INTRODUCTION

Outlining the Challenge

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Everybody knows that Russia lives in a troubled neighborhood. Weak and unstable states on its borders threaten to export their problems to it or to become conduits for the threats brewing in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and the Middle East. Yet other post-Soviet states face an even more daunting environment, and Russia occupies a large part of it. Scarcely any of these states, with the exception of the three Baltic states now nestled under Europe’s protective wing, enjoy anything approaching a secure existence. On the contrary, many confront not only dangers on their borders, but fundamental sources of insecurity generated from within. All are suffering the uncertainties, setbacks, and miseries of inventing themselves from the ruins of the Soviet Union; many are beset by explosive internal conflicts and, in four cases, rebellious provinces that refuse to be a part of a common state.

If only a few post-Soviet countries were facing these perils, the outside world could look the other way. However, virtually no state in any of the subregions of the former Soviet Union—Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the “new lands in between” (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine)—is free from the threats posed by uncertain domestic transformations, potential civil strife, and regional violence.1 Again, if one or all of these subregions (or for that matter the post-Soviet space as such) were located at the outer edges of the international system, other states, including major powers, could afford to ignore failures in meeting these challenges. But the post-Soviet space is the hinterland of the two most important state-

1 The notion of Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova as the “new lands in between” is developed in Robert Legvold and Celeste A. Wallander, eds., Swords and Sustenance: The Economics of National Security in Belarus and Ukraine (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004).
gic regions in the contemporary international system—East Asia and Europe—and of the cauldron where its gravest security threats boil—the Muslim south. In addition, each of the subregions within the post-Soviet space merges uneasily into some of the world’s most unstable areas.

Thus, the issue for the larger international community and its leading powers is not and never has been Russia alone, but rather Russia in geographical context. Yet even this does not do justice to the way this part of the world should be thought of and approached. Each of the subregions is capable of generating disorder menacing the stability or adding to the instability of neighboring regions. Each harbors trends toward domestic political illiberalism, spoiling the casual hopes many in the West had that the post-Soviet states would form the core of the next democratic wave. And each already serves as a corridor through which all manner of contaminant—drugs, arms, contraband, trafficked humans, and potentially supplies for weapons of mass destruction—make their way into the outside world.

No subregion better illustrates or incorporates more of these threats than the Caucasus, and no country is more afflicted with these hazards than Georgia. In addition, no country in any of the subregions is more central than Georgia in determining whether these threats will affect others. That is the first reason for this book.

For virtually all of Georgia’s existence as an independent state, the country’s peace and well-being have been under siege, undermined by violent separatist conflicts. The simmering problems of Abkhazia and South Ossetia evoke national security in its most primal form—namely, as a threat to the territorial integrity of the state itself. Complicating this peril, Georgia’s original leaders faltered in guiding the country through the transition from its Soviet past to a more modern political and economic order, leaving the country weakened and poorly positioned to address the security challenges confronting it. Superimposed on the trouble that Georgia faces within its borders is the instability that prevails beyond them. To the south, the tension surrounding the unsettled issue of Nagorno-Karabakh leaves Armenia and Azerbaijan in a quasi-state of war. To the north, the ongoing insurgency in Chechnya makes Russia, already seen by Tbilisi as aggressive and ill-intentioned, still more on edge and overweening.

All of these factors create an immensely complex and intractable security challenge for Georgia’s new government. It has been more than a
year since the political opposition, following transparently manipulated elections, mobilized the streets and chased Eduard Shevardnadze’s regime from power. The Rose Revolution of November 2003 and the presidential and parliamentary elections that followed installed leaders determined to break with past practices and face this challenge head on. At home, the new president, Mikheil Saakashvili, and his principal partners, the former Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and parliamentary leader Nino Burjanadze, moved swiftly to reinvigorate the state, strengthen executive power, pare back corruption in government, disrupt criminalized networks, restore central authority in the often quarrelsome province of Ajara, create a trustworthy domestic police force, and collect taxes to sustain a revenue-starved government.

But the new government has accomplished these goals in what one of this book’s authors calls a “prolonged revolutionary syndrome” and with tactics that by the first anniversary of the Rose Revolution had civil society advocates, many of whom were the new regime’s original supporters, questioning just how pluralistic and open a society the new government would tolerate. Moreover, in attempting to compel progress on the agonizing core issue of Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatism, the new leadership’s impetuous initiatives during spring and summer 2004 reheated the embers of conflict, roiled relations with Russia, and brought admonitions from otherwise well-disposed Western governments. One year after the Rose Revolution, the central questions remained: As promising as the intentions and first steps of the new government were, could it surmount the profound challenges facing the country? Could it overcome the lethal sources of the country’s insecurity?

If the deficiency of outsiders is their failure to assess judiciously their stake in Georgia’s developments (as is true of the Russians) or to give adequate weight to their stake in them (as is true of the Europeans and the Americans), the weakness on the Georgian side is conceptual: the failure to think through the many dimensions of Georgia’s security problem and their complex interconnections. Beyond a visceral sense of frustration and danger over the ethnically-charged regional conflicts, the inability of earlier governments to come to grips with the country’s problems, and

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2 The quote is from Ghia Nodia and is cited in Jaba Devdariani, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution Grapples with Dilemma: Do Ends Justify Means?” Eurasia Insight, October 26, 2004.
the Russian threat (each real enough), relatively little sophisticated conceptual thinking about Georgian national security had been done, at least not in official circles. In late 2000, the Shevardnadze government issued a formal document called, “Georgia and the World: A Vision and Strategy for the Future.” It was an effort to articulate Georgia’s approach to foreign and security challenges, but rather than grappling with the hard conceptual issues, it settled for a loose statement of basic principles and a wish-list of what it hoped to see happen, particularly in relations with Europe and the United States. The new Saakashvili government, as David Darchiashvili notes in his chapter, has given military reform a new impulse, and by spring 2005 it appeared ready to release a new national security concept for parliamentary and public discussion. Whether this document would at last capture the complexity of the threats facing the country and offer a systematic, realistic, and concrete response to them remained to be seen.

Thinking through the challenge to Georgian national security provides this book’s second justification. The authors of this volume have tried to bring greater clarity to the task of identifying the key dangers facing Georgia and their complicated interaction. True, Georgia’s security problem is often acknowledged to be multi-tiered, with the secessionist threat, the corrosion of state institutions, and Russian mischief-making treated as parts of a whole. And many have noted, although not spelled out, the linkage between insecurity within Georgia and instability within the region. But simply listing the different dimensions of the security problem without considering the synergy among them or without exploring the precise connection between trouble inside and outside the country makes it hard to devise a national security concept that does justice to the challenge. Second, and even more important when it comes to assessing the significance of Georgia and its security problems for the wider world, the failure to situate Georgia within a broader regional context leads policymakers in Washington, Brussels, and almost surely in Moscow as well to underestimate and distort their stake in the outcome of the challenges facing Georgia. That they care about Georgia because they have stakes in the region is not the same as recognizing the way that regional dynamics intersect. Nor is their genuine but general desire to see the new Saakashvili government advance toward democracy and draw closer to Europe any guarantee that they will muster policies suited to the intricate domestic and foreign environment in which Georgia operates.
We have, therefore, given ourselves three tasks in this book: First, to untangle the many different layers of the security challenge arising both within and outside Georgia and to explore the complicated ways they intersect and influence one another. Second, to explain why the challenge confronting this country matters to more than Georgia and its immediate neighbors—indeed, why it should be a problem taken seriously by major Western powers and their allied institutions, a problem requiring more than the material aid at the heart of current efforts. And third, to consider what the Georgians, their immediate neighbors, and the West ultimately can and should do in response. How, in short, might Georgians, Russians, Europeans, and Americans improve the situation in ways that enhance each party’s national security while strengthening mutual security? And how might this be done within the realm of the politically feasible?

THE ESSENCE OF THE PROBLEM

For Russia and all other post-Soviet states, except arguably the Baltic states, security begins at home, because the turbulence and uncertainties surrounding their efforts to fashion new or at least viable political and economic systems after the collapse of the Soviet Union remain their single greatest preoccupation. In the case of Georgia, however, even before getting to the traumas of this task, its leaders confront the risk that the homeland they hope to reconstruct may not survive intact. Hence, security for them begins in the most tangible fashion—with preserving the territorial integrity of the country, and short of that, with restoring sovereign authority over broad swaths of territory where it has been lost.

Achieving this objective, however, is only the beginning of Georgia’s security agenda. The anxieties of knowledgeable Georgians are not only prompted by the threat of separatism, but by the fear that neither the Georgian state nor Georgian society has the will or capacity to stand up to the threat. They worry that institutions, including those expressly designed to provide security, have so weakened, have been so corrupted, and have so become the preserve of families, clans, and special interests that they no longer have the strength to defend either the individual or the country from harm. Georgians even contemplate uneasily the possibility that they are the source of the problem: that what underpins Georgian identity ends up fracturing the larger community. These apprehensions explain why the Rose Revolution has become such a watershed—
because it represents Georgian hopes of at last breaking free of these shackles and reversing the downward descent.

Formidable as the internal sources of Georgian insecurity are, if the country enjoyed a benevolent or at least an unthreatening environment beyond its borders, the nature of the challenge would be more confined (albeit still not easy). On the contrary, Georgia’s neighborhood offers trouble, not relief. Violence, either active or latent, surrounds the country. If intrastate conflict poisons Georgia’s domestic life, regional conflict defines international relations in Georgia’s immediate neighborhood. The absence of dialogue—often even of practical or economic intercourse, let alone the rudiments of community—in the South Caucasus leaves Georgia without support from its neighbors or, more important, the opportunity to concentrate on its own problems. It also creates the risk of conflicts in one area bleeding into another or generating tensions among neighbors forced to choose among contending parties. In particular, the uncertainty and violence in the Northern Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, make Russia a more aggressive and impatient neighbor. This, in turn, compounds a basic problem: even if Chechnya were at peace and the rest of the Northern Caucasus securely a part of the Russian Federation, Russia would still cast a large shadow over Georgia, given Moscow’s slow and painful adaptation to its loss of control over a region that has been a strategic salient for two centuries.

These are the immediate, practical sources of Georgian insecurity. On a deeper level, history and geography conspire to create more permanent, structural impediments to Georgia’s security. Georgia is part of the Black Sea region, which through the millennia, dating back to the Greeks and Scythians, has been dominated by the rise and fall of empires—Roman, Byzantine, Persian, and Ottoman—or by the interplay of dueling empires, such as the Persian and Ottoman from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries and the Russian and Ottoman in the nineteenth century. Over time, smaller societies were simply absorbed into these imperial domains or, as in the case of the Caucasus, turned into buffer zones (between Roman and Parthian, Byzantine and Arab, and Persian and Russian empires). For only a single century—the “Golden Age” of the Bagratid monarchy beginning with the liberation of Tbilisi from the

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Seljuks in 1122 and ending with the Mongol invasion in 1220—was Georgia master of its own fate. For nearly all of the last two hundred years, it remained a dominion of the Russian and then Soviet empire. During interludes of relative freedom, Georgia’s choices ranged narrowly from seeking protection at the expense of autonomy (as with Erekle II’s approach to the Russians at the end of the eighteenth century) to watching the country fracture (as under Alexander I’s sons in the fifteenth century) or be partitioned (as under the Turks in the sixteenth century).

Now that Georgia is again independent, it faces the small power’s predicament of existing alongside a large and less than beneficent neighbor, particularly when, as Jaba Devadariani stresses in his chapter, historical memory sets the two countries at odds. Georgia enters this new era without natural allies or a history of reliable alliances. As Thomas de Waal notes in his chapter, rarely has Georgia, when buffeted among competing great powers, been able to fall back on a united front with its Caucasian neighbors. The fissures and tensions that keep the Caucasus in disarray are not new; they have long-standing historical antecedents. As a result, Georgia is, to use de Waal’s expression, “without a secure regional security environment.”

Pronounced as these historical patterns are, nothing says that they must prevail or cannot be escaped. Choices matter: the choices Georgia’s leaders make in facing domestic challenges, in dealing with the breakaway territories, in helping to fashion greater cooperation in the region, and in responding to the policies of external actors—in short, in playing the hand they are dealt. Alas, the choices made by Georgian leaders and their counterparts in the decade and half of independence have fallen considerably short of optimal. As a consequence, until recently the inertia of historical patterns and the force of contemporary trends were reinforcing rather than distinct. The unanswered question is whether the Saakashvili regime can divorce them.

Georgia’s security challenge is large, dramatic, and complex. Its essence, however, can be thought of as two-part: At its core, Georgian security is about statehood; beyond this core, it reflects the unhappy reality that an insecure Georgia exists within a region of insecure states. The insecurity of statehood and the insecurity of neighborhood combine to produce the kind of security dilemma endured by only the most endangered countries.

To say that security for Georgia is about statehood contains, but does not convey, the underlying nature and full scope of the issue. What strikes the outsider with particular force (as it presumably will strike many read-
ers of this book) is how much the question of Georgia’s very existence dominates Georgian thinking about security. It is not that Georgian policymakers and political analysts are oblivious to the dangers of violence within the region they inhabit; or are incapable of imagining how conflict between states might escalate to war; or are inattentive to the importance of a conventional defense policy addressed to conventional military needs; or are unmindful of the perils inherent in a badly managed relationship with Russia. It is simply that all these considerations pale alongside anxieties over Georgia’s future and particularly its incapacity to find some means by which to draw the lost territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia back into the national fold.

Most countries, including the United States, Russia, and the European states, approach the question of national security by first laying out the character and range of threats they face. Georgia, however, in sharp contrast, begins not with the topic of threats, but with that of security—that is, by defining security itself. In the “National Security Concept for Georgia” proposed by the Strategic Research Center (Tbilisi) in November 1998, the authors place the uncertainties surrounding Georgian statehood squarely at the center of their formulation. They start from the premise that Georgia is in peril because state institutions are enfeebled, because society has lost its sense of common purpose, and because the nation has failed to create a locus around which to rally different ethnic communities. While not all official and unofficial voices are as explicit as the Strategic Research Center, most implicitly share a similar perspective.

According to the security concept developed by this group, security depends less on Georgia’s ability to fashion a security strategy than to create a development strategy. Security will be the product of conscious and effective efforts to give the country a focus inspiring loyalty and a constitutive direction appropriate to Georgia’s cultural identity, yet suited

4 National Security Concept of Georgia (Tbilisi: Strategic Research Center, November 1998), http://www.src.ge/policy_papers/national_security.html. Although the authors of the report are not identified, the founders of the center are David Iakobidze, former minister of finance; Irakli Menagarishvili, former minister of foreign affairs; Niko Melikadze, the executive director of the center; and Natela Sakhokia, the center’s director. I cite this report not because of its political impact—my impression is that it had little if any influence on policy—but as representative in the spectrum of Georgian thinking.
to the changing imperatives of a globalizing international environment. This, however, requires a sovereign Georgia— that is, a Georgia able to make choices for itself, free of interference from outside forces. Hence, in this argument, the chain goes from a "national development strategy" to statehood to sovereignty to security. It is true that there is a circularity to this argument, because security qua sovereignty must underpin a strategy for domestic transformation, but the relationship between statehood and security is clear: statehood precedes security.

Ghia Nodia’s chapter in this book argues along similar lines. Security, he maintains, is the freedom of a people to pursue the "idea of what they want to be." He calls it the "national project," and anything that threatens to undermine or divert it constitutes a security challenge. In order for the national project to work, Nodia insists that it must respect "some kind of unique national identity," whether based on language, culture, or "spirituality," but it must also aspire to something more. In Georgia’s case, the "more," he says, is the desire to emulate the liberal democratic model of European states. Yet as Nodia acknowledges, how can one be sure of what the national project is and who subscribes to it? If there are competing national projects, which has legitimacy? These questions push the problem to a deeper level and reverse the relationship between security and statehood.

