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# THE THREE COLORS OF WAR: RUSSIAN, TURKISH, AND IRANIAN MILITARY THREAT TO THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Lasha Tchantouridzé\*

## Abstract

*The South Caucasus once again became a ground for major regional power competition after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Russia, Iran, and Turkey vie for power and influence, as well as for the access to strategic resources and transportation routes. These three major regional powers have used or threatened to use their armed forces against the region. Russia has invaded and threatened Georgia, Turkey has planned an invasion of Armenia and Georgia, and Iran has threatened Azerbaijan. Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran will remain willing to use force in the South Caucasus if they feel that their vital interests are at stake. The governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have to rely mainly on themselves, and strengthen the weakest areas of their national defences. Georgia's Black Sea, and Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea coasts remain examples of poorly defended lines, weaknesses of which could be easily exploited by the main opponents of the states in question.*

**Keywords:** *South Caucasus, Invasion, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Defence, Security*

## Introduction

The South Caucasus region, comprised by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, is surrounded by three large regional powers, Iran, Turkey, and Russia, which for the last 200 years have played influential roles in regional politics and security arrangements. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all three major powers invaded the Caucasus, with Russia managing to achieve the most. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> saw Russians dominating the region, and Persians and Ottomans playing the role of challengers. Things have changed considerably since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. After the restoration of independence and sovereignty by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, they found themselves on a new playing field with the two other major powers back in action and vying for more power and influence.

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All three dominant powers have the ability to influence things in the region by employing economic and political means at their disposal. Even the smallest and the most insignificant of international regions may become of huge strategic significance, if the major powers involved in the region decide to compete and vie for gains. The South Caucasus is no exception, as the region has attracted attention of not only historically major players, but also newcomers, such as the United States and China. After 15 years of the restoration of sovereignty by the South Caucasian states, Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran continue to play decisive roles in regional politics.

## **Russia: An Old Country and the Sea**

Russia has been the most aggressive of the big three since the dissolution of the USSR. Moscow has resorted to the use of force in the South Caucasus many times, as it sees this region as vital to its national interests. Of the highest importance for Russia is the energy corridor that runs through the region as it represents the only alternative route for Azerbaijani and Central Asian energy resources to be shipped to Western markets. Moscow wants to have the final say on this issue, as Russia funds its state defence and security enterprises, and basically, holds the vast country together due to its easy access to crude oil and natural gas. To further provide for survival and power of the Russian state, the Kremlin will not hesitate to use its armed forces, as well as its former KGB apparatus to gain as much influence in the region as it needs.

One obvious area Russia exercises huge dominance over in the states of the South Caucasus is the Black Sea. Of the three South Caucasian states, only Georgia has access to the Black Sea, and it is ill equipped to deal with any military challenges that Moscow may throw its way in that area. In October 2006, Russia's Black Sea fleet conducted live fire maneuvers off Georgia's Black Sea coast. According to Georgian officials, Russian ships were as close as 16 miles from the Georgia's coastline.<sup>1</sup> The live fire exercise disrupted civilian shipping in the area, as the Russian military vessels blocked the Georgian ports Poti, Supsa, and Batumi. The Russian government clearly intended this exercise as a hostile act, as they declined to inform the Georgian counterparts of the movements of their vessels, and deliberately misinformed the public of the nature of the exercise. Defence Minister Ivanov labeled it part of Black Sea Harmony (BSH), a joint exercise with Turkey that is supposed to be conducted after advance planning. Ankara, however, rejected this claim, and expressed its surprise at such claims.<sup>2</sup>

Since then Russian Black Sea fleet vessels entered Georgia's territorial waters a number of times, more recently during the November 2007 rallies in Tbilisi. Such incursions take place without advance notice of warning, as the Russians feel secure from any credible response by the

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Tbilisi Claims Russian Navy Holding Exercises off Georgian Coast," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. III, Issue 194, October 20 2006, The Jamestown Foundation, ([http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=414&issue\\_id=3895&article\\_id=2371563](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=414&issue_id=3895&article_id=2371563))

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Georgians. Moscow will try to maintain its dominance in the Black Sea, as without proper defences Georgia will not be able to exercise its full sovereignty, and Azerbaijan and Armenia will lose as their access to the outside world will be limited to Russian and Iranian controlled routes.

The October 2006 live fire exercise followed the Tbilisi-Moscow spy row, and signaled sharp deterioration of Russo-Georgian relations. After imposing comprehensive economic embargo on Georgia, and organizing mass deportations of ethnic Georgians from Russia, the Kremlin sharply highlighted vulnerabilities in Georgia's defences – its Black Sea coast has been virtually undefended from a potential sea invasion since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The small Georgian navy and coast guard cannot do much to deter such hostile acts let alone repel a full scale invasion.

Georgia should assert its sovereignty and independence by establishing a noticeable military presence in the Black Sea. It needs a deterrent for potential invasion and intimidation by a hostile power. With the Black Sea coast exposed, Georgian territorial waters poorly defended, and its exclusive economic zone poorly monitored, Tbilisi's chances of re-uniting the country and establishing itself as a viable political entity remain small. Even if the country's current problems could be solved, without a strong naval presence Georgia would remain very vulnerable for future encroachments on its sovereignty.

Moscow has funded the breakaway Abkhazia, and supplied it with armed warships. Georgia's separatist province is now claiming control over its 'territorial waters' in the Black Sea. Abkhazia is a major piece in Russia's Black Sea regional calculations, as it could serve a number of useful purposes. Small, but well armed and supplied Abkhaz military could be used as an intimidating factor against Caucasian states' ambitions to exercise independent foreign and defence policies. The Abkhaz forces could also disrupt energy routes in the region not favoured by Moscow. Further, Abkhazia could be used by Moscow to re-assert its control over Georgia as this separatist province remains *de jure* part of Georgia, and theoretically the country's re-unifications could be initiated from both ends. Control of Georgia is crucial for Russia's new great power game, as Moscow sees energy as the key for its comeback on the world stage, and Georgia remains its chief rival in securing the access to energy resources of the South Caucasus and Central Asia from the west.

Georgia's Black Sea coast is virtually undefended from a sea invasion – currently this can be easily undertaken by Russia, and potentially even by Abkhazia. It is hard to imagine that the General Staff of the Russia's armed forces does not have a plan for a potential full-scale invasion of Georgia. Given its historical legacy (the Soviet army had offensive and defensive plans for almost every contingency), and current tense relations between Moscow and Tbilisi that are not likely to better anytime soon, this would be a very natural assumption. In such a plan, an invasion from the sea would figure as the most prominent option, as the sea side remains undefended. Plus, the Russians have both training and military experience of sea invasion of Georgia.



The Soviet navy, marines, and the army regularly practiced seaborne invasions in Georgia (mostly Soviet Black Sea fleet).<sup>3</sup> Russians have assailed Georgia's Black Sea coast in combat formations a number of times since the collapse of the USSR. The Russian Black Sea fleet and army supported the Abkhaz separatists during the 1992-1993 war, and have continued providing military assistance since the end of military conflict. Further, in 1993, combat-ready Russian forces landed in the Poti area to 'help' the Georgian government, which was struggling with a pro-Gamsakhurdia uprising in western Georgia.

Georgia's land border with Russia is naturally protected by the Caucasus Mountains. In fact, Georgia historically has not experienced a large scale invasion from the north as hostile parties mostly came from southern and eastern directions. On the other hand, geography of Azerbaijan's border with Russia adjacent to the Caspian Sea is more 'welcoming' to a potential Russian invasion. In 1920-1921, when Russia re-occupied the three South Caucasus republics, the Bolshevik- controlled 11<sup>th</sup> Army invaded Azerbaijan first, and then it advanced to Armenia and Georgia.

Azerbaijan is also vulnerable by the Caspian Sea, as the Russian navy maintains superiority in this land-locked body. Making Azerbaijan's defences more credible in the Caspian is more complicated as other littoral states may not necessarily support strengthening of Baku's sovereignty. Iran has been especially aggressive toward Azerbaijan, as it challenges the legal status of the Caspian, as well as Baku's ownership of certain off-shore Azeri oil fields. Turkmenistan has been traditionally leaning toward Russia, and it will not complicate relations with the big brother for the sake of Azerbaijan.

On the Georgian-Russian border in Caucasian Mountains, there are only a handful of passable roads that potential northern invaders could use, and even they could be easily blocked or destroyed. In a scenario of Tbilisi asserting its control over the Tskhinvali region, the only thing the Georgian army would have to do to cut Russia's military support routes with the local separatists is to block or disable the Roki Pass. All other roads linking the separatist Tskhinvali region with the Russian Federation will be impassable from late fall to early spring. However, Georgia would still be wide open to retaliation from the sea.

Similarly, military options for Azerbaijan in addressing the Karabakh question do not look bright, as the country remains virtually undefended from a potential attack from the Caspian Sea. Both Russia and Iran would very likely support Armenian and Karabakh forces if hostilities were to resume between the sides. Moscow and Tehran may, under favourable circumstances, form an alliance against Azerbaijan, and try to divide its rich crude oil reserves in the process.

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<sup>3</sup> Back then Georgia was part of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet army used Georgian sea coast for practice purposes only. The author of this article was part of such exercises in the 1980s.

Because of the above, both Azerbaijan and Georgia need to restore their sovereignty over territorial waters, deter potential aggression from Russia, and check military ambitions of other hostile parties. It would be naïve to expect Moscow to just hand over control of Abkhazia to Tbilisi after extending so much effort and resources there. Georgia is the only alternative to Russia for South Caucasus and Central Asian energy shipment routes and transportation corridors destined to Western markets. By eliminating this alternative, Moscow would make a major step toward re-establishing itself as a world power, and extending influence over its southern and western neighbors.

Georgia has more chances at enhancing its defences, and warding off a potential invasion from the sea. Tbilisi could utilize good will of friendly littoral states and deploy diesel submarines. According to Canadian Commodore Denis Rouleau, submarines are "a phenomenon tool for collecting intelligence."<sup>4</sup> Modern submarines are fitted with newest intelligence collecting capabilities that allow them to collect a variety of information about the surface vessels. A submarine can 'sit' very quietly, and collect intelligence, complete with imagery, etc, without being detected by the opposition. For any surface vessel and/or fleet commanding officer "to know that there's a sub somewhere, but not to know where it is exactly, is the scariest thing out there."<sup>5</sup> Boats carry at a minimum 12 torpedoes each (most carry more, and some may carry missiles in addition to torpedoes). Any enemy considering invasion would be certain to reckon the submarine while performing a cost/benefit analysis. Most modern diesel-electric (and AIP) submarines have an endurance of few weeks.<sup>6</sup> A small fleet of subs can do much damage to a larger fleet of surface vessels, and check naval supremacy of larger sea powers.

Moscow will use vast foreign intelligence experience and apparatus to prevent Georgia from acquiring submarines or otherwise strengthening its defences on the Black Sea. Kremlin's best bet is to manipulate Georgian government and the country's political class, both of which it has been doing quite well recently. Moscow benefits from keeping Georgia and Azerbaijan weak as it seeks to secure the regions energy reserves and pipeline networks for itself.

## **Cold Turkey**

Turkey seems to be the least likely source of invasion of the South Caucasus; however, apparently Ankara came very close in 1993 to sending its troops to Karabakh and Georgia. Ambassador Chrysanthopoulos of Greece tells an interesting story linking the October 1993 failed coup in

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<sup>4</sup> Commodore Denis Rouleau, Keynote Speech to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Political Studies Students' Conference, the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, January 31 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Commodore Rouleau, Winnipeg, MB, January 31 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Stan Zimmerman, "Submarine Technology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Trafford Publishing, 2006.

Moscow, with Turkish designs for the South Caucasus.<sup>7</sup> On October 5 1993, then President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrossian told Ambassador Chrysanthopoulos, who was posted in Armenia at that time, that he had armed forces of Armenia on maximum readiness because he expected Turkey to attack Armenia: there was a possibility that about ten thousand Russian soldiers "guarding the border between Armenia and Turkey" would be ordered to return to Russia.

Apparently, Ter-Petrossian was convinced that Turkey would take advantage of serious unrests in Russia, and occupy Armenia using a pretext of either the Kurdish question or the protection of Nakhichevan.<sup>8</sup> President of Armenia had intelligence reports that Ankara was considering such a course of action, and his suspicions were further confirmed by Turkish armed forces penetration on October 5 into Iraq in hot pursuit of PKK guerillas.

On October 11 of the same year, Ambassador of France to Armenia, Madam France de Hartingh,<sup>9</sup> whom Ambassador Chrysanthopoulos describes as "a dynamic woman who spoke fluent Russian and knew very well the problems of the region,"<sup>10</sup> informed the Greek ambassador that according to French intelligence sources, there had been an agreement on Armenia between a leader of the Russian coup, Chairman of Russia's Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, and Ankara. Reportedly, Khasbulatov promised Turkish leaders that he would allow Turkish incursions of limited nature into Armenia, to round up PKK guerillas, and "into Georgia to secure Abkhazia." According to the same source, Khasbulatov had also planned withdrawal of Russian troops from Armenia. Chrysanthopoulos adds that the same information was later confirmed by his "United States colleague."<sup>11</sup>

On October 12, Chrysanthopoulos had a conversation with Vazgen Sargsian, Defence Minister of Armenia. Sargsian also linked the events in Moscow with Turkish military build-up at the Armenian border. Sargsian also remembered the September 22 visit to Armenia by a Turkish military delegation under General Hayrettin Uzun in the framework of CSCE verification missions. The Turkish delegation reportedly asked to visit Armenia's border with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Quite predictably, the Armenian military authorities did not allow the Turkish officials to inspect the frontiers by land, but did so from a high-flying plane instead. On October 2 and 3, when the Moscow unrest was in full swing, Armenian authorities panicked that the Russian troops would be withdrawn from the country, and a Turkish invasion was imminent. Defence Minister Sargsian<sup>12</sup> was in constant communication with his Russian counterpart, who assured him a

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<sup>7</sup> Leonidas T. Chrysanthopoulos, "Caucasus Chronicles: Nation Building and Diplomacy in Armenia, 1993-1994," London and Princeton: Gomidas Institute Books, 2002

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 76-77.

<sup>9</sup> Madam Hartingh was France's first ambassador to Armenia.

<sup>10</sup> Chrysanthopoulos, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Harry Gilmore was America's first ambassador to Armenia, 1993-1995.

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Sargsian (sometimes spelled as Sarkisian) subsequently became Prime Minister of Armenia. He was assassinated in October 1999, when gunmen stormed the Armenian Parliament and opened fire killing several top government officials.

number of times that there was no question of recalling the Russian troops from the Turkish-Armenian border.<sup>13</sup>

Ambassador Chrysanthopoulos believes that the above mentioned scenario was quite credible,<sup>14</sup> and such an agreement did exist between Ruslan Khasbulatov and Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller. He does indicate that the increase of Turkish armed forces at the border could be "attributed to the occupation of Fizuli by the Karabagh armed forces." Further, Chrysanthopoulos provides only Khasbulatov's ethnic background, "Chechen Moslem," as his motivation to surrender Armenia to Turkey; however, this does not seem to be a very credible reason for such a major concession.

In 1993, one could imagine Turkey helping Azerbaijan, and preventing its collapse under joint Armenian, Russian, and Iranian pressure. However, one could also imagine Azerbaijan managing its own problem with Karabakh had the Russians not supported the Armenian-Kharabakh troops in the first place, with weapons, ammunition, fuel, and expertise. Therefore, for Azerbaijan to win or at least to be better positioned for the post-war settlement they needed to convince Moscow to quit supporting the Armenians. The Karabakh question, in theory, could have been settled without Turkish or Azeri invasion of Armenia.

It is more difficult to imagine Turkey invading Georgia "to secure Abkhazia," although poor coastal defences would make that a possibility even today. Such an invasion would have been perceived as a hostile act as in 1993, neither Georgia nor the Abkhaz rebels had invited Ankara to become an occupying or peacemaking power in Abkhazia or elsewhere in Georgia.

It is quite possible that Ankara indeed had an agreement with Khasbulatov. It is difficult to judge what was the nature of the Turkish game plan for the invasion, but it was likely influenced by perceptions that the former Soviet space was falling apart – civil and inter-state wars were raging in the Caucasus, rebellion was taking place in Moscow, and violence (Moldova, Tajikistan) elsewhere. Turkey could not dare advance its troops against the Russians, but with the Russians weakened or gone from the region, Turkish invasion of Armenia is not a very unlikely scenario. Ambiguities of 1993 eventually contributed to the Armenian victory in the Karabakh war, and the inability or unwillingness by the Europeans and others to stop the ethnic cleansing of almost one million Azerbaijanis and others from the Armenian occupied territories.

## **Persian Letters**

It is counter-intuitive, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran has exhibited more balanced and less aggressive behaviour toward the South Caucasus than the other two major

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<sup>13</sup> Chrysanthopoulos, pp. 78-79.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Leonidas T. Chrysanthopoulos, Ambassador of Greece to Canada, Winnipeg, MB, February 5 2002.

powers. Tehran assisted Armenia in its war against Azerbaijan, but only came close to blows with Azerbaijan once – disputed oil field in the Caspian Sea in 2001-2002 generated much hot air both in Baku and Tehran.

In July 2001, Iran threatened the use of force unless Azeri oil exploration vessels left the area in the Caspian Sea that Tehran regards as its own.<sup>15</sup> After the dissolution of the USSR, Iran effectively laid a claim over 20 per cent of the Caspian, which translates into many billions of barrels of crude oil reserves.<sup>16</sup> Tehran constantly violates Azerbaijani airspace and territorial waters, most recently such violations occurred in February, and again in November of 2007.<sup>17</sup>

Since the early 1990s, Tehran's major objective in the Caucasus has been to build bridge-ways to Russia and Europe. At least, that was Iranians' initial claim,<sup>18</sup> and most of their activities afterward have supported it. Despite its stand-off with the US and disagreements with Europeans, Iran has managed to cultivate friendly relations with Western leaning Caucasian states. Tehran has especially warm relations with Yerevan – leaders and social groups from the two countries proclaim eternal brotherhood, and historical continuity of their common evolution. Armenia has managed to run very successful foreign relations in the 1990s gaining much help from Iran, as well as from the United States, and most importantly, from the Russian Federation – from 1993 to 1995 Moscow shipped over US \$1 billion of arms to Armenia,<sup>19</sup> and provided most of its fuel as well.

Volunteers from Iran helped Armenians fight in the Karabakh war.<sup>20</sup> Tehran's general goal in the South Caucasus has been to check ambitions of those in Azerbaijan who desire to see two Azerbaijanans, one sovereign state, and the other a province in Iran re-united.<sup>21</sup> Iran has also tried to promote a form of irredentism in Azerbaijan. In 1993, one Alikram Humbatov led an ill-conceived rebellion in Azerbaijan's southern area populated by the Talysh, and declared himself head of 'the Talysh-Mughan Republic.' The rebellion was stopped in a couple of days, but it is widely believed that ever since Tehran has exercised wide influence over the Talysh, a Persian

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<sup>15</sup> "Baku-Tehran Dispute over Oilfield," APS Diplomat Recorder, accessed at ([www.thefreelibrary.com](http://www.thefreelibrary.com)).

<sup>16</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Iran Claims Over Caspian Sea Resources Threaten Energy Security," Executive Summary #1582, The Heritage Foundation, < [www.heritage.org/Research/Iraq/bg1582es.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Iraq/bg1582es.cfm) >.

<sup>17</sup> Khazri Bakinsky and Mina Muradova, "Azerbaijan: US-Iran Tensions Cause for Minority Arrests?" eurasianet.org < [www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav030507a.shtml](http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav030507a.shtml) >.

<sup>18</sup> A conversation with Iran's ambassador to Georgia, spring 1994.

<sup>19</sup> "Caspian Sea Region: Regional Conflicts," July 2002, US Energy Information Administration, ([www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/caspconf.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/caspconf.html)).

<sup>20</sup> Interviews in Erevan, March 1993. Reportedly, ethnic Armenian volunteers from other Middle Eastern countries, such as Syria and Lebanon, also served in the Armenian armed forces.

<sup>21</sup> Abulfaz Elchibey, a nationalist president of Azerbaijan (1992-1993), under whose leadership Azerbaijan lost some territories to Armenia, explicitly expressed such sentiments.

dialect speaking Shi'a group.<sup>22</sup> In 2003, Iran held large scale military maneuvers in its Azerbaijan province to send a clear message of threat to Baku.<sup>23</sup>

Violations of Azerbaijani airspace by Iran are very similar to Russia's violations of Georgian airspace. The two countries, Iran and Russia, even plan a joint naval task force in the Caspian Sea, which is going to be established after a successful resolution of the status of the Caspian Sea.<sup>24</sup> Moscow has already started beefing up its military presence in the Caspian Sea by providing its Caspian Flotilla with new vessels, and repairing older ones.<sup>25</sup> Since 2002, Iran has been rebuilding its naval forces as well – Tehran has initiated major vessel building works in the country, and has purchased boats and equipment abroad, specifically in China.<sup>26</sup> Azerbaijan remains to be the prime target of Iranian and Russian build-ups in the Caspian.

