverage and guarantee of Russia’s physical presence in the region. The conflicts had in this context been securitised in the entire post-Soviet period. Only as Russia’s self-confidence grew did analysts began to speak of potential changes. The Saakashvili Government had from the very onset with certain predetermined pledges (NATO membership, EU membership, closure of the remaining military bases) not been able to thaw the mistrust of Georgia in Russian politics, so that Russia would give up its support for the secessionist regions. Moreover, the Georgian Government grew increasingly impatient with the situation and attempted to resolve the issue at a time when Russia was not prepared for it. In contrast, most of mistrust of Azerbaijan was associated with Azerbaijan’s Western ambitions and ever closer ties with Turkey. Azerbaijan withdrew from a balancing strategy in the security-political realm, and its energy based cooperation with the US and EU is no longer seen as a threat to Russia.

To sum up, overall the bilateral relations dimension of Russia’s engagement in the ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus is quite an important variable, which should not be ignored.
Findings

To what extent does Russia support secessionist conflicts in the South Caucasus and what is the primary driving force behind its policies? This was the main research question of this study. At the beginning several approaches from international relations literature was employed to offer an insight on this question.

This study began by testing three theoretic approaches to state behaviour in international relations. Realist perspectives attributed Russia’s engagement in the conflict regions to its relative material capabilities in the region and the anarchic structure of the international system. The relevant versus relative power concept argued that due to both material and socio-economic factors the states in the South Caucasus have not been able to balance Russia, because its material capabilities in the region outweigh those of the other states. The concept also suggested that balancing is deemed to fail in the CIS in the near future, because on the one hand Russia is to remain the relevant power, with larger capabilities and mechanisms to influence the security architecture of the region; and secondly, because the region is not tied to the international system that tightly, thus there are no alternatives to align with. The motivation of Russia’s behaviour in realist logic varies. Domestic security is recognised as a tenet in the second image of realism, and in this context, Russia’s domestic security interests in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are compatible with realism. As to the broader considerations of its policies beyond domestic security concerns, those are attributed by the second image to Russia’s national interests to remain a great power, avoid poles in its regional shell and have buffer zones in a region of its vital interests. Since the South Caucasus is a region where Russia’s domestic security interests meet with its broader geopolitical interests, a realist approach would draw attention to the long-term interests of Russia in the region. On the account of its long-term interests of stability and prosperity in the Caucasus and its policies of short-term engagement which have to a certain extent been borne out of a strategy vacuum rather than strategic interests, realism has less to say. The area in question is an interaction between internal security and external security and power, and in the long run, the two might be at odds. Thus, the thing in question in this research could more or less be explained by all three levels of realism, the first image was largely left out.

What is the level of Russia’s engagement?

Russia’s engagement in all three conflicts and its tacit support to secessionism has varied in terms of both successive governments and its extent of involvement. This study has argued that a Great Game approach to Russia’s engagement in the conflicts is not very useful and at
times may be misleading. Russia’s approach to the three conflicts has been stipulated by factors that are specific to each conflict. Therefore, the thesis encourages a move away from the analysis that Russia’s engagement in all three conflicts has been equal and has been motivated by its desire to control the heartland. The core causal variable of Russia’s behaviour has been more complicated than such an explanation.