The roadblocks to the national project in Georgia are considerable. According to Nodia, they include: "ethnic exclusivity" among the Georgians themselves; a Soviet institutional legacy aiding fragmentation; powerful "alternative national projects;" and an array of potential sources of tension, from Armenian and Azerbaijani irredentism to unintegrated ethnic groups. These obstacles are the internal dimension of the national security challenge; they are the threat to the national project, the threat to statehood. But they, by his light, do not alone constitute the problem. The deeper dimension resides in the faltering of political institutions, which accentuates the roadblocks to the Georgian national project, not the other way around. It is not that these obstacles explain the failure of institutions, but rather that the troubled condition of institutions account for the magnitude of these obstacles.

Hence, in Nodia’s view, to penetrate to the heart of Georgia’s security problem, one must explain the reasons for the weak state. His explanation takes him back to an essential duality in Georgian popular values: fancying, on the one hand, the liberal democratic model, but prejudicing
it, on the other hand, with an antipathy to the state and a readiness to hijack it for private purpose. Dig a bit deeper, and the problem appears to stem from the nature of the Georgian public’s stake in the Western model: it accepts the democratic model, because it wants to be Western, and it wants to be Western to affirm its independence from Russia. In this chain, however, a commitment to the liberal Western model is for security’s sake, not because of a strong attachment to the model’s intrinsic worth.\textsuperscript{5} Add to this the Georgian public’s instinctive mistrust of the state—any state, democratic or otherwise—because of what the state came to represent in Soviet times, and the prospect of overcoming state weakness by promising democracy dims, particularly when for many Georgians, democratic values compete with other values embedded in Georgian society and at times fostered by the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Other knowledgeable Georgians argue from the same basic point of departure. David Darchiashvili, another author in this book, elsewhere suggests that the future of Georgia’s Rose Revolution depends “on its ability to mobilize around a national idea,” something that cannot be done by simply assuming civil society will carry the day.\textsuperscript{6} Rather, the “project” requires “emotion, even romanticism.” Hence, he argues, in order to succeed, Georgia’s “democratic forces,” must “draw on [Georgian] nationalism to strengthen their project,” provided—and here is the rub—that it can be cleansed of “its dangerously ethnic flavor.” In effect, Georgian nationalism must be rescued from its unholy alliance with corrupt officialdom and the criminal element, and deployed by democrats to legitimate a state capable of capturing the support of the alienated citizen.

So Darchiashvili is among the commentators who believe that Georgia’s security problem starts from the frailty of statehood and that its most dangerous manifestation is the inefficacy of state institutions. In his explanation, however, the hollowing of institutions is due to rampant

\textsuperscript{5} This is my interpolation. Nodia insists that among most Georgians the commitment to liberal values and the democratic model is genuine, not instrumental, indeed, more so than in most other post-Soviet states.

corruption, which has led to three effects: first, “the privatization of security”—that is, state agencies responsible for national and public safety have become the preserve of corrupted state officials who subordinate them to private interests; second, the re-empowering of armed groups that only a few years earlier were thought to have been contained; and third, the entwining of “politics, crime, and clans.”

Georgian officials at all levels “are deeply involved in dubious commercial deals that involve the open or hidden privatization of state assets,” all of which fosters in the public a sense that criminality is a normal and acceptable ethos.

The links among corruption, including its worst manifestation, the criminalized state, the enervation of institutions, and the erosion of national security all figure widely in most analyses of Georgia. Darchiashvili, however, makes them the core of his story. He is not alone. Pavel Baev goes further, contending that “Georgia’s troubles,” whatever the mischievous actions of outsiders have been, derive principally from “the anomalies and distortions of its own society, political institutions, and elites,” and that these stem less from “ethnic grievances, or past injustices, or communist legacies [than from] the all-penetrating shadow economy and corruption.”

Indeed, he traces the rise of paramilitaries such as the National Guard and the Mkheidrioni at the outset of independence, the civil war in the early 1990s, and even the eruption of war over Abkhazia to “clan-based corruption,” whose roots had grown thick and sturdy during the Soviet period. What the Soviet era had wrought, the economic devastation following its collapse, the end of normal economic activity, and the rise of the shadow economy unleashed in still more virulent form.

In this volume, Darchiashvili looks specifically at the destructive interplay among the enfeebled state, corruption, and the military. Unlike a number of other former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, Georgia could not simply nationalize standing Soviet forces deployed on its territory and use them as the basis for a new Georgian military. Instead, during the rule of Georgia’s first post-independence

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8 Pavel K. Baev, “Civil Wars in Georgia: Corruption Breeds Violence,” in Jan Kochler and Christoph Zürcher, eds., Potentials of Disorder (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 128. (Baev recognizes that corruption and the shadow economy also formed part of the communist legacy.)
president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the void was filled by a variety of paramilitary groups, only some of which were loyal to him and all of which owed their first allegiance to the often criminal figures who commanded them. The first challenge for Gamsakhurdia’s successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, therefore, was to bring these semi-renegade military elements to heel and achieve some degree of state control over their actions. Shevardnadze, Darchiashvili contends, went about the task by adopting a strategy of “divide and rule,” picking off key paramilitary figures one by one. By its nature, however, this strategy stood in the way of rationalizing a new Georgian military, because it worked against a clear-cut centralization of military authority.

Darchiashvili explores in detail the painful, desultory stages by which Gamsakhurdia and then Shevardnadze sought to discipline the criminalized, ragtag, freewheeling military groupings used to fight Georgia’s initial battles and to turn them into a proper military responsive to national leadership, under civilian authority, and subject to democratic oversight. Until the end of the Shevardnadze era, notwithstanding numerous commissions, dozens of “reforms,” and considerable input from the United States and other NATO countries, Georgia had not gotten very far in its military reform efforts. Darchiashvili lays the blame on Georgia’s leadership, particularly on Shevardnadze’s “divide and rule” strategy for dealing with the military and security forces he mistrusted and his willingness to ignore corruption among elements whose support he sought. To complete the vicious circle, Shevardnadze’s inability or unwillingness to do what was necessary to create a reformed, well-institutionalized military was compounded by the failure to settle on a larger strategic concept to guide the effort. But this failure also traced back to the regime’s incoherent, narrowly opportunistic approach to the military needs of the country.

Whatever the contrasts in emphasis, nearly all Georgian analysts understand the core of the country’s security problem to be the compromised condition of statehood. What makes the issue so difficult, however, is that everything is a piece of a larger puzzle. Analyses that seek to locate the precise source of Georgia’s security problem generally end up being circular, such as that of the Strategic Research Center mentioned earlier. It is a chicken-and-egg problem par excellence: what comes first, institutions capable of securing public loyalty and overcoming noxious forms of nationalism, or the transformation of nationalism permitting the emergence of institutions capable of commanding general support? Restoring
the state in order to attack corruption or attacking corruption in order to restore the state? Devising the “national project” or a “national development strategy” to consolidate statehood as a foundation for sovereignty *qua* independence, or battling for sovereignty to permit the pursuit of the national project?

Then there are the internal contradictions: Georgians, particularly Western-oriented foreign policy intellectuals and policymakers, commonly insist that however one gets there, the goal should be to create a liberal democratic system, but one that protects Georgians’ unique cultural, social, and historical identity. Yet liberal democratic systems require that conflicting identities be reconciled, if necessary by affording less protection to the predominant nationality. In addition, the equally frequent exhortation to predicate statehood on the reconciliation of warring national identities has no answer if a group refuses to be conciliated.

It is here that the outside world enters the Georgian situation. Its entry is often for ill, and when for good, usually more a promise than a fact. If the essence of Georgia’s security problem is statehood, its agonizing form is truncated sovereignty—that is, the absence of national authority over whole provinces, and, as Darchiashvili stresses, even the territory adjacent to these breakaway territories. The reality that South Ossetia and Abkhazia are de facto mini-states within Georgia’s borders, that Georgian writ has no standing in areas seen as integral to the Georgian state, and that the national government remains powerless to change the situation appears to focus the question of national security as nothing else can.

Because Russia is universally perceived as originally a party to Abkhazian separatism, subsequently as an obstacle to a Georgian–Abkhazian settlement, and ultimately as manipulating the Russian–Abkhazian relationship to pressure Tbilisi, the internal dimension of Georgian security automatically becomes international and highly inflammatory. Russia, viewed from the Georgian perspective, constitutes the single most dangerous factor in Georgia’s international environment. The reasons are many: Russia is seen as having stalled on the removal of its remaining military bases in Georgia in order to intimidate Georgia’s leaders or at least to prevent these facilities from falling into U.S. or NATO hands; it is viewed as bullying and willing to violate Georgian sovereignty if it thinks

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its war in Chechnya warrants it; it is assumed to be behind past attempts to assassinate former President Shevardnadze; and it is suspected of doing everything from interrupting gas services to conniving with the regime's opponents in order to dictate Georgia's choices. But what consolidates these impressions and gives them special resonance is Russia's assumed readiness to abet Abkhazian and Ossetian separatism or, at a minimum, to exploit these conflicts with the aim of weakening or pressuring Georgia's national leadership.

REGIONAL CONFLICT AND GEORGIAN NATIONAL SECURITY

It is not that Georgian observers ignore the nuances that make the Russian threat less clear-cut. They are aware that at times Russian trouble-making may have been more the work of freebooters than by the design of those in power in Moscow. They accept that the tension and ill-will may not have been generated only on the Russian side. And they realize that while an issue like global terrorism may be used prejudicially against the Georgians by the Russians, Russia's stake in this issue is genuine, not merely instrumental, and consequently has the support of others, such as the United States, whose goodwill is important to Georgia.

This more subtle appreciation of the factors burdening the Georgian-Russian relationship is evident in Jaba Devdariani's chapter in this volume. He sees the Russian dimension of Georgia's national security challenge as complex and rooted in the deepest levels of Georgia's national psychology. The clash of what he calls "national myths" gives a far greater resonance to contemporary frictions than they might otherwise have, particularly at a time when both countries are struggling to fashion new national identities. The fact that Georgians find inspiration—and the Russians offence—in the notion that Georgia has long been defiled and oppressed by Russian imperialism, however, does not distinguish Georgia from several other former Soviet republics. The difference between, for example, Georgia and Ukraine would appear to be in how


11 See also Jaba Devdariani, "Georgia on a Fault Line," Perspective, vol. 13, no. 3 (January–February 2003), pp. 1, 6–8.
uniformly this sentiment is shared throughout the population. Segments of the Ukrainian population, particularly in the western half of the country, think as the Georgians do on this issue, but people in other parts of the country, particular the eastern half, do not. As a result, attitudes toward Russia, rather than being a unifying backdrop to policy, become a divisive factor in domestic Ukrainian politics.

Dueling national myths, however, shape the context within which Georgia and Russia deal with the tensions that divide them; they do not create the tensions. These arise out concrete circumstances—out of disputes over the liquidation of military bases or the imposition of visa regimes; out of activities seen as ill-intentioned or subversive; and out of frustration over conflicts, such as Abkhazia and Chechnya, where the other side is perceived as unhelpful or, worse, malevolent. Devdariani does not blame Moscow alone for all that has gone wrong in Georgian–Russian relations. Even when the Russians have, in his view, behaved aggressively, a part of the blame belongs to Georgia. He argues that when Georgia is focused, firm, and willing to assert itself in measured ways, the Russians act with restraint. A prime example of this was the Ajaran crisis in April 2004, when the Saakashvili government drove from power a local political boss who, with Russian complicity, had long defied the central government. Thus, Devdariani too is brought back to the problem of Georgian statehood. He too sees Georgian security—in his case, the Russian dimension—diminished by weakness on the Georgian side: by unsteady foreign policies, by leaders who use Russian actions to obscure their own failings, and by the corruption and infirmity of government itself, which encourages the Russians to treat these as exploitable vulnerabilities.

In the end, however, Devdariani and most Georgians do worry that Russia remains less than fully reconciled to its imperial demise and is determined to preserve as much control in Georgia and the Caucasus as possible. No part of Georgia’s security agenda raises this concern more acutely than the problem of the separatist territories, particularly Abkhazia. Georgians know that the roots of Abkhazian and South Ossetian defiance reach deep into ethnic, cultural, historical, and political differ-

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12 Here I speak of the dominant ethnic group. Several minority groups in Georgia do not share the Georgian view of Russia, if one accepts Devdariani’s representation of it.
ences. They know equally well that these differences were exacerbated by policies adopted by Georgian leaders, particularly in the 1990–91 period under Gamsakhurdia. True, as both Nodia and Christoph Zürcher discuss in their chapters, the spiral leading to the open break between the central government and these regions was the work of both sides. Whether the moves of Abkhazian leaders in 1988 to detach their region from the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic or the menacing measures adopted by the Georgian side in 1989 started the escalation to violence cannot be easily settled. Whatever the starting point, however, the rapid and convulsive interaction between Tbilisi on the one hand and Sukhumi and Tskhinvali on the other spun out of control in a matter of months (these developments are traced in detail by Zürcher in his chapter). The Georgian leadership’s neuralgic fear of Abkhazian and Ossetian “disloyalty” was more than matched by the Abkhazian and Ossetian fears of Georgian repression and, in the case of Abkhazian and Ossetian elites, fear of losing the privileged positions they held within their locales. But for the threshold of bloodshed to be breached—at least in the Abkhazian case—Zürcher maintains that yet another pathology was required: Georgia’s tragedy stemmed from military and paramilitary elements that, unrestrained by a debilitated state, triggered the violence in order to protect lucrative criminal activity. He calls these groups “entrepreneurs of violence.”

Once this threshold was crossed, Russia became a crucial factor. Georgians almost universally believe that the Russians abetted the Abkhazian side in the 1992–93 war, help that many Georgians still think was decisive in turning the tide against them. Their only uncertainty is whether the Russian role was orchestrated from Moscow or at the initiative of Russian military commanders and units in Abkhazia. In her chapter, Oksana Antonenko relates a far more complex story, one—and this is symptomatic of the deep emotions that flow at the base of this problem—that few Georgians, including most of those who contributed to this book, would buy. Indeed, the Russian military was involved, but in her view, its involvement was split. Parts of the military did supply or sell arms to the Abkhazian rebels, and Georgian troops were attacked by aircraft belonging to the Russian Air Force. At the same time, the command of the Transcaucasus Military District (inherited by Russia from the Soviet era) had transferred large stocks of arms to the Georgian military, including a sizable quantity of tanks on the eve of the August 1992 Georgian attacks on Abkhazia. And in the initial phases of combat, Georgian
forces were backed by Russian naval units in the Black Sea. Symptomatically, Antonenko argues, the political lineup back in Moscow was equally divided between segments of the elite (including the president, foreign minister, and minister of defense) who supported a "stronger unified Georgia" and others (such as parts of the military and security forces, regional leaders, and activists in the North Caucasus) who wanted a "pro-Moscow Abkhazia."

In the longer run, by Antonenko's account, Russia complicates the Abkhazia issue less because of malicious intent than because of the way it goes about its mediating role. In carrying out a Russian-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia, Moscow's primary concern has been to prevent renewed violence, which from the Georgian perspective has had the perverse effect of securing Abkhazia's border and solidifying its autonomy. It is true that Russia's second war in Chechnya has given a darker cast to Russia's role in Georgia since 1999. The Russians, beginning with President Vladimir Putin, see the Georgians as too sympathetic to the Chechen cause and, at a minimum, as uncooperative in helping to cut off outside support for the insurgents. They have retaliated by sharply criticizing Georgian leaders, threatening to act preemptively to quash an alleged Chechen threat from the Georgian side of the border, and, on occasion, apparently allowing Russian military aircraft to strike targets inside Georgia. Russia also began to enhance ties with Abkhazia after 1999—opening their common border, lifting a blockade that had been (loosely) in place since 1992, and extending citizenship to the Abkhazian population while imposing visa restrictions on the Georgian population, although it is difficult to know whether these actions were meant to pressure Tbilisi or were the lowest-common-denominator outcome of domestic political conflicts within Russia. In any event, they left the Georgians still more convinced that Russia could not or would not play the role of honest broker in the secessionist conflicts rending the country. Nor did Moscow do much to soften this image by tenaciously resisting a larger peacekeeping or peacemaking role for others, including international organizations.