## Conclusion

The Caucasus as a modern international region has been shaped by interactions among the three dominant powers that surround it. Currently, the region occupies a crucial strategic point in long-term calculations by Russia, Turkey, and Iran, as well by the US and other powers with a global reach. Small countries frequently get traded in international diplomatic games and gambles, and for that reason they need to depend mostly on their own strengths. Of the three Caucasian states, only Armenia, a landlocked country, can effectively defend itself from a potential invasion. Azerbaijan and Georgia have recently developed and invested into land forces, but have ignored the needs for naval and coastal defences. If the lessons given by Russia and Iran during the last fifteen years are worth anything, Baku and Tbilisi have to acknowledge that they are in charge of maritime countries that need adequate naval defences to be credible international players.

As far as Armenia is concerned, in the immediate future it faces no real threat of invasion from outside the region. Azerbaijan might try to re-take its lost land by military force, but most likely Ankara will not support it if the Russians remain militarily committed to Armenia. However, with time, and eventual weakening of Russia's military presence in the region, Turkey might present a serious threat to Armenia's security and defences. The South Caucasus has seen many empires over centuries, none of them managing to stick around forever, and there is no reason why Russia, which has been in the South Caucasus for about 200 years, should be an exception.

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<sup>22</sup> Bakinsky and Muradova.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Blank, "New Military Trends in the Caspian," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 06.01.2005 ([www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3072](http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3072)).

<sup>24</sup> "Iran and Russia May Establish Joint Navy in the Caspian Sea," *RIA Novosti* report posted by GlobalResearch.ca, October 15 2007 < [www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=7097](http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=7097) >.

<sup>25</sup> "Caspian Flotilla," GlobalSecurity.org ([www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mf-caspian.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mf-caspian.htm)).

<sup>26</sup> "[Iranian] Navy," GlobalSecurity.org < [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/navy.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/navy.htm) >.

## **NAGORNO-KARABAKH: BASIS AND REALITY OF SOVIET-ERA LEGAL AND ECONOMIC CLAIMS USED TO JUSTIFY THE ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN WAR**

**Adil Baguirov\***

### **Abstract**

*The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) region of Azerbaijan, which in its modern form has continued for 20 years, is a complicated case study of multi-vector and multi-layered claims, mostly from the Soviet times, ranging from history, economy, and legal status, used to justify the military occupation (along with seven adjacent regions). The article illustrates that some of the weaker claims were dropped altogether, whilst others were continually mixed with additional charges to make them “stick”. Despite solid legal, historic and moral grounds, Azerbaijan has been lagging in clarifying and explaining the fictitious charges of NK’s supposed transfer to Azerbaijan’s suzerainty in 1920s, the legal status of NK itself, its economic and financial well-being, and the impossibility to apply the 3 April 1990 Soviet Law on Succession to the NK case whether for the purposes of justifying its independence or attachment to Armenia. Despite all the challenges and blame shared by all sides, NK and adjacent currently occupied territories are recognized as part of Azerbaijan, with the latter retaining all rights, including military, to return it under its full sovereignty.*

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, Armenia, Soviet Union, USSR, Nagorno-Karabakh, conflict, separatism

### **Introduction**

One of the biggest challenges in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) region of Azerbaijan, that made it so difficult for outside observers and even experts to grasp, is a barrage of multi-level finger pointing and claims, some even predating military action, which after being repeated for years, become mainstream and accepted. In light of a recent flurry of statements and articles that repeat those clichés, in major part perpetuated due to the nature of the Internet and greater interest to the NK issue (be it due to Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, Kosovo independence or stand off with Iran), it warrants a more scrupulous elaboration of these claims.<sup>1</sup>

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The primary distortions regarding the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan under our scrutiny in this article are the following: 1) that NK is an “ethnic Armenian enclave” and is simply “surrounded by Azeri territory”, 2) that Stalin supposedly “gave” NK to Azerbaijan, 3) that the 1993 United Nations Security Council (UN SC) resolutions have nothing to do with the Republic of Armenia and are addressed only to some vague “local Armenian forces”, 4) that the economy of NK region was deliberately neglected by Soviet Azerbaijani authorities, and this, apparently, left no choice other than for military action, 5) that there are only three parties to the conflict -- that is the Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Armenia, and Armenian NK community (the unrecognized “NKR”), and, 6) that the Armenian secessionists of NK, with full support of Armenia, declared their “independence” in, allegedly, full accordance of then Soviet laws, particularly the April 1990 law on succession from USSR, and thus the so-called “NKR” is, the logic goes, *de jure* “independent”. Let us review all these points in that order.

### **Brief history and current belonging of the NK region: official international opinion**

Karabakh region (NK) is a historically Azerbaijani territory – according to the 2001 U.S. State Department NK fact sheet, “In the late 18th century, several khanates [Azerbaijani kingdoms – A.B.], including Karabakh, emerged in the South Caucasus to challenge the waning influence of the Ottoman Empire. After the Russian Empire eventually took control over the region in 1813, Azerbaijani Turks began to emigrate from Karabakh while the Armenian population of mountainous (nagorno) Karabakh grew.”<sup>2</sup> (For the demographics of the Karabakh region, see Table I) The *de jure* belonging of the currently Armenian occupied region to Azerbaijan is recognized by all relevant international bodies and organizations, including the United Nations Security Council (e.g., specifically and directly in resolutions 853, 874 and 884<sup>3</sup> passed in 1993, at the height of the conflict), UN General Assembly (49/13<sup>4</sup> and 57/298<sup>5</sup>), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)<sup>6</sup>, Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)<sup>7</sup>, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the analysis was previously done in: Baguirov, Adil, Myths Related to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, in: Azerbaijan International magazine, Media Watch, Vol. 6.1, (Spring 1998),

[http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/61\\_folder/61\\_articles/61\\_mediawatch.html](http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/61_folder/61_articles/61_mediawatch.html)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, History of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, (March 30, 2001),

[http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/karabakh/karabakh\\_current/keywest\\_history.html](http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/karabakh/karabakh_current/keywest_history.html)

<sup>3</sup> For the full list of all UN Security Council resolutions passed in 1993, see:

<http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1993/scres93.htm>

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 49/13, forty-ninth session, agenda item 27, (November 25, 1994),

<http://www.un.org/gopher-data/ga/recs/49/9460075e.txt>

<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 57/298, fifty-seventh session, agenda item 22 (I), (February 6, 2003),

<http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/RES/57/298&Lang=E>

<sup>6</sup> OSCE Lisbon Summit Final Documents, DOC.S/1/96, (3 December 1996), p. 15,

<http://www.osce.org/item/4049.html>

<sup>7</sup> OIC Secretary General's Report On The Aggression of The Republic of Armenia Against The Republic of Azerbaijan, OIC/ICFM-33/POL/SG.REP.7, (2006),

<http://www.oic-oci.org/baku2006/english/SG-report/SGREP-33ICFM-AZERBAIJAN-REV.doc>;

The Aggression of The Republic of Armenia Against The Republic of Azerbaijan, The Thirty-third Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Session of Harmony of Rights, Freedoms, and Justice, Baku, (19-21 June 2006), <http://www.un.int/azerbaijan/oic.php> and

[http://www.oic2006baku.gov.az/eng/resolutions/armenian\\_aggression.shtml](http://www.oic2006baku.gov.az/eng/resolutions/armenian_aggression.shtml)



Europe (e.g., PACE Doc. 10364, Report of the Political Affairs Committee, 29 November 2004<sup>8</sup>, and PACE Resolution 1416 (2005)<sup>9</sup>), the U.S. State Department (e.g., NK Conflict Fact Sheets in 2001 and 2005<sup>10</sup>), UK Government<sup>11</sup>, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>12</sup>, and many other states.

**Table I: Demographics of the Nagorno-Karabakh region since earliest available Russian census of 1823 till last Soviet census of 1989/1990<sup>13</sup>**

Year	Armenian	Azerbaijani	Russian	Notes
1810	2,500	9,500	N/A	Karabakh was still a khanate at the time (abolished in 1822).
1823	9%	91%	N/A	At the time Nagorno-Karabakh was not an autonomous oblast, instead was split into several <i>uezd</i> (districts). When listing “N/A” in
1832	35%	N/A	N/A	

<sup>8</sup> Atkinson, David, United Kingdom, European Democrat Group, (Rapporteur), The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), (29 November 2004), <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc04/EDOC10364.htm>

<sup>9</sup> PACE Resolution 1416: The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, (25 January 2005), <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/TA05/ERES1416.htm>

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State, The United States and the Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh, Fact Sheet, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Washington, DC, February 7, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/41401.htm>

<sup>11</sup> UK Government, UK and Azerbaijan 'reaffirm declaration of friendship and co-operation', (15 December 2004), <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page6776.asp>

<sup>12</sup> MFA of Russian Federation, Комментарий Департамента информации и печати МИД России в связи с прошедшими недавно в Нагорном Карабахе “парламентскими выборами”, Департамента информации и печати МИД России, Doc. 1417-22-06-2005, (June 22, 2005), [http://www.mid.ru/Brp\\_4.nsf/arh/FE4FBA95FEBDC55FC32570280048D43B?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/FE4FBA95FEBDC55FC32570280048D43B?OpenDocument)

<sup>13</sup> Population statistics is based on the figures from the following sources, in order of appearance: Cornell, Svante, “Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus”, Surrey, England: RoutledgeCurzon Press, (2001), p. 68, and Присоединение Восточной Армении к России, Ереван, 1972, с. 562;

Cornell, *ibid.* Also see: Swietochowski, Tadeusz, “Russia and Azerbaijan, a Borderland in Transition”, New York: Columbia University Press, (1995), p. 11, and Сборник сведений о Кавказе, т. 7, Тифлис, 1873; Altstadt, Audrey, “The Azerbaijani Turks: power and identity under the Russian rule”, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, (1992), p. 30, table 3.1, Imperial Census of 1897;

Джамал, Сахиб, Карабахская Хроника (реконструкция этнической истории Карабаха по архивным материалам (1805-1905 гг.)), in: IRS journal, №7, (2003), [http://www.irs-az.com/gen/n7/n7\\_11.htm](http://www.irs-az.com/gen/n7/n7_11.htm)  
 Novannisian, Richard, The Armeno-Azerbaijani Conflict over Mountainous Karabagh, 1918-1919, in: The Armenian Review, Vol. 24, 2-94, (Summer 1971), p. 5;

*Ibid.*, p. 4-5, footnote 4;

Soviet population census of 1926 (in Russian), Wikipedia, [http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Всесоюзная\\_перепись\\_населения\\_СССР\\_1926\\_года](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Всесоюзная_перепись_населения_СССР_1926_года) (accessed October 2007);

De Waal, Thomas. “Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War”. New York: New York University Press, (2003), p. 130;

Численность и состав населения СССР (по данным переписи населения 1979 года), М., Финансы и статистика, 1985;

Human Rights Watch, “Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh”, printed in USA by Human Rights Watch / Helsinki, (December 1994), p. xiii, ISBN 1-56432-142-8, citing: Natsional'nyi Sostav Naseleniya SSSR, po dannym Vsesoyuznyi Perepisi Naseleniya 1989 g., Moskva, "Finansy i Statistika";

Yunusov, Arif, Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict: Demographic and Migratory Aspects, in: Central Asia and Caucasus Journal, #16, (1998), [http://www.ca-c.org/journal/16-1998/st\\_10\\_junusov.shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/journal/16-1998/st_10_junusov.shtml)

				case of Azerbaijanis, they represented overwhelming majority of the remainder population. Russian, Greek, Assyrian, Ukrainian, German and other population represented less than 2% at all times.
1871	29,200 (24%)	87,800 (73%)	N/A	
1897	109,250 (39.5%)	164,098 (59.5%)	2,605 (1%)	At the time of when it was not an autonomous oblast but 4 <i>uezds</i> ; last official Russian Imperial census.
1897	1,987 hereditary nobles	5,033 hereditary nobles	N/A	One of the population categories from the 1897 census – hereditary nobles, which factually shows how many nobles were native, for generations, to Shusha <i>uezd</i> and city.
1916	nearly 70%	N/A	N/A	At the time Nagorno-Karabakh was not an autonomous oblast, instead was part of the larger Karabakh region. When listing “N/A” in case of Azerbaijanis, they represented overwhelming majority of the remainder population, Russian, Greek, Assyrian and others represented less than 2% at all times. Both 1916 and 1919 figures are from Armenian sources, Russian and Azerbaijani numbers differ significantly.
1919	165,000	59,000	7,000	
1926	111,700 (89,5%)	12,600 (10,06%)	596	First official Soviet census
1979	123,076 (75,9%)	37,264 (23%)	1,265 (0,8%)	Last Soviet census before the outbreak of war
1989	145,500 (76,9%)	40,688 (21,5%)	1,99 (1%)	Last Soviet census; a re-count was ordered in October 1990 which showed the number of Azerbaijanis higher, at 46,000 (24%), plus 1,000 of other minorities.

Thus, it is inappropriate to describe NK as some “ethnic Armenian enclave” (which in itself is due to ethnic cleansing of all its Azerbaijani population in 1988-1994) that is “completely surrounded by Azeri territory”, as it gives the incorrect impression of NK being if not independent, then at least not being Azerbaijani. In essence, the NK region, which is part of Azerbaijan, is surrounded by more of Azerbaijani territory, such as the seven regions and parts of other regions which are also currently occupied by Armenia, and also by, in the words of then U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Ambassador Elizabeth Jones, “criminal secessionists”.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> ANCA Press Release, ANCA criticizes State Department statement describing the Nagorno Karabagh republic as "criminal secessionists". Incendiary Remarks by Assistant Secretary of State Jones Undermine the

## Legal status of NK before and after Sovietization in 1920

NK was not “part of Armenia until 1923” or “part of Azerbaijan since 1920’s” and was not “ceded” to Azerbaijan by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, as many Western authors and news reports repeat to this day. Archival documents and expert determinations, such as the above-mentioned 2001 U.S. Department of State fact sheet, prove beyond any doubt that NK was never part of Armenia and instead, was part of Azerbaijan. However, the most important document in this context is the July 5, 1921 plenum of Kavbureau CC RCP(b) decree (Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks), in which Stalin, along with several Armenian members, such as A.Nazaretyan and A.Myasnikyan, decided on “**leaving**” (or “retaining”; the term in original Russian that was used in the document: *оставить* (*ostavit*)) NK within Azerbaijan and not “**transferring**” (or ceding; in Russian: *отдать* (*otdat*)) it to anyone: “Nagorno-Karabakh to leave within the borders of Azerbaijan SSR”.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, when you “retain” or “leave” something somewhere, it obviously means that it was there in the first place (that is, Karabakh belonged to Azerbaijan since before the Sovietization). Due to unfortunate mistranslations and manipulations of the key terminology from Russian into English from these official Soviet documents pertaining to the history of Karabakh region, too many, to be even mentioned here, veteran journalists and political scientists have fallen into the trap of perpetuating the regrettable clichés and mistakes.

Other scholarly references proving that Karabakh was Azerbaijan’s even before Stalin are attested, for example, by Prof. Audrey Altstadt: “Early in 1920, the Peace Conference recognized Azerbaijan’s claim to Karabagh”.<sup>16</sup>

Anastas Mikoyan, a powerful ethnically Armenian Soviet official and right-hand of Stalin, in his report to the chairman of CC RCP(b) Vladimir Lenin on 22 May 1919, wrote: “Dashnaks – agents of the Armenian government, are trying to attach [or connect, in Russian: *prisoedineniya* – A.B.] Karabakh to Armenia. But for the population of Karabakh that would mean to lose their source of life in Baku and link up with Irevan [current Yerevan – A.B.]. With which [meaning Irevan/Yerevan – A.B.] they were never and in no way linked together”.<sup>17</sup>

Then, in August of 1920, in the letter by the chairman of Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee (Azrevcom), Nariman Narimanov, and such Armenian members of the body as abovementioned A.Mikoyan and A.Narjanyan, addressed to the Commissar (Minister) of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, G.Chicherin, and to G.Ordzhonikidze, another powerful Bolshevik and senior member of the Caucasus Bureau of the CC RCP(b), in Vladikavkaz, wrote: “As to the supposedly disputed Zangezour and Karabakh, already part of Soviet

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Karabagh Peace Process, Washington D.C., (January 18, 2005),  
[http://www.anca.org/press\\_releases/press\\_releases.php?prid=698](http://www.anca.org/press_releases/press_releases.php?prid=698)

<sup>15</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Moscow), f.64, op. 2, d.1, p.118, 121-122. A facsimile of the actual archival copy from the Azerbaijani State History archive is at the disposal of this author.

<sup>16</sup> Altstadt, Audrey. "Azerbaijan Turks: Power and identity under Russian Rule", Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, (1992), p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the CC CPSU (Moscow), f. 461, op. 1, report #45252, p. 1. Note that all archival references are given by their original, Soviet names of the archives, which have since changed.

Azerbaijan, we categorically declare, that these lands must indisputably remain as part of Azerbaijan henceforth”.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, to be certain, it would be impossible to include any Armenian lands into Azerbaijan during the Soviet times, due to the overwhelming presence and domination on the part of ethnic Armenians in the Soviet leadership, starting with the right-hand of Stalin and long-time apparatchik Anastas Mikoyan (1895-1978). Also, Azerbaijan was the only Soviet republic, where the top leaders of the republic, the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, were not only exclusively Russian or that of the titular (main) ethnicity, but even included three ethnic Armenians, such as the above-mentioned A.Mikoyan (28 April 1920 – December 1920), Levon I. Mirzoyan (January 1926 – August 1929), and Ruben G. Rubenov (Mkryityan) (January 1933 – December 1933). It should be noted that all of them were leaders in the Stalin era. Needless to say, that after all these archival reverences and facts, and considering who was at the helm of Azerbaijan in those turbulent times, allegations about Stalin giving anything to Azerbaijan, especially at the expense of Armenia, are at very least not credible. To be sure, the opposite was being done, where chunks of Azerbaijan were chipped away and transferred to Armenia, starting with Zangezour region in 1920-21, parts of Qazakh in 1920's and even 1982, and some villages of Naxcivan in 1920's and 1930.

## United Nations Security Council Resolutions

The four UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions passed in 1993, are specifically addressed to the Republic of Armenia, and also mention the imprecise “local Armenian forces”, which some pundits choose to interpret as simply addressed to, and implying only, the separatist Armenian community of the NK region. However, such interpretation would be contrary to fundamentals of geography and political science.

To begin with, the UNSC resolution 884 (12 November 1993) states: “Expressing its serious concern that a continuation of the conflict in and around the Nagorny Karabakh region of the Azerbaijani Republic, and of the tensions between the Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijani Republic, would endanger peace and security in the region,” thus of course both recognizing NK region as part of Azerbaijan and specifically mentioning Armenia as a party.

It then continues with the following statement: “Calls upon the Government of Armenia to use its influence to achieve compliance by the Armenians of the Nagorny Karabakh region of the Azerbaijani Republic with resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993) and 874 (1993), and to ensure that the forces involved are not provided with the means to extend their military campaign further”. Aside from once again reaffirming that NK region is a legitimate part of Azerbaijan (and thus partially countering the false impression, outlined above, that NK region could be *de jure* “independent”), and Armenia is a party to the conflict, it requests that the latter stops its military supply and assistance to any Armenian forces on the territory of Azerbaijan, something Armenia ignores to this day, according to the annual U.S. State Department findings: “[t]he fact that Armenia continues to station troops and CFE limited equipment on the territory of Azerbaijan without Azerbaijani permission... [A]rmenia is not a

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<sup>18</sup> Central State Archive of October revolution of Azerbaijan SSR (Baku), f. 410, op. 2, d. 69, pp. 181-187.

significant exporter of conventional weapons, but has provided substantial support, including materiel, to separatists in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan”.<sup>19</sup>

Yet most important is what follows after this line and shows with greater clarity what the international law stipulates: “Demands from the parties concerned the immediate cessation of armed hostilities and hostile acts, the unilateral withdrawal of occupying forces from the Zangelan district and the city of Goradiz, and the withdrawal of occupying forces from other recently occupied areas of the Azerbaijani Republic in accordance with the "Adjusted timetable of urgent steps to implement Security Council resolutions 822 (1993) and 853 (1993)" (S/26522, appendix) as amended by the CSCE Minsk Group meeting in Vienna of 2 to 8 November 1993”.

Thus, UNSC clearly demands that all “parties concerned” cease hostilities and unilaterally withdraw “occupying forces” from regions which are not even part of NK region and where ethnic Armenian population barely constitutes even 1% of total (according to the figures of the last Soviet census in 1989). Of course, since all fighting is going on inside Azerbaijan and in districts outside NK, the responsibility for occupation and hostilities can lay only on Armenia and all Armenian forces.

Then, in the resolutions the UNSC clearly, “Urges again all States in the region to refrain from any hostile acts and from any interference or intervention, which would lead to the widening of the conflict and undermine peace and security in the region”. Since the Armenian community of NK is not a “State”, only Armenia and Azerbaijan are among those directly named in the UN SC resolution as fighting parties (there is no mention of other bordering states, specifically, Georgia, Russia, Iran, and Turkey), it means this statement is clearly aimed at the Republic of Armenia. All other relevant UNSC resolutions on the conflict, which have a status of international law, are similar in their demands, but, alas, all but ignored by Armenia to this day.