Georgian-Abkhaz conflict

In this conflict, Russia’s engagement in the preliminary period served two primary objectives: cessation of hostilities and manipulation of the conflict for its bilateral relations with Georgia. Georgia’s resistance identity and its policies towards the minorities in the country during the national movement had produced a deep level of mistrust of Georgia in Russian political circles, which only exacerbated through the years. Its refusal to comply with Russia’s foreign policy and domestic security objectives in the region led to the latter to use the conflict as a lever against Tbilisi. Although at declaratory level Russia supported Georgia’s territorial integrity, but after a certain point, Russia’s support for the Abkhaz forces seemed to have been sanctioned at the state level. Another factor, during President Yeltsin’s tenure was the North Caucasus, which played a crucial role in the phase of armed conflict, and Moscow largely failed to prevent the support Abkhazia received from the Caucasus Confederation of Mountain Peoples. Again, the weakness of the Yeltsin administration and overall Russia’s control over the North Caucasus in early 1990s dictated that Russia should follow a line that would not put it in conflict with the former. The picture changed slightly once Georgia complied with Russia’s conditions and received support both to suppress the civil war between the supporters of the ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia and forces of Georgian State Council. Russia also applied sanctions against Abkhazia and made statements on the inadmissibility of Abkhazia’s independence. These measures softened Abkhazia’s stance, but failed to achieve a modus vivendi due to two factors. Firstly, the incompatibility of Georgia’s and Abkhazia’s approaches to modus vivendi played a primary role. Abkhazia’s mistrust of Georgia was deeper than certain analysts expected, so the sanctions failed to break that resistance. Moreover, Tbilisi’s position towards the region was far from being liberal at the period. Another factor was that the sanctions were never held tightly, therefore it is difficult to judge what implications it might have produced for the peace process. Russia’s state weakness and mistrust of Georgia among the major political circles in Russia was the reason why the sanctions were not held strictly. Starting from 1994, the rhetoric of geopolitical rivalry strengthened in Russia’s perception of the region, so that towards the latter period of the Yeltsin administration, many in the Kremlin thought that there was no urgency to assist
the resolution of the conflict. Russia’s failure to observe the sanctions strictly led to Georgia’s balancing efforts and search for alternative allies. It strengthened the Georgian conviction that Russia due to its geopolitical interests in the region would not allow a resolution of the conflict.

Improvement in Russia’s state capacity and manoeuvre potential in the conflict coincided with deterioration in Georgian-Russian bilateral relations and increased Western presence in the region. This led to Russia’s cancellation of the sanctions regime against Abkhazia and more active engagement in the region. Russia has passportised an overwhelming majority of the residents, has paid their pensions and created further disincentives for their integration into Georgia. The more Georgia has applied pressure on Russia on the question of military bases and peacekeepers, the harsher Russia’s position has become. The deterioration in the bilateral relations has aggravated the already deeply rooted mistrust of Georgia in Russian politics, which should be overcome before getting the desired effect on the Russian side. The peak of this deterioration came out by Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia’s independence. The declaratory rhetoric was that now that it would be entirely impossible to convince Abkhazia to any model with Georgia, there is no point in keeping the region isolated. The real picture however, is the recognition was borne out of the desire to have buffer zones between Georgia and the Russian North Caucasus.

**Capacity**

Russia’s capacity to influence Abkhazia has been limited. This is due to the intractability and complexity of the conflict. The conflict has largely been identity based, and the conflict parties have not always pursued rationality in their behaviour. During Yelstin’s tenure, there were cases when the Abkhaz leadership had defied Russia’s pleas. Improvement in Russia’s state capacity overall reduced the influence of the North Caucasian elites upon the decisions of the Kremlin vis-à-vis the region. Moreover, Abkhazia’s isolation has rendered more dependence on Russia. As a result, as it was evident during the ‘presidential’ elections in Abkhazia in 2004, although Russia’s capacity here is limited, it still has sufficient levers to influence the conflict dynamics. This does not mean however that Russia’s exit from Abkhazia would lead to a settlement of the conflict or modus vivendi, on the contrary Russia’s unilateral exit from the conflict region might exacerbate the security situation to an unprecedented extent.