Yet to push Antonenko's argument further, the challenge Russia poses for Georgia is far more subtle and intricate than Georgians generally appreciate. It starts not so much from a tendency on Russia's part to pursue openly aggressive aims as from a policy intended to have one's cake and eat it too. That is, in the Abkhazian case, Russia is not out to
favor one side over the other but rather to preserve its influence with both. It is formally (and probably genuinely) committed to preserving the territorial integrity of Georgia, but it also does all that it can to foster ties with Abkhazia. It almost certainly wants a stable Georgia within a stable South Caucasus, but it also is jealous of its own power in the region and resents the idea of others such as the United States, Turkey, NATO, or even the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) intruding in what it views as its security sphere. Moreover, as Antonenko shows, specific Russian actions that on the surface appear malign or spiteful, such as imposing visa requirements on Georgian citizens, granting Russian citizenship and waving visa requirements for Abkhazian and South Ossetian residents, opening rail links to Abkhazia, and doing little to promote constructive international initiatives directed at a Georgian–Abkhazian settlement turn out to have a much more complicated basis. For these reasons, therefore, dealing with Russia requires a more astute and nuanced policy than Georgian leaders have devised to this point.

Both Antonenko and Devdariani, however, detect signs that Russians and Georgians at the outset of Saakashvili’s tenure were ready to explore the possibility of putting some of the past behind them. Devdariani points to solid pragmatic (principally economic) reasons for the two parties to dampen tensions and seek a more stable relationship. Antonenko agrees and identifies what at the time seemed like a series of potential areas of economic cooperation. She also senses that based on Russian actions during flare-ups over Abkhazia and South Ossetia in late spring 2004, Moscow had grown less resistant to greater cooperation between Russia and NATO in the Caucasus and between the CIS peacekeeping force and the UN monitoring group in Georgia. Still, notwithstanding these initial hopeful signs, the bedrock of mistrust and frustration between the two leaderships remained, and, if anything, further hardened in the months that followed. By early 2005, Saakashvili, in a scarcely veiled reference, spoke of Georgia facing “the strongest and most aggressive—perhaps not the strongest but certainly the most aggressive—forces in the world.” And, as one source close to Putin’s entourage noted at

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about the same time, Saakashvili stirs in Putin roughly the same animus that “Fidel Castro does for U.S. politicians.”

THE EXTERNAL CONTEXT: VORTEXES AND CONCENTRIC CIRCLES

Nonetheless, in the end, barring an improbable geographical miracle moving Georgia to another place on the globe, Georgians know that they must find a way to live with their large northern neighbor. They also hope, as Georgia’s former Foreign Minister Tedo Japaridze expressed it, that Russians also know—or will come to know—that their security “depends on Georgian stabilization.” The difficult circumstances between these two countries, however, create a dilemma. Can Georgian–Russian relations be normalized bilaterally, or considering the hurdles, will progress depend on finding a broader framework? Devdariani argues the latter and suggests the possibility of a constructive triangle drawing in the United States, a more active role for the European Union (EU), or the invigoration of alignments such as GUUAM—the loose association of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and before Spring 2005 Uzbekistan. None of these alternatives, however, as he realizes, appears to be a very bright prospect. Herein lies the dilemma: It may be that the Georgian–Russian relationship resembles other relationships, such as the Israeli–Palestinian, North Korean–South Korean, and, until lately, the Indo–Pakistani, where the two parties alone are incapable of finding a way out. Yet “multi-tiered” solutions, to use Devdariani’s phrase, face their own structural obstacles, making them scarcely more accessible.

Imagine a three-way conversation among the Americans, Russians, and Georgians to ease the Georgian–Russian bilateral relationship out of a dead end is fine in the abstract, but it soon confronts the reality that the U.S.–Russian strategic interaction in the Caucasus over the last decade has been far more competitive than cooperative. Thus, Georgia, rather than benefiting from the dynamic of U.S.–Russian relations in this part of

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14 Interview in Moscow, March 24, 2005.
15 Chikhladze, “Georgia’s Interim Foreign Minister: Russian Security Depends on Georgian Stabilization.”
the world, has tended to be its victim. It is true that at important points—such as after Russian military incursions into Georgia, Putin’s September 2002 arrogation of the right of preemption, and Russian foot-dragging on withdrawing from its military bases in Georgia—Washington has urged Moscow’s restraint. Both the nature and the effect of U.S. intervention, however, more closely corresponded with a competitive than a cooperative model. It hardly led Russian authorities to rethink the underlying relationship with Georgia. If anything, it induced those Russians who see U.S. encroachment in the Caucasus as a direct threat to argue their case even more adamantly.

In truth, Georgia is dragged in the wake of U.S.–Russian relations and cannot realistically expect to appropriate them for its own purposes. This unfortunate fact is only the first of several dimensions complicating Georgia’s strategic position. Two metaphors capture the heart of the problem. They also begin to suggest why the stakes are considerable for more than Georgia alone. The two metaphors are a vortex and a series of concentric circles.

To begin with the first of these, conflict cleaves the Caucasus, north-south and east-west, creating a large obstacle to more constructive forms of cooperation within the region. As Bruno Coppieters argues elsewhere, until the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian conflicts are resolved, regional integration cannot go forward.17 Moreover, unlike other regions of the former Soviet Union, conflict does more than create political divisions and generate tensions; it dominates every aspect of the region’s international relations. Others have accurately described just how amorphous, fractured, and malign relations are in the South Caucasus. In Dov Lynch’s retelling, the South Caucasus is about as politically impoverished as a region can be.18 Disputed borders, economic blockades, disrupted rail and road links, and punitive visa regimes not only obstruct the moderating effects of commerce and contact, they serve as both the source and the amplification of widespread tension. To say the region

lacks the institutions present in other areas, from Southeast Asia to Western Europe, is a risible understatement of how absent any form of community—institutionalized or not—is among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. In addition, each of the three states in the region, like other post-Soviet states, is struggling to recast itself as a political, economic, and national entity—indeed, to do all three things simultaneously. These three countries, more than others, however, suffer from the feebleness and corruption of political institutions critical to this effort. Uniformly weak states in an amorphous, conflict-ridden setting obviously would pose a security challenge to Georgia even were its own internal picture healthy. Because the picture is not, trouble outside the country’s borders risks mixing with trouble on the inside, making both more serious threats.

De Waal, however, stresses not only the politically fractured nature of the Caucasus, but Georgians’ delinquency in doing much about it. Indeed, as de Waal writes, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia are so remote from one another, so unengaged economically that they scarcely constitute a region. As he says, on most counts “the three Caucasian countries are painfully estranged from one another.” Economically, they remain divided, not least because of “strong criminalized vested interests” that obstruct any kind of a “Caucasian common market.” Yet over time the Georgians have done little to alter this circumstance. Under Gamsakhurdia, Georgia pursued what de Waal calls a “messianic image of Georgia as a special European country,” largely divorced from the tortured life of the region and bent on distanciing itself as much as possible from Russia. Shevardnadze, Gamsakhurdia’s successor, devoted himself to forging closer ties with the United States, and, in de Waal’s words, “showed almost no interest in enhancing political or economic integration with Georgia’s neighbors.” Thus, rather than mediating between its neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia scarcely lifted a finger, leaving that role to the OSCE and the Russian government.

At the center of a region so charged with tension, Georgia, rather than emerging as a hub of stability, the metaphor that should be its natural lot, risks—in part of its own making—turning into a vortex of instability. If progress stalls and disorder follows, a Georgia in crisis could well pull neighbors in, if only to defend co-ethnics, protect material stakes, or prevent spillover effects from infecting their own domestic strife. On the other hand, it is not only the failings within Georgia that create the dan-
ger of the country’s fission; unrest along Georgia’s borders could easily seep across, and in the case of its northern border with Russia, already does. Thus, the danger remains that Georgia, rather than being a steadying influence within the region or an engine of regional integration, could yet turn into the opposite. In addition, if developments elsewhere in the Caucasus, including to the north, explode, Georgia has a much better chance of getting itself into trouble at home.

None of these danger points had dissipated a year and a half into Saakashvili’s tenure. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh wavered uncertainly between, on the one hand, glints of hope that the Armenians and Azerbaijanis were making progress in their bilateral talks, perhaps enough to merit a new initiative from the OSCE Minsk Group, and, on the other, signs that Baku really was considering military action to force the issue. In Chechnya, the war dragged on, with all the attendant uncertainty of where its collateral effects might erupt next and what the Russians might do in response. And in Georgia, after the ill-considered effort of the new leadership to achieve a breakthrough on the South Ossetia stalemate in summer 2004, frustration continued to simmer when Saakashvili presented a new, and by most lights generous, peace plan to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in January 2005, only to see it utterly thwarted by a recalcitrant South Ossetian leadership backed by Moscow.

The images of the Caucasus as swept with instability and of Georgia as potentially a vortex rather than a hub of stability capture a crucial part of the picture, but not all of it. They convey the essential character of fragmentation and instability in the region’s international relations. Yet there is a great deal more to the political geography of the area, for the Caucasus is not an enclave, but an arena where other powers are also active, which brings us to the second metaphor: Georgia at the heart of a series of concentric circles. Historically, of course, the Caucasus has been the fought-over outer wedge of empire. The empires (Persian, Ottoman, and Russian) are gone, but their rump successor states—Iran, Turkey, and Russia—once more jostle against one another in this space, sometimes directly, more often indirectly. Russia remains more resistant to Iranian and Turkish intrusion into the area than Iran and Turkey are toward Russia’s dominant role, but Tehran and Ankara generally view Russia’s actions in the Caucasus warily, particularly when it comes to energy politics and often welcome the chance to curtail Moscow’s influence.
Turkey and Iran’s real impact in the Caucasus is more direct and, while both positive and negative, arguably more the latter than the former. They do create opportunities for some of the Caucasian states: Turkey provides aid to Azerbaijan and economic options for Georgia, while Iran helps to reduce Armenia’s political and physical isolation. That said, however, Iran and Turkey’s more powerful effect on the international relations of the Caucasus stems more from the challenge they pose to other states. Iran constitutes, after Russia and Armenia, a third major security concern for Azerbaijan. The sources of potential tension, as Arif Yunusov has noted, are multiple: the stirrings of the large Azerbaijani population in Iran, disputed access to the Caspian gas fields, and Iran’s policies toward the Shia of Azerbaijan, the country’s dominant religious group.\(^{19}\) Iran, it is true, has not attempted to exploit trouble in the region, including Nagorno-Karabakh, and for a fleeting moment in the early 1990s even sought to help mediate the Azerbaijani–Armenian conflict.\(^{20}\) Yet Iranian restraint in this one sphere is quickly lost among Azerbaijani amid the other sources of disquiet.

For Armenia, Turkey represents the preoccupation. Rather than a shadowy influence on the periphery of the Karabakh conflict, Turkey occupies a central place, allied to Azerbaijan, a critical link in the blockade of Armenia, and insistant on a resolution of the Karabakh issue before any real progress toward a normalization of Turkish–Armenian relations will be entertained. Notwithstanding halting steps to move beyond the past (including the 1915 massacres of Armenians) during the first years of Armenian independence, Armenian resentment over Turkey’s position on Karabakh reinforces the long-held popular conviction that the Turks dream of restoring dominion over the Caucasus and would happily see the annihilation of Armenia as a means to that end.\(^{21}\)

To add to the tangle, these bilateral enmities feed seamlessly, albeit at some remove, into a larger architecture of competition and conflict in the Caucasus. Not only do Azerbaijan’s close ties with Turkey aggravate its

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21 De Waal makes the point and then illustrates it in *Black Garden*, pp. 274–75.
relationship with Iran, given the frictions between Iran and Turkey. And not only do Armenia’s dealings with Iran have much the same effect on Turkey. They also extend alignments generated in the equally unstable regions to the south and west: The link between Azerbaijan and Turkey reaches to Israel; the link between Iran and Armenia extends to Greece. This dynamic draws the international politics of the Caucasus into the next concentric circle of international relations and carries the potential of bringing the politics of the Near East and the Balkans into the Caucasus. Consequently, weakness and instability in the Caucasus mixes with weakness and instability in adjacent regions.

The outer and last concentric circle is political rather than geographical. It is the level at which the major powers enter the Caucasus. Both the United States and the Europeans, including the European Union, also see their interests implicated in the region. The oil and gas in and around the Caspian Sea constitute the most obvious stake, and devising the means for getting it to European markets creates both foreign policy and commercial challenges. Because the politics of Caspian oil and gas is more about transport than production, no countries care more about influencing outcomes than the United States and Russia, which adds to the competition between the two countries. The U.S. determination, tracing back to the middle years of Bill Clinton’s presidency, to ensure that the oil and gas flow east to Turkey—not south, lest it strengthen the Iranian regime; and not only north, lest it leave Moscow with too much leverage over the energy-producing states in the region—has stimulated a response in kind from the Russians. As a result, the new pipeline from Baku through Georgia to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, long championed by the U.S. government, has been more a bone of contention between Washington and Moscow than a basis for cooperation.

The international politics of oil and gas in the Caspian Sea region cannot be explored here—beyond the account provided in Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia’s chapter—other than to point out that the field of play is broad, involving Central Asia as well as the Caucasus; populated with important third-party players, such as the Europeans, Iranians, Turks, Chinese, and the oil majors; and governed by cooperative as well as competitive rules. Even the often politically contentious issue of pipelines has a positive side to it, and at times, as in the case of the Caspian Pipeline System (CPS), the United States and Russia have worked together. This, however, has not been true for the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline,
the major pipeline crossing Georgia. The BTC Pipeline has from the beginning stirred Russian discontent, particularly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, casting another shadow over the Georgian–Russian relationship.

The U.S. agenda in the Caucasus, of course, involves more than oil, and, indeed, has evolved markedly in recent years. As Brenda Shaffer and others have noted, since September 11, Georgia and Azerbaijan (especially Azerbaijan) have taken on a special importance in Washington’s war on terrorism. In a way that oil considerations did not, the new American preoccupation with global terrorism emboldened the Bush administration to override Congressional restrictions on aid to Azerbaijan and has prompted the Pentagon in particular to pay attention to ways these countries can be useful pieces in the mosaic of its strategic planning. Here too, however, while the United States and Russia share a common concern about global terrorism and cooperate in many respects in the fight against it, in the Caucasus their notions of the threat and how to respond are less in tandem. Thus, even on a question where the United States and Russia generally see eye to eye, their competing views of the conflicts in the Caucasus and where terrorism fits in make it hard for Georgia to mobilize a relationship with one of these countries in order to avoid yielding to the other. As a result, for Georgia, the war on terrorism affords neither a firm basis for building ties with the United States nor a very helpful context in which to deal with Russia.

Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia all tend to see Russia and the United States as the decisive actors in the region. Given the region’s impasses, bloody-mindedness, and disarray, the natural instinct is to assume that help and conceivably solutions must come from the outside. Because Moscow and Washington, however, are not viewed as equally benevolent, Tbilisi, Baku, and Yerevan feel forced to choose between them and then to labor to ingratiate themselves with the one they have chosen. But, because a thoroughgoing alliance with the United States is unavailable and such an alliance with Russia is unwanted (even by Armenia), each country in the South Caucasus must protect its options with both of the major powers. Again, realities are harsh, requiring a delicate balancing act.