Last, but not least, in its very first resolution on the conflict, UN SC 822 (30 April 1993), the SC is, “Expressing its serious concern at the deterioration of the relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan,” and immediately after that follows up with: “Noting with alarm the escalation of hostilities and, in particular, the latest invasion of the Kelbadjar district of the Republic of Azerbaijan by local Armenian forces”. What is interesting with this statement is that the “local Armenian forces” are never precisely defined or somehow identified, instead, only Republic of Armenia as the sole Armenian party is clearly defined and presented. Moreover, Kelbadjar district is located between Armenia and the NK region, and shares a nearly twice longer border with Armenia. On the top of that, Armenia as the warring party against Azerbaijan is well documented and stated since, most notably in several U.S. Department of State, as well as U.S. Presidential Memorandums (e.g., in two 1998 such documents signed by then President Clinton<sup>20</sup>). Also, no one but Armenia occupies such parts of Azerbaijan, which have no direct link to NK region, as Kerki village in

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of State, Criteria For U.S. Assistance Under Section 498a(A) Of The Foreign Assistance Act. Armenia. U.S. Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with Eurasia - FY 2003, Released by the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, (January 2004), <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rpt/c13148.htm>

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Presidential Determination (PD) No. 99-8 of December 8, 1998, and PD No. 98-11 of January 26, 1998, Memorandum for the Secretary of State, Re: "Assistance Program for the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union", The White House, Washington D.C., (1998).

Naxcivan, and Asagi Askipara, Yuxari Askipara, Guscu Ayrim and Barxudarly villages of the Qazax region of Azerbaijan.

## **Economic situation in NKAO**

Regarding the early claims that the economy of NK region was supposedly deliberately neglected by Soviet Azerbaijani authorities, to both “punish” and “root out” Armenians, and this, allegedly, left no choice than for Armenian separatism and military action. Ironically, this argument did not stand the test of time and has been disproved by the fact, that the economic situation of the remaining Armenians in the occupied territories today is hardly better than it was before the war. This is not only the consensus of foreign journalists visiting the occupied territories, but also of the OSCE fact-finding mission in February 2005.<sup>21</sup>

However, authoritative ethnically Armenian Soviet economists maintained in a March 1988 government meeting, which was at the start of the conflict, that the economy of NK autonomous region, if taken separately, was actually better overall than in both Azerbaijan and Armenia, and even all of USSR. In fact, from the point of economic development the NK region in Azerbaijan was second only to Absheron region and its city Baku, the capital, and ahead of other nearly 60 regions of the country. The meeting was chaired by academician Tigran S. Khachaturov, a prominent Armenian economist sent from Moscow, and the following ethnic Armenian high-level officials of Azerbaijan SSR reported: A.Ayriyan, Minister of Timber and Wood-processing of Azerbaijan, L.Davidyan, deputy head of the Department of Construction and Urban Management of the Azerbaijan CPCC, and A. Pogosova, deputy department chief, State Planning Committee (Gosplan).<sup>22</sup>

Mr. Davidyan reported that: “During recent 5-year plans, regarding the activation of housing, preschool institutions, and public-health facilities, the indicators for the specific capital investments for the autonomous oblast were considerably higher than the average for the republic and for its regions.” Mrs. Pogosova, for her part, reported: “In past years, transportation and communication means developed dynamically in the oblast. A railroad line with all the management necessary for operation was activated in the city of Stepanakert [Khankendi – A.B.]. Accelerated development, as compared with the republic as a whole, occurred in motor vehicles: there are 26.3 motor vehicles per 1000 inhabitants of the oblast, as compared with the average of 17.5 for the republic as a whole”.<sup>23</sup>

Before the Armenian aggression, in 1988-89 academic year there were 136 secondary schools, in which the teaching language was Armenian (16,120 students), and 13 inter-ethnic schools (7,045 students) in NK region of Azerbaijan. There were altogether 181 Armenian secondary schools (20,712 students) and 29 inter-ethnic schools (12,766 students) in Azerbaijan in the academic year 1988-1989. In the town of Khankendi (formerly Stepanakert) there was a State Pedagogical Institute with over 2,130 students, mainly

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<sup>21</sup> Report of the OSCE Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan Surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), Website of the European Parliament, (28 February 2005),

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/fd/dsca20050413\\_08/dsca20050413\\_08en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/dsca20050413_08/dsca20050413_08en.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> “Expert Contrasts Armenia, Azerbaijan Development”, FBIS-translated item WA182000106, Baku, “BAKINSKIY RABOCHIY” newspaper, in Russian, (11 March 1988), pp. 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Armenians, annually attending its Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian departments. In addition, there were dozens of technical colleges and vocational training schools in NKAO working in the Armenian and Russian languages.<sup>24</sup>

The meeting chaired by academician Khachaturov produced the following table (**Table II**), showing NK edging out, overall, Azerbaijan, Armenia and even all of USSR. It becomes obvious that NK region was not only living better than most Soviet people, but received disproportionately more than its economic output, a fact that remains true to this day.

**Table II: Comparable Indicators of Social Development as of 1988<sup>25</sup>**

Items	Azerbaijan SSR	NKAO	USSR	Armenia SSR
1. Number of hospital beds per 10,000 persons	97.7	101.7	130.1	86.2
2. Number of physicians of all specialties per 10,000 persons	38.4	29.1	42.7	38.6
3. Number of middle-level medical workers per 10,000 persons	93.5	122.7	114.7	93.5
4. Number of public libraries per 10,000 persons	6	13	4.8	4.1
5. Number of clubs per 10,000 persons	5	15	4.8	3.8
6. Number of movie projectors [movie theaters] per 10,000 persons	3	11.2	5.4	2.9
7. Number of children served by preschool institutions (in percentages of size of population of the corresponding age)	20	35	57	39
8. Number of students attending first shift (in percentages of overall number of students)	74.3	92.5	78.2	87.8
9. Housing fund per inhabitant (square meters)	10.9	14.6	14.9	13.7
including:				
in urban localities	12.2	14.6	14.3	13.1
in rural localities	9.2	14.6	16.1	15.0

### **Principal vs. Interested parties in NK war: the “Baker Rules”**

In regards to the number of parties in the NK conflict, they were specified and cemented already in 1992, in no small part thanks to the U.S. position and specifically, its Secretary of

<sup>24</sup> Council of Europe, ACFC/SR (2002) 1, Report Submitted By Azerbaijan Pursuant To Article 25, Paragraph 1 Of The Framework Convention For The Protection Of National Minorities, (received on 4 June 2002), <http://www.humanrights.coe.int/minorities/Eng/FrameworkConvention/StateReports/2002/azerbaijan.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Table reproduced from: "Expert Contrasts Armenia, Azerbaijan Development", FBIS-translated item WA182000106, Baku, “BAKINSKIY RABOCHIY” newspaper, in Russian, (11 March 1988), pp. 2-3.

State at the time, James Baker, as then U.S. CSCE/OSCE top negotiator on the NK conflict, Ambassador John Maresca, writes in his numerous scholarly articles on the conflict.<sup>26</sup> It was Secretary Baker who intervened with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers to reach an agreement on how Karabakh region was to be represented in the OSCE-sponsored negotiations. The rules, to which all parties agreed and which the OSCE Minsk Group adheres to even today, were simple: in NK conflict, there are two “principal parties” – the Republic of Armenia and Republic of Azerbaijan, and two “interested parties” -- the Armenian community of NK and Azerbaijani community of NK. That is the Azerbaijani community of Karabakh was a legally recognized “interested party” to the conflict and thus attends the meetings and signed the May 1994 cease-fire agreement. Since then, these simple and effective rules became known as the “Baker Rules”.

### **The 1990 Soviet law on succession**

On the top of the already confusing legal aspects and history of NK region due to oft-repeated references to Stalin, mistranslations and distortions regarding the supposed transfer of NK region to Azerbaijan, there is another legal claim, that the unrecognized separatist “NKR” is, allegedly, a legitimate and independent state, since it succeeded from the USSR in accordance with the 3 April 1990 law.<sup>27</sup> Several Western sources, such as Congressman Frank Pallone (D-NJ), the Co-chair of the Caucus on Armenian Issues of the U.S. House of Representatives, and ironically, himself a former practicing lawyer, and NGO’s, such as a center affiliated with the New England Law School, have been repeating these flawed claims.<sup>28</sup>

To begin with, that Soviet law, “On the Procedures for Resolving Questions Related to the Secession of Union Republics from the USSR” of 3 April 1990, was as its date shows, passed in the waning days of the USSR, when the NK and other post-Soviet conflicts already started, Baltic republics declared independence, Russia wanted to go alone its separate way, and USSR was clearly on the fast track to disintegration. To prevent this, President and Secretary General of the Communist Party of USSR Mikhail Gorbachev and his supporters came up with several ways to make it nearly impossible for the Soviet Union Republics (there were 15 of them, including Azerbaijan SSR and Armenia SSR) to become independent. The solution implemented in the form of the 3 April 1990 law – “[w]as drafted and adopted in a hurry, without open debates and discussions, without consultations with the republics, without previous publication of the draft...”<sup>29</sup> -- was very Stalinesque in both its essence and purpose

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<sup>26</sup> Maresca, John J, “Resolving the Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh: Lost Opportunities for International Conflict Resolution”, In Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (eds) *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, p. 260. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, (1996)

<sup>27</sup> “Law on Procedures for Resolving Questions Related to the Secession of Union Republics from the USSR (3 April 1990)”, in Hurst Hannum (ed.), *Documents on Autonomy and Minority Rights*, pp. 753-760, London: Martinus Nijhoff Press, (1993)

<sup>28</sup> “A Blueprint for Resolving the Nagorno-Karabagh Crisis,” New England Center for International Law and Policy and the Public International Law and Policy Group, (June 2000), <http://www.nesl.edu/center/pubs/nagorno.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Kučinskis, Linas, *Lithuania's Independence: The Litmus Test For Democracy In The U.S.S.R.*, in: *Lithuanian Quarterly Journal Of Arts And Sciences (Lituanus)*, Volume 37, No.3, (Fall 1991), ISSN 0024-5089, [http://www.lituanus.org/1991\\_3/91\\_3\\_01.htm](http://www.lituanus.org/1991_3/91_3_01.htm)



– to give the never-before held rights of secession to autonomous regions (oblast'), such as NK in Azerbaijan, and thus coerce those Union Republics (e.g., Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova) from attempting to secede and become independent from USSR.<sup>30</sup>

However, the main problem with the new, hurriedly adopted, law was not just its intention, but its illegality. First of all, the supreme law in USSR at the time was the 1977 Soviet Constitution (in this article we used the official English translation by the Soviet State Novosti Press Agency Publishing House).<sup>31</sup> The new law on secession, as is clear from Article 1 of its text, is supposedly based on the Article 72 of the USSR Constitution. Yet, Article 72 of the Soviet Constitution stated only the following: “Each Union Republic shall retain the right freely to secede from the USSR”.<sup>32</sup> As we can see, there is not a single word about autonomous republics (such as Abkhazia) or autonomous regions (such as South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh), only about the rights of 15 Union Republics (which the preceding Article 71 defines) – the republics that actually put the “U” (for “Union”) in the “USSR”. Moreover, the new law was clearly in total violation of the Article 78 of the USSR Constitution, which stipulated that: “The territory of a Union Republic may not be altered without its consent. The boundaries between Union Republics may be altered by mutual agreement of the Republics concerned, subject to ratification by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”

Furthermore, Article 79 stated: “A Union Republic shall determine its division into territories, regions, areas, and districts, and decide other matters relating to its administrative and territorial structure”, and finally, in Article 81, a promise was made: “The sovereign rights of Union Republics shall be safeguarded by the USSR”. It becomes obvious, that the 3 April 1990 law contradicts all of the above articles of the supreme law of the country, the Soviet Constitution, specifically, articles 72, 78 and 79, and thus the law was unconstitutional.

Moreover, where the Soviet Constitution did discuss autonomous regions (areas), in articles 86-88, it only said the following: “Article 86. An Autonomous Region is a constituent part of a Union Republic or Territory. The Law on an Autonomous Region, upon submission by the Soviet of People's Deputies of the Autonomous Region concerned, shall be adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic.” Then Article 87 defined all the autonomous regions in USSR, of which there were eight. Finally, “Article 88. An autonomous Area is a constituent part of a Territory or Region. The Law on an Autonomous Area shall be adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic concerned”.

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<sup>30</sup> The official Azerbaijani position is found here: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Legal aspects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”, accessed November 2007, [http://www.mfa.gov.az/eng/armenian\\_agresion/legal/index.shtml](http://www.mfa.gov.az/eng/armenian_agresion/legal/index.shtml)

The official Armenian view is here: Nagorno Karabagh A White Paper, The Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan, Armenia. Publication sponsored by the Armenian Assembly of America, Washington, D.C., (March 1997), [http://www.ArmeniaForeignMinistry.com/fr/nk/white\\_paper.html](http://www.ArmeniaForeignMinistry.com/fr/nk/white_paper.html)

<sup>31</sup> Constitution (Fundamental Law) Of The Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics, Adopted at the Seventh (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Ninth Convocation On October 7, 1977. Translation by official Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, (1985) (split into 7 parts by Bucknell University, consisting of 174 articles), <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/1977toc.html>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Articles 70-88 can be read here: <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons03.html>

In addition to the before mentioned points exposing the unconstitutionality of the 1990 law and discrediting its Stalinesque essence, the law itself contains provisions which the Armenian community of NK clearly either did not follow or violated, such as in Articles 6 and 7, which stipulate that any referendum in an autonomous region (such as NK – A.B.) must not only provide all residents the right to vote (which was violated, as the entire population of some 46,000 Azerbaijanis [1990 census], was either already ethnically cleansed from their homes or denied voting rights), but also send the results of the referendum for approval to the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic (in this case the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR in Baku), which would then make its determination and recommendations, and send it up to Moscow for further deliberations. Obviously, this never happened, partially because not a single union republic followed these procedures due to USSR's unexpected and unilateral dissolution by the Belovezhskaya Pushcha (Belovezh forest) agreements of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus presidents and the formation of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) in its place.

Finally, Article 3 of the 1990 law, which Armenians frequently site in their quest for “NKR” legitimacy, used a vague stipulation, which was grossly misunderstood. Specifically, it said: “The people of the autonomous republics [such as Abkhazia – A.B.] and autonomous formations [formations such as NK or South Ossetia are meant – A.B.] are reserved the right of an independent decision of a question on whether to remain in the USSR or in the seceding union republic, as well as on putting up the question on their legal status [‘gosudarstvenno pravovoy status’ in Russian – A.B.]”. Hence, this convoluted and vague provision of an unconstitutional and in itself contradictory law simply gives NK region the choice of either seceding from USSR while remaining part of Azerbaijan, or staying in USSR if the Union Republic decides to secede anyway. This determination is also concurred by the Council of Europe background paper prepared by the Directorate General of Political Affairs.<sup>33</sup>

The secondary part of Article 3 of the 1990 law, where it says: “as well as on putting up the question on their legal status”, does not imply the right to independence, but simply refers to a possibility of raising the issue of upgrading its status from an autonomous oblast (region) to that of an autonomous republic. What Soviet Russian legal experts and drafters of the law meant by the “question on their legal status” clause, becomes very apparent in the case of Tatarstan (a sovereign Republic that is a constituent part of Russian Federation), reviewed by the Constitutional Court of Russia (the highest judicial authority of the land) on 13 March 1992, which used precisely the same stipulations to strike down many provisions for greater autonomy of the Tatars and bring Tatarstan's laws in accordance with the Russian Constitution.<sup>34</sup> The importance of this legal decision is great, considering the date (1992), place (Moscow) and individuals involved (Soviet-era constitutional experts and judges).

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<sup>33</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Background paper on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, prepared by the Directorate General of Political Affairs for the seminar ‘Youth and conflict resolution’, Strasbourg, (31 March – 2 April 2003), [http://www.coe.int/t/e/com/files/events/2003-04-Youth-conflicts/Nagorno\\_conflict.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/e/com/files/events/2003-04-Youth-conflicts/Nagorno_conflict.asp)

<sup>34</sup> ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ от 13 марта 1992 г. N 3-П. "По делу о проверке конституционности Декларации о государственном суверенитете Татарской ССР от 30 августа 1990 года, Закона Татарской ССР от 18 апреля 1991 года "Об изменениях и дополнениях Конституции (Основного Закона) Татарской ССР", Закона Татарской ССР от 29 ноября 1991 года "О референдуме Татарской ССР", постановления Верховного Совета Республики Татарстан от 21 февраля 1992 года "О проведении референдума Республики Татарстан по вопросу о государственном статусе Республики Татарстан", [http://www.ksrf.ru/doc/postanrtf/p3\\_92.rtf](http://www.ksrf.ru/doc/postanrtf/p3_92.rtf) and also here: <http://www.eurolawco.ru/publ/ccrf31.html>

The Chechen insurgents have also tried to use this and other Soviet-era laws and declarations for their independence claims, which were all, of course, rejected by the central Russian authorities.<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that despite the obvious, if not unintended, threat to Russia's territorial integrity stemming from the 1990 law(s), some of the ultra-nationalist Duma members, such as the Rodina (Homeland) fraction (since merged into the "Fair Russia" party) and its leader, then Member of the Duma, Mr. Dmitry Rogozin, have introduced a bill in 2005, invoking the law and attempting to simplify the process of becoming part of Russian Federation for all four break-away regions of the FSU republics, such as NK, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria. However, the bill has been blocked by the ruling majority and did not pass during its first reading on March 11, 2005.<sup>36</sup> This is not surprising, considering the fact that the Russian government and judiciary have never interpreted or meant to interpret the 3 April 1990 law, along with many other haphazard laws hurriedly passed in 1990, the way separatists try to do post-factum.

In short, the 3 April 1990 was simultaneously unconstitutional, illegal, contradictory, Stalinesque and neither applied nor was applied to NK, and does not legitimize continued occupation of Azerbaijani regions, such as Karabakh, and certainly does not recognize the independence of the "NKR". The position of the international community and most importantly of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council has been the same for all this time – Nagorno Karabakh is a constituent part of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

## Conclusion

The Karabakh region as a whole, and its mountainous part (NK), has been a historic part of Azerbaijan and populated by a majority Azerbaijani population for the past several centuries. The Armenian-speaking population became majority only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after an out migration of the Muslim (primarily Azerbaijani Turkic) population and settlement of ethnic Armenians from primarily the Iranian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the mountainous part of

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the statements, articles and declarations in Russian of pro-independence Chechen activists: А. Закаев, Я. Чагаев, "Некоторые замечания к вопросу о легитимности Чеченской независимости", Чеченпресс, 17.08.04, <http://www.chechenpress.info/events/2005/04/29/30.shtml> ; Идигов, Ахъяд, Председатель Парламента ЧР-Ичкерия (1993-1997 гг.), Отдел политической информации Chechenews.com, (06.09.2006), <http://www.chechenews.com/events/2006/09/06/02.shtml> ; Бадалов, Руслан, председатель регионального общественного движения Чеченский комитет национального спасения, "У нас уже есть одна Конституция. Другой не надо", in: Время МН, N 43 (дайджест публикаций центральной прессы N 51 (589), 21 марта 2003 года), <http://www.hro.org/editions/press/0303/21/21030336.htm>. Then, compare with a retort from a pro-Federal Chechen expert: Султыгов, Абдул-Хаким, "Правовые проблемы чеченского национально-государственного самоопределения", in: Елена Боннэр, Дмитрий Фурман и Юрий Самодуров (eds) Чечня и Россия - заложники друг у друга, Общественный центр имени Андрея Сахарова, (22 October 1999), Москва, [http://www.sakharov-center.ru/chs/chrus17\\_1.htm](http://www.sakharov-center.ru/chs/chrus17_1.htm)

<sup>36</sup> For some more background info, see these articles in Russian: Госдума не разрешила иностранным автономиям самовольно переходить в состав России, (11.03.2005), <http://www.vcj.ru/rus/news/2005/03/11/subject/> and: Ratiani, Natali. "Родина" расширяет границы. Дмитрий Рогозин Хочет Присоединить К России Немного Бывшей Советской Родины, in: Газета "Известия", (10.03.2005), <http://www.rodina-duma.ru/press/?page=17> and <http://www.vibori.ru/news/2005/3/11.htm>

the region. Despite intense lobbying and attempts to transfer NK to Armenian jurisdiction, the region was retained as part of Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1920s. However, a time-bomb was put in place by arbitrary delimitation of the mountainous Karabakh to include a maximum of Armenian-populated villages, and exclude Azerbaijani ones, hence creating an “Armenian enclave” with a special autonomous status of an *oblast’* (NKAO) – which while being lower than the status of the Autonomous Republic and Union Republic, favored the Armenian irredentism and separatist claims. Despite better quality of life and standards of living that on average in either Azerbaijan, Armenia or USSR as a whole, claims of economic deprivation and mistreatment were alleged early on, with swift reaction of central Soviet authorities, pressuring Azerbaijan to increase financial subsidies of NKAO even further, at the expense of truly depressed and overlooked regions of the republic. Despite continued Armenian efforts to show NK as being part of Azerbaijan only in Soviet times and succeeding in full conformity with the laws of the time, particularly the 3 April 1990 Law on Succession, the United Nations Security Council, along with all other relevant international organizations, recognized NK and all other currently Armenian-occupied regions as integral part of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan. The international community has also implicated and recognized Republic of Armenia as not only a supporter of local Armenian separatists, but as a country occupying territories of a neighboring state, but has not applied or approved any sanctions. Additionally, the international community, in what has been termed as the “Baker Rules”, has recognized only the Republic of Armenia and Republic of Azerbaijan as the “principal parties” to the NK conflict, whilst the two ethnic communities, including the self-proclaimed and unrecognized “NKR”, were recognized only as the “interested parties”.

