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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY  
University College  
Department of International Affairs

**The Georgian Crisis and U.S.-Russian Relations**

By

Ekaterina I Chertkova

A thesis presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### THE GEORGIAN CRISIS AND U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

By Ekaterina I. Chertkova

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S.-Russian relations, perplexed by constant strains and unresolved contradictions, shifted like a precarious seesaw. The former Soviet space has become a stage for an ambitious political game for regional supremacy between Moscow and Washington. Russia, eager to reestablish its great power status has tried to find a balance between collaboration with the West and its neo-imperialistic ambitions, aiming to preserve the control over its traditional sphere of influence. Washington, allured by the area's natural resources riches, and after 9/11 terrorist attacks, in need of the region's strategic location, has been creating its own intricate web: NATO's eastward expansion; the construction of the BTC pipeline, to undermine Moscow's regional monopoly over the pipelines routes; and sponsorship of the "color revolutions." Determined to keep the U.S. behind the "red line," the Kremlin has been actively reasserting itself in the post-Soviet space: at first, through the elaborate structure of the Commonwealth of Independent States, later, by use of energy as an instrument of political pressure, and even by military means, like in 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

This thesis will analyze the development of the post-Soviet U.S.-Russian relations in light of the Georgian crisis. Russia's complex foreign policy will be discussed based on Neil MacFarlane's course of reasoning, which maintains that Moscow's post-communist foreign strategy has been characterized by cooperation with the U.S. and reasserting itself at the regional level, in its "near abroad." Through discussions of NATO's "open door" policy, U.S.-Russia geopolitical competition over energy resources and routes, and eventual escalation of the events into the August five-day military confrontation, the evidence will lead us to conclude that MacFarlane's argument is still pertinent. Moreover, the Georgian conflict vividly reflects the situation. The thesis will follow Georgia's turbulent history from the ancient times to the Rose Revolution and investigate the underlying causes of the "frozen conflicts" of separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia. No doubt, significance of the Georgian crisis in a geopolitical sense is conditioned by its direct affect on the politics of the world's most powerful countries and should ultimately be seen in such a setting. Strife for regional supremacy between a resurgent Russia and the West presents Georgia with bets of high stakes and the grand prize of the Caspian oil. Multifarious historic, ethnic, and geopolitical factors, perplexed by the new dynamics of international and regional interdependence, account for the complexity and unpredictability of the current state of affairs on this post-Soviet territory.

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## Introduction

*Russian leaders envisage Georgia's breakaway provinces as pawns in a new phase of Great Power politics. The Kremlin sees conflict as a means to divide foreign coalitions along the lines of energy, power, and perception.*

*Gregory Gleason, George C. Marshall  
European Center for Security Studies.*

*The two countries (Russia and the U.S.) could develop a serious agenda for genuine, rather than token, cooperation.*

*Mikhail Gorbachev, 19 August 2008.*

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S.-Russian relations, complicated by permanent tensions, shifted back and forth. The past two decades saw a unipolar world, with the U.S. accounting for about half of the global military expenditure. Moscow chose to bandwagon with Washington. Pragmatism at the turn of the millennium replaced euphoria of the early 1990s. Moscow was supportive of Washington right after the 9/11 attacks, but soon became discontent with the U.S. increased influence in the former Soviet space, Russia's historic "sphere of influence." Moreover, empowered by the rapid economic growth and modernized military, Russia aspired to a superpower role. Tensions led to mutual criticism and growing hostility, which, at the time of the 2008 Russo-Georgian confrontation, turned into peril of a new Cold War. The hopes for strategic partnership between Russia and the U.S. revived in the past two years with Obama's "reset."

This thesis will examine the unfolding of U.S.-Russian relations in light of the Georgian crisis. It will take Neil MacFarlane's argument regarding Russia's mixed foreign strategy as a basis for reasoning. In discussions prior to the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict, MacFarlane maintained that Moscow's ambiguous foreign strategy was expressed by collaborating with the U.S. and reasserting itself at the regional level, in its

“near abroad” (MacFarlane 1999, 219; MacFarlane 2006, 56). Even though MacFarlane made this statement prior to the five-day warfare, the Georgian conflict strongly reflects the situation. The reason why the state of the matters is so complex is because there is very much at stake for both the U.S. and Russia. Through a detailed historical examination this thesis will look at how the Georgian crisis affected the relations between Moscow and Washington and at the same time it will endeavor to provide a political analysis of the Georgian crisis itself that is ultimately understood in the context of U.S.-Russian relations.