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Thus, a remarkably formidable array of interlaced problems stands behind the stark notion of the twin security challenge facing Georgia: the "insecurity of statehood" within an "insecure neighborhood." Seeing how interconnected and tangled the many sides of the statehood problem are, it is disconcerting, although perhaps understandable, that Georgia has done so little to collect its thoughts and articulate a strategic doctrine to address the challenges facing it. In his chapter, Darchiashvili rehearses the various false starts in this direction—the diverse attempts to outline something that might serve as a defense agenda. None, beginning with the so-called military doctrine adopted by the Georgian Parliament in 1997 and ending with one last abortive effort by the government in 2003, ever made it off the shelf. All of these efforts, including the military’s own 2002 White Paper and the official 2000 “Vision and Strategy for the Future,” were either not vetted sufficiently within the political establishment to gain general acceptance or, worse, not sufficiently refined and attuned to the hard realities facing Georgia to be useful.

The 2000 “Vision and Strategy for the Future” well illustrated the problem. It spoke in sweeping terms of strengthening Georgian citizens’ “feelings of loyalty to the Constitution and a sense of common citizenship” and of the “need to consolidate the unity of the state by building a stronger sense of nationhood among its people and regions.”23 It also acknowledged the need for a “long-term national program,” but this only served to recognize a problem, not to conceptualize it; to highlight a challenge, not to break it down into its constituent parts. General principles—such as respecting territorial integrity, protecting human rights, abjuring blockades, and preserving the environment—are fine, but they are at best a lodestar, not the starting point for disaggregating threats and devising a strategy by which to respond.

As Darchiashvili reports in his chapter, President Saakashvili and his colleagues have set in motion an effort to create a national security concept more directly relevant to the concrete challenges facing Georgia, and by spring 2005 it was about to appear. How close the new leaders would come to accomplishing this goal, and how easily they would overcome the lethargy and bureaucratic indifference of the past stood as a major test of their ability to transcend the limitations of their predecessors.

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Without a fundamental guide of this sort, as Darchiashvili stresses, it is difficult to devise a working military strategy, determine the necessary size of forces, and assign missions. The 2000 “Vision and Strategy for the Future” did contain a section devoted to defense strategy that effects a somewhat closer connection between need and response. Georgia, it says, must be able to defend the pipelines crossing its territory, defeat “attacks by modest size forces,” prevent “smaller-scale infiltration of border areas,” and “deal with potential unrest or disruption along the borders that might result from violence in neighboring regions.” Although it also casually demands a military capable of “defeating any type of armed forces that might seek to divide Georgia or to change, by force of arms, its political system or form of government,” elsewhere the document speaks more realistically of an ability to “counter threats until assisted by the international community.”24 Still, as Darchiashvili notes, the task of spelling out a practical, well-defined defense posture entails much more.

THE OUTSIDE WORLD

If Georgian efforts to think hard about the elaborate and intricate nature of the security challenge facing their country have fallen short, how well have the major outside powers done in identifying their stakes in Georgia and the best way of securing them? As Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia argue in their chapter, until recently, not very well. Not only have the Europeans and the Americans for much of the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union failed to treat the challenge of Georgia and the region in its full interlocking complexity, they, unlike the Georgians, had long underestimated the stakes involved.

In fairness to the Americans and Europeans, it was easy to underestimate the stakes. Were it not for the oil, it well might be thought that those on the outside would be wise simply to wall themselves off from the chaos, tension, and backwardness of the region—in effect, creating a (political) “sarcophagus” around it much like that for the Chernobyl reactor. The Iranians and Turks, even though they border the Caucasus, have good reason to want to concentrate on their primary foreign policy fronts, which lie elsewhere. The Europeans have their hands full closer to home and, indeed, within their home. The United States scarcely needs

24 “Georgia and the World.”
yet another corner of the globe to police or remake. Even the Russians might be better off if they could distance themselves from the uncertainties in the Caucasus, and focus on countries and regions—such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Central Asia—that are economically, strategically, and politically more critical to them.

None of these states, of course, will do anything of the kind. They cannot and will not in the first instance because of the inertia of past behavior—because of the assumptions, prejudices, aspirations, fears, and actions that have gotten them to this point. So for the foreseeable future, most of the players, including Russia, are likely to do more or less what they have been doing in the Caucasus, unless the course of events within the region changes fundamentally or, in the case of Russia, the summer and fall 2004 surge of terrorism tied to the war in Chechnya provokes the Putin administration into a suddenly more assertive policy. Putin's renewed talk of attacking wherever necessary beyond Russian borders against terrorists—Chechen and otherwise—and careless rumblings within the Russian political elite about securing Russia's position in Abkhazia and South Ossetia by extending recognition to these territories are straws in the wind. Still, for the moment, the safer bet is that none of the outside countries, including Russia, is likely to assert itself dramatically in the Caucasus. At the same time, however, neither in all likelihood will any of them walk away from the region. Thus, on the one hand, they are unlikely to invest heavily in recasting relationships, forcing change, or, alas, facilitating peace. On the other hand, they are equally unlikely to run great risks to exploit instability, displace rivals, or build strategic outposts.

The second reason that these outside countries cannot—or best not—forget Georgia and the Caucasus is the one normally offered by policymakers and analysts when exhorting their governments to pay attention. Wherever the region ranks in the grand scheme of things, it has the capacity to produce things good and bad on a scale justifying Brussels, Berlin, London, Paris, Washington, and others' interest. The usual list begins with oil and gas—gas being more important to the Europeans, oil to the Americans, while both are important to the Iranians, Turks, and Russians. Then comes the trouble—the flow of drugs, arms, and the

25 The point is often made that the United States actually has a very low stake even in oil from this region, because it represents such a small a percentage of U.S. imports. This ignores the very real interest the United States has in getting as much oil as possible to the world market.
like, particularly in and around the breakaway territories; the risk that unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia will reignite; and the prospect of terrorists gaining a foothold. The Iranians, Turks, and Russians all have reason to contemplate how instability anywhere in the region could spill across their shared borders, and, with the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU in 2007, the Europeans will also become immediate neighbors to the Caucasus. As Helly and Gogia underscore, Europe will never be entirely secure if the Caucasus is left out of Europe’s security purview.

The Americans, since September 11, have a different concern: they see the region, particularly a state like Azerbaijan, as a battlement in their new war with global terrorism. Allied states with Muslim-majority populations are few and far between, and Washington values them not just for the facilities they may lend, but also for the examples they provide. Russia, it scarcely needs saying, views the region as an organic extension of its domestic agenda, beginning with the war in Chechnya and including the basing needs of its military, as well as a field of opportunity for Russian state monopolies and quasi-public corporations in communications, electricity, and the like.

According to Helly and Gogia, despite a range of initiatives and a fair volume of assistance, for most of the last decade neither the Europeans nor the Americans framed the challenge posed by Georgia quite as it merited. The United States and Europe, it is true, were more generous to Georgia on a per capita aid basis than to almost any other post-Soviet state, but they were slow to use this aid in a brutally direct way to induce institutional change and a serious struggle with corruption. They showed sympathy for Georgia’s position on the breakaway territories, but they were unwilling to take the lead in forming an international monitoring group that would relieve Georgia of its dependence on the Russians. They had at various points, including the 2004 rise in tensions, sought to keep the lid on in South Ossetia, but they had been reluctant to back a more assertive role for the OSCE in the conflict. The EU had toyed with developing a “strategy for the South Caucasus,” but then left it largely in abeyance. The United States had sided with Georgia at moments of heightened tension between Tbilisi and Moscow, but had done very little to mediate a long-term normalization of relations between the two countries.

Since the Rose Revolution, the engagement of the United States, the EU, and NATO has palpably grown. The “donor fatigue” of Shevard-
nadze’s last years has disappeared, replaced by a new surge in economic assistance, including $1 billion pledged by the international community at the June 2004 Brussels donors conference. In addition both NATO and the EU have clearly energized their approach to the country. Each has quickly moved to map out steps by which Georgia can bring itself more in line with the needs and practices of their organizations. President Bush’s visit to Georgia in May 2005, the first by a U.S. president, graphically underscored Washington’s eagerness to give the new regime its seal of approval and, in the process, to signal its stepped up concern over Moscow’s churlish behavior toward Tbilisi.

The task ahead, however, is formidable, and, if Europe and the United States truly mean to make a difference, they will have to go beyond the measures they have already undertaken. State-building and the arduous process of fashioning institutions capable of addressing corruption and restoring public confidence should be the priority of Western aid, but progress must also be achieved in thawing Georgia’s frozen conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Helly and Gogia credit the West with understanding that the outside world can contribute here only if the effort is genuinely multilateral, allowing the resources and influence of all parties, including Russia, to be brought to bear. Alas, they say, Russia has done little to foster a multilateral approach, and the West has not done enough to make what multilateralism there is effective. Matters were not helped in January 2005, when the Georgian leadership laid out an unusually generous peace plan for South Ossetia to the applause of Americans and Europeans, only to receive a stony dismissal from the South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoiti, then on a visit to Moscow—and his Russian hosts made no effort to contradict him.

This still leaves an important vulnerability in Georgia’s relations with the West, one noted by many of the authors in this book: the gap in expectations between Georgia’s hopes for integration into the West and, unsurprisingly, the West’s hesitancy to provide firm assurances that it will happen. Georgia’s new Western-oriented leadership not only desires Georgia’s membership in NATO and the EU, but believes membership in one or both is within reach. Washington and Brussels do not want to discourage Georgia or remove an incentive to domestic reform, but they are still not ready to embrace the prospect. The resulting ambiguity built into even positive steps such as Georgia’s action plan with NATO and the EU’s new European Neighborhood Policy reflect genuine ambiguity on
the West’s part, but this uncertainty carries the risk of, at some point, casting Georgia into the negative limbo that long characterized Ukraine’s relationships with NATO and the EU and that has only begun to dissipate in the wake of the Orange Revolution.

Important as these considerations are, they underestimate the stakes the outside world, including the United States and Europe, has in Georgia’s fate and the fate of its neighborhood. To appreciate these stakes at this other level, developments across the post-Soviet area must be factored in. True, what once was the Soviet Union no longer hangs together; it is a disintegrating space, with countries immersed in their subregions, and the subregions slipping away from the Russian core and fusing with often troubled neighboring areas. Yet, notwithstanding this fragmentation, trends within the post-Soviet space are similar, do interact, and have their greatest significance for the larger international setting as a composite. Viewed from this perspective, Georgia and its neighbors matter far more than most outsiders recognize in three respects.

First, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, many on the outside, particularly in Europe and the United States, casually assumed that the bulk of the new states would soon be part of the “third wave of democratization,” that is, would want to create open, democratic political orders buttressed by market-oriented economies. Over the intervening years, the scales fell from the eyes of these outsiders as the post-Soviet countries struggled and stumbled. But none of the major powers, including those closest to the post-Soviet space, had faced up to the danger that the bulk of these states at the outset of the new century were not in transition to some form of genuine democracy, however imperfect, but settling for an illiberal, counterfeit version. Not many policymakers in Washington, Brussels, or Tokyo (and unsurprisingly, in Beijing or Moscow) gave much thought to what the failure of most post-Soviet states to make it to democracy would mean for their own countries.

Until the Rose Revolution, the Orange Revolution, and the turmoil in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, the pattern was scarcely encouraging. The politically unreconstructed countries—Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—remained so, but rather than forming a doomed circle of increasingly isolated remnants of the past, they were joined by a steadily increasing number of states ready to imitate them, at least in part. Virtually the whole of Central Asia—including Kyrgyzstan, whose leader’s democratic aspirations were genuine at the start—had slowly slid from
the path of open political competition, meaningful political parties, transparent decision-making, and relative freedom of expression. Ukraine drifted further from, not toward, democracy in the initial rounds of the 2004 presidential election, until the regime overreached and provoked a public reaction much like the one in Georgia in 2003, only with still more dramatic consequences. In Russia’s case, few were able to explain how the Russians could turn an oxymoron like “managed democracy” into anything resembling a liberal democratic order. And in the Caucasus—in Armenia and Azerbaijan, not just in Georgia—the 2003 parliamentary and presidential elections veered powerfully in the wrong direction.

It may be that the revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan represent a historic countercurrent capable of stemming and perhaps reversing the general tide away from democratic reform. But for that to be so, those who led them must prove that they have reopened the door to democratic progress while simultaneously demonstrating that they have the ability to mitigate, if not solve, their countries’ problems. While it remains to be seen whether the Saakashvili government can prevail against the enormous obstacles facing it—or even whether in the process it can preserve its commitment to a more pluralistic and open political order and a more transparent and competitive economic order—the mere fact that leaders have come to power who believe these goals should be their guide breaks the discouraging general trend among post-Soviet states.

It would be naïve to take what happened in Georgia, Ukraine, let alone Kyrgyzstan as certain to inspire publics elsewhere while cowering their high-handed leaders, particularly since the events in these countries have yet to prove self-sustaining. Yet if orderly, progressive change within the post-Soviet space is important to stability there and beyond, every wisp of hope—every fragment of a positive model—deserves strong outside support. Moreover, as the post-Soviet space loses cohesion, the

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26 Indeed, if anything, leaderships in a number of states, including Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Russia were treating the Georgian case as a negative object lesson and taking steps to ensure that opposition groups were not able to mobilize street demonstrations around varied, but mounting grievances. Matters were not helped by chaos and political self-seeking among Kyrgyz politicians in the immediate weeks after the March 2005 upheaval in Bishkek.
effect of one state on another shrinks to its own immediate vicinity. Change is likely to be subregional, and each subregion will likely require its own constructive example of a state that has halted the slide toward illiberalism and resumed progress toward democracy. In an ideal world, the most influential candidate in Central Asia would be Kazakhstan (not Kyrgyzstan); in the west, Ukraine; and in the Caucasus, Georgia. That is not the way strategists in any of the world’s major capitals yet think.

Second, there is a critical factor checking the centrifugal forces within the post-Soviet space: Russia. Russia continues to be the single most powerful external influence on the political and economic life of every post-Soviet state, with the exception of the Baltic states. While weak in comparison to its former Soviet self, not to mention in comparison to other major powers, Russia has more economic, political, and military capacity to help or hinder its new neighbors than any other power. It also continues to see its stakes in these countries as greater than any other power does. Thus, to the extent that China, India, Pakistan, and the United States have interests in Central Asia, as they surely do; or Iran, Turkey, the EU, and the United States do in the Caucasus; or the United States and the EU do in Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, effective policy must cope with the Russian factor. No interested party can simply ignore the Russian dimension or assume that it will take care of itself.

The obverse is still more important: From the beginning, despite the original neglect, it has been apparent that the direction and character of Russian policy in the newly independent states would play a large role in defining the overall condition of Russian foreign policy. Invariably, therefore, it was certain to matter in Russia’s relations with other major powers. In the global contest that was the cold war, the axes of Soviet interaction with the United States, Europe, China, and Japan were direct—at the Elbe, in the Middle East, and across the nuclear divide. They have been replaced, in the murkier and more remote circumstances of the post–cold war world, by indirect encounters, as Russia maneuvers to preserve its influence among its new independent neighbors and the West goes about its own separate agenda in these states. Thus, if the United States, Europe, China, or Japan wants to put relations with Russia on a different footing or to enhance cooperation and manage discord, it will have to take account of the chemistry with Russia in these new intermediate regions. The same holds true for Russia in its relations with the other major powers.
In the 1990s, the chemistry between the West, particularly the United States, and Russia had grown progressively less promising. Gradually, the dynamic within the post-Soviet space had begun to take on the quality of strategic rivalry—over pipelines, NATO Partnership for Peace exercises, key bilateral relationships, and the overall direction of NATO policy. After September 11 and the equanimity with which Putin initially accepted the deployment of U.S. and other forces in Central Asia and U.S. Special Forces in Georgia, the trend toward rivalry appeared to dissipate. It now seems that this trend is anything but over. Although less openly and stridently, Putin and his people have made it plain over the last two years that they have no intention of ceding a dominant voice to the United States or any other combination of powers in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the former western republics. Sometimes with military resources or assertive diplomacy, but more often with economic clout, Moscow has underscored its determination to compete with any outside player, especially the United States, which is seen to be attacking Russia’s presence and influence.