# RUSSIA, IRAN, AND THE CONFLICT IN CHECHNYA

Martin Malek\*

## Abstract

*The reactions in the Islamic world to Russia's wars in Chechnya from 1994 to present were by far not as strong as the 'Islamic solidarity' claim might have suggested. Theocratic Iran was no exception. Sceptical remarks from some Iranian officials were immediately softened by reservations: Chechnya is an "internal affair" of Russia whose territorial integrity Iran would certainly continue to respect. At the beginning of the second war in Chechnya in 1999, Iran was chairing the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and made ostensible efforts to keep its role as a means of criticising Moscow as small as possible. Russian President Vladimir Putin showed himself not to be very familiar with matters concerning international or only Russian Islam. On many occasions he made patronizing comments about Islam, without triggering a sharp reaction from Iran or other Islamic states and organisations.*

**Keywords:** *Iran, Russia, Chechnya, Islam, separatism, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, terrorism*

## Iran and Chechnya

Chechen separatism as of 1991 was not motivated by Islam (or even Islamism) but developed on a "purely secular basis of socio-cultural and political protest."<sup>1</sup> In fact, Islam was not mentioned in Chechnya's separatist constitution of 1992. Instead, article 43 (paragraph 1) reads: "Freedom of conscience is guaranteed. The citizens of Chechen Republic have the right to profess any religion or profess no one, to execute religious ceremonies and to conduct any other religious activity not contradicting the law."<sup>2</sup>

When the Russian army withdrew from Chechnya in 1992, it left behind a considerable weapons arsenal. In 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin deployed forces to Chechnya, anticipating a "small-scale war" and an easy victory. However, Chechen resistance turned out to be much stronger than expected, and in August 1996 guerrilla fighters, lead by Aslan Maskhadov, were able to re-capture the capital Grozny. By early 1997 the Russian troops had

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<sup>1</sup> Glinskiy, Dmitriy, *Musulmane Rossii: obretenie politicheskoy subektivnosti. Konstitutsionnoe pravo: Vostochnoevropeyskoe Obozrenie*, vol. 11, nos. 1-2, Winter/Spring 2002, pp. 12-25, here p.14; also cf. Malashenko, Aleksey, "Islamskoe vozrozhdenie v sovremennoy Rossii". Moskva: Moskovskiy Tsentr Karnegi (1998), p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Chechnya – Constitution, <http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/cc01000.html> (accessed 30 October 2006).

withdrawn. In late summer 1999, Yeltsin and his new Prime Minister Vladimir Putin launched the second Chechen war which is still ongoing.

Especially at the beginning of the second war criticism was voiced in Iran. For instance, Ayatollah Abdul Vaez-Javadi-Amoli said on 15 January 2000 that Russia “will be destroyed and disgraced if it continues with the killing of the innocent Muslims in Chechnya.”<sup>3</sup> At the same time Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi told Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Grigori Karasin that a continuation of the war in Chechnya would be “unacceptable for the Islamic world” and added his concern about the “picture from Russia to the region and the Muslim world.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, such and similar statements had no obvious consequences for the official bilateral relationship. In early January 2000, President Sayed Mohammed Khatami congratulated Putin on assuming office as (then provisional) President and expressed hopes to further intensify contacts with Moscow. On 14 January 2000, the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti commented on Iran’s position as follows: “It is very important for Moscow that Iran has again confirmed its pro-Russian position on Chechnya [...] and recognizes its right to punish terrorists and bandits” (i.e., the Chechen rebels, M.M.).<sup>5</sup> The then Secretary of Russia’s Security Council Sergei Ivanov (today Minister of Defence and First Deputy Prime Minister) thanked Iran for its “by and large constructive approach.”<sup>6</sup>

Also later, Iranian criticism of Russia’s Chechnya policy was occasionally voiced, as for example by the newspaper *Dschomchürjye eslami*, allegedly loyal to Iran’s spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Chamenei, on the occasion of a hostage-taking in a Moscow musical theatre in October 2002. Also the moderate Russian press reacted to that with headlines such as “The Ayatollahs Supported Terrorists.”<sup>7</sup> Sceptical remarks from Iranian officials on Russia’s war in Chechnya were immediately softened by reservations: Chechnya is an “internal affair” of Russia whose territorial integrity Iran would, of course, respect. Neither for Iran nor any other Muslim country the recognition of Chechnya’s self-proclaimed independence of 1991 was ever a serious point of discussion.<sup>8</sup>

Hamid Reza Assefi, a representative of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announced in 2003:

*“We tolerate all measures of Russia that are peaceful in nature and aimed at respecting and guaranteeing the rights of Russia’s multinational population, including the Muslims. Iran welcomes the respect the Russian Federation pays to the many representatives of the Islamic faith and, by all means, considers the problem with the Chechen Republic to be an internal Russian affair.”*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from: RFE/RL Iran Report, vol. 3, no. 6, 7 February 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Sekretar Sovbeza RF provel peregovory s Sekretarem Vysshogo Soveta Natsionalnoy Bezopasnosti Irana. Obshcheekonomicheskie novosti, yanvar 13, 2000 g., <http://www.innov.ru/news/en/2000/01-13.htm> (accessed 11 November 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Yusin, Maskim, Ayatolly podderzhali terroristov. Izvestiya, 31 October 2002, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Only the Taliban in Afghanistan had “recognized” Chechnya (in January 2000), though their own regime was not internationally recognized.

<sup>9</sup> RIA “Novosti”, 2 March 2003, <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2003/03/m1694.htm> (accessed 13 November 2007).

Therefore, the Chairman of the Federation Council (Upper House of Parliament), Sergei Mironov (a Putin loyal), had no difficulty with telling the Iranian Parliament in 2004 that Russia “greatly appreciated” Iran’s “principle position” on the situation in Chechnya. According to Mironov, Iran’s support for “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation” would have positive effects on the present and future bilateral relations.<sup>10</sup> Iran also received credit in Russia for not admitting representatives of Chechen separatists (as did several CIS and European countries).<sup>11</sup>

According to the German Caucasus expert Uwe Halbach, Middle East governments – including Iran – were, in general, (even) more reluctant to criticise Russia’s war in Chechnya than officials in the EU and North America. Some Islamic states (including Iran) and organisations provided humanitarian aid to Chechen refugees. “Volunteers” from several Islamic states joined the Chechen rebels in their fight.<sup>12</sup> However, Chechnya never had the “attraction” that other conflicts with Islamic involvement have had. In general, the reactions in the Islamic world to the events in Chechnya were “by far not as strong as the ‘Islamic solidarity’ claim might have suggested.”<sup>13</sup> Chechen President Maskhadov, undoubtedly a secular-oriented leader, in vain approached even Pope John Paul II for help, as the Islamic world appeared to be indifferent to the fate of the Chechen people.

The death toll figures in Chechnya since 1994 vary strongly, depending on the source and reach up to 200,000. In any case, one can work on the assumption that tens of thousands of civilians were killed and that hundreds of thousands had to flee their homes – in a Republic that had approximately one million inhabitants in 1991. From both wars there are reports about numerous massacres, committed by Russian troops against the civilian population, and about random shootings and bombings of gathered crowds as well as about the establishment of “filtration camps” (where people of both sexes and all ages were sent, who were accused by Russian troops of having connections with the rebels). At the beginning of the second war in Chechnya, Russian troops and intelligence services systematically targeted alleged and actual symbols of the Islamisation that had taken place in the meantime. Mosques<sup>14</sup> and even cemeteries were damaged or destroyed. The possession of a copy of the Koran alone could lead to arrest for allegedly “sympathising with the rebels”, and men wearing beards could raise suspicion of being “Wahhabis.”

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted from: Mironov: v Rossii vysoko tsenyat pozitsiyu Irana po Chechne. RIA Novosti, 12 December 2004, <http://rian.ru/politics/20041212/758245.html> (accessed 11 March 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Pylev, Alexey I., Iran i Rossiya kak strategicheskie soyuzniki: istoriya i sovremennoe polozhenie, <http://www.evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=969> (accessed 11 August 2006).

<sup>12</sup> The Kremlin occasionally propagated that the Chechen resistance was steered from the outside and would, therefore, not be autochthonous. It also tried to create the impression that the Russian Armed Forces were confronted with an entire Islamist “army of terrorists,” in which foreign mercenaries play a substantial role. In fact, there had probably never been more than two to three hundred foreign fighters in the Republic (Malashenko, Aleksey and Trenin, Dmitriy, “Vremya yuga. Rossiya v Chechne, Chechnya v Rossii”. Moskva: Gendalf [2002], pp. 103-104). By no means, all of those came from the Islamic world – there were, for example, also Ukrainian nationalists. And it was particularly unwelcome in Russia that ethnic Russians (often Islamic converts) fought with the rebels, though their number was undoubtedly small.

<sup>13</sup> Halbach, Uwe, Regionale Dimensionen des zweiten Tschetschenienkriegs. Teil II: Die südliche GUS und die “islamische Welt”. Aktuelle Analysen des BIOst, no. 2, 2000, p. 4; Halbach, Uwe, Russlands muslimische Ethnien und Nachbarn, in Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, B 16-17, 2003, pp. 39-46, here p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> In concrete terms, e.g., a mosque in Vedeno (Shamil Basayev’s hometown), a mosque in Starye Atagi built by Dudaev’s successor Selimkhan Yandarbiev, and a mosque in the centre of Gudermes.

In Russia the terms “Wahhabi” and “Wahhabism” were gradually stripped of their analytical content and came to be frequently used catchwords and ciphers for all movements that Moscow perceived as radical, militant, or terrorist and “steered from the outside” within the “Islamic renaissance” that was taking place in the “post-Soviet space.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, both terms point to Saudi Arabia, which in Russia is all too readily accused of financing Islamic extremists in the CIS and particularly in Chechnya, while they simultaneously exclude Iran.<sup>16</sup>

A researcher at the Moscow-based Institute for World Economics and International Relations (IMEMO) of the Russian Academy of Sciences noted: “In today’s Russia the attitude towards ‘Wahhabism’ as an enemy ideology recalls the attitude of the official authorities during the Soviet era towards ‘Zionism’.”<sup>17</sup> Moscow and its Chechen accomplices are seeking to make a distinction between “evil” “Wahhabism” and “good” (because pro-Russian) “traditional Islam.” According to prevailing Russian opinion, those who declare jihad on separatist rebels in Chechnya are “good Muslims,” whereas those who conversely declare jihad on “Russian infidels” and “national traitors” (a hint at Chechens siding with Moscow) are “Wahhabis” and, therefore, have to be fought and “wiped out.” There was, however, a general “Chechenisation” of Russian perceptions of Islam, which manifested itself in anti-Islamic prejudices within parts of Russia’s Slavic population in general and, in concrete terms, within the political elite and articulated itself in reprisals against believing Muslims who obviously had nothing to do with the Chechen rebels. As a result, not only in contested Chechnya, but also in other North Caucasus regions Muslims faced grievances or the ban of Arabic and Islam instruction as well as collective mockery, harassments and even arrests, when praying in mosques.<sup>18</sup>

On the surface, Iran’s official reaction was surprisingly indifferent to those events. Neither the war in Chechnya itself nor Russia’s related self-presentation in international relations harmed the relations between Tehran and Moscow. According to Alexei Malashenko and Dmitri Trenin, the first war in Chechnya did not overshadow Russian-Iranian “pragmatic” cooperation and the second war even unchained “the hands of those Russians who advocated closer ties with Iran. This process brought the interests of Russian military leaders as well as of circles of the weapons industry and the nuclear industry to the fore.”<sup>19</sup> Cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, initially published in a Danish provincial newspaper in late 2005 and early 2006, provoked much more indignation and violent protests in many Islamic states (including Iran) than did the Russian war in Chechnya with its enormous death toll and property damage.

Some perceived Iran’s Chechnya policy as a violation of the Iranian constitution, which obliges Iran to be “fraternally committed” to all Muslims and provide “unsparing support to the *mustad’afin*<sup>20</sup> of the world” (article 3, paragraph 16). Official Tehran justified its stance towards the Chechen conflict mainly by pointing out that the rebels were backed by “external forces” which were enemies of Iran and Russia alike. “In doing so, Tehran makes practically no effort to conceal the fact that by such forces it means, among others, the U.S. and

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<sup>15</sup> The term “Wahhabism” actually refers to the extremely purist teachings of Ibn Abd al Wahhab (18<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>16</sup> Halbach, Uwe, “Wahhabiten” im Kaukasus und in Zentralasien. Religiöse Konflikte an der Südflanke Russlands. Aktuelle Analysen des BIOst, no. 19, 12 May 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Glinskiy, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Perović, Jeronim, Am Abgrund. Fehlentwicklungen im Nordkaukasus. Osteuropa, vol. 56, no. 7, 2006, pp. 33-53, here p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> Malashenko and Trenin, op. cit., p. 204-205.

<sup>20</sup> In this context, the Arab word can be translated as “the weak” and “the oppressed.”



Turkey.”<sup>21</sup> These two countries as well as NATO were repeatedly accused by Russian politicians and the press of supporting the rebels or at least wanting to use the Chechen conflict for their own aims. It is, therefore, a widespread opinion that “neither Russia nor Chechnya needs war and instability in Chechnya, regardless of their views. It is the West who needs the war, in order to create an internal enemy image in the form of Muslims within Russia and turn Muslims and Orthodox Christians against each other.”<sup>22</sup>

Some observers also explained Iran’s position of straddling the fence between indifference and de facto partisanship with Moscow, regarding the conflict in Chechnya, with Iran’s own multi-ethnicity and voiced the opinion that the Azerbaijanis in the north-west, the Arabs in the south, the Balujis in the south-east, and the Turkmen in the north-east might also develop separatist or irredentist tendencies.<sup>23</sup> In the “Treaty about the Basis of Mutual Relations and Principles of Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran” both countries obliged themselves not to open their respective territory to “aggressions, diversions and separatist activities” (article 2).<sup>24</sup> This is merely a declaration, though, for Russia has signed many bilateral and multilateral documents within the CIS containing references to respecting territorial integrity, while, at the same time, it supports armed separatists, especially in Moldova (Transnistria) and Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia).

In late 2005, the British newspaper *Sunday Telegraph* claimed to have knowledge of incidents which would equally violate the aforementioned passage of the Russian-Iranian Principle Agreement: Referring to “Western intelligence reports”, the newspaper read that in the “Revolutionary Guards’ Imam Ali training camp, located close to Tajrish Square in Tehran”, Chechen rebels were secretly trained “in sophisticated terror techniques to enable them to carry out more effective attacks against Russian forces”. In addition, the Chechens would receive “ideological and political instruction by hardline Iranian mullahs at Qom.” All this would be taking place with the knowledge and approval of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>25</sup> – Later, however, the *Sunday Telegraph* report only met with denials and criticism. The Chechen separatist Kavkazcenter website called the report “complete nonsense” and added:

“It has long been common knowledge that in relation to Chechnya, Tehran has always taken a clear and unambiguous position. Iran in every way justifies Moscow's occupation of Chechnya and will never put its military-economic ties with Russia under threat because of the Chechens.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Shakaryants, Sergey, *Aspekty rossiysko-iranskogo sotrudnichestva s uchetom ego voennoy sostavlyayushchey. Armenian Center for National and International Studies (Yerevan)*, 29 August 2000, <http://www.acnis.am/aspects.htm> (accessed 15 May 2001).

<sup>22</sup> A. V. Polosin, Head of the Association of Islamic Journalists in Russia (and former Russian-Orthodox priest), quoted from: *Rossiya i islamskiy mir – problemy, predposylki i perspektivy dolgosrochnogo vzaimodeystviya. Vestnik Analitiki*, no. 1(19), 2005, pp. 211-224, p. 220.

<sup>23</sup> Samii, A. William, *Iran and Chechnya: Realpolitik at Work. Middle East Policy*, vol. VIII, no. 1, March 2001, pp. 48-57.

<sup>24</sup> *Rossiyskaya Federatsiya – Federalnyy Zakon o Ratifikatsii dogovora ob osnovach vzaimootnosheniy i printsipach sotrudnichestva mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiey i Islamskoy Respublikoy Iran.* <http://www.akdi.ru/GD/proekt/088099GD.SHTM> (accessed 23 October 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Coughlin, Con, *Teheran ‘secretly trains’ Chechens to fight in Russia.* *Sunday Telegraph*, 27 November 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/11/27/wchech27.xml> (accessed 13 November 2007).

<sup>26</sup> *Report of Iranian Training of Chechens Greeted Sceptically.* *Eurasia Daily Monitor – The Jamestown Foundation*, vol. 6, issue 46, 8 December 2005.

The pro-Kremlin Moscow-based newspaper *Izvestija* talked about “another shot fired in the information war that the West is waging against the Iranian regime,” adding that “a quarrel between Tehran and Moscow would make the Western diplomats’ work easier.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the Iranian Embassy in Moscow combined its rejection of the report with a (further) statement that it saw the Chechen problem “as being in the competence of Russia and its internal matter.” There was only the very cautiously phrased additional suggestion that “the government of Russia and the sides to the conflict should put forward all proposals for settling the problems.”<sup>28</sup> Already in 2002, the Iranian Embassy in Moscow had “categorically” rejected a statement by the convicted criminal Beslan Gantamirov, a pro-Russian Chechen politician and high-ranking staff member of the office of the Presidential Plenipotentiary envoy to the Southern Federal District (to which Chechnya belongs), according to which Tehran would support the “terrorist activities of Chattab” (a Chechen fighter of Arab origin who was killed by the Russians in 2002).<sup>29</sup>

## The Chechen Problem in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference

In 1994, separatist President Dzhokhar Dudaev tried to achieve the accession of Chechnya into the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). However, the initiative failed. The final communiqué of the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Heads of State and Governments of the OIC in Casablanca in December 1994 dedicated only one single sentence to Chechnya, which did not contain any direct criticism of Moscow: “The Conference expressed its concern over the recent developments in Chechnya and called on all concerned parties to exercise restraint and avoid more bloodshed and to work for a peaceful settlement of the problem, in the framework of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.”<sup>30</sup>

At the beginning of the second war in Chechnya in 1999, Iran was chairing the OIC and made ostensible efforts to keep the role of the OIC as a means of criticising Moscow as small as possible. From that two well-known Russian scholars deduced that Iran, as chair of the OIC, had “supported Moscow and its policy in Chechnya.”<sup>31</sup> Russia’s highest political establishment saw it similarly, because Mironov thanked Iran for its role in assessing the “developments in Chechnya” in the framework of the OIC.<sup>32</sup> Kharrazi offered Russia, provided it would give its “permission,” to negotiate a ceasefire in Chechnya on behalf of the OIC, but it was easy for

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<sup>27</sup> Bausin, Aleksey, Anglichane otyskali bazy chechenskikh boevikov v Irane. *Izvestiya*, 30 November 2005, <http://www.izvestia.ru/world/article3022797/> (accessed 5 October 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Chechnya – eto vnutrennee delo Rossii. Posolstvo Irana v Moskve oproveraet... Zayavlenie Posolstva Irana v Moskve, 7 December 2005, <http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1133922720> (accessed 23 October 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Zayavlenie posolstva Irana v Rossii. Kavkazskiy uzel, 30 April 2002, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/493671.html> (accessed 23 October 2006).

<sup>30</sup> The Seventh Islamic Summit Conference (Session of Fraternity and Revival). Casablanca, Kingdom Of Morocco, 11-13 Rajab 1415h (13-15 December, 1994), <http://www.oic-oci.org/english/conf/is/7/7th-is-summit.htm#FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE> (accessed 25 February 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Malashenko and Trenin, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> Mironov: v Rossii..., op. cit.

Moscow to reject the proposal – on the very basis of Iran’s own assessment of the Chechen conflict as “interior Russian matter.”<sup>33</sup>

Neither Iran nor the OIC felt affronted. Criticism of the “commensurability” of the Russian military operation and regrets about the large number of civilian casualties continued to be moderate. The OIC positions on the question of Chechnya (including those adopted in Tehran) contained mostly factual to reserved and carefully formulated wordings and expressions of “concern” or “grave concern” as well as calls for negotiations, but no ultimatums or emotional criticism of Russia; they were always accompanied by the “respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Russian Federation and non-interference in its internal affairs.”<sup>34</sup> This was in clear contrast to the regular biting OIC statements concerning other crisis zones with Islamic involvement (especially the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, although there were far fewer casualties than in Chechnya). OIC observers even called the more than controversial election in August 2004 of Moscow’s protégé Alu Alkhanov to President of Chechnya – who allegedly gained 73.67% of the votes (on an 85.25% turnout) – “legitimate.”<sup>35</sup>

Chechnya never played an important role in the OIC framework, even though several member states made it clear that they would have wished an active and critical position of their organisation in this respect. Particularly Saudi Arabia has been accused by Russian sources of having acted in favour of separatist Chechnya within the organisation. Like in Western Europe and North America, the interest of the Islamic world in the conflict steadily decreased with its duration. In 2005 – i.e. during the second war in Chechnya – Russia obtained observer status in the OIC. Iran was one of the first OIC members to push for this, for which Putin thanked Ahmadinedjad profusely at a meeting in June 2006.<sup>36</sup> During the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Baku in the same month, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov represented Russia as an observer.