*The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict*

Russia’s engagement in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict has been less conspicuous than in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Conclusion of this thesis suggests that this conflict might
have been resolved during President Yeltsin’s tenure or President Putin’s tenure. The conflict was less about identity, rather than self-governance, only in recent years since the reintegration attempts of the Saakashvili Government, has the region become resistant towards reintegration into Georgia. Although there were no formal sanctions applied to this region, the Russian president in early 1990s made it hopeless in various declaratory statements the possibility of South Ossetia’s unification with North Ossetia. Again, the mistrust of Georgia in Russian politics on the one hand, and the incapacity of the Russian executive to impose rules upon the North Caucasus elites and certain domestic Russian political forces precluded Russia from pursuing a more active role as a peacekeeper. Like in Abkhazia, since 2001 the residents of the region have been naturalised and Russia has undertaken a more active role in the region’s domestic affairs. South Ossetia has no natural resources and its dependence upon Russia has even been larger.

*Mountainous Karabakh conflict*

Russia’s engagement in the MK is not comparable to the two above-mentioned conflicts because its engagement here has been much less, and motivated by different factors. Unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Mountainous Karabakh conflict is not related to Russia’s domestic security interests. There is nearly no link between Russia’s domestic security and Mountainous Karabakh conflict. Russia’s engagement in this conflict has largely been via its strategic alliance with Armenia. Like in Abkhazia, in Mountainous Karabakh, too, Russia has manipulated the conflict for its own ends. This happened mainly during the military phase of the conflict, when Russia through military support to Armenia and MK, pressured Azerbaijan to join the CIS and accept border guards. Moreover, the conflict was then viewed in Moscow as a lever against Azerbaijan’s further rapprochement with Turkey. During Yeltsin’s term, the conflict was viewed as a guarantee of Russian presence in the South Caucasus against Western intrusion and Azerbaijan’s further rapprochement with the West.

Many of these perceptions changed over the last few years, largely due to improvement in the Russian-Azerbaijan bilateral relations, but also changes to the circumstances. The resources of the conflict are exhausted, further manipulation of the conflict is not needed. Deterioration in US-Turkish relations, but also increased economic cooperation between Turkey and Russia has deconstructed the rival image of Turkey in Russian politics. The improvement in Azeri-Russian relations has been conditioned by increased state capacity in Russia since 2002, and Azerbaijani leadership’s willingness to cooperate. Unlike Georgia, Azerbaijan since 1993 had pursued a balanced foreign policy, cooperation on certain areas with Russia and on other with the West. This since the last few years has come to be replaced by a more bandwagoning
relationship with Russia. The primary implication of a shift in Russian approach to this conflict is, it is interested in its resolution.

Whether it is interested to undertake sufficient measures to support the parties reach modus vivendi is linked to the question of Russia’s capacity. Taking into consideration Armenia’s isolation, and economic and security dependence on Russia, Moscow can pressure both Armenia and MK and Azerbaijan to reach a deal. However, this could spoil Russia’s alliance with Armenia, since the issue of MK is a sensitive one in both Armenia and MK. To avoid such a scenario, Russia has preferred a gradual evolution of the peace process. President Putin had more than once reiterated that Russia is not intent on pressuring one side at the cost of another. Its objective thus is to retain its alliance with Armenia, but also enjoy a partnership with Azerbaijan.

Russia’s motivation: the strategic interests

The key causal variable of Russia’s behaviour towards the conflicts is its power political interests rather than its domestic security. Hence, Russia at this stage is not interested in a resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz or Georgian-Ossetian conflicts and its behaviour towards both regions is driven by broader geopolitical interests, rather than its domestic security needs or identity based interests, as its leaders claim. Such a strategy has proven compatible with its short-term interests of hegemony and great power status, but is at odds with its long-term strategy of stability. As already mentioned at this stage there is certain tension between its long-term and short-term interests. The broader geopolitical interests include political and military presence in the South Caucasus, avoiding Georgia’s NATO membership, avoiding Western security-political presence in the region as well as avoiding the internationalisation of the conflicts. The latter is conditioned by the perception that an internationalisation of peacekeeping would imply Russia’s failure in conflict management and undermine its great power capabilities in its own region. Under such a scenario alternative and more experienced peacekeepers might undertake measures to undermine Russia’s hegemony in the CIS or its domestic security interests. Georgia’s calls to internationalise peacekeeping to include the EU and US was viewed as a part of a balancing strategy the West had undertaken. Equally, Georgia’s NATO membership’s securitisation is on Art 5 of NATO Charter, that Russia might be threatened by an unfriendly small state interested in provoking it. Such a scenario, in Russian perception might end up in confrontation between Russia and the bloc. Moreover, Russian policymakers have insisted that since the region is vulnerable, presence of extra-regional powers, with no primary security interests in the region should be avoided.
The role of the West