Thus, if the United States and Europe hope to see the historically vexed issue of Russia’s relationship with the West resolved and Russia integrated into its universe, and if Russia wants something similar, the two sides will have to find ways of making the post-Soviet space an area of constructive, rather than destructive, interaction. No part of the post-Soviet space poses this challenge more sharply than the Caucasus and no country presents it in more neuralgic form than Georgia. Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan may all be bigger prizes, but in none of them, with the obvious exception of Ukraine, does perceived U.S. involvement arouse Moscow’s instant and emotional jealousy as intensely as in Georgia. And in Washington, no region raises more suspicion of Russia’s ill intentions than the Caucasus and no country seems more the object of Russia’s impatience and heavy-handedness than Georgia. Figuring out how the United States and Russia can work together rather than at cross purposes in Georgia, therefore, is not only crucial in addressing the security challenge facing Georgia, but vital to the kind of mutual relationship Moscow and Washington can build between themselves. Although Russia’s relationship with the EU is richer and more ramified, it too faces something of the same challenge.

Third, the future of much of the post-Soviet space remains a question mark. At this point, there is no way of knowing whether most, or even
any, of these new states will fashion stable political and economic orders; whether they will be able to manage the animosities that bubble up from within and threaten from without; whether they can overcome the maladies, including the corruption of values and institutions, that have taken root during the formative period of their independence; and whether they can escape the deformed politics that have kept other regions of the world in turmoil and ruin. Some states, of course, have a better chance of surviving these threats than others, and it is crucial to the entire post-Soviet region that Russia appears to be one of them, although its progress is likely to be uneven. If, however, there is a part of the post-Soviet space that represents the question mark in darkest outline, it is the Caucasus. It is the hard case.

Thus, if the major powers—not just the United States and the Europeans, but China, Japan, and for these purposes Russia as well—recognize the importance of seeing the uncertainty that hangs over the post-Soviet space resolved in a way that adds to the vitality and stability of the world outside, they need to give coherence and depth to their currently disparate, scattered, and incomplete engagements in this part of the world. If they come to see, as they should, the wisdom of laboring seriously to begin untangling the sources of tension and conflict widely prevalent throughout the post-Soviet space, the Caucasus is as good a place to start as any. More than any other region, it combines everything that can go wrong: war-torn societies and war-divided states; ethnic divisions; corrupted political societies; embattled reforms; economic failure; the scourge of drugs, illegal arms, and terrorists; as well as natural resources that others covet and that the have-nots are too ready to use against the have-nots.

If achieving progress on the hard case is the best way to create and temper a capacity for dealing with a generic problem, then the outside world has a reason to focus on Georgia and the Caucasus, one that again transcends the intrinsic significance of the region. I would not make the

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27 It is, of course, characteristic of European, Chinese, and Japanese policy that none of these countries has seen its stakes as extending to all parts of the post-Soviet Space. For China and Japan, this has left the Caucasus largely beyond their purview. In a companion volume to this book, I have made an argument why this is shortsighted. See Robert Legvold, ed., Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), especially the introduction.
indefensible argument that ameliorating Georgia’s security problems and, in particular, its separatist challenges is more important for the peace and stability of the Caucasus than finding a way out of the Nagorno-Karabakh impasse. Both problems, in fact, constitute the nucleus of the mutual insecurity problem in the region. The international politics of the area will not change fundamentally until both are resolved; although, as one untangles a dense knot by picking at one strand and then another, the same method might be applied in the Caucasus. No method, however, is likely to produce much, unless it is underpinned by an appreciation of how complex and ramified the security environment is for Georgia and its neighbors.

For that, we invite the reader to turn to the contributions of our co-authors. Ghia Nodia begins the book by probing the most profound “inner” dimension of the problem: the interplay between the burden of the past and the challenges as well as failures on the path to state-building and reform, and how all of this has shaped the way national security has been addressed under successive regimes. His core concept is the “national project,” by which he means the normative ideal that defines the sources of state sovereignty and the desired political order. He locates the main “sources of Georgian insecurity” in the failure to integrate competing national projects, a criminalized economy, and ineffective constitutional and institutional reform.

In the second chapter, Christoph Zürcher turns to the failure of the Georgian state to prevent violent mobilizations during its transition to independence, most particularly in the loss of South Ossetia in 1991 and of Abkhazia in 1993. David Darchiashvili then analyzes the various stages in the development of a Georgian defense posture. He deals directly with the military dimension of national security, including the construction of the armed forces, the devising of strategic doctrine, the management of civil–military relations, and the taming of renegade military actors. In chapter four, Jaba Devdariani looks at the Russian dimension of Georgian security, and in the following chapter, Oksana Antonenko zeroes in on the Russian role in the Georgian–Abkhazian conflict.

In the sixth chapter, Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia consider U.S. and European policies toward Georgia as part of their approach to security in the Caucasus, including support for state-building and economic development. Tom de Waal, in the seventh chapter, turns to what might be thought of as the indirect regional factors complicating Georgian national...
security: the energy and the security stakes of various players in the oil and gas pipelines in Georgia; second, the impact of regional conflicts in which Georgia may not be directly involved but suffers the effects nonetheless (Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia–Turkey, and Azerbaijan–Iran), and finally, regional organizations that bear on security, such as the unsteady collaboration among Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova (GUAM). Finally, in the conclusion to this volume, my co-editor, Bruno Coppieters, reframes the security challenge facing Georgia by placing it in a spatial context that features the varied dynamics in center–periphery relations and then offers thoughts on what the future holds.

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28 GUUAM has once again become GUAM, since Uzbekistan no longer finds Georgia and Ukraine after their revolutions to be attractive partners.
At the end of 1919, a newly independent Georgia was struggling with a terrifying range of challenges on all fronts. A border dispute with Armenia remained unsolved; there was a small but troublesome list of bilateral problems with Azerbaijan; and the government in Tbilisi was asserting a contested claim to the region of Batumi, which the British were on the point of abandoning. Amid this chaos, Georgia’s sophisticated foreign minister, Yevgeny Gegechkori, was still trying to keep the idea of a broad-based Transcaucasian confederation between Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan alive. Gegechkori was the prime mover behind a series of conferences designed to re-establish ties between the three republics, which had been severed the year before. But British journalist C.E. Bechhofer, who met with Gegechkori in 1919, was struck both by how unready the Georgians were to compromise with their neighbors and by the inauspicious regional climate overall. He wrote:

What he [Gegechkori] did not tell me, but what was evident enough to any one who knew a little of the inside of the Transcaucasian situation, was that Georgia could not count upon Azerbaijan[’s] support in the event of a Turkish or pro-Turkish invasion of the Caucasus. Nor as time was to show was the Tartar–Armenian [Azerbaijani–Armenian] Treaty worth the paper it was written on.¹

Bechhofer comments further that what he calls the “the recent Georgian–Armenian squabble” of December 1918 might have ended in Armenian occupation of the city of Tiflis (Tbilisi) if the British had not

intervened in defense of the Georgians.\textsuperscript{2} Georgian historians have a different account of the same episode, asserting that British troops prevented Georgia’s army from going on the offensive. In any event, it was an outside power that played the critical role in bringing the intra-Caucasian fighting of 1918 to a close.

Four external powers—Russia, Turkey, Germany, and Great Britain—were the big players in the South Caucasus in this period, and each of them at various times was seen as the protector of the three Caucasian states—Russia protected Armenia, Turkey protected Azerbaijan, and Great Britain and Germany protected Georgia, respectively. The continued quarrels between the states of the Caucasus make it clear that the promise of protection from a big military power superseded any feelings of regional solidarity or loyalty. Indeed, in a region of contested borders, the support of the most dominant power (in 1919, this was briefly Britain) could be exploited effectively to get the upper hand in disputes, such as the one over Batumi. In the case of Armenia, picking your allies carefully could make the difference between survival and annihilation.

In 2005, the three small recently independent post-Soviet states of the Caucasus are driven by similar calculations in their foreign and security policies, as they try to buy into security arrangements that strengthen their independence and borders. Armenia still relies on Russia as its main strategic ally, Georgia looks to the United States, while Azerbaijan’s closest ally is Turkey. These protection agreements tend to work against cross-Caucasian cooperation. The need of the states of the Caucasus to obtain security from big external powers means that once again these outside powers, as well as other players such as international oil companies and the Islamic Republic of Iran, fracture the security picture of the region.

Pulled apart by conflicting interests, the South Caucasus and its immediate neighborhood has never formed an easily recognizable “region” in the way that, for example, the Baltic states or the Benelux countries have. The metaphor of a crossroads or meeting place of different cultures, rather than a region, is much more commonly applied to the South Caucasus. From 1918 to 1920, Gegechkori was one of the few people trying to facilitate some kind of regional cooperation in the South Caucasus. More recently, Georgia has displayed little interest in close cooperation with its neighbors. Modern Georgia’s first president, Zviad

\textsuperscript{2} Bechhofer, \textit{In Denikin’s Russia and the Caucasus}, p. 54.
Gamsakhurdia, promoted an image of Georgia as a special European country that should immediately sever all links with Russia and its Soviet past, and that would turn into a country like Austria or Switzerland within a matter of years. His eccentric ideas about the common ethnic and cultural basis of the Caucasian peoples and that the Georgian ethnosc was part of an Ibero-Caucasian ethnocultural civilization distracted from regional integration. He ended by isolating his country from Russia, the West, and his South Caucasian neighbors. Gamsakhurdia's successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, intently focused his foreign policy on moving Georgia away from Russia and toward winning the protection of the United States, to the exclusion of both the European Union and Georgia's immediate neighbors. He showed almost no interest in enhancing political or economic integration with Georgia's neighbors and even his good relationship with Azerbaijan was based on high-level strategic and energy calculations rather than commercial links. Georgian political leaders have shown rhetorical support for their fellow leaders in Armenia or Azerbaijan or signed their name to initiatives, but these paper-thin commitments have been no substitute for the hard work of building a region.

My argument in this chapter is that Georgia's environment, both in the South Caucasus and in the wider region beyond, is not one of security, but of insecurity and that the failure of the three South Caucasian countries to imagine themselves as a region has deleterious effects on their long-term prospects. This is partly the fault of the Georgian government and the ambitions of the country's elites, and partly stems from deeper historical and geographical factors (such as the diverse and divisive history of the region and the role of Moscow) that have shaped political choices in the South Caucasus. The net result is that Georgia remains very much alone in its security arrangements. Even the much-vaunted energy pipelines being built across Georgia have negative aspects and do not necessarily contribute to a broader regional security architecture.

The regime change in Georgia in November 2003 that brought to power a new president, Mikheil Saakashvili, has changed many things, but the deep-rooted structure of regional insecurity is not one of them, at least not in the short term. Saakashvili's fight against black markets and corruption promises—if it works—to make cross-border trade more transparent. His vision of a more balanced foreign policy holds out the hope of a Georgia that is less of a hostage to Washington and Moscow. But with Saakashvili strongly concentrated on Georgia's internal prob-
lems and with the intractable security problems of the wider region unresolved, the road forward in the South Caucasus is going to be a long one.

SECURITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

The geographical definition of the “South Caucasus” has only enjoyed wide currency since the mid 1990s. Bounded to the north by the defining landmark of the vast Caucasus Mountain range, the territories of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were formerly collectively called by the Russocentric term “Transcaucasus” (or “Zakavkaz’e”) before independence allowed the three countries to employ the more neutral term of “South Caucasus.” But while the mountains form a conclusive barrier to the north (albeit one whose exact boundaries might be disputed by groups such as the Abkhazians, Ossetians, or Lezgins), the southern limits of the region are more arbitrary. Broadly speaking, the southern frontier of the region was drawn by Russian imperial rulers, first in tsarist times and then by the Soviet Union. Its exact borders have been defined more by history than geography. The fact that the South Caucasus includes Batumi but not Kars is a matter of historical contingency (stemming from the events of 1915–1921) that leaves Batumi far closer politically to Moscow than to the nearby Turkish port of Trabzon. Thus, the Soviet legacy still defines the modern identity of this region as a region in innumerable ways.3

From the security perspective, a brief glance at the history of the region gives the impression that the phrase “Caucasian security” is actually an oxymoron. The South Caucasus has been a battlefield of empires for centuries, with local peoples used as willing or unwilling combatants in a seemingly endless series of wars. This imperial legacy of enforced cohabitation and great power war by proxy has never provided the region with a stable security framework, except for one imposed from above.

Georgia, with Tiflis/Tbilisi as its capital, has frequently been acknowledged as the center of the region. Tiflis was the administrative capital of the region when it was part of the Russian Empire and again during the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation of 1918. With the border between

Armenia and Azerbaijan, the longest in the South Caucasus, closed by the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, Georgia is again (by default) the regional center for any international organizations, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that want to deal in all three countries.

It is worth stressing that the Georgians themselves have generally not laid claim to a leading role in the South Caucasus, and Georgia as such has no tradition of dominance in the region. The status of Tiflis/Tbilisi as a capital city was conferred by Russia in tsarist times, but neither Armenians nor Azerbaijanis regard the city as the capital of the Caucasus. Over the last century, Georgia’s nation-building has consistently clashed with the ambitions of its ethnic minorities, who have looked for protection not to Tbilisi but to Moscow (the Abkhazians and the Ossetians), to Baku (the Azerbaijanis), or to Yerevan (the Armenians). At the same time, there is no comparable Georgian diaspora scattered across the rest of the South Caucasus that might have given Tbilisi the status of a protector for citizens outside the borders of Georgia. In the Caucasus family, you could say, Georgia has been one of the competing children, not a parent. Indeed, the problem might be defined as a family that has no parents, only intervening uncles and stepmothers.

The Caucasus’s traditional stepmother has been Moscow. In Soviet times, 50 percent of the region’s trade was with Russia (the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic), and economic relations among the three Caucasian republics were poorly developed. Political negotiations for resources and favors were generally conducted in Moscow rather than in collaboration with comrades from Baku or Yerevan.

The role (or lack thereof) of Georgia in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute illustrates this dysfunctional regional dynamic. When the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict first erupted in 1988, Georgia was a Soviet republic and in no position to mediate. At the first signs of trouble in Nagorno-Karabakh in February 1988, the Politburo dispatched a motorized battalion of 160 Soviet Interior Ministry troops from Georgia to Nagorno-Karabakh to keep order. Even at this early stage, it was already deemed too risky to send a battalion from Armenia or Azerbaijan to the region. However, even if many of the personnel of that first battalion sent to Nagorno-Karabakh were Georgian, it is safe to assume that its commander was a Slav.

Politburo transcripts (released in 1992) show that the only Georgian in the Politburo, Eduard Shevardnadze, was the first to offer a proposal
for resolving the conflict. Shevardnadze’s proposal was to upgrade the status of Nagorno-Karabakh to that of autonomous republic. But his advice was not heeded and his involvement seems to have ended there. Shevardnadze’s proposal was taken up again later in 1988, but by then it was already too late.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a dispassionate observer might have expected a newly independent Georgia to be a useful intermediary between the Armenians and Azerbaijani when the Karabakh dispute escalated once again into a full-fledged interstate war in 1991. Instead it was Russia’s President Boris Yeltsin and his Kazakhstani counterpart, Nursultan Nazarbaev, who launched the most high-profile peace initiative of that year, as both of them visited Stepanakert, the regional capital of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Georgia’s failure to mediate between its warring neighbors was probably due in part to the fact that it was too immersed in its own troubles from 1991 to 1994 to have the political will to resolve anyone else’s problems. Of greater importance was the fact that Georgia, which was confronting the attempted secessions of the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, supported Azerbaijan’s fundamental position in the Karabakh dispute—that the territorial integrity of the new post-Soviet states must be upheld and separatism must be curtailed. Forging a close strategic relationship with Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Shevardnadze therefore essentially supported Azerbaijan on the Karabakh issue.