## **Russia’s “Fight Against Terrorism” in Chechnya**

High-ranking Russian officials were and are heard saying that Russia was the main target of international terrorism. The “threat from the south” – i.e. alleged or actual attempts of Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists to gain a foothold in the Central-Asian CIS Republics as well as in Russia itself – was intermittently the main topic in Russia. Chechnya is considered to be one of the focal points in that respect. The first war there (1994-1996) was officially described in Moscow as an “operation to restore the constitutional order.” This phrase hardly came up, however, during the second war (since 1999). Instead, Russian officials as well as directly or indirectly Kremlin-controlled media consistently spoke of an “anti-terror operation” (or a “fight against bandits”). However, one must bear in mind that the Russian leadership considers any Chechen resistance against its predominantly violent repression to be “terrorism.” With

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<sup>33</sup> So did the Minister for Federal Affairs and Nationalities Alexander Blokhin, see RFE/RL Iran Report, vol. 3, no. 12, 20 March 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. e.g.: Resolution no.13/27-P – On the Situation in Chechnya. Adopted by the Twenty-seventh Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 27-30 June 2000. A verbatim quote is included in Resolution no.5/30-P – On the Situation in Chechnya. Adopted by the thirtieth Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers. Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 28-30 May 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Trifkovic, Srdja, Chechnya: Time For The U.S. to End Ambiguity. *Chronicles Magazine*, 1 September 2004, <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/News/Trifkovic04/NewsST090104.html> (accessed 25 February 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Skosyrev, Vladimir, NATO dlya bednykh. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 16 January 2006, p. 6.

consistency Moscow does not regard the rebels' activities as combat or war operations but as "terrorism." The terms "terrorists" and "bandits" are intended to discredit the rebels as criminals abroad and at home and deny that they have legitimate political reasons to act. In doing so, Moscow also justifies its refusal to enter into any kind of negotiations.

The term "terrorism," as predominantly understood by the Russian elite as well as the public, is strongly focused on the "anti-terror operation" in Chechnya. Minister of Defence Ivanov made this clear when he said that Saddam Hussein's Iraq could not have anything to do with terrorism simply because no Iraqis were identified among the fighters from 30 to 40 states on the side of the Chechen separatists.<sup>37</sup> About Iran Ivanov said that it was not supporting any "terrorist activities" in Chechnya while "other Middle East countries did."<sup>38</sup> This was obviously a reference to Saudi Arabia.

Russian human rights activists, among them the well-known NGO Memorial, point out the high casualty tolls of the wars in Chechnya and, in turn, accuse the Kremlin of "state terrorism,"<sup>39</sup> but, with that, belong to a tiny and politically unimportant minority. Also in Western Europe and North America politicians, the media and political observers have used this accusation only as exceptions. Particularly after 9/11 in the U.S., Moscow gained success in its efforts to present its intervention in Chechnya as "contribution to the fight against international terrorism." It denies that the conflict has deeper roots and strives to put its war in Chechnya on the same level as the ongoing U.S.-led combat against the Taliban in Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda since 2001, and to give the impression that Russian Armed Forces were confronted with an entire "Islamist terrorist army" or with an "Islamist aggression." Moscow has repeatedly claimed that Al-Qaeda was responsible for attacks and hostage-takings (as, e.g. in a school in Beslan in the autonomous Republic of North Ossetia in 2004). However, there is poor evidence for that. Chechnya has always been at the low end of Osama bin Laden's list of priorities. In Jihad texts and videos released on the Internet it rarely appears as individual conflict but is usually included in listings of crises with Muslim participation, anywhere between Bosnia-Herzegovina and the southern Philippines. Russia is hardly ever condemned, nor its downfall wished for in the way, as is the case with the U.S., Israel and other "crusaders." Jihadist texts sometimes even accuse the U.S. of having supported the Russian military interventions in Chechnya.<sup>40</sup> In fact, this allegation cannot be completely rejected.

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<sup>37</sup> Babaeva, Svetlana, Sergey Ivanov: "Nam obyavlena vojna bez frontov i granits" (Interview). *Izvestiya*, 5 November 2002, p. 2. – The \$25,000 reward Saddam Hussein paid to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel was clearly not seen as supporting terrorism by Ivanov. However, the Russian law "About the Fight Against Terrorism" (enacted in 1998) states that financing terrorist groups counts as "terrorist activity." – Saddam Hussein had always clearly supported Russia's "anti-terror operations" in Chechnya. As revenge for this representatives of the Chechen rebels rendered support to the U.S.-led war in Iraq in 2003 – despite Washington putting three Chechen factions on its list of terrorist groups. The official reason for this was that U.S. citizens as well as U.S. interests are endangered by their activities. However, Chechen rebels have never attracted attention by attacking U.S. targets. In fact, Washington wanted to convince Moscow to vote for an UN resolution legitimising the intervention in Iraq. But this was never an option for Russia.

<sup>38</sup> "Rußland ist nicht entscheidend" (Interview). *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 February 2006, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Saidov, Arslan, "Konterror nuzhen lish konkretnym chinovnikam dlya usileniya svoikh pozitsiy" (Interview with Alexander Cherkasov), *Svobodanews.ru*, 31 January 2007, <http://www.svobodanews.ru/Article/2007/01/31/20070131145244013.html> (accessed 11 November 2007).

<sup>40</sup> Kepel, Gilles, and Milelli, Jean-Pierre, *Al Qaida – Text des Terrors*. München/Zürich: Piper Verlag (2006), pp. 67, 108, 124, 379.

## Excursus: Putin About Islam

Putin has shown himself to be not very familiar with matters concerning international or only Russian Islam. In 2000, for instance, he said in an interview on CNN that “mainly Shi’ites” lived in the North Caucasus and “that caused a certain revolt on the part of the population there.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed the Shiites (particularly Azerbaijanis and a small part of the Lezgins and Dargins in Dagestan) are a disappearing minority in the North Caucasus region.<sup>42</sup> That same year the Russian President warned, with obvious exaggeration, of the threat caused by Chechen separatists: “If extremist forces manage to get a hold in the Caucasus, this infection may spread up the Volga River, spread to other republics, and we either face the full Islamization of Russia, or we will have to agree to Russia’s division into several independent states.”<sup>43</sup> In 2002 Putin, answering a journalist’s question about Chechnya, said that “Islamic terrorists” wanted to “establish a Caliphate” first in Chechnya and then “in the whole world.”<sup>44</sup>

Also on many other occasions Putin made patronizing comments about Islam, without triggering a sharp reaction from Iran or other Islamic states and organisations. In 2002, answering a question from a reporter about the war in Chechnya, he said that all Christians and allies of the U.S. were threatened by Chechen separatists. According to a version taken from Russian television footage and translated by *The New York Times*, Putin actually said: “If you want to become a complete Islamic radical and are ready to undergo circumcision, then I invite you to Moscow. We are a multidenominational country. We have specialists in this question as well. I will recommend that he carry out the operation in such a way that after it nothing else will grow.”<sup>45</sup> In 2005, the Russian President being in the Netherlands rejected allegations that the Russian Armed Forces have been too heavy-handed in attempts to put down the rebellion in Chechnya. Then he accused some European leaders of being “more Muslim than Mohammed.”<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, on 12 December 2005, at the opening of the Chechen parliament in Grozny – installed by Moscow – Putin declared that “Russia has always been the most faithful, reliable and consistent defender of the Islamic world’s interests.”<sup>47</sup> On 7 February 2006, Putin called the abovementioned cartoons satirizing the Prophet Mohammed an “inadmissible” provocation against Muslims.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Larry King Live: Russian President Vladimir Putin Discusses Domestic and Foreign Affairs. Aired 8 September 2000, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0009/08/lkl.00.html> (accessed 1 March 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Koptev, Dmitriy, *Voprosy teologii*. *Izvestiya*, 12 September 2000, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted from: Waldman, Amy, *Shackles Off, Russia’s Muslims are still chafing*. *The New York Times*, 9 November 2001, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted from: Reut, Andrey, *Putin predlozhl Evrope obrezanie*. *Gazeta* (The Daily Telegraph / The Sunday Telegraph), 12 November 2002, <http://www.gzt.ru/print.php?p=world/2002/11/12/125959.html> (accessed 7 September 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Quoted from: Fuller, Thomas, *Hint of castrating Islamic radicals gets lost in translation: Putin’s words spark confusion at EU*. *International Herald Tribune*, 13 November 2002, [http://www.iht.com/articles/2002/11/13/putin\\_ed3.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/2002/11/13/putin_ed3.php) (accessed 6 February 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Quoted from: Hanuska, Karl Emerick, *Putin, Dutch PM Spar Over War in Chechnya*. *The Moscow Times*, 3 November 2005, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted from: Kosachev, Konstantin, *Islamofobiya kak politicheskiy faktor*. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 22 December 2005, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted from: RFE/RL Newline, vol. 10, no. 24, Part I, 8 February 2006.

At the same time, according to Putin, Russia was preventing the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism into Europe.<sup>49</sup> Against this backdrop, he practically justified the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan: At the time, the USSR was “the first to resist Islamic fundamentalism and organised terrorism.”<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

The Russian war in Chechnya has never posed a big problem for Tehran. Iranian “nuclear trade with Russia flourished particularly during those years in which the Chechen capital Grozny was levelled to the ground.”<sup>51</sup> Tehran’s pragmatic attitude towards Moscow’s activities in Chechnya did not go unnoticed (Svante Cornell: “Iran’s attitude to the Chechen conflict has reaffirmed the predominance of realpolitik in Iranian foreign policy”<sup>52</sup>, Clement Therme: “This abandoning of Islamic solidarity for the profit of a fragile economic and strategic partnership with Moscow is proof that the foreign policy of Tehran isn’t completely ideological”<sup>53</sup>). Russia itself hardly acts less “pragmatic.” It established close ties to theocratic Iran, regardless of the fact that Islam is viewed with suspicion in large parts of Russia’s Slavic population and its political elite. Many perceive Islam as a religion and ideology that is seen in Russia as weakening Moscow’s hold.

However, common interests preponderate between Russia and Iran. Above all, they share an opposition towards what they perceive as “expansion of the West” – and particularly of the U.S. and NATO – in the CIS, the Caspian Basin and the Near and Middle East. This common approach will not change in the foreseeable future. Other global political actors, including the EU, should adjust to this attitude.

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<sup>49</sup> See Melkov, Sergey, “Transformatsiya voennoy politiki Rossii pod vliyaniem islamskogo faktora”, in Aleksey Malashenko and Marta Brill Olcott (Eds.), *Islam na postsovetском prostranstve: vzglyad iznutri*. Moskva: Moskovskiy Tsentr Karnegi, Art-Biznes-Tsentr (2001), p. 45-71, here p. 62.

<sup>50</sup> Vylegzhanin, Rostislav, *Afgan opyat nasha slava*. Moskovskie novosti, 13 February 2004, <http://www.mn.ru/print.php?2004-5-46> (accessed 4 October 2006). Many post-Soviet publications still or again refer to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 as “provision of internationalist assistance to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan” – as does the deputy head of Putin’s Presidential Executive Office and ex-KGB staff member Viktor Ivanov in his official biography (Pomoshchniki Prezidenta. Ivanov Viktor Petrovich, [http://president.kremlin.ru/state\\_subj/27809.shtml](http://president.kremlin.ru/state_subj/27809.shtml) [accessed 10 January 2007]). – The military newspaper *Krasnaya zvezda* in early 2007 published statements by General Valentin Varennikov (Ret.) who had spent five years with the Soviet expeditionary corps in Afghanistan. He kept to the official version at the time, claiming that the USSR deployed its troops “on Afghanistan’s request.” Despite “U.S. fuelled provocations by the Mujaheddin,” the Soviet troops “showed patience, generosity, courage, and incredible self-sacrifice.” The Soviet Army wanted “the people of Afghanistan to live in peace.” And: “We never intended to harm the civil population” (Knyazkov, Sergey, General armii V. I. Varennikov: *Nas po-prezhnemu zovut shuravi*. *Krasnaya zvezda*, 14 February 2007, [http://www.redstar.ru/2007/02/14\\_02/3\\_01.html](http://www.redstar.ru/2007/02/14_02/3_01.html) [accessed 14 February 2007]).

<sup>51</sup> Randow, Gero von and Ladurner, Ulrich, “Die iranische Bombe. Hintergründe einer globalen Gefahr”. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe (2006), p. 102.

<sup>52</sup> Cornell, Svante E., *Iran and the Caspian Region: The Domestic and International Context of Iranian Policy*. Cornell Caspian Consulting, Caspian Brief, no. 15, May 2001, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Therme, Clement, *Tehran and the Chechen Question*. Caucaz.com, 26 September 2006, [http://www.caucaz.com/home\\_eng/breve\\_contenu\\_imprim.php?id=262](http://www.caucaz.com/home_eng/breve_contenu_imprim.php?id=262) (accessed 13 November 2006).

# IRAN'S STRATEGY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

**Kaweh Sadegh-Zadeh\***

## **Abstract**

*The Islamic Republic of Iran seldom has been lauded for its foreign policy in the west. In contrast, Tehran is regularly accused of being a supporter of terrorism and a source of regional instability. In this regard the “mullah regime” is mostly blamed to pursue an irresponsible foreign policy undermining not only regional but, thanks to Iran’s nuclear programme, also international security. Paradoxically, while constantly being criticized by western governments, Iran’s immediate neighbours seem to take a complete different view on Iran’s foreign policy. From Baghdad to Kabul, neighbouring governments are quick to point out Iran’s constructive role in regional politics. By concentrating on Iran’s strategy towards the South Caucasus this paper wants to present the reader with proof of Iran’s ability to pursue pragmatic Realpolitik in spite of its religious nature. In the current debate this element of Iran’s foreign policy is hardly ever recognized. In order to shed light on this issue the author outlines the driving forces behind Iran’s foreign policy whilst concentrating the analysis on Tehran’s approach to its northern neighbours.*

**Keywords:** *Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, Caspian Sea, South Caucasus, foreign policy, energy*

## **Introduction**

After the Cold War the South Caucasus re-emerged as a critical area in the geopolitical contest between major regional and global powers. The Caspian Sea’s rich natural resources arouse visions of a prospering region while the outbreak of conflicts demonstrated how difficult this was to achieve. This essay will explain the dynamics of Iran’s policies in the South Caucasus and evaluate any risks of confrontation. The author tries to provide evidence that Iran’s relations to all three South Caucasian states are improving and that economic ties dominate mutual affairs. Section II will give a quick overview of the dynamics behind Iran’s turn towards the South Caucasus followed by three case studies covering Iran’s relations to each one of the South Caucasian countries in section III-V. Finally, section VI will give an assessment on the prospective developments between Tehran and the South Caucasian states in the near future.

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## The dynamics behind Iran's turn towards the South Caucasus

While Iran was readjusting its policy towards the Arab countries after the ceasefire with Iraq and Ayatollah Khomeini's death at the end of the 1980's, a dramatic change occurred along its northern border. The Soviet Union (SU) collapsed, the bipolar confrontation which had dominated world politics for 45 years ended and Iran's main rival, the USA, remained as the sole superpower.

In essence three broad developments at the end of the 1980's and early 90's directed Iran to develop relations with its South Caucasian neighbours. First, was the new geopolitical reality. The cease-fire agreement with Iraq and the US-led Desert Storm campaign changed Iran's political environment to the west. While Saddam Hussein was weakened and ceased being an existential threat, the US enlarged its presence in the Middle East and became the guarantor of the status-quo while pursuing its double-containment policy. Simultaneously, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of New Independent States (NIS) changed Iran's geopolitical situation to the north. New immediate security threats arose, such as conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the escalation of inner conflicts in Georgia, and civil wars in Tajikistan and Afghanistan that destabilized Central Asia.

Second, was the changed socio-economic reality. Iran's economy was ruined after the war with Iraq, which cost the country an estimated \$ 160 billion.<sup>1</sup> Falling oil prices during the 1980's as well as failed economic policies curbed down earnings and economic performance. Unexpectedly high birth rates hampered economic growth. A massive brain drain of around 4 million Iranians deprived the country of the human capital needed for economic recovery.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore an 'economic and demographic shift from southern to northern Iran'<sup>3</sup>, caused by the severe war damages in southern Iran, modified the economic equilibrium and made an expansion of increased economic relations with its northern neighbours inevitable.

Third, were the ethnic realities of the Islamic Republic. Iran consists of different ethnic groups of which the Persians are only a 51 % majority. The rest of the population is made up of Azerbaijanis (24%), Gilakis and Mazandarani (8%), Kurds (7%), Arabs (3%), Lurs (2%), Baluchis (2%) and finally Turkmens (2%).<sup>4</sup> These large minority groups are situated mainly on border areas. Thus, regional instability, such as the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, has the potential to spill over into Iran.

So while the political developments of Iran's western border limited its ability to conduct active policies, developments on its northern border opened up opportunities as well as serious threats. Under enormous pressure from its young population to achieve economic progress, and as a result of the increasing instability in the region, Iran turned its attention towards its northern neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup> CIA Analysis, Iran's economy: a survey of its decline, (1991), <http://www.foia.cia.gov/>, p iii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, piii.

<sup>3</sup> Roy, Oliver, The Iranian foreign policy towards Central Asia, (1998), <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/regional/royoniran.html>, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> The CIA World Fact Book 2006, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>.



To have a better understanding of Iran's foreign policy approach towards the South Caucasus, the following three chapters will analyze Tehran's relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

## Armenia

Relations between Armenia and Iran are based on a common history and common geopolitical objectives. After the fall of the SU, Christian Armenia and Islamic Iran were not divided by religion but united by common enemies. Iran's trouble with Azerbaijan's nationalistic government under President Elchibey (1992-93), and the menace of increased US-Israeli-Turkish influence in the South Caucasus guided Tehran to support Armenia at the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the assistance to Armenia advanced Iran's cooperation with Russia, with which Iran shared common interests in the Caucasus by establishing what was later labelled as the Russia-Armenia-Iran axis. Armenia on the other hand, landlocked between Turkey, Azerbaijan and an unstable Georgia, needed Iran in order to disenclave itself, circumvent sanctions imposed by Turkey and win the war with Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup>

After initially providing support to Armenia, Iran shifted its stance towards one of neutrality and tried in vain to mediate between the two adversaries. Tehran was worried about the instability along its northern borders and tried to achieve a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the possibility of renewed hostilities still represent a major source of concern for Iran.

Over the years Yerevan and Tehran have built up very strong relations. Energy cooperation plays the biggest part in their mutual relations and the construction of a gas pipeline from Iran to Armenia has been completed. Although the pipeline was supposed to end Yerevan's dependence on Russian gas, it will most probably be taken over by Gazprom.<sup>7</sup> Russia has become Iran's main competitor in Armenia's energy market and has successfully pressured Yerevan to reduce the pipeline's diameter, so as to prevent Iran from exporting its gas to Georgia and other countries.<sup>8</sup> But there are rumours that Iran and Armenia are planning to build a second pipeline with the capacity to deliver Iranian gas to third-party countries.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Armenia and Iran have agreed upon the construction of a third power transmission line connecting Armenian and Iranian power grids.<sup>10</sup> There are also plans to build a large hydroelectric plant on the Arax River flowing along the Armenian-Iranian border.<sup>11</sup> Infrastructural projects like the current construction of a highway from Armenia to the Iranian

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammad-Reza, Djalili, Iran and the Caucasus: Maintaining some Pragmatism, in: *The Quarterly Journal*, No.3, September 2002, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> 'Kocharian confirms Russian control of Iran-Armenia Pipeline', <http://www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2006/10/F20C558F-A566-4192-9BBF-7EF0CF256EEA.ASP>, 31/10/2006.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 'Russia tightens control over the Armenian Energy Sector', <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav101706.shtml>, 18/10/2006.

<sup>10</sup> 'Armenia deepens ties with embattled Iran', <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav072806.shtml>, 18/10/2006.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

border are underway in order to increase the modest current trade volume of \$ 105 million between the two countries.<sup>12</sup>

## Azerbaijan

The relationship between Iran and Azerbaijan has exhibited massive turbulence over the past years. Three connected sets of factors steer their relations: ideology, geopolitics and economics.

After the collapse of the SU, Azerbaijan went through an identity crisis. The country's 'complex interweaving of historical and religious bonds to Iran; ethnic, ethno-linguistic and traditional intellectual links to Turkey; and political, intellectual and linguistic ties to Russia' made the creation of a coherent national identity difficult.<sup>13</sup> But despite Azerbaijan's cultural and historic legacy, the nationalistic Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) decided to take an overly pro-Turkish stance. Taking power in June 1992, PFA's leader and elected president, Abulfaz Elchibey, overemphasized Azerbaijan's Turkish cultural heritage to the extent that not only Russia and Iran but also the country's own ethnic minorities (14% of the population in the early 90's)<sup>14</sup> felt excluded.