This study has taken Russia’s relations with the West, its perception of the US an intervening variable behind Russia’s policies. The failure of Russia’s cooperation with the West, overall US policies in the Middle East have influenced Russian policymakers’ perception of the international system. Accordingly, the international system is anarchic and every state pursues its own national interests by all available means. There is a certain level of culpability of the West, in particular the US in the strengthening of such perception. Russia’s requests for a special role and recognition as a great power in early 1990s went unanswered. Equally in 2002 as Russia hoped for a partnership with the US and was turned down, the Kremlin’s belief in power politics only strengthened. Moreover, declaration of independence by Kosovo and subsequent recognition by most Western nations was perceived in Russia as ignorance of Russia’s concerns and status. As a result Russia has become less cooperative on those issues that concern the CIS, and has taken more a defensive position on global issues. Russian political circles during the South Ossetia crisis even accused the US of attempting to undermine Russia’s own security in order to undermine its global position. Such messages have been heard from all level of Russian government in the recent years.

Although Russia’s capacity as a state has improved and it has the resources that were absent for its foreign policy in previous periods, it still has no long-term strategy towards the South Caucasus region. Its recognition of both Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence was borne out of a strategy vacuum in the Kremlin. When examining Russia’s policies towards the South Caucasus region, one encounters the difficulty of explaining Russia’s strategic interests within the rationality dimension of neorealism. In this context, since there is no long-term or mid-term strategy, its policies have not been driven by clear cut strategic interests. A major cause of such a strategy vacuum is, Russia’s transformation from empire into a nation-state is still underway and this has implications for its foreign policy as well.

Assumptions

Overall in terms of the conflict dynamics, the regional level has not generated conflict, but rather taken part in it both positively and negatively. Absence of peace is not to blame on Russia per se, but no peace can be achieved without its approval. Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia’s and Abkhazia’s independence is not the end of the peace process. For any substantial improvement of bilateral relations between Georgia and Russia, Tbilisi should first address the mistrust of Georgia in Russian politics. A patient deconstruction of such mistrust, and gradual rapprochement with Russia might have implications for the peace processes, although it is difficult to imagine a return to status quo ante, what could maximally be
achieved is a loose confederation. The previous efforts by Georgia to bandwagon with Russia did not produce the desired effects because of incapacity in Russia and mistrust of Georgia.

**Opportunities for further research**

Further research is required on a number of questions. The question of tension between long-term and short-term interests in a comparative analysis of Russia and other great powers could be useful. A further question would be the link between domestic politics and foreign policy, and whether it would be possible to separate domestic security from the broader geopolitical interests of any state. One question that requires further research is the rationality of state behaviour, in particular classical realism’s approach to it. The link between transformation, identity and rationality should be explored.

Further research on the empirical questions of this study would need to shed light on the (de)construction of the mistrust of Georgia in Russian politics, link between Russia’s own transformation and its policies towards the region, comparative analysis of its policies towards the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Further elaboration on why Russia has prioritised its great power status and how this issue is correlated to its policies towards the South Caucasus states would also be desirable. Further research on great power transformation and its behaviour towards its near abroad might offer a new insight as well. The relationship between Russia’s hegemony and capacity require further exploration, since most of the theories on hegemonic stability suggest the opposite of the nature of Russia’s hegemony in the region.
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