A look at the tangled web of relations between the South Caucasian countries and their immediate neighbors suggests that hard realist calculations are much more important than culturally or historically determined factors in defining priorities. For example, despite all their rich cultural and historical interconnections over two centuries, Georgia’s relations with Russia are currently very poor. In addition, Georgia’s often troubled history with predominantly Muslim Azerbaijan has not prevented these two countries from developing a good relationship over the last ten years; and although Russia and Armenia both talk up the age-old affinities that supposedly underlie their alliance, those same types of considerations do not explain why Armenia (which has a population that is approximately 98 percent Christian) has a good strategic partnership with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The same types of pragmatic considerations inform Georgia’s relations with Armenia—two nations with an ancient Christian heritage whose foreign policies are not, however, governed by
this common historical experience. Landlocked Armenia relies on the Georgian Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi for most of its foreign imports. Georgia is also the conduit for Russian gas and oil exports to Armenia. But this link is not backed up by broader political or economic cooperation between Georgia and Armenia. The main road on the Georgian side of the border with Armenia in the Javakheti region is one of the worst in the Caucasus and there are currently no commercial flights at all between Yerevan and Tbilisi.

The Georgian–Armenian conflict of December 1918, over the Lori and Akhalkalaki regions, lasted only two weeks. But tension remains around the Georgian region of Javakheti in general and around the town of Akhalkalaki in particular. Approximately 5 to 6 percent of the population of Georgia is Armenian, and in Javakheti the figure is more than 90 percent. Javakheti Armenians’ discontent with Tbilisi is a simmering problem that, while it does not conspicuously hurt top-level relations between Armenia and Georgia, creates suspicions lower down in Georgian society.

Strategically, Armenia and Georgia look in opposite directions—toward Moscow and Washington, respectively. In 1995, Armenia signed an agreement allowing the Russian military to remain at the base in Gyumri for twenty-five more years. Two years later, this agreement was supplemented by a comprehensive “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance.” The Armenian and Russian armies train together and cooperate closely. On an economic level, Russia is affecting a gradual takeover of many of Armenia’s most important assets, including Armenia’s nuclear power station and many of its industrial plants. In sharp contrast, Georgian leaders consistently say they want to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and have made it a priority for Russia to close its two remaining military bases in the country. It is in Armenia’s strategic interest for the bases at Batumi and Akhalkalaki in Georgia to remain open, as these bases help allow the Russian military to supply the Russian base in Gyumri, Armenia. There has also been plenty of both human and technical Russian military traffic across the Georgian-

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Armenian border (although this has decreased since Russia and Georgia set up their mutual visa regime in 2000). In addition, the Akhalkalaki base is virtually the only employer for the local Armenian population in the district, and its closure may have a catastrophic effect on the local economy.

Georgia’s relations with Azerbaijan appear to be much better than its relations with Armenia. Although the two countries have had border disputes over the Zakatala region in the past, they have not flared up in recent memory. Both countries now have a declared strategic orientation toward the West, embodied in their commitment to the highly politicized Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline project (which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter). In addition, the countries’ two previous long serving presidents, Shevardnadze and Aliyev, also forged a very public alliance during the 1990s—even though they had been ideological opponents when they were members of Mikhail Gorbachev’s Politburo in the 1980s. Aliyev even “donated” Azerbaijan’s transit fees for the BTC Pipeline to Georgia at a time when the project appeared to be in trouble.

Yet the Georgian–Azerbaijani partnership is not as close as it seems. Cooperation on the huge infrastructure project of the BTC Pipeline has not translated into substantial lower-level economic collaboration. In line with the particular traditions of the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan’s strategic priorities are proving to be different from Georgia’s. Azerbaijani-Russian relations have thawed since President Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia. As two former KGB officers, Putin and Heydar Aliyev were able to strike up a good relationship, which was in strong contrast to the strained relations between Putin and Shevardnadze. In 2000, Russia conspicuously imposed visa requirements on Georgia while continuing to waive them for Azerbaijan. And Moscow’s prompt and warm congratulations to Ilham Aliyev in October 2003, following his victory in Azerbaijan’s disputed presidential election, were in strong contrast to Russia’s ten-day silence following Mikheil Saakashvili’s overwhelming—and entirely undisputed—victory in the presidential elections in Georgia in January 2004. Azerbaijan and Georgia’s different relationships with Russia suggest that Baku and Tbilisi do not see eye to eye on all strategic issues.

The experience of postwar Europe demonstrates that a close trading relationship and open borders between countries are prerequisites for closer strategic alignment. Measured against this yardstick, the three Caucasian countries are painfully estranged from one another. Indeed, the
semi-isolation of Georgia from its two South Caucasian neighbors is most obvious at the borders. Passing from one former Soviet republic to another in this region can take many hours: commercial traffic is subject to heavy tariff fees plus substantial bribes; drivers with cars bearing the license plate of one country are reluctant to cross into another, for fear of being harassed for bribes by the traffic police across the border.

As a result, legitimate trade between Georgia and its neighbors is mainly restricted to timber, wheat, and energy products. The disincentives to any kind of joint ventures, let alone to any broader Caucasian common market, are huge. What is more, this does not appear to be a case of corrupt local officials sabotaging the grand plans of their leaders. This isolation seems to be intrinsic to the political and economic structure of the South Caucasus. These problems are not merely unfortunate bureaucratic obstacles which, when removed, will release pent-up entrepreneurial energy, but are products of a deep-rooted political economy where short-term political interests oppose longer-term economic progress.

The economy of the South Caucasus is divided up among a number of powerful players who seek stable monopolies to keep their political power well-funded and secure. In Georgia, a situation has developed whereby widespread poverty, an informally privatized economy, and weak and corrupt law enforcement agencies have made the black economy all-pervasive, endangering any attempts to build up a properly funded and functioning state. Zurab Zhvania, Georgia’s late prime minister, said that because of smuggling and non-payment of taxes, the Georgian government had lost 60 million lari ($29 million) from uncollected tobacco revenue alone in 2003 and almost $200 million from non-declared oil products. An American specialist puts the issue even more starkly, saying that, “The [Georgian] government could eliminate its fiscal deficit if it would just fully collect the taxes on two products, imported gasoline and cigarettes.” A Georgian expert on organized crime, Giorgi Glonti, estimates that the Georgian economy “is 60 to 70 percent dependent on the black


market, which sells mostly smuggled goods such as food, alcohol, cigarettes, and other manufactured goods.”

Often the distinction between legal and illegal is less clear-cut. Tony Vaux has argued, “Despite the appearance of being a crumbling post-Soviet state, Georgia is really a thriving free-market economy. The problem is that regulation of that economy depends on the influence of clan and criminal networks rather than on the rational actions of the state.”

Perhaps it would be better to say that the market is not “free” at all, but regulated by the narrow political considerations of a few individuals (some of them state actors) who are not interested in the long-term economic development of the state as a whole.

In regions where the rule of law is weak, the question of the legality of some economic activity is hard to define. But the people who control timber in northern Armenia or western Georgia, hazelnuts or cigarettes in Ajara, petroleum products of all kinds in Azerbaijan, or scrap metal all over Georgia have good reasons to fear free trade. As a result, Georgia’s ambitions to be a transportation corridor have so far made it into an attractive route for criminals. For example, the country has become a transit zone for the international drug trade. Louise Shelley of the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TRACC) writes that, “According to analysts at Interpol, in the 1990s the southern route [across the South Caucasus] for the drug trade now carries 10 percent of the drugs trafficked from Afghanistan to European markets, a non-existent share before the end of the USSR.”

Some of the illicit drugs—heroin and raw opium from Afghanistan—appear to be crossing from Iran into the South Caucasus before passing onward to the Balkans. Other drugs almost certainly make their way through Turkmenistan and across the Caspian Sea, although obtaining data from the highly secretive state of Turkmenistan makes this hard to verify. Svante Cornell makes the point that Georgia is particularly hard hit by the use of this narcotics route, not least because the “Georgian security services are ill-equipped

to deal with the problem, and have apparently been infiltrated by trafficking networks to a greater extent than in Azerbaijan.\footnote{Svante Cornell, “The Growing Threat of Transnational Crime,” in Dov Lynch, ed., The South Caucasus: A Challenge for the EU, Chaillot Papers no. 65 (December 2003), p. 33, http://www.iss-eu.org/public/content/chaile.html.}

With Georgia’s borders all too often closed to the poor but honest businessman, but disturbingly open to organized crime, state authority is constantly vulnerable. The presence of several dozen “professional mujahedeen” (some with ties to al-Qaeda) in the Pankisi Gorge from 2001 to 2002 can probably be attributed to Georgia’s weak and corrupt security forces and borders officials. Georgia thus became for a while a haven for international terrorists, and the Pankisi region also became the launching pad for the disastrous expedition led by Chechen commander Ruslan Gelayev to the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia in October 2001 that severely undermined the Georgian–Abkhazian peace process.\footnote{For more detail on the Gelayev expedition in the Kodori Gorge, see the chapter in this volume by Oksana Antonenko. For more detail on the Pankisi Gorge question, see the chapter by Jaba Devdariani.} This was a blatant case of the country’s endemic corruption undermining its own statehood.

Corruption and border issues are perhaps the biggest challenges that Saakashvili has pledged to tackle. The arrest of powerful figures associated with the Shevardnadze regime on corruption charges, a drive to clean up the customs services, operations against smuggling on the Georgian–Azerbaijani border and in Ajara—all these actions suggest that he understands the scale of the problem, if not necessarily which methods need to be used to combat it. The case of South Ossetia highlights the dilemma facing Saakashvili: nothing can be treated in isolation, yet the Georgian government lacks the resources to fight all of its problems simultaneously. Georgia’s “anti-smuggling operation” against South Ossetia in June 2004 quickly escalated into the worst political standoff between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali in more than a decade.

As well as providing Tbilisi with its biggest security headache, the inability to resolve the conflicts of the 1990s also, needless to say, continues to undermine the formation of a healthier economic environment in the South Caucasus. A negotiated end to the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia conflicts would weaken a number of powerful cartels in the region. To name three examples: (1) the Armenian military, which has control over much of the Armenian economy and the
traffic that travels on the single road between Armenia and Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh, would lose out if the border with Azerbaijan, closed since 1990, were to reopen; (2) the authorities and security structures in Samegrelo district complicit in smuggling gasoline, cigarettes, and hazelnuts across the border between western Georgia and Abkhazia would lose a great deal were that border to be fully open to road and rail traffic; and (3) if the main north-south rail route from Russia to Georgia and Armenia across Abkhazia were to reopen as a result of progress over the Georgian–Abkhazian dispute, that would also hurt those who are making millions of dollars a year in profit from the semi-legal road trade across South Ossetia.

In other words, strong vested criminal interests oppose the development of a Caucasian common market. The only big cross-Caucasian projects currently underway are two energy pipelines being built across Georgia and Azerbaijan, which are funded by Western oil companies and thus mainly immune to parochial economic interests. However—and I turn to a more detailed discussion of the strategic impact of the pipelines later in this chapter—their potential for boosting regional trade is mixed at best. Once construction of the two pipelines is finished and the final compensation payments to landowners in Azerbaijan and Georgia are handed out, no one along the route stands to derive further special economic benefits. The profits will go to oil companies and governments in Baku, Tbilisi, Ankara, and the West.

At the same time, there is a real risk that the pipeline projects will skew the cross-Caucasian economy. This is because of the “Dutch Disease” syndrome. Three experts writing about the potential risks to Azerbaijan define this syndrome as follows:

Dutch Disease occurs when large amounts of foreign exchange earned from the sale of a commodity such as oil are converted into local currency. The effect is to raise the demand for local currency, leading to appreciation of the exchange rate. As a result, imports become cheaper and exports more expensive. This decline in price competitiveness weakens the labor-intensive manufacturing sector.12

In 2001, Azerbaijan’s oil sector accounted for 67.5 percent of the country’s industrial production. Output in the non-oil sector has declined sharply, and exports of goods to Russia, the country’s largest trading partner, more than halved between 1997 and 2001. This trend is only likely to intensify as a large tide of foreign currency revenues begins to enter Azerbaijan in the next few years. Azerbaijan’s non-oil economy could simply collapse. The implications for Georgia of such a scenario are not clear: it could lead to an increase in Georgian exports to Azerbaijan, although Georgian production is still so low that this seems unlikely. The important point is a more general one: a sharp boost in the energy sector is likely to have a dramatic (and not necessarily positive) effect on the economies of the South Caucasus. The environment in which these big energy profits will be made, one of cartel-dominated economies and obstructive borders, is not one where free trade will develop any time soon.

**PIPLINES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS**

In 2005 and 2006, two new energy pipelines will comprehensively change the energy profile and strategic shape of the South Caucasus. The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline is due to be completed in early 2005 and is scheduled to be followed a year later by the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzerum (or South Caucasus) gas pipeline, which will run parallel to BTC through Azerbaijan and Georgia before diverging from it in Turkey. Each of these pipelines is by itself larger than any infrastructure project ever to be built in the region. These projects will transform Georgia’s place in the world in a strategic if not an economic sense, binding the country closely to Turkey and the West and giving Western countries an added interest in the stability of a country through which oil and gas must be safely delivered to their markets. Yet such a high-profile project also inevitably carries security risks, and Georgia has probably underestimated the long-term security challenge that the pipelines will present.

In purely economic terms, the BTC Pipeline will not make a big impact on Georgia. This is in contrast to Azerbaijan, where the rewards will be huge. It has been estimated that at an oil price of only $25 a barrel, Azerbaijan already could earn total revenues of more than $17 billion from oil production and shipment by the year 2010. If the current, much higher price of oil is maintained, the revenues will be even greater. Georgia stands to earn far less—it will only receive approximately $50 million
dollars a year from tariff fees along its comparatively small section of the route. This has led to accusations against Shevardnadze from people such as his successor Mikheil Saakashvili that he “oversold” BTC to the Georgian population.

The Baku–Erzerum gas pipeline will certainly bring greater immediate benefits to Georgia by providing a reliable supply of Caspian Sea gas to whole areas of the country that were previously dependent on irregular Russian gas supplies or entirely without gas. The fate of the Baku–Erzerum Pipeline still depends on whether an energy deal signed by the Shevardnadze government and the Russian gas giant Gazprom in 2003—the full implications of which are not yet clear—undermines the new pipeline. In addition, as Armenia continues to rely on Russian gas shipped via Georgia and was negotiating with Iran for the construction of an Iran–Armenia gas pipeline, Georgia found itself at the center of two gas routes planned by politically opposed blocs: Azerbaijan–Georgia–Turkey versus Russia–Georgia–Armenia–Iran.

BTC has had two incarnations. The first project was initiated by Turkey, which stood to gain by it because the ultimate destination point at the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea would reduce the constant environmental threat posed by oil tankers from the Black Sea ports of Novorossiisk and Poti passing through the narrow channel of the Bosporus next to Istanbul. The idea really took flight, however, when it won strong support from the Clinton administration in Washington in 1997 and 1998. In Congressional testimonies during those years, top U.S. officials such as Steve Sestanovich, Richard Morningstar, Frederico Pena, and Bill Richardson promoted BTC as a project that would improve U.S. energy security while buttressing Azerbaijan and Georgia.