Azerbaijan's early orientation towards Turkey and the West, as well as its disregard for Russia and Iran was a matter of concern to both regional powers. Both were alarmed by the prospect of rising US–Israeli-Turkish influence in the Caucasus. More worrisome for Iran was the fact that the 'Greater Azerbaijan' idea gained widespread support in Azerbaijan. According to the 'Greater Azerbaijan' idea, Azerbaijani national unity was split into northern and southern halves by imperial Russia and Iran and should therefore reunite.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, many Persians are convinced that 'Northern Azerbaijan' was originally part of Iran lost to Russia in 1828.<sup>16</sup> President Elchibey led the "Greater Azerbaijan" campaign and accused Iran of mistreating its Azerbaijani population living in northern Iran close to Azerbaijan's border. Tehran, fearing the spread of separatist sentiments among Iranian Azerbaijanis, who account for 24% of its population, went on the offensive. In addition to financing Islamic parties in Azerbaijan and launching a public relations campaign, Tehran started to destabilize Azerbaijan by supporting the Talysh separatist movement, an ethnic minority in Azerbaijan with a strong Persian identity. Together with Russia, Iran managed to undermine President Elchibey's policies and destabilize Azerbaijan. Foreign and domestic policy failures led eventually to Elchibey's loss of power in June 1993. He was succeeded by more moderate ex-communist Heydar Aliyev.<sup>17</sup>

Heydar Aliyev avoided the extreme nationalistic position of his predecessor and pursued a more balanced policy towards his neighbours. But relations between Iran and Azerbaijan remained strained. Differing positions on the issue of the division of the Caspian Sea, the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, as well as Iran's exclusion from the 'Contract of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Nazrin, Mehdiyeva, Azerbaijan and its Foreign Policy Dilemma, in: Asian Affairs, vol. XXXIV, no. III, (2003), p. 271.

<sup>14</sup> *Microsoft Encyclopaedia 2005*.

<sup>15</sup> Mehdiyeva, p. 280.

<sup>16</sup> Oliver, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Mehdiyeva, p. 271.

Century' petroleum exploration agreement in 1995 angered Tehran.<sup>18</sup> The bilateral relations deteriorated on July 2001 as a British Petroleum boat, which was conducting prospecting operations on disputed offshore oilfields under Azerbaijani authorization, was forced to return to port by an Iranian warship.<sup>19</sup> Sable rattling between the two countries followed but eventually gave way to a more pragmatic approach.

The relationship has changed since then and is progressing towards closer cooperation in political, economic as well as cultural domains. In the political field Azerbaijan supports Iran's right for peaceful use of nuclear technology and has repeatedly expressed its refusal to join any anti-Iran coalition, stressing the need to settle the issue by diplomacy.<sup>20</sup> Both sides have signed an agreement banning their respective territories from launching an attack on the other. Moreover, bilateral cooperation against drug trafficking has been introduced.<sup>21</sup> In the economic field, energy and gas swap agreements have been signed and Baku has voiced its interest in transferring oil to the Persian Gulf.<sup>22</sup> With the completion of power lines and ongoing projects, the transfer capacity of electricity between Iran and Azerbaijan, which currently stands at 200 megawatts, will increase to 600 megawatts.<sup>23</sup> In Addition, Azerbaijan's First Deputy Premier suggested that if Russia's gas price becomes too expensive Azerbaijan will start to negotiate with Iran. Both countries also cooperate on infrastructure projects within the framework of the North-South Corridor and TRASECA. Even the negotiations about the division of the Caspian Sea have recently been described as fruitful by the Iranian Ambassador to Baku.<sup>24</sup> Cultural ties could be fostered by the establishment of the Iran-Azerbaijan Friendship Association.<sup>25</sup>

## Georgia

Georgia shares no common border with Iran and has the least developed relations with Iran among the South Caucasian states. Diplomatic relations were not very strong in the past and Iran kept out of Georgia's internal disputes.<sup>26</sup>

However, the conflict between Georgia and Russia has opened a new chapter of bilateral cooperation. Georgia is desperately seeking a way out of its energy and economic dependence on Russia. Tbilisi's relationship with Russia has suffered severely since the 'Rose Revolution' in 2003 and Mikhail Saakshvili's rise to power. President Saakshvili's westward orientation, his

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<sup>18</sup> Iran was expecting to get a 5% share in the international petroleum consortium, but under the pressure of the US, Iran was excluded. For details see: Djalili, p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> 'Azerbaijan: trying to keep Washington and Tehran happy', <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav050506a.shtml>, 18/10/2006.

<sup>20</sup> 'Konflikt: Aliev pitaetsya otvesti udar ot svoego iranskogo kollegi Akhmadinezhada', <http://www.ng.ru/printed/67647>, 06/05/2006.

<sup>21</sup> 'Iran, Azerbaijan to Ink Drug Campaign Agreement', <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8508120290>, 15/11/2006.

<sup>22</sup> 'Baku Seeking to Transfer Oil to Persian Gulf', <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8507130236>, 23/10/2006.

<sup>23</sup> 'Iran-Azerbaijan energy transfer to increase', <http://www.iranmania.com/News/ArticleView/Default.asp?NewsCode=46011&News>, 23/10/2006.

<sup>24</sup> Axis Information and Analysis, [http://www.axisglobe.com/print\\_news.asp?news=5599](http://www.axisglobe.com/print_news.asp?news=5599), 13/11/2006.

<sup>25</sup> 'Iran-Azerbaijan Friendship Group Starts Work', <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8507030388>, 23/10/2006.

<sup>26</sup> Phone interview with Professor Edmund Herzig, Professor of Persian Studies, University of Oxford, 16/11/2006.

government's hard stance towards the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as his provocative policies directed against Russia's tacit support for the separatist movements damaged bilateral relations. The most recent incident took place in October 2006 as Georgia arrested four Russian army officers and 11 Georgians, accusing them of spying for Russia's GRU military intelligence.<sup>27</sup> Moscow, in response, imposed heavy economic sanctions, cut transport links and announced that it would more than double the current gas price for Georgia from \$110 to \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it becomes clear why a closer relationship with Iran is so important to Georgia. As one of the regional powers in the South Caucasus, Iran has the potential to supply Georgia with gas and consequently break Georgia's dependence on Russia. Stronger economic ties with the Islamic Republic could help Tbilisi to diversify its trade, which is again strongly dependent on Russia (ranking first as export and import partner).<sup>29</sup>

Iran, which has the world's second largest gas reserves after Russia, is profiting from the conflict between Moscow and Tbilisi. Tehran is eager to find a new customer for energy exports and to expand its economic ties. Following the clash between Moscow and Tbilisi as well as Russia's plan to increase their gas price for Georgia, Tbilisi announced that gas from Iran and Azerbaijan could fully replace Russian gas.<sup>30</sup> Moreover Iran and Georgia agreed to swap electricity via Armenia.

## Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has made clear that the region is moving towards closer cooperation with Iran. There are however several factors which could potentially lead to confrontations or a slow down in bilateral affairs and which need consideration. First, relations with Azerbaijan could worsen very rapidly if there is any proof of Azerbaijani involvement in supporting nationalist feelings among ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran. This issue is very sensitive, as demonstrated by recent tumults among Iran's Azerbaijani population over perceived Persian chauvinism. Furthermore, the unresolved question of the Caspian Sea's division remains problematic. Second, Iran will have to take into account Russian interests in the South Caucasus. This is particularly important in regards to Georgia where Iran has to be very cautious not to anger Russia over its cooperation with Tbilisi. Thus, Iran might give up stronger involvement in the region in order to preserve the close political and military cooperation with Moscow. Third, the American containment policy might hinder Tehran from expanding its influence in the South Caucasus. As done in the past, the US could put pressure on its regional allies to cut down their ties with Iran. Furthermore, an US attack on Iran could lead to extreme responses from Tehran aimed directly against US interests in the South Caucasus. This could lead to Iranian operations in the South Caucasus or even the bombardment of the BTC-pipeline, which certainly would strain Tehran's relations with its South Caucasian neighbours.

Nevertheless, in the short and midterm perspective relations between Iran and the South Caucasian states can be expected to improve for several reasons. First, Iran's relations with

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<sup>27</sup> 'Russia-Georgia media war escalates', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5392058.stm>, 01/10/2006.

<sup>28</sup> 'Russia sets 2007 gas price for Belarus at \$200 per 1,000 cu m', <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20061103/55362782.html>, 13/11/2006.

<sup>29</sup> The CIA World Fact Book 2006, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>.

<sup>30</sup> 'Gruziya rasschitivaet na pomosh Tegerana', <http://www.nregion.com/print.php?i=5518>, 13/11/2006.

Armenia will most likely remain good. Armenia has frozen relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan; additionally it has suffered great losses as a result of Russia's imposed sanctions on Georgia. In this landlocked position, Armenia has no other option than to expand its ties with Iran. Furthermore, Iran is the only country that could help Armenia move its energy sector away from dependence on Russia.

Second, a clash with Azerbaijan is unlikely, because Azerbaijan has no interest in being dragged into a second conflict, nor does Iran seem interested in destabilizing Azerbaijan and risking domestic upheaval among its own Azerbaijani population. Azerbaijani government's policy towards Iran is buttressed by polls showing widespread public opposition among Azerbaijanis to US policy towards Iran.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Azerbaijan has even voted against a recent UN General Assembly draft resolution on the violation of human and minority rights in Iran.<sup>32</sup>

Third, Georgia is also trying to break its economic and energy dependence on Russia. The imposed sanctions leave Tbilisi no other choice than increasing its ties with its southern neighbours. Iran, with its huge gas resources, stands out in this respect and both sides are eager to expand bilateral relations.

What can be said without doubt is that Iran is definitely profiting from the recent geopolitical dynamics in the South Caucasus. Stronger cooperation in the region has the positive side effect that it binds the South Caucasus to Iran and gives it stronger leverage in its nuclear standoff. All three Transcaucasian governments have already voiced their concern over a possibility of US-military strike and support a diplomatic solution. In the economic sphere it must be noted that the small overall population of the South Caucasus of around 16 million will certainly not saturate Iran's economic potentials. Iran, sitting on 18 % of the world's gas reserves, is very attracted to the idea of gaining access to European energy markets by expanding electricity and pipeline networks through the Caucasus to Europe.<sup>33</sup> Given Russia's interests in maintaining its market positions in Western Europe and Washington's interest in containing Iran, it remains to be seen how successful Iran can be in this respect. Finally, Tehran is also extremely keen on becoming a transit route for Caspian Sea oil resources to the Persian Gulf. Thus, it can be concluded that Iran's main strategy in the South Caucasus is to advance relations with the respective governments in order to improve its standing vis-à-vis the US, to reach European energy markets and finally to become the main export route for Caspian Sea resources.

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<sup>31</sup> 'Azerbaijan: trying to keep Washington and Tehran happy', <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav050506a.shtml> , 18/10/2006.

<sup>32</sup> 'Azerbaijan against UN draft minorities in Iran', <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=16632> , 26/11/2006.

<sup>33</sup> 'Gazprom pipeline deal points to alliance with Iran', <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,13130-2442753,00.html> , 13/11/2006.

# THE RUSSIAN DEFENSE REFORM AND ITS LIMITATIONS

Andrew Liaropoulos\*

## Abstract

*After years of neglect due to financial constraints, the Russian military has entered a period of systemic development. The ongoing defense reform has introduced a few important changes, but so far the pace of the reform is slow. In order to review the current reform effort, a number of factors - the resistance of the military elite to change, the demographic factor, the lack of a clear defense doctrine, the restructuring of the defense industry and the state of civil control over the military - will be analyzed. These limitations will define not only the pace of the defense reform, but also Russia's ability to play a more active role in the international arena.*

**Keywords:** *Russian Defense Reform, Russian Defense Doctrine, Russian Defense Budget, Rosoboronexport.*

## Introduction

Over the past several years, President Vladimir Putin has managed to restore Russia's status as a great power. Russia became a major energy supplier, experienced economic recovery, consolidated its relationship with China, expanded its influence in the former Soviet states and played an active role in several international developments, such as the crisis over Iran's nuclear program and the Kosovo settlement. Russia's resurgence as a strategic actor in the international arena raises a number of questions about its security policy in the near future.<sup>1</sup> An important aspect that will shape Moscow's security policy is the military factor. In particular, what will the Russian military look like in the coming decade? Will it be a huge army based on conscripts or a smaller and professional one? How efficient will the Russian Army be in counterinsurgency operations? Will nuclear deterrence remain the central pillar of Moscow's defense policy? In answering all those questions, it is important to review the defense reform effort that has started since 2003 and is still taking place.

## Defense Reform in Russia: Defining the context

Until recently, defense reform has not gained the attention it deserves in Russia. Financial and structural problems, like the deterioration of capabilities, hazing and growing crime rates, have dominated the debate about the future of the Russian armed forces and defense analysts

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<sup>1</sup> See selectively Eugene Rumer, *Russian Foreign Policy Beyond Putin*, Adelphi Paper 390 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007).

overlooked some important developments that took place over the last years.<sup>2</sup> As a result, defense reform has been the subject of controversy among military analysts for some time.<sup>3</sup> Simply examining one aspect of the ongoing reform - the rise of the defense budget or the reduction and reorganization of the military - will not provide us with satisfactory answers. One has to define the suitability of the present defense doctrine, the extent to which the reorganization has actually modernized the Russian military, the degree to which the increased spending has added new capabilities and the state of civil-military relations in order to reach a holistic understanding of Russian defense reform. One has to examine a number of structural limitations that affect the pace of the ongoing reform: financial constraints, the demographic crisis, the vast territory, the Cold War legacy and the Soviet strategic culture, and the reorganization of the defense sector in order to critically assess the prospects of the current reform.

### **In search of a defense doctrine**

The reform of the Russian military has been a priority for President Putin since he came into power. The latest military reform programme, adopted in 2003, set as its main objective the partial professionalisation of the armed forces over the period 2004-2008. The reform plan emphasizes the need for reductions in force size, a gradual decrease in the use of conscripts in favour of professional soldiers, the creation of a professional non-commissioned officer corps, drastic changes to officer training and education, and greater political oversight of military spending.<sup>4</sup>

The rationale behind these reforms has been to transform Russia's military into a flexible and modern force that will be able to deal successfully with the new security challenges, and to participate in crisis management, peacekeeping and counter-terrorist operations. Indicative of this new rationale is the release of the "Urgent Tasks for the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation", by the Ministry of Defence on October 2003. The so-called *Ivanov Doctrine* deemphasises the threat posed by NATO and highlights new threats and missions, like global terrorism and the need to deal with smaller scale conflicts.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, procurement policies and military exercises demonstrate a different picture. Large scale operations, including first-strike nuclear operations using ICBM's or tactical nuclear weapons outweigh counterinsurgency and counter-terrorist exercises. Military exercises portray regional or large-scale wars for which the call of the reserves and transfers of large, military formations between theatres are necessary in a very limited period of time. This seems at least odd given the fact that during this entire period of time, Russian officials and military representatives declared that large-scale wars were very much unlikely in the near future. The fact that the Russian Army is preparing for these kinds of conflicts suggests otherwise. According to Stephen Blank, despite its rhetoric, the military elite still believes that

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<sup>2</sup> Irina Isakova, *Russian Defense Reform: Current Trends*, (Carlisle PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S Army War College, November 2006), p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Rumer, *Russian Foreign Policy Beyond Putin*, p.68.

<sup>4</sup> For more details regarding the April 2003 Reform Plan see Dale Herspring, "Vladimir Putin and Military Reform in Russia", *European Security*, vol.14:1 (2005), pp.146-48.

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the *Ivanov Doctrine* see Matthew Bouldin, "The Ivanov Doctrine and Military Reform: Reasserting Security Stability in Russia", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol.17:4 (2004), pp.619-641.

a large scale war with NATO or even China is a real possibility and that the Russian forces should be ready to conduct all types of operations, from nuclear war, to peace-keeping missions and counterinsurgency campaigns.<sup>6</sup> For Blank, Russia's doctrinal ambivalences and tendency to preserve a full conflict spectrum capability demonstrate that its elite still perceives itself as an empire.<sup>7</sup>

Characteristic of the above were the discussions for the need to rewrite the military doctrine, during the annual conference of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences that took place in January 2007. In March 2007, Russia's Security Council has announced that it will prepare together with other departments a new military doctrine, arguing that since the present military doctrine was adopted, the geopolitical, military, and security situation of Russia has changed substantially.<sup>8</sup> Russia has strongly criticized the setting up of NATO bases and the proposed deployment of the U.S. missile shield in Central Europe. Moscow also opposes the eastward expansion of NATO, as well as Georgia and Ukraine's drive to join the Western military alliance.

### **Towards an all-conscript army: Structural limitations**

The Russian armed forces amount to 1,100,000 personnel. A large part of these soldiers - roughly 70% - are recruited by conscription, with the rest being volunteers. Since 2002, the Russian military has been trying to initiate a shift from an all-conscript army to a professional one. So far there is no significant progress. At present, no serious cutbacks in the number of Russian conscripts can be perceived, and the reduction of military personnel seems rather unlikely in the years to come given the current strategic situation of the Russian Federation.<sup>9</sup> Covering a huge territory and a long borderline, Russia is in need of a big army. Taking under consideration the national demographic crisis, it is doubtful whether Russia can afford to completely abandon the conscription system for at least a decade ahead. The constant population decrease, simply limits the availability of potential recruits.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, NATO's expansion is used as an effective argument against reducing the size of the Russian armed forces. NATO's enlargement postpones a full transition to contract service and favours a mass army. On the other hand, Alexei Arbatov, correctly points out that the maintenance of a large army at the expense of quality, equipment and combat readiness is not justified. Such an army is obviously unsuitable not only for major wars (against NATO, US or China), but also local wars or regional conflicts that involve counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations.<sup>11</sup>

Facing the dilemma between a large and stiff army based on conscription and a smaller, professional and combat ready one, Russia chose both. According to Arbatov, a small, elite

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the lack of a coherent defense doctrine see Stephen Blank, "A New Russian Defense Doctrine?", *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, 12 (2006), pp.153-161.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.160.

<sup>8</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russian Security Council plans to draft military doctrine", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 22, 2007, accessed online, 29/12/07, [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2372031](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372031)

<sup>9</sup> "Russia Report", *CSIS Files* no.1 (Bucharest: Center for Security and International Studies, May 2007), pp.44-45.

<sup>10</sup> Rumer, *Russian Foreign Policy Beyond Putin*, p.72.

<sup>11</sup> Alexei Arbatov, "Russian Military Policy Adrift", *Briefing*, vol.8:6 (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, November 2006), pp.6-7.



army is created within a larger one. In particular, armed units of permanent combat readiness and well equipped soldiers numbering in total about 200,000 will coexist within a bigger low-combat readiness army that will still consume the vast share of the budget. Ironically, the elite army will be too small for the full conflict spectrum that Russia needs and the big army will hardly be useful for anything except auxiliary functions.<sup>12</sup>

### **The nuclear arsenal: A minimal deterrence capability?**

Despite deep cuts in its nuclear arsenal, Russia still maintains a deterrent force. Nuclear weapons continue to be seen in Russia as a symbol of the Russian Federation's status as a great power. The nuclear capabilities serve as a deterrent against both nuclear and conventional threats. The intention is to modernise the nuclear arsenal, but the modernisation proceeds at a very slow pace. There is a mass removal from service of older strategic arms and a minimal introduction of new ones.

In particular, the SS-18, SS-19 and SS-25 are scheduled to be withdrawn from service by 2015. By 2025, most of the current Russian silos-based as well as mobile-launched ICBMs will reach the end of their service life and will have to be decommissioned, leaving Russia with a significantly reduced deterrent capability. Likewise, the ballistic missile submarine fleet is also in the process of downsizing.<sup>13</sup> Over the last years, the decommissioning and elimination of the old nuclear submarines was made a priority, bringing the modernization programs to a halt due to a lack of funds. However, a new platform, a modified Borey class submarine, was launched in April 2007 that can only carry Bulava, weapons that are not yet operational. In 2007, the Russian Federation had only six Delta III assigned in the Pacific Fleet, six Delta IV based in the Pacific and Northern Fleets, and three Typhoons submarines operating in the Northern Fleet.<sup>14</sup>

By 2015, Russia will retain a minimal deterrence capability. According to Stephen Cimbala, realistic or minimum deterrence includes balance and minimum deterrence in offensive weapons; the capability to penetrate any opposed defenses and asymmetrical responses to perceived threats or technology enhancements by rivals.<sup>15</sup> The United States' plans for the development of a new Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system causes concern in Moscow, but even a reduced nuclear arsenal is adequate in order for a minimal deterrence to be in place.

### **Reforming the Military: Resistance from the inside**

So far, the record of reform has not been that impressive. The main reason for the slow pace of reform is that the Russian military is simply unwilling to change. The military, due to its central role in Russian politics (see the role of the military in the August 1991 putsch and the Chechnya conflict) enjoys an administrative and operational autonomy that is unprecedented

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Rumer, *Russian Foreign Policy Beyond Putin*, pp.70-71.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Military Balance 2007* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007), p.95.