From the beginning, many were worried that the initial plans for BTC were too driven by political interests and were an example of the “flag leading trade.” Wayne Merry, a former Pentagon and State Department official who was present at some of the initial discussions about the pipeline, said that thinking about the project was extremely muddled. According to Merry, the initial motivation was to compensate Turkey for the revenues it was losing as a result of sanctions against Iraq after the 1991 Persian Gulf war:

Only [later] did other issues—and other personal and institutional prejudices—come into play. The oil companies always wanted a southern route through Iran to make use of their
existing local and global distribution infrastructure. This conflicted with powerful interests in Washington—the anti-Iran faction (who remain capable of blocking initiatives). Then came interest in a [northwestern] route to Novorossiisk, which ran into the anti-Russian faction who feared “neo-imperialism” (although there were significant voices favoring Russian involvement). Then came interest in doing something to help “Shevy” [Shevardnadze] for his often-compensated actions as Soviet foreign minister and to bolster Aliev—in both cases without considering that neither would live long enough to see such a project come on line.\textsuperscript{13}

Where the BTC Pipeline did not go was as important as where it did, and it could perhaps have been described as the “not-Russia, not-Iran pipeline.” In Congressional testimony in March 1998, the top U.S. strategist for the former Soviet Union, Strobe Talbott, gave an overt warning to Iran, which he termed a “state sponsor of terrorism,” and a veiled one to Russia about their perceived interests in the Caucasus. He said, “We continue to caution nations throughout the region about the development of close relations with Iran...Moreover, we are against any state in the region being allowed to dominate the region politically or economically. We will continue to work with all the states of the Caucasus to thwart the growth of Iran’s influence in the region.”\textsuperscript{14}

The oil industry was not fully convinced by all these arguments. Terry Adams, who headed the first multinational oil consortium in Baku, the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC), said that the scheme was too politicized and had not demonstrated its economic viability. Writing in 2000, Adams said:

\begin{quote}
[T]he support of any national independence, by definition, engages the external player in the broader geopolitical arena. For the U.S. this meant constraining Russian and Iranian influence in the region, whilst simultaneously requiring an increased presence in the region by the U.S. itself. This inevitably led to regional diplomatic and commercial conflicts,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Wayne Merry, letter to the author, November 4, 2003.
which almost by default became focused on the pipeline issue. All was based on an untested perception that enforced selection of pipeline routes for petroleum export from the Caspian would determine the long-term geopolitical outcomes.¹⁵

Around the year 2000, however, as circumstances changed in and around the region, oil companies (particularly BP Amoco) began to believe in the commercial possibilities of BTC. Construction finally began in 2003. The combination of promised oil reserves from the Caspian, a continuing high oil price, and increased uncertainty about the Middle East were the decisive factors. As "energy security" became a bigger priority for Western companies and governments, the attractions of a source of energy that was outside OPEC and controlled almost directly by international companies boosted the rating of the Caspian once again. As John Roberts has written, "The Caspian is important not because it is one of the world's major producing areas, but because it is likely to become one of the biggest producing areas in the world in which actual oil production remains essentially in the hands of market-oriented international energy companies."¹⁶ In this sense, BTC has transformed from the "not-Iran, not-Russia pipeline" into the "not-Iraq, not-Saudi Arabia pipeline"—an attractive alternative source of energy security that is under the full control of Western companies.

For Azerbaijan and Georgia, the three-country route of BTC had evident political benefits. For Azerbaijan, to have its politically weak neighbor Georgia as a transit country was attractive, as long as the jealousy of Iran and Russia could be handled. For Georgians, the pipeline has an overwhelmingly political character and has come to symbolize their independence as a state. Georgia's former President Eduard Shevardnadze made it clear that he saw the building of BTC as perhaps the most important achievement of his presidency. "Everyone recognizes that Georgia is a key link in this project," Shevardnadze said in August 2003. "The functioning of the pipeline will largely depend on our country. Georgia has

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become part of a sphere of global interests, which is a serious factor in strengthening our state independence.” 17

According to Gela Charkviani, one of Shevardnadze’s closest aides and his chief adviser on foreign policy, both Georgians and Russians recognized the important symbolism of a major pipeline that avoided Russia. Charkviani regarded it as a bulwark of Georgian sovereignty:

The Soviet Union was the most centralized country in the world and all movement in the Soviet Union was from the periphery to the center, not the other way round. There was never any connection from the periphery outside, from Tbilisi to Turkey. Turkey is much nearer than Moscow, but everything had to go via Moscow. Nothing had the right to cross the border until it got the blessing of the center. That mentality is still there.18

Despite its confused origins and delays, BTC now has near-universal backing in Azerbaijan and Georgia. No significant political voices have been raised against it in either country and opposition parties support it. Even concerned NGOs in Georgia such as Green Alternative have reservations not so much about the project itself as about what they maintain is its flawed or hasty implementation.

The notion that the two pipelines will help Georgia become an east-west transit corridor and win more independence from Russia is almost universally accepted. However, BTC is having other strategic repercussions for Georgia that are more uncomfortable and have not yet been widely appreciated. This is because the very political nature of the pipelines divides the region into “winners” and “losers” and is likely to exacerbate some existing arguments and tensions.

From the beginning, it was clear that the BTC Pipeline was unlikely to go through Armenia. The quickest and cheapest way of running a pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan would have been to build it along the Araxes River valley beside the Azerbaijani–Iranian border, through the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan and across into eastern Turkey. How-

18 Gela Charkviani, interview with the author, October 24, 2003.
ever, that would have meant sending it through a thirty-kilometer stretch of territory either in Iran—unacceptable to the United States—or across a similar distance in Armenia. The Armenia option enjoyed popularity among some in the West who saw it as a potential “peace pipeline.” John Maresca, formerly U.S. co-chairman in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)’s Minsk Group responsible for the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, argued for this idea in 1995, saying that it would have the positive benefit of involving Armenia in a shared cross-regional economic project. Maresca wrote that, “The possibility that a pipeline could be built across Armenia could encourage rational Armenians to join in an honest effort to find a solution to the Karabakh conflict, in order to capitalize on this unique opportunity. It will be a foolish mistake if the pipeline is not used with this possibility in mind.”

This did not happen, because the dynamics of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process were deemed far too uncertain to drive a fundamentally commercial project, and oil companies were understandably reluctant to allow the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh to determine the fate of their pipeline. As energy specialist Robert Ebel memorably put it, “Peace can bring a pipeline but a pipeline can’t bring peace.” Even more importantly, without a solution to the Karabakh dispute, the notion of building a pipeline across a hostile state was a priori unacceptable in Azerbaijan. Domestic political opinion would simply not countenance a route that was perceived as rewarding the enemy or, practically speaking, inviting sabotage.

Thus, BTC excludes Armenia—but in a way that has been evident for several years. Its impact on the Karabakh dispute is likely to be mixed. To take the more positive side first, the construction of a $3 billion project gives BP Amoco and other foreign investors a stake in a peaceful resolution of the conflict. At its nearest point, BTC will run just twelve kilometers north of the Karabakh cease-fire line. Azerbaijani officials have made fairly implausible claims about the threat “Armenian terrorism” poses to the pipeline. Azerbaijan’s Defense Minister Safar Abiev said, “Armenia is building up its arms stocks and poses a real security threat to the pipeline,”

while Deputy National Security Minister Fuad Iskenderov said that his organization had information about “Armenian terrorist organizations” that represented a threat. 21 These comments both overestimate Armenian destructive capacity and intent, and underestimate the vast and complex security features that the investors are installing to protect the pipeline. Most importantly, the Armenians have been made aware that any sabotage of the pipeline by anyone associated with Armenia would be an international diplomatic disaster for them—and are no doubt acting accordingly. Energy expert John Roberts has written:

Both the BTC and SCGP [South Caucasus Gas Pipeline] will be buried at least one meter underground for their entire length, so this should shield them against casual attacks. But there will be two pumping stations above ground in Azerbaijan, another two in Georgia, and various pumping stations and pressure reduction facilities in Turkey. Although these could constitute targets for guerrillas or terrorists, attacks on such installations are far more likely to occur as elements in a much more wide-ranging conflict than as part of a direct campaign against the pipelines themselves. So the underlying issue is the stability of the countries through which they pass.22

To take the terrorist threat first, two hypothetical dangers can be identified (although over the projected forty-year lifespan of BTC, many others can be expected to emerge). One is that the pipelines, Western-led projects in a pro-American country, could be targets for al-Qaeda or its allies. Militant Islamists have come and gone freely across Georgian borders over the last few years and a few dozen are still believed to be in and around the Pankisi Gorge area. This perceived danger has led to discussion as to whether Georgian Special Forces trained under the U.S. Georgia Train and Equip Program might be deployed to protect the pipeline.

The other hypothesis is that if Russia becomes a more authoritarian state and more hostile toward Georgia, then rogue Russian security elements or their allies—if not, it should be emphasized, official Russian forces themselves—could try to disrupt the pipelines. Many Georgians believe that some elements of the Russian security forces were complicit

21 Amirova et al., “Special Report: Trans-Caucasus Pipeline Underway at Last.”
in the two assassination attempts against Shevardnadze in 1995 and 1999—and that Russia’s refusal to extradite Georgia’s former security chief Igor Giorgadze is a partial admission of guilt in this. Moscow appears to have moved away from the kind of covert action it used in the Caucasus in the early and mid-1990s, but it could still return to it in the future. In both of these scenarios, the pipelines would become a security liability for Georgia, turning its territory into a battleground in which the Georgian government itself would be one of the weakest players—as happened in the row over the Pankisi Gorge in 2002, when both the United States and Russia argued out their security concerns in front of a confused Georgian government.

If we consider Roberts’s warning of a “wide-ranging conflict” in the Caucasus, the most serious danger is that of an overall resumption of hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Before his arrest in March 2000, the former Karabakh Armenian military commander, Samvel Babayan, talked of the need for a “fourth round” of the conflict in which the Azerbaijanis would be made to acknowledge their defeat. Shortly before his arrest, Babayan said, “If there is this fourth round, it will be decisive and then we won’t have to stop the war and sit down at the negotiating table. In the course of the war, both sides will have to make concessions and come up with a solution. If we stop again as we did in 1994, then we will forget again what this problem was.”

Although the line of the more moderate Karabakh Armenian government prevails, the views of Babayan, now released from prison, continue to enjoy popularity among many military men in the breakaway Armenian-ruled statelet. The danger is that if hostilities were to start again, these Armenian officers, unrestrained by the cease-fire, would identify the BTC Pipeline as a target.

This leads to another possible negative scenario that could result from BTC. Paradoxically, as has happened to several states in Africa and Latin America, energy wealth could do Azerbaijan more harm than good, by allowing the government to spend heavily on weapons and the country’s own security apparatus. If that were to happen and Azerbaijan were to buy itself an expensively re-equipped army, its bellicose rhetoric might become a self-fulfilling prophecy and lead to a new military offensive against Karabakh. Almost all outside observers agree that if two well-

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23 Samvel Babayan, interview with the author, February 26, 2000.
armed belligerents renewed the destructive conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, it would be a disaster for all sides. One likely outcome is that the Armenians would respond to an Azerbaijani offensive—some of them enthusiastically seeing this as Babayan’s “fourth round” of the conflict—and the South Caucasus would then be plunged into another regional war, with the Russian military drawn in on the Armenian side. The most immediate devastating consequences would be felt in Armenia and Azerbaijan, but Georgia and the pipelines would also suffer.

The prospect of another Karabakh war is fortunately remote—at least for the next few years. A more immediate problem that could develop into something more serious lies in Georgia’s southern Armenian-majority province of Javakheti. This is a problem that BTC may exacerbate. The Javakheti Armenians have long felt alienated from Tbilisi. Few of them speak Georgian, their transportation links to the rest of Georgia are poor, and the currency of choice tends to be the Armenian dram or the Russian ruble rather than the Georgian lari. Two Armenian nationalist parties campaign for official autonomy—but not yet (as some Armenian nationalists outside the region want) for outright secession from Georgia. Following the election of Mikheil Saakashvili in January 2004, some Javakheti Armenians again raised the issue of being granted a politically autonomous structure within Georgia.

Initially, when the Georgian section of the route for BTC was under discussion, there was widespread support for a route via Javakheti following the quickest path to the Turkish border. However, when the decision was finally taken, it was for a longer route through more difficult terrain to the north. The new route passed close to Borjomi, home to Georgia’s famous mineral water springs and to a national park that is trying to attract tourists. This has become the most controversial aspect of the whole BTC project so far, with the main mineral water producer in Borjomi, Georgian Glass and Mineral Water, and a group of Georgian environmental NGOs (supported by the World Wildlife Fund) opposing the Borjomi route.

The decision-making process behind the choice of the pipeline’s route was opaque. The project’s institutional investors maintain that the Borjomi route makes good sense. The then-head of the Georgian state oil company GIOC, Giorgi Chanturia, and the then-head of the Georgian Security Council, Tedo Japaridze, said in 2002 that it was unacceptable to build the pipeline close to the Russian base at Akhalkalaki—even though the base is due to close within the next few years, while BTC is intended
to last for forty years. Many Georgians are still equivocal about the choice of the Borjomi route. For example, Ramaz Jabauri, Georgia’s deputy intelligence chief, said the decision to place the pipeline around Akhalkalaki “was made when the nation was facing a different set of threats.” He added that, “At this point, it might stand to reason to run the pipeline through Akhalkalaki to boost local employment opportunities there.”

Given the division of opinion in Georgia, it is highly likely—although still unproven—that Azerbaijan’s view of a Javakheti route was critical and that the government in Baku vetoed the idea of its pipeline going through an Armenian-populated area for political reasons. Azerbaijani officials have not commented directly on the issue, but given Azerbaijan’s extreme sensitivity to any project that is seen to have any benefit to Armenia or Armenians, support for a Javakheti route would have made the government politically vulnerable. For example, opposition leader Ali Kerimli, head of the reformist wing of the Popular Front Party, said that, “It was impossible to lay [the pipeline] through Javakheti. This region is populated by Armenians and so it represents a threat to the project. Running the pipeline through Borjomi is more secure.”

An immediate consequence of the choice of the Borjomi route has been an increase in feelings of alienation among the Javakheti Armenians. The mayor of Akhalkalaki, Nairi Iritsian, said in an interview that he was disappointed that his region had been ignored. He said that around 2,000 of the town’s residents go to Russia every year to look for work and the only jobs to be had in his city are at the Russian military base. BTC would have provided construction jobs and compensation payments to the region. Given that the short-term benefits of the pipeline to the local economy would be limited, perceptions may be more important than reality. A local NGO leader, Ararat Esoyan, put the political context of the decision to bypass Javakheti more starkly: “In Javakheti, people say that by choosing this route they have drawn the future border of Georgia.”

Taken overall, the two pipelines present Georgia, a country with only weak sovereignty, with both enormous opportunities and daunting responsibilities. The long-term security challenge will come when the two

24 Amirova et al., “Special Report: Trans-Caucasus Pipeline Underway at Last.”
25 Amirova et al., “Special Report: Trans-Caucasus Pipeline Underway at Last.”
26 Amirova et al., “Special Report: Trans-Caucasus Pipeline Underway at Last.”
pipelines are built and begin operating for up to forty years and the Georgian state will have prime responsibility for protecting them on its territory. The wider sociopolitical context is just as important, however. If Georgian society as a whole (and not just certain sections of it) is seen to be benefiting from the pipelines, the projects will receive the public support that guarantees their political durability.

FINDING A PLACE IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Under the Soviet Union, Georgia was relegated from being a sovereign state to being one region in a highly centralized state. During Soviet times, most contacts between union republics went through Moscow, and the non-Russian republics had very limited bilateral relations. It was unthinkable for Georgia to have anything approaching “bilateral relations” with Turkey, and traffic across the Georgian–Turkish border was very restricted. In the Gorbachev era of the late 1980s, locked doors suddenly began to open. But since then, Georgia has (to change metaphors) spent the last fifteen years like a dancer in a bewilderingly choreographed performance, in which its partners keep changing quickly.