<sup>15</sup> See Stephen Cimbala, "Russia's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: Realistic or Uncertain?", *Comparative Strategy*, 26:3 (2007), pp.185-203 and Isakova, *Russian Defense Reform: Current Trends*, pp.31-38.

in the West. Never before have the civil authorities tried to exercise control over military policy-making.<sup>16</sup> The reform plan that Putin and Ivanov put forward aims to downgrade the role of the General Staff and exercise some form of control over its performance. The legacy and prestige that the powerful Russian military has historically enjoyed among the Russians, its traditional autonomy (monopolizing knowledge over military affairs, no oversight of the military budget by civilian authorities) and certain political and structural characteristics, like favouring universal conscription and state controls over military-industrial enterprises, are all being challenged by the present reform.<sup>17</sup>

A large part of the Russian military hinders the plan to make the armed forces professional, since professional armed forces are challenging the concept of a national army (a mass army based on universal conscription). Most senior military officers trained during the Soviet era believe that an efficient army is a mass army recruited by universal conscription, and backed up by a large reserve. Trained in concepts that place emphasis on mass numbers, quantity and firepower, Russian officers tend to distrust projects aimed at creating a smaller, professional army far removed from their cultural referents. After all, in a professional army, orientated primarily against new missions, they would not have appropriate knowledge or skill to educate, train or command the new forces.<sup>18</sup> The project for an army intended to respond primarily to small-scale conflicts, to fight non-state actors and to counter non-military threats in cooperation with internal security and police forces, and to be integrated into international military deployments, has met strong resistance within the military elite.<sup>19</sup>

To sum up, the generals have shown little desire to implement reforms that would present, according to them, a serious risk to national security or are potentially unfavourable to their corporate or personal positions.<sup>20</sup> The attempts by the Kremlin to overcome the military's opposition have been hindered by two more factors, a domestic and an international one. The domestic factor is the absence of pressure from Russian society. Due to the centrality of the military institution in the history of the Russian state, there has been no decisive impetus in favour of military reform from Russian society and the political class, contrarily to what happened in Western countries. Actually, many Russians believe that a radical reform of the army would present a serious risk to national security. The international factor has to do with certain international developments - the integration of the Baltic States into NATO, the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the ABM Treaty and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq - that have convinced the Russian generals that the traditional threat from the West is still present.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Regarding the civil-military relations in Russia see David Betz and Valeriy Volkov, "The False Dawn of Russian Military Reform", *Conflict and Security*, vol.4:2 (2003), pp.48-50.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the institutional and operational autonomy of the Russian military see Alexander Golts, and Tonya Putman, "State Militarism and its Legacies. Why Military Reform has failed in Russia", *International Security*, vol.29:2 (2004), pp.121-158.

<sup>18</sup> Zoltan Barany, "The Politics of Russia's Elusive Defense Reform", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.121:4 (2006), pp.597-627.

<sup>19</sup> Isabelle Facon, *The Modernization of the Russian Military: The Ambitions & Ambiguities of Vladimir Putin* (Defence Academy of the UK, Conflict Studies Research Center, August 2005), p.3.

<sup>20</sup> Characteristic of the above is the failure to reform - professionalize the 76<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. See Rob, Thornton, "Military Organization and Change: The Professionalization of the 76<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol.17:3 (2004), pp.449-474.

<sup>21</sup> Facon, *The Modernization of the Russian Military*, pp.10-11.

## Defense Budget: Spending more or spending enough?

Since 1999, Russian defence spending has increased steadily, reflecting the policy orientation of governments under Vladimir Putin as well as strong economic growth. According to *Military Balance*, National Defense expenditures in 2007 were set at 821 billion rubles, which amounts to 2.9 of Russia's GDP. The National Defense spending has more than doubled in nominal terms since 2003, highlighting the willingness of the Kremlin to proceed with defense reform.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Alexei Arbatov, correctly points out that there is a sharp contradiction between the size of the military budget and the size of the armed forces. Russia's military spending is comparable with those of Great Britain or France, whose military forces number 250,000 men, whereas Russia's army is about 1,100,000 men. Furthermore, the maintenance of such a large army and huge stocks of equipment absorbs a large part of the defense budget, thereby allocating only a small part for technical modernization, research and development.<sup>23</sup>

## Defense Industry: An uncertain future

Under President Vladimir Putin, the Russian defense industry has been restructured and centrally controlled. Following the pattern that has been successfully applied in the energy industry, Putin has increased government ownership and intervention.<sup>24</sup> In an effort to reform the defense sector, Kremlin decided the unification of all defense procurement into a single office, the consolidation of individual manufactures - mainly in the aviation, radio-electronic and shipbuilding industries - in larger government run umbrella enterprises and the creation of the governmental Military Industrial Commission (MIC). The later is tasked with overseeing the development of the arms industry and coordinating the defense-industry restructuring policies.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the MIC, the government also introduced a new agency to exercise civilian control of military procurement. The Federal Agency on Procurement of Weapons Systems, Military and Specialized Equipment and Logistics that will come into force in 2008, will be responsible for preparing, monitoring and signing contracts, as well as accounting. Characteristic of the Kremlin's willingness to fight corruption in the defense sector was the appointment of Anatoly Serdyukov, former head of the Federal Tax Service, to replace Sergei Ivanov as the new Minister of Defense.<sup>26</sup>

In recent years, Rosoboronexport (the Russian Arms Export Agency) has increased its value of exports. Russian weaponry is offered at lower prices than those of western producers, along with flexible finance policies and after-sale service.<sup>27</sup> Output of Russian-made military

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<sup>22</sup> For more details on Russia's 2007 Defense budget see *The Military Balance 2007*, pp.191-192.

<sup>23</sup> Arbatov, "Russian Military Policy Adrift", pp.4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Regarding the parallels between the energy and defense sector and the increasing state control over these two sectors in Russia, see Stephen, Blank, *Rosoboronekspart: Arms Sales and the Structure of Russian Defense Industry* (Carlisle PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S Army War College, January 2007), pp.10-17.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander, Nicolli, "Russia's defense industry. Phoenix from the ashes?", *IISS Strategic Comments*, vol.13 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, October 2007), p.2.

<sup>26</sup> Irina, Isakova, "The Russian Defense Reform", *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol.5:1 (2007), pp.80-81.

<sup>27</sup> Nicolli, "Russia's defense industry", p.1.

hardware has grown over the last years and is likely to be further boosted by recent increases in domestic funding as well as multibillion arms-export deals with Algeria, Indonesia, Venezuela, China and India.<sup>28</sup> In addition, after years of industry dependence on export orders, domestic demand is showing signs of recovery. The almost total cessation of arms purchases by the Ministry of Defense in the mid 1990s forced the defense sector to seek new markets. Exports became the only practical means of survival. In order to preserve the defense sector, the Ministry of Defense began to finance R&D programs that did not have direct application to the needs of the Russian armed forces, but which were aimed at foreign procurement.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the fact that the Russian defense sector has been on the rise in the last few years, it is important to point out that its future is uncertain. Investment on research and development has increased, but it is hard to compensate for almost a decade of economic starvation. In addition, Russia will have to compete for markets in China and India against these countries' own arms industries. The EU's plan to sell weapons to China will further diminish Russian arms sales to Beijing.<sup>30</sup> Russia's efforts to develop new markets in South-East Asia and Middle East point to the right direction. The drive against corruption, the success of the procurement reform and the need for increased funding will shape the industry's future in the coming decade.

## Civil-Military Relations

Civil control over the military is an important element of the ongoing defense reform effort in Russia. Parliament has not always been successful in persuading the government to introduce legislation increasing civil control over the military. For instance, since 2000, the Russian government has stalled consideration of the draft federal law "On the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation," by the State Duma.<sup>31</sup> In addition, defense experts draw attention to the weak role played by legislators in the implementation of defense reform, mainly the failure to exercise parliamentary control over the budgeting process.<sup>32</sup> Although both the president and the parliament exercise control over the military, there has been a tendency to introduce new modes of civil control. The most important development in this area is the establishment of the Public Council that was created by the Russian Ministry of Defense in August 2006. The Public Council oversees legal documents and bills that are initiated by the MoD. The Council is also responsible for the legal rights of military servicemen and MoD's civilian employees, the conditions of the military service and aspects that involve military discipline and law enforcement.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For more details on Russia's arms-export trade see *The Military Balance 2007*, pp.192-194.

<sup>29</sup> See Ruslan Pukhov, and Mikhail Barabanov, "Challenges to the Reform of Defense R&D in Russia", *Moscow Defense Brief*, no.7 (2007), accessed online 29/12/07, <http://www.mdb.cast.ru/mdb/1-2007/item3/article1/>.

<sup>30</sup> Rumer, *Russian Foreign Policy Beyond Putin*, p.61.

<sup>31</sup> Isakova, *Russian Defense Reform*, p.53.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Isakova, "The Russian Defense Reform" pp.81-82.

## **Conclusion**

Since 2003, the Russian military entered a stage of systemic change. The number of servicemen in the armed forces has been reduced, the defense budget has been raised and a program to increase the number of contract-based conscripts over the coming years has been introduced. The defense industry has been reorganized and new patterns of civil control have been established. Indicative of all these evolutionary developments is the fertile debate about the need to rewrite the country's defense doctrine. Although most of the measures taken by the Russian military and political elite, over the period 2003-2007, point to the right direction, the pace of the reform is rather slow, due to several limitations. Most of these limitations are of a systemic nature, such as the national demographic crisis, a long period of neglect in terms of modernization, research and development, and a strong military culture that has been shaped during the Cold War period and demands the maintenance of a large military establishment.

To conclude, defense reform in Russia has finally gained the political attention it deserves. The reform is far from complete, as it is in a transitional phase and its success is uncertain. Nevertheless, taking into account the available resources and structural constraints, the transformation of Russia's military into a small professional army backed up by a large reserve force and with a minimal deterrence capability, seems to be the rational choice. The way Russia will adjust to the rapidly changing security environment, the state of its economy over the coming decade, the willingness of the military elite to adapt to the new security challenges and above all the role that Russia wants to play, will shape the pace and result of the defense reform.

# NATO COOPERATION TOWARDS SOUTH CAUCASUS

**Alberto Priego\***

## **Abstract**

*After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO was forced to remake its image. For this reason the Atlantic Alliance has created some cooperative initiatives like the Partnership for Peace (PfP). This programme is very flexible and allows partners to choose the kind of cooperation that they want to pursue. In the South Caucasus, each country has chosen its own style of involvement in the PfP.*

**Keywords:** *NATO, the Caucasus, Russia, PfP, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.*

## **Introduction**

In the aftermath of the Cold War era, NATO changed its character. After more than forty years of existence, NATO became a flexible organization where the different members and partners could find a comfortable/suitable position. The lack of a common enemy allows NATO members to adopt different and sometimes less committed positions. While there are historic members like the US or the Great Britain with a deep investment, then there are others like Spain or Belgium that rely more on the E.U for their security. This big difference is much clearer among the NATO partners. There are at least, two different sets of partner countries: those interested in becoming full members of NATO, and those interested in maintaining some kind of cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance rather than in membership.

Reinforcing this argument is the palpable existing division in the South Caucasus. On the one hand, Georgia maintains a strategy clearly oriented towards its integration into NATO. In a similar position, Azerbaijan was actively looking for its NATO membership while respecting its relations with Russia and Iran. Nevertheless, the current situation in the South Caucasus has dramatically changed but the position of Azerbaijan, while blurred, is still close to NATO.

On the other hand, Armenia seeks to cooperate more and more with NATO, although the Atlantic Alliance is still an organization in which it does not feel very comfortable. There are two reasons to explain this behaviour. The first is that NATO was created against the most important of Armenia's allies: Russia. The second is that the most important of Armenia's enemy, Turkey, plays an important role within the Alliance. Consequently, though Armenia has enhanced its relations with NATO, it may well prefer other international institutions to ensure its security.

By its own, what NATO has in mind concerning the South Caucasus is the idea of being a flexible organization to cooperate with all the PfP countries. According to this reality the

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Atlantic Alliance has tried to launch several flexible and original initiatives like EAPC, the Virtual Silk Road or the IPAPs (PfP) that allow the partners to choose the kind of their cooperation with NATO. In developing this strategy, the partner countries including the South Caucasian ones, can choose all the fields in which they are prepared to cooperate and those in which they need to be assisted by NATO.

Summing up, we can affirm that NATO's approach towards the South Caucasus is flexible and chosen by partner countries. Actually, NATO policy towards the PfP in general and towards the South Caucasus in particular could well be labelled as a form of *a la carte* cooperation. Concerning the South Caucasus, any of the three Caucasian Republics can select what kind of cooperation it prefers to develop in the framework of the PfP. For instance, Georgia is involved in most of the initiatives launched in the framework of the PfP. Georgia's most important aim is to obtain its NATO membership in the near future to deter Russia from interfering in its foreign policy. Nevertheless, Armenia does not need NATO to deter its enemies (Turkey or Azerbaijan); this task is reserved to Russia. Armenia tries to cooperate with NATO in other fields through PfP in order to diversify its foreign policy. By its own, Azerbaijan also cooperates with the Alliance, but its behaviour is more balanced than the Georgian or Armenian ones. Baku does not seek integrating into the Alliance but its relations with NATO are much stronger than those of Armenia. For this reason, we can point out that NATO Partnership for Peace programme is a flexible initiative that allows the partners to fill their foreign and security gaps.

## **NATO Cooperation towards the Post-Soviet Space**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union NATO tried to remake its image in Eastern Europe developing a new cooperative relationship with Russia and its former allies. Thus, the Atlantic Alliance launched a series of cooperative initiatives (NACC, EAPC, etc...) intended to make it appear like a peaceful organization rather than an aggressive one.

Nevertheless, the most pro-Western countries like Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic or the Baltic Republics wanted to go further. Continuing to see in Russia a potential threat to their security, they needed some security assurances in order to face Russia, which had controlled their countries for forty years during the Cold War. All these states were actually looking for their survival and their perception of having been abandoned when the Second World War concluded explains much of their strategy. For its part, Russia perceived itself as a defeated state that had to avoid losing more weight and influence in Europe.

Despite the rapprochement between Washington and Moscow, from the point of view of Russian interests, NATO was still considered as the most dangerous and aggressive organization. Russia's relations with the alliance have been determined by its domestic issues. Although NATO needed to improve its image especially in Russia, Washington did not want to repeat the same mistake again: leaving the future of Eastern Europe in Russia's hands. Taking into account the dual dimension of the problem, Warren Christopher introduced an innovative tool (the so called Partnership for Peace programme) which allowed NATO to face this significant challenge. Through this project NATO created a cooperative framework to reform their defence sector while leaving NATO's door opened for those interested in going

further. Russia not only could not blame NATO for seeking its enlargement, but also couldn't avoid participating in the programme.

In the case of the South Caucasus, when the Partnership for Peace emerged, an important regional division became apparent. Although neither Georgia nor Azerbaijan had real aspirations of becoming members of NATO, both governments decided to maintain an active role in the PfP. Nevertheless, Armenia, whose relations with Azerbaijan were rather difficult, decided to move closer to the Russian position than to the NATO one, thus boycotting any PfP initiatives. Armenia considered that it could not cooperate with an organization in which its main enemy, Turkey, was one of the major actors. This was the first significant division in the South Caucasus, as far as the cooperation with NATO was concerned.

Armenia's loyalty towards Moscow was strengthened in 1995 when NATO published its enlargement study. Suddenly Russia decided to block any sort of cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance. Moscow advised its allies, including Armenia, not to cooperate with NATO in the framework of PfP. Russia felt that NATO had created the PfP just to enlarge the organization. Russia boycotted any cooperative initiative including the Partnership for Peace. For this reason, the distance between Yerevan and the other two Caucasian capitals grew increasingly larger. Indeed the Russian military assistance to Armenia reached unexpected levels and Yerevan became the most important Russian ally in the region, thus strengthening its historical alliance with Moscow.

In contrast, in 1999 Azerbaijan and Georgia decided not to renew the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security, leaving the Russian-led security structures. Azerbaijan and Georgia felt that this security agreement was very unsuitable for their interests, taking into account that Russia had supported separatist movements in both countries. However, Armenia not only renewed this agreement, but also signed a new one (CSTO) in 2002.

Far from that, Azerbaijan and Georgia started to cooperate in the framework of a new regional organization called GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) oriented towards NATO and United States.

The key point of NATO's interest in the Caucasus was the September 11 terrorist attacks. After being attacked by Al-Qaeda, Washington decided to change its strategy towards the Greater Middle East. The South Caucasus's importance for NATO and the US increased tremendously. For this reason, the Partnership for Peace Programme was redefined and the South Caucasus and Central Asia became crucial for the War on Terror launched by the US. Nevertheless, NATO's interest in the South Caucasus was also driven by other issues such as, transnational crime, separatism and its growing strategic importance as an energy corridor.

The tour made by its Secretary General in 2003 constituted a landmark step in NATO's interest in the South Caucasus, even if it was not the first time the Secretary General visited the region.<sup>1</sup> However, on that occasion, Lord George Robertson confirmed the Alliance's interest in the region by paying a three-day visit.<sup>2</sup> During the visit, NATO's Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> Speech by Irakli Menagarishvili (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia) welcoming Lord George Robertson, NATO Secretary General, Tbilisi, Georgia, 26 September 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Devdariani, Jaba NATO interest in the Caucasus Security confirmed by Secretary General's visit, in Eurasia Insight, May 2003.



General stressed the role of the South Caucasus for the security of Europe<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, Lord Robertson reminded the South Caucasian republics that NATO's door remained open for them although the way would be long and tough. Today, one can observe how hard and long this way has been for the South Caucasian countries, especially for Georgia, which has real aspirations of gaining NATO membership.

In summer 2004, the NATO summit was held in Istanbul. There, the NATO Allies decided to increase their involvement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, creating two important positions: that of the NATO Special Representative and two NATO Liaison Officers (one for each region). What are its functions and responsibilities? The Secretary General's Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia tries to coordinate NATO's policy towards these two regions. In practical terms, the Special Representative provides the Secretary General with advice on NATO's policy in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Besides, the Special Representative works directly with regional leaders in order to improve their cooperation with the Alliance. The first and the current Special Representative is Robert F. Simmons, who was appointed in August 2004 by the Secretary General.

In November 2006, NATO held a new summit. The city of Riga organized a summit where the overall theme was future NATO enlargement. Although, there was no NATO commitment on the Georgian integration process, the Allies encouraged Tbilisi to continue its efforts to become a member of NATO.

## **NATO's Bilateral Cooperation with the South Caucasian countries**

Each South Caucasian country has its own interests in cooperating with NATO. While Georgia is searching for a protector against Russia, Azerbaijan just wants to diversify its foreign and security policy. The case of Armenia is more complicated; whereas its attitude towards NATO has dramatically changed over the last few years, Yerevan still considers that Russia is its main ally and protector against "the Turkic threat".

### **Georgia's cooperation with NATO**

Georgia has been identified as the most ambitious country in its drive to join the EU and NATO. Cooperation between NATO and Georgia can essentially be defined as a case of balancing<sup>4</sup> against Russia. Tbilisi perceives Russia as the threatening power and tries to deter it through an alignment with NATO and the US.

Since early 2005, when Saakashvili came into power, Georgia became even more pro-Western than before. The Rose Revolution was just the beginning of an alliance between Washington and Tbilisi that has an extension in NATO. Georgia's main alignment is actually with the US, but Tbilisi prefers it to be conducted under the NATO umbrella in order to deter

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Available at [www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051903\\_pr.shtml](http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav051903_pr.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> "The Caucasus region is of a crucial importance for the security of the whole Euro Atlantic Area" *NATO Release*, May 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Gangale, Thomas, "Alliance Theory: Balancing, Bandwagoning and Détente", *International Relations*, (October, 2003, vol 720), OPS-Alaska and San Francisco State University.

Available at [http://pweb.jbs.net/~gangale/opsa/ir/Alliance\\_Theory-htm](http://pweb.jbs.net/~gangale/opsa/ir/Alliance_Theory-htm)

Russia from attacking Georgia. For this reason it can be affirmed that Georgia is trying to balance the perceived threats from Russia with its partnership with NATO and the US<sup>5</sup>.

Georgian cooperation with NATO has two implications for the security of the region. The first one is its fast growing defence budget. Georgia is working very hard to enhance its defence sector to meet NATO's standards as well as to achieve NATO interoperability levels. For this purpose, following the explanation given by its government, Georgia has doubled its defence budget in order to qualify for NATO membership. This fast growing defence budget is being used to modernize the Georgian army, though Russia accuses Georgia of creating a security dilemma. The reality is that the secessionist regions of Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), too often supported by Russia, are afraid of being attacked by the new updated Georgian army.

The second security implication has to do with its integration with NATO. Tbilisi has worked very hard in its path to NATO, carrying out an ambitious Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), being part of the Intensified Dialogue and working on the approval of its Membership Action Plan (MAP). However Russia and the two secessionist republics (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), which are heavily oriented towards Moscow, would not allow the Georgian accession into NATO. If finally Georgia gets its NATO membership, Tbilisi would invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty to call on its allies to defend it every time Russia decides to attack the border area. For this reason, Georgia-NATO cooperation and, overall, its accession into NATO are very contested within the Atlantic Alliance itself. Those countries with a strong relationship with Russia are not supportive of Georgian aspirations to become a member of NATO. This is the case of Germany, which signed several energy agreements with Russia, that allow the latter to supply up to forty per cent of Germany's total gas consumption<sup>6</sup>. This has been one of the major issues blocking Georgia's accession into NATO.

Indeed there is another problem: the question of the two secessionist republics, i.e. South Ossetia and Abkhazia. What will happen with these two territories if Georgia joins NATO? South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both, are clearly Russia-oriented and, even more, Russian peacekeeping forces are protecting the Russian passport holders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. If Georgia wants to become a member of NATO, it should settle these two conflicts first.

For these reasons, NATO does not agree to present any schedule for the accession of Georgia into NATO. Current NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop, stated in October 2007 that Georgia should try to settle its internal conflicts to become a member of the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "The aim of balancing is self-preservation and the protection of values already possessed" Waltz, Kenneth N., *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 282.

<sup>6</sup> "Russian-German pipeline that run via Ukraine deliver forty percent of the German gas supply and eighty percent of the European gas supply" Bryza Matthew J., "The Policy of the United States toward the Black Sea Region" in Asmus, Ronald D., (ed) *Next steps in forging a Euro-Atlantic strategy for the wider Black Sea* (Brussels: GMFUS) p. 47

<sup>7</sup> "NATO: finding solutions to conflicts in Caucasus vital for security of entire Euro-Atlantic region" *PanArmenian Network*, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007.

## Armenian Cooperation with NATO

Armenian interest in NATO is less vital than the Georgian one. While Georgia perceives Russia as the threatening power, Armenia regards Russia as its protector against its enemy Turkey. Therefore, Armenia is more confident in Russia than in NATO, an organization in which its enemy, Ankara, is deeply involved. Nevertheless, from September 11 terrorist attacks on, Armenia has drastically changed its foreign policy approach. For several years, Armenia relied exclusively on Russia to protect its interests, whereas now Yerevan has diversified its foreign and security policy. Armenia has adopted the so-called multi-vector foreign policy to ensure its national interest.

From early times, Armenia and Russia have maintained a traditional alliance though it has not been very fruitful for Armenia over the past years. From 1991, Armenia had been isolated and dependent on Russia for its survival, including in the economic sphere. Then Armenia began to think about other “big brother” possibilities such as the U.S or Europe. The September 11 events increased the regional imbalances in the space covered by the so called Greater Middle East<sup>8</sup>, what represented a window of opportunity for Armenia. Yerevan decided to implement a new foreign and security policy called the multi-vector model. It means that Armenia maintains its strategic partnership with Russia, while trying to strengthen its relations with other powers such as the US or France.

As for NATO, Armenia has decided to be more involved in Partnership for Peace exercises. Besides, President Robert Kocharian signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO as a proof of Armenia’s commitment with the Atlantic Alliance. The US requested Armenian support in Iraq, and as a result, a group of 46 Armenian peacekeepers were sent to Iraq in January 2005. By its own, the Congress of the United States started in 2007 debates concerning the adoption of a resolution recognizing the so called “Armenian Genocide”. The adoption of the resolution was adjourned after one of the traditional American allies in NATO, Turkey, vigorously protested against such attempts by the Congress.

It must be noted that Armenia has greatly softened its historical aversion towards NATO. Previously, Armenia perceived NATO just as an organization that strengthened its eternal enemy Turkey. While in the past Armenia just followed Russian NATO policy, today Yerevan considers the Atlantic Alliance as an important key to apply its multi-vector foreign policy. Therefore, Armenia has already adopted IPAP, though Yerevan does not officially aspire to NATO membership or to build a “Georgian scenario”<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Priego, Alberto “The Emergence of Southern Caucasus as a cornerstone of the Greater Middle East”, REEI ([www.reei.org](http://www.reei.org)) (January 2007, vol.13), p. 13

<sup>9</sup> “He (Kocharian) has always made it clear that he will not build relations with Russia by the Georgian scenario” Tadevosyan, Ara “Armenian-between the wider Black Sea Region and the Greater Middle East” in Asmus, Ronald D., (ed) “Next steps in forging a euroatlantic strategy for the wider Black Sea, (Brussels: GMFUS) p. 159

Armenian behaviour with NATO can be described as one of bandwagoning,<sup>10</sup> because after 2001 Yerevan has aligned itself with the Atlantic Alliance more actively in the hope of profiting from its dominant position. Nevertheless, Armenia still relies on Russia for its security, especially concerning its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Thus, although Armenia has enhanced its relations with NATO adopting the IPAP, it remains an active member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The case of Armenia proves that NATO, after the end of the Cold War, has become a flexible international organization.

### **Azerbaijan's Cooperation with NATO**

It must be stressed that the case of Azerbaijan is quite interesting. First of all, Azerbaijan is probably the most secularized Muslim country in the World. The majority of the Azerbaijani Muslims follow the Shiite direction<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, the Azerbaijanis are ethnically Turks. Thirdly, the Russian and the Kemalist heritages turn Azerbaijan into a European country in the middle of the Greater Middle East. Moreover, Azerbaijan has enormous oil and gas reserves and does not belong to OPEC.

After becoming independent in 1991, Azerbaijan sought to follow the Turkish Kemalist model of statehood. He aspired to become a member of the Euro-Atlantic Community while preserving their Azerbaijani identity. For these reasons, Azerbaijan started to actively cooperate with Turkey, with the US and NATO. From 1994 on, Azerbaijan has been an active member of the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) participating with Turkey in several international peacekeeping missions (KFOR, ISAF)

Although Azerbaijan considers NATO membership an option, for the time being it is not a priority for him. It is not a secret that Azerbaijan's neighbours (Iran and Russia) do not feel comfortable about any NATO enlargement to the region. Thus, Azerbaijan tries to combine his efforts to cooperate with NATO in the framework of the PfP and IPAP with his more or less friendly relations with Iran and Russia.

Azerbaijan's foreign policy is mainly aimed at protecting its interests in the dispute with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, an enclave in Azerbaijan primarily populated by Armenians. This conflict, while dormant after the cease-fire of 1994, has still the potential of getting out of control and destabilizing Azerbaijan and the whole region again. The conflict remains unsettled to date and determines to a great extent the Azerbaijan's foreign policy. All the Azerbaijani presidents have adapted their foreign and security policy to this priority. Azerbaijan's interest in any international security organization, including NATO or CIS, is always related to supposed international support on the question of restoration of his sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh.

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<sup>10</sup> "the goal of bandwagoning is usually self-extension: to obtain values coveted" Schweller, Randall. L., "Bandwagoning for profits. Bringing the revisionist state back, *International Security*" (Summer, 1994, Vol. 19, no1), p. 74

<sup>11</sup> Priego, Alberto., "The Creation of Azerbaijani Identity and its influence on foreign policy". *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, (May 2005, vol. 8), p. 2.

As far as NATO is concerned, Azerbaijan would like to see the Alliance getting involved in the conflict and providing peacekeeping forces. Nevertheless, NATO has rejected several times this possibility as a result of Russian and Armenian pressures. On her own, Armenia with the support of Russia will always impede any NATO involvement in the conflict, as Armenia achieved her goals during the war and any negotiation might cause a worsening of her current position.

Although Azerbaijan has not achieved his goals on Nagorno Karabakh, the same cannot be said about other issues. For instance, NATO and the US have helped Azerbaijan regarding energy security. In this sense, the construction of the BTC oil pipeline has given Azerbaijan more relative power as the pipeline constitutes an energy corridor alternative to the northern (i.e., Russian) one. On his side, Azerbaijan has contributed to NATO by participating in several PfP programmes and international peacekeeping missions. That's why one can argue that the cooperation between NATO and Azerbaijan can also be labelled as one of bandwagoning for profit.

## **Conclusion**

Summing up, after the demise of the Soviet Union, NATO turned into a flexible organization where members and partners can develop their own strategies. In the case of the South Caucasus, each country has dealt with the Alliance in a different way. While Georgia has adopted a balancing strategy, Armenia and Azerbaijan have chosen different sorts of bandwagoning behaviours.

By itself, this flexibility has allowed NATO to survive post-Cold War international changes, such as the rise of international terrorism and other international threats or the proliferation of WMD. NATO has benefited from the vacuum of power created after the break up of the Soviet Union. The aforementioned flexibility allows NATO to be involved in a space traditionally dominated by Russia. Nevertheless, Moscow cannot accuse NATO of using the PfP to enlarge the organization because each PfP member can choose its own form of involvement in this programme.

## INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN T. RYAN\*, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

*Conducted by Pierre-Emmanuel Dupont for the CRIA*

**Question:** *How would you describe the current security situation in Iraq, and what are the prospects for withdrawal of U.S. forces, following the Petraeus report?*

**Ryan:** It is still too unsettled to say that the security situation in Iraq is good or even better than before. By many measures (sectarian violence, murders, terrorists captured/killed) security is better today than a year ago. However, reports show that civilians are still dying at high rates and terrorist attacks continue. The ultimate factor in whether the security situation will actually be better is the ability of the Iraq forces to sustain the achievements of coalition forces. Regardless of the security situation, U.S. troops are beginning the drawdown. General Petraeus announced that the 5 surge brigades would return to the U.S. after their 15-month tours ended 2008 and will not be replaced. The reason they will not be replaced is because the U.S. does not have the will to mobilize additional forces to replace them. The prospect for even more withdrawals beginning in summer 2008 is good. In his speech following Petraeus' report to Congress, President Bush said that he had approved Petraeus' recommendation to begin shifting more effort to training of Iraqi forces and handing off security responsibility to Iraq security forces. This change in mission will allow further reductions in Iraq and, by December 2008, it is possible that the U.S. could have as few as 10 brigades in Iraq.

**Question:** *Do you think that the recent clashes between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Turkey present a serious risk for the security in Iraq?*

**Ryan:** Every conflict in Iraq is serious and could develop into a fatal crisis for the country. However, compared to the Sunni-Shia divide, or even the threat from Al-Qaeda affiliates, the clashes between Turkish and PKK forces do not pose a critical risk. The PKK is almost universally abhorred by the Turks and the neighboring Kurdish groups. An extremist group, the PKK has a history of terrorist attacks throughout Turkey. If Turkey can limit its operations to clearly PKK targets in Iraq, the incursions will likely not become a reason for wider battles with Iraq or other Kurdish groups.

**Question:** *Talks about Iraq were held in the summer of 2007 between Iran and the U.S. in Baghdad. Do you think such talks could resume in a near future, given the current tension between the two countries?*

**Ryan:** At the end of the last round of talks, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, said

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that it was clear to him that Iran had no intention of conducting serious discussions on the problems in Iraq. Additionally U.S. ground commanders have been very open about evidence of the growth of Iranian support to insurgents inside Iraq. Given these developments, it seems unlikely new talks will be opened.

***Question:** Do you think Russia and the U.S. might find common ground about the missile defense deployment project in Eastern Europe?*

**Ryan:** Having worked U.S.-Russian relations for almost three decades, I have become an optimist that positive change is sometimes possible, but always difficult. There are clearly compromises available which could enable the U.S. to deliver a missile defense system to Europe against Iranian missiles while guaranteeing Russia against attack by that same system. However, Russia is in no hurry to reach these compromises because it feels that the U.S. deployment can be delayed indefinitely by domestic and foreign opposition to the plan. By the same token, American leaders believe they have the support at home and in Europe to deploy the system as planned without Russian cooperation or interference. The two nations will only find compromise when conditions prove one or the other wrong.

***Question:** You recently wrote that President Bush should accept Putin's challenge to make the INF Treaty become "universal in nature", as an alternative to a new missile race. Could you develop this point?*

**Ryan:** Long and medium range missiles present the risk of sudden and unexpected attack. When coupled with nuclear warheads these missiles can threaten the destruction of whole societies with only minutes warning. Without an effective missile defense system, the only way to protect against such attacks is to deter the enemy's use of those missiles by threatening a comparable attack. That caused both Russia and the U.S. to deploy medium range missiles during the Cold War. However, in 1987 Russia and the U.S. pioneered a better way of precluding such attacks - eliminating the missiles altogether. Achieving a global ban on intermediate-range missiles would remove the threat of sudden attack by neighboring states, and also make it unlikely that nations could build longer-range missiles either. If, however, states like Iran, Syria, or North Korea are not willing to eliminate medium range missiles then the U.S. and Russia will find themselves in the same situation they experienced in the 1980's - confronted by the deployment of intermediate-range missiles. In such a case, Russia and the U.S. would feel great pressure to return similar weapons to their arsenals.

***Question:** During the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm this summer, Putin made a proposal to Bush to use the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan. What do you think about the negotiations going on about this proposal ?*

**Ryan:** Unfortunately, the Gabala radar is not the right type for guiding U.S. missile defense interceptors and cannot be modified to do so. The U.S. side has said that it is willing to add Gabala's radar data into the wider European defense network, but Putin has clarified his offer by saying that he does not intend Gabala as an "add-on" but a replacement for the Czech Republic radar. Gabala could eventually become part of a Europe-wide air and missile defense system, but cannot operate as a substitute for the radar planned for the Czech Republic.

## BOOK REVIEW

### *DEADLY ARSENALS: NUCLEAR, BIOLOGICAL, AND CHEMICAL THREATS*

BY J. CIRINCIONE, J. B. WOLFSTHAL AND M. RAJKUMAR

(Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2005), ix-490 p. (ISBN-13 : 978-0-87003-216-5)

#### Review by Pierre-Emmanuel Dupont\*

The second edition of *Deadly Arsenals*, published under the auspices of the Washington-based *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, is to be compared with the well-known Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's *Yearbook*<sup>1</sup>.

The two works are largely complementary. While the SIPRI *Yearbook* focuses mainly and in a comprehensive way, in each of its chapters, on developments during the previous year in a vast range of issues that are of relevance to international security and arms control, and provides a large number of bibliographical references on these events, it is often necessary to go back to previous issues in order to acquire a global understanding of a particular topic. In contrast, *Deadly Arsenals* gives a general and more readable snapshot of nuclear and CBW proliferation issues.

In its first part, the book reviews current “global trends”, gives an overview of international disarmament regimes, provides useful technical background, *inter alia*, on nuclear activities in the world (pp. 45-55), biological and chemical weapons (with useful tables of the main existing biological warfare agents, pp. 69-76, and examples of chemical warfare agents, pp. 77-80), and missile technology (with special emphasis on the burning issue of antimissile systems, pp. 97-101).

It is interesting to note that the authors, who document extensively the use by U.S. and other Western officials prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq of unverified and often misleading information about the supposed Iraqi WMD arsenal (pp. 333-337), have decided as a consequence to avoid the term “WMD” from now on. They give the following reasons:

*“One significant change in the new edition is that it no longer employs the term “weapons of mass destruction”. Though used widely by officials and the media, this phrase conflates very different threats from weapons that differ greatly in lethality, consequence of use, and the availability of measures that can protect against them. [...] A failure to differentiate these*

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<sup>1</sup> The latest edition was published in May 2007: SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.



*[chemical, biological, and nuclear] threats can lead to seriously flawed policy. For example, the repeated use of the term “weapons of mass destruction” to describe the potential threat from Iraq before the 2003 war merged the danger that it still had anthrax-filled shells, which was possible, and the danger that it had nuclear weapons, which was highly unlikely. Similarly, saying that Syria has weapons of mass destruction merges the danger that it has chemical weapons, which is almost certainly true, with the danger that it has a nuclear bomb, which is certainly not true” (p. 3).*

The second part of the work is devoted to detailed analysis of the nuclear, BW and CW arsenals of each of the Nuclear-declared states (Russia, China, France, United Kingdom and the United States), with a review of the current strategic context in which they are involved. The third part deals in the same way with non-NPT nuclear states (India, Pakistan and Israel), the fourth with “two hard cases” (North Korea and Iran), while the fifth and last deals with what are regarded by the authors as “non-proliferation successes” (the cases of Libya, Iraq, the three non-Russian successor states of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa).

Given the richness of the book, we will limit ourselves to the three cases of the U.S., Israel and Iran.

The nuclear and chemical arsenal of the United States still raises concerns, not only because of its weight, which is, according to the authors, not known officially with precision<sup>2</sup>, but also because of the uncertainties created by the new U.S. strategic doctrine, following the *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) released by the Department of Defence in January 2002, which emphasizes the enduring value and central importance of nuclear forces for the U.S. defence policy, despite of the end of the Cold War. The NPR outlined plans, among others, to accelerate efforts to develop antimissile systems, and to begin the development of new, low-yield nuclear weapons (p. 204). As the authors point out:

*“Though the NPR’s commitment to deep cuts in the nuclear arsenal was significant, it was basically a slower and less verifiable version of earlier U.S. plans, developed in the 1990s in START II and discussions for START III” (pp. 204-205).*

As a consequence of these trends, under the provisions of the *Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty* (SORT) signed by George W. Bush and Russian president Putin in June 2002, which replaces START, Russia and the U.S. will maintain “more weapons in the field than was envisioned in the arms reduction process pursued throughout the 1990s” (p. 205). Without contest, “with the signing of SORT, the irreversibility of nuclear cuts is no longer a U.S. goal” (Ibid.).

What is most disturbing is that the NPR also “called for steps that make the use of nuclear weapons by the United States more likely, even in response to non-nuclear threats or attacks” (p. 207). The authors rightly remark in this respect that: “within the new nuclear use policy formulation, there are few if any military contingencies that would explicitly rule out a possible nuclear response by the United States”. Given this position, it is not surprising that

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding nuclear weapons, the authors write that “no estimates have been released on the size of the total U.S. arsenal”; however, “reliable estimates put the stockpile at more than 10,300 weapons” (p. 209). Otherwise, “no official inventory is available on the total stockpile of highly enriched uranium (HEU) produced by the United States” (Ibid.).

president Bush refused in 2006 to rule out the use of nuclear weapons in the event of a strike on Iran<sup>3</sup>.

Apart from the nuclear issue, it is also mentioned that, while the U.S. entirely destroyed its impressive stockpile of biological weapons during 1971-73, it has not met the destruction deadlines of its chemical arsenal under the *Chemical Weapons Convention* (CWC).

In light of these developments, the reader is in a position to identify the U.S. as the main party responsible for the current crisis of the international arms control regime (see p. 211).

The nuclear and CBW posture of Israel is also well documented. It is more disturbing than even that of its powerful U.S. ally. As is common knowledge, Israel, which owns, according to the authors, between 100 and 170 nuclear weapons, is not a member of the nuclear *Non-Proliferation Treaty* (NPT), and has never acknowledged officially that it possesses nuclear weapons<sup>4</sup>. It possesses “advanced chemical and biological weapons capabilities, although it is not known what type or how many offensive agents it currently has” (p. 261); regarding these capabilities, the work under review relies mainly on the authoritative works of Avner Cohen<sup>5</sup>. The authors highlight the “nuclear opacity” (p. 268) or “nuclear ambiguity” (p. 269) of Israel, which signed the *Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty* (CTBT) in 1996, being the only one of the three non-NPT nuclear weapon states to do so, but opposed the 1991 US proposal for a ban on production of fissile material.

Lastly, regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran, the book under review contains substantial developments on the nuclear programme and the missile capabilities of the country, but one will regret that the authors rely mainly, if not exclusively, on sources and references which are likely to reflect the viewpoint of the U.S. administration, or close to it<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, because of that, the presentation of the current nuclear controversy is questionable: the authors assert that “for more than two decades Tehran has secretly pursued the ability to produce nuclear materials than can be used in weapons” (p. 295), while in fact the UN Security Council Resolution 1737 (2006), referring to the IAEA Director general report of 27 February 2006, stated only that: “the IAEA is unable to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran”<sup>7</sup>. It is obvious that there is more than a nuance between these two assertions. It is also to be noted that the book, due to the year of its publication (2005), does not take into account the latest developments, among them the sanctions imposed in 2006-2007 by the UNSC, and the work plan agreed on 27 August 2007 between Iran and the IAEA<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> President Bush, quoted by the British newspaper *Telegraph*, April 19, 2006: See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/04/19/wiran19.xml>.

<sup>4</sup> See ‘Olmert inadvertently acknowledges Israel has the bomb’, *International Herald Tribune*, December 19, 2006, <http://www.ihl.com/articles/2006/12/12/news/israel.php>.

<sup>5</sup> See Cohen, Avner, “Israel and the Bomb”, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998; also Cohen, “Israel and CBW: History, Deterrence, and Arms Control”, in: *Nonproliferation Review*, Fall 2001, pp. 1-20.

<sup>6</sup> See the notes on Iran on pp. 308-310.

<sup>7</sup> The reader will find a less partisan and more correct presentation of the history of the Iranian nuclear controversy in Kile, S. N., ‘Nuclear arms control and non-proliferation’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2005: “Armaments, Disarmament and International Security”*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 555 sq.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Understandings of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the IAEA on the Modalities of Resolution of the Outstanding Issues’, attached to the IAEA Director general report ‘Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006) and 1747 (2007) in the Islamic Republic of Iran’. See <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2007/gov2007-48.pdf>.

In conclusion, one can say that “*Deadly Arsenals: nuclear, biological, and chemical threats*”, despite the above-mentioned weaknesses, is beyond dispute a comprehensive and useful guide to nuclear and CBW proliferation issues, and an essential companion to the *SIPRI Yearbook*.