The whirlwind of events has not allowed stable relationships to form. From 1989 to 1991, the Soviet republics most hostile toward the center formed an informal alliance against Gorbachev and Moscow. Georgia joined five other republics—Armenia, Moldova, and the three Baltic republics—in boycotting the March 1991 referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union. That list, however, gave no clue to how relations would develop, as the alignment of the former Soviet republics has frequently changed. Although they formed a common front against Moscow in 1991, the Baltic and Caucasian republics have little direct contact now—and also have very contrasting fortunes. As noted, Armenia now has a very different strategic orientation from Georgia. Only Moldova, hardly a major ally of Georgia’s, shares something of the same orientation.

This is a useful lens through which to view the GUUAM alliance. Formed in 1996–1997 as GUAM by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, it was, broadly speaking, an attempt to form an informal alliance of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries who wanted to resist Russian influence collectively. In April 1999, GUAM became GUUAM with the accession of Uzbekistan. At the same time, three of its
members—Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan—quit the CIS Collective Security Treaty. The venue for this (re-)formation of GUUAM was significant—it was done at NATO’s Fiftieth Anniversary Summit in Washington.

At this Washington meeting, the GUUAM leaders set out an agenda that declared a shared commitment to four main ideas. The first two were a commitment to uphold the territorial integrity of states and to reject “aggressive separatism”—a reference to Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova’s claim to recover their lost secessionist territories, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria. The third was a common will to fight “religious extremism”—a reference to the Uzbek government’s campaign against its Islamist opposition. The final point was a common commitment to prevent an arms buildup in conflict areas, a reference (although not by name) to Russian bases in Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova.

The location of this meeting of GUUAM was intended to be symbolic, and it paralleled the agenda of a Russosceptic strand of opinion then very much in the ascendancy in Washington. The conservative *Jamestown Foundation Prism* commented approvingly that, “The venue and setting were doubly significant: first, for dramatizing Moscow’s failure to persuade the CIS countries to fall into line with Russian policy toward NATO; and second—just as important—for symbolizing the five governments’ strategic orientation toward the West.”

GUUAM, however, has proved to be a mirage. It was never institutionalized, and no treaty was ever signed by the member states. There is no evidence that trade between them increased substantially as a result of the alliance. As noted earlier in this chapter, even relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan are not as deep as an initial glance would suggest.

GUUAM suffered heavily from the events of September 11, 2001, when strategic priorities in the United States changed with regard to the former Soviet Union. Suddenly, containment of Russia’s perceived neo-imperial ambitions was no longer such a popular policy in Washington. In combating the new threat of Islamic terrorism, U.S. relations with Vladimir Putin’s Russia improved and Moscow’s relations with Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan took a turn for the better. Most of the GUUAM countries now saw no contradiction in cultivating good relations with Russia as well.

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as the United States—although Georgia, for very understandable reasons, proved to be an exception. Symptomatic of the constantly shifting political terrain, in May 2005 GUUAM again became GUAM, when Uzbekistan, alarmed over the Rose and Orange revolutions, pulled out.

GUUAM has, if nothing else, underlined the redundancy of another international grouping, the Moscow-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS turned out to be less of a “commonwealth” and more of an instrument for Russia to continue to exert control over its former Soviet neighbors—an institutionalization of the phrase, “Russia’s near abroad.” When the CIS has been called upon to play an active security role, as with manning the 1,600-strong peacekeeping mission for postwar Abkhazia, its real status has been revealed: no other CIS country except Russia has supplied troops to the peacekeeping force in Abkhazia.

Thus, the hard reality is that even Georgia’s relations with its former Soviet neighbors are largely dependent on the variations of U.S.–Russian relations, with Washington and Moscow representing the two security poles between which the former Soviet republics fluctuate. This provides the context in which Georgia’s membership in a whole series of ambitious but poorly funded regional organizations has to be seen. What is the worth of the modest budget and grand declarations of a GUUAM when a real crisis confronts a government in Tbilisi, Gali, or the Pankisi Gorge?

Outside the borders of the former Soviet Union and to the south and west, Georgia is part of a region that has been variously classified, perhaps most usefully as “the Greater Middle East.” Tbilisi is closer geographically to Baghdad and Damascus than to Moscow. Its best transportation links with any of its neighbors—by road, rail, sea, and air—are with Turkey. Over the last thousand years, the Persian and Ottoman empires have frequently controlled the South Caucasus and determined its history, and it is reasonable to expect their successors, Iran and Turkey, to have interests in doing the same.

Since formally regaining independence in 1992, however, Georgia’s place in this wider non-Soviet region must count as “unused potential.” The primary reason for this is obviously the fact that Georgia needs time to cultivate relations with neighbors with whom all direct relations were severed during seventy years of Soviet rule when the Soviet Union’s southern borders were virtually closed. Moreover, the experience of Soviet rule made Georgians more educated, secular, and Europeanized than their southern neighbors. Syria, Turkey, or Iran hardly offers a state
model that Georgian elites would want to copy, and almost no young Georgians take an interest in studying in these countries that are far from the Christian European civilization to which Georgia aspires.

Politics between these countries lag behind in the same way. Georgia’s relationships with its neighbors to the south, superficially at least, embed Georgia within a complex network of alliances that defines this larger area. Turkey is, after all, a member of NATO and has a strong relationship with Israel. Iran and Armenia have sought to build a trilateral relationship with Greece. The further reaches of these arrangements, however, appear to have little impact on Georgia. Israel and its problems barely cause a flicker of interest in Georgia, while President Shevardnadze’s offer of Georgian air bases in 2003 to the United States for the Iraq war was politely declined. As for Greece, the primary bilateral issue between Tbilisi and Athens is the large number of migrants and guest workers (most but not all of them ethnic Greeks) traveling between the two countries. Neither “Christian solidarity” nor historical suspicions of Turkey are enough to stop Greece from having an active embassy in Azerbaijan and displaying a strong interest in consuming Azerbaijani gas.

Iran, despite its relative geographical proximity, is remote from Georgia and its strategic concerns. Iran’s strategic interest in the South Caucasus is concentrated mainly on Armenia and Azerbaijan. Tehran worries about the influence of Azerbaijan on its own Azerbaijani population in northern Iran and cultivates a good relationship with Armenia, a relationship which may be cemented by a new gas pipeline. Even Armenia and Azerbaijan, however, keep Iranian diplomacy at a distance: Iran made one effort to negotiate the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict in May 1992, which was cut short by the Armenian capture of Shusha and was never resumed.

Georgia’s relationship with Iran is even more remote. The Islamic Republic’s semi-authoritarian political system is not a model that any Georgians want to follow, and its status as part of President Bush’s “axis of evil” puts it in a camp opposite to the one with which Georgia sympathizes over the big world issues of the day. Moreover, Iran is not a member of any of the pan-European institutions that Georgia is either part of or wants to be part of: the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and NATO.

Another instance of undeveloped potential is Georgia’s muted relations with its neighbors across the Black Sea, as symbolized in the relative failure of the eleven-member Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)
organization. Article 8 of BSEC’s founding Summit Declaration signed in Istanbul on June 25, 1992, asserts that the organization’s aim is to “ensure that the Black Sea becomes a sea of peace, stability, and prosperity, striving to promote friendly and good-neighborly relations.” The organization was conceived by Turkey’s President Turgut Ozal as an institution that could mobilize 330 million people in a group of contiguous countries with a joint trade balance of more than $300 billion into a new free-trade area. While it has formed a bureaucracy capable of holding meetings and passing declarations, it is not an organization that is capable of more substantial cooperation. In an embittered June 1999 interview, BSEC’s International Permanent Secretary Nurver Nures lamented that since the death of Ozal, even Turkish politicians had failed to support his organization. He said two of BSEC’s offices—supposedly those of an international organization—were commandeered by Prime Minister Tansu Ciller for the Turkish government’s use. Nures also said:

If Ozal had lived, perhaps we would have overcome the obstacles and reached more advanced levels, because Ozal could argue the attractiveness of this idea very well. If we weren’t able to open the doors to these purposes sufficiently enough, the mistake was not in his thinking but lay rather with the people. The idea is marvelous. Turkey has had to play the role of the locomotive within this organization.29

BSEC is making efforts to acquire new teeth with the appointment of a second Georgian secretary-general in succession, former foreign minister Tedo Japaridze, but it has only a tiny budget, and it is a fair assumption that few Georgians could say what the organization does. This is not to say that a Black Sea regional association is not a good idea. The Black Sea has recently become a route for aid to be shipped to Afghanistan, with the first cargo leaving Bulgaria for Georgia and then Afghanistan in September 2003. In April 2001, the six littoral states of the Black Sea formed BLACKSEAFOR, an organization to coordinate search-and-rescue and humanitarian operations on the sea. The point is that without a serious agenda of economic cooperation and a well-funded organizational structure, BSEC, like GUUAM and the CIS, is doomed to be no

more than a talking shop.

Georgia does not need BSEC in order to develop its relationship with Turkey, a country of growing importance for the South Caucasus. Like Russia, Turkey is a country of a different order to its neighbors. Its population of 68 million inhabitants contrasts with a combined total of around 15 million people for all three South Caucasus countries, and its enormous land area and much greater GDP dwarf those of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan combined.

Turkey and Georgia have strong shared interests that are being strengthened by the BTC and Baku–Erzerum pipelines. Both Turkey and Georgia aspire to European Union membership (with Turkey’s ambition much more plausible than Georgia’s), and Georgia wants to follow Turkey into NATO. In contrast to Turkey’s other eastern neighbors—Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Armenia—Georgia promises to be a trouble-free political and commercial partner, and Turkey is already Georgia’s second biggest trading partner. A military partnership is developing between the two countries, with Turkish military trainers moving into barracks recently vacated by the Russians in the Vaziani airbase outside Tbilisi. In April 2003, a large Turkish military delegation, led by military Chief of Staff Hilmi Oztok, flew to Tbilisi and discussed, among other things, the training of Georgian military personnel by Turkish military experts, increased Turkish funding for the Georgian army, the renovation of a Georgian military air facility, and Turkish assistance in training a marine anti-terrorism unit for Georgia’s Black Sea flotilla.\(^\text{30}\)

Even so, Turkey still lags far behind Russia in its economic importance for Georgia. Historical and linguistic factors appear to outweigh contemporary political ones in that at least half a million Georgians are living as guest workers in Russia, a country where Georgians now need to apply for a visa well in advance to visit, while the numbers for Turkey—where visas are obtainable within minutes—are much smaller.

In part, of course, Turkey is simply poorer than Russia, but that does not appear to be the whole story. A comparison of the responses of Ankara and Moscow to Georgia’s Rose Revolution of November 2003 points up how Georgia is far more enmeshed in Russia and its concerns than in those of Turkey, whether it likes it or not. As soon as the Shevard-

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nadze regime was tottering, it was Russia’s (Georgian-born) Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov who flew to Tbilisi to mediate between the president and the opposition. Ivanov had crisis talks with both sides and even talked to a rally of demonstrators on Rustaveli Avenue. The same scenario was repeated in May 2004, this time right on Turkey’s doorstep in Ajara, when Ivanov, now the secretary of the Russian National Security Council, again flew in to negotiate the peaceful surrender of veteran Ajaran leader Aslan Abashidze.

It would be hard to imagine Turkey playing such a significant role in a crisis in Georgia. In fact, the Rose Revolution seems to have caught the Turkish government by surprise, with its prime minister and foreign minister both away and unwilling to comment. Newspaper columnist Tuncay Ozkan noted that Turkey and Georgia had maintained strong and friendly ties ever since Georgia’s independence and their two militaries were cooperating closely. But, wrote Ozkan in the center-right daily *Aksam*, “Turkey is now unable to even understand the developments [in the Caucasus], let alone to manipulate them.”31 It seems that Turkey simply lacks the language and framework to move its relationship with Georgia into an everyday political conversation—something that cannot be said of either Russia or the United States.

Recent history and the powerful institutional frameworks offered by Russia and the West thus still outweigh all the claims of geography and older history in Georgia. Paradoxically, an indicator of the strategic disengagement of both Turkey and Iran from the South Caucasus is the interest of both in the now-moribund concept of a “Security Pact for the Caucasus.” President Suleyman Demirel backed the idea at the OSCE summit in 1999, and Iran’s Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi tried to revive the plan in a tour of the South Caucasus in April 2003. For both countries, a “security pact” would have given them a role in the region that they currently do not have.

CONCLUSION

More than ten years after it gained full independence, Georgia finds itself in the curious situation of still looking to two distant capitals, Washing-

ton and Moscow, to define its foreign policy choices and has done surprisingly little to further cooperation with its more immediate neighbors. The European flag flying over government buildings in Tbilisi under Saakashvili proclaims a new declaration of intent, which may eventually provide Georgia with a more stable security environment but so far has resulted only in increased economic aid: the EU, after all, has no history of extended involvement in the security of far-flung regions. Georgia’s immediate neighborhood remains troubled. For various reasons, Georgia has failed to win any strategic advantage from its central position in the South Caucasus and proximity to Turkey and Iran. Detached from the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, it has open borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, as well as its fourth neighbor, Russia—but does not have long-term security arrangements with any of these countries. In some respects, Georgia’s central geographical position can be uncomfortable. Georgia finds itself caught between two competing alliances, Turkey—Azerbaijan and Russia—Armenia—Iran, both of which are promoting energy corridors. Although Georgia’s preference is clearly for the former alliance, it cannot ignore the latter and will have to reckon with Russia’s continuing desire for access to Armenia.\(^{32}\)

Georgia’s lack of interest in regional cooperation is a major factor in its own strategic vulnerability. The theme of “unused potential” recurs throughout this chapter. While the ebbs and flows of the U.S.–Russian relationship have dominated Georgian foreign policy for the last thirteen years, Georgia’s relations with its neighbors have not advanced significantly. Great-power rivalry has contributed to this trend, and it may be unreasonable to expect a “regional identity” to form and drive forward economic integration in an area of such great diversity and historical suspicions. But the Georgian elite must also share responsibility for the choices it has and has not made. Legitimate trade, the prerequisite to a closer relationship, is still depressingly limited among South Caucasus countries. In 2003, Georgia’s two biggest exports were scrap metal and

\(^{32}\) An Iran–Armenian pipeline would cut against Gazprom’s interests, but Interfax reported on February 2, 2004, that Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Boris Alyoshin had told a press conference in Yerevan that an Iranian–Armenian gas pipeline was in Russia’s interests because of increased Russian ownership of energy-generating facilities in Armenia. He said Gazprom might become operator of part of the pipeline through Armenia and that the line might be extended to the Georgian border.
timber, marking it as a largely non-industrial country without a strong economic profile or strong sovereignty. Border restrictions, smuggling, and crime undermine any tenuous hopes for free trade and open markets. These problems have deprived Georgia of the economic power or stability to exploit its regional potential, while corrupt local and national leaders have taken more interest in their own economic well-being than in the long-term interest of the state.

The most hopeful development for Georgia is the two new energy pipelines under construction. Although they will help free Georgia from energy dependence on Russia and build a link to Europe, these pipelines also entail new risks and responsibilities for the Georgian state. Providing protection for a Western-backed pipeline draws Georgia into wider security issues it has not had to deal with hitherto.

In short, the lack of ground-level regional cooperation in the wider region in general and between Georgia and its South Caucasus neighbors in particular serves to magnify the influence of both the United States and Russia and their own disputes. It makes Georgia unhappily vulnerable to shifts in relations between Moscow and Washington. Georgia alone is not responsible for the fractured condition of its neighborhood and its uncertain future, but it has done little to mend the cracks and break down the barriers.