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, Georgia has been one of the world’s most unstable zones of so-called “frozen” ethno-political conflicts that like a time bomb threaten to explode. This small country in the South Caucasus is “no longer a backwater of international politics” (Cornell 2005, 2). Critical due to its pivotal location on the energy corridor, Georgia lies in the middle of a web of pipeline routes that deliver oil from the Caspian Sea to the West. Here, in an amalgam of various ethnicities, religions and traditions, geo-strategic ambitions of actors are tangled into a struggle for spheres of influence.

The current Georgian crisis is an ongoing international conflict between the pro-Western Georgia and its enclaves, Abkhazia and South Ossetia that are supported by Russia. In August 2008, the conflict escalated into a five-day war that strained the relations between Russia and the West, leading some to assert that a new Cold War might be on the horizon. The peace mission, initiated by Nicolas Sarkozy, resulted in the signed ceasefire agreement and led to cessation of military actions. However, against Tbilisi’s wish, Russia recognized the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as



sovereign states soon thereafter. Further, despite the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's calling on Russia in July 2010 to desist its "occupation" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian military troops have not been withdrawn (Radio Free Europe, 10 November 2010). Moreover, five military bases have been established in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and long-range S-300 missile batteries have been deployed in order to have aerial control over the Georgian territory (Cohen 2010). Regardless of previous disagreements between Moscow and Washington, recently elected presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev pushed the "reset" button of their relations not long ago. But the tensions between Russia and Georgia still remain high.

Despite numerous international proposals and attempts to solve the Georgian conundrum, little progress has been made toward its settlement. Diplomatic relations between the two countries have been cut off, with the Swiss embassy representing the Russian Federation in Georgia and Georgia in Russia. The Geneva talks, which started on October 15, 2008, co-chaired by the special representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), provide an opportunity for open discussion between the Russian and Georgian Deputy Foreign Ministers and representatives from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Aiming to find a durable solution for the Georgian conflict, the parleys, however, have brought no feasible plan in sight yet. All things considered, the South Caucasus nascent democracy still has to face many challenges on a daily basis. Insufficient legal system, increased unemployment, drug trafficking, gun smuggling and human rights violations are among the widespread problems. Adding to this list, the influx of thousands of refugees and

internally displaced persons has caused a major humanitarian crisis by presenting the Georgian authorities with a number of urgent socio-economic issues.

It is necessary to keep in mind the role played by international players. For years, the United Nations, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe along with multiple NGOs and other international organizations monitored ceasefires and facilitated negotiations between the conflicting parties. Turkey, Iran and China for the obvious “energy” stakes have had strong interest in the region. Seemingly insignificant to the region, the small pro-Russia states of Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru played their part by recognizing Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence. Not only it is essential to understand the involvement of other international actors in stability of the South Caucasus region, but also it is vital to analyze the reasons behind these political players’ motivation. Even though examination of the presence of these actors in the South Caucasus picture is important, yet the primary concern of this paper is the Russia-Georgia-U.S. triangle.

The thesis comprises eight chapters that present the historic background and political analysis of the current issues. Over the past twenty years, the U.S.-Russian relations have been complicated by the overlapping interests and went through distinctive phases from euphoria in the early 1990s to peril of a new Cold War in 2008. Chapter 1 strives to analyze the key events that shaped each stage of the post-Cold War U.S.-Russian relations, discuss the role of political leaders, and investigate distinctive characteristics of foreign policies of the U.S and Russia and the sources of tension between them.

To understand the complexities of the Georgian crisis in the context of the Russo-American geopolitical game, it is fundamental to see this small South Caucasus country as a piece of a large puzzle of the post Soviet space and compare its circumstances to the situation in the other former Soviet republics. Chapter 2 tackles a difficult task of exploring the fate of the post-Soviet space and establishes parallels between Washington's and Moscow's relations with other newly independent states and Georgia. The former Soviet states, entangled in a geopolitical strife, not only were confronted with difficult choices, but also were given opportunities to further their potential. After the disintegration of the USSR, the newly independent states had to play with the cards they were dealt. Their aces were copious natural resources and the pivotal location. The low cards comprised inadequate political institutions, corrupt leadership, and impaired economies, leading to ethnic clashes, poverty and drug trafficking.

The underlying causes of issues of the modern day Georgia could be understood through the country's past. Quite evidently, the South Caucasus current situation is the result of its tumultuous history, particularly the Soviet period. Throughout history, due to its vital geographic location on multiple empires' peripheries, Georgia has been a subject of territorial expansion, numerous conquests, invasions and dominance by neighboring empires, on the one hand, and internal fragmentation, on the other. In the past two decades, geopolitics has been about influence because of political, economic and security interests of Russia and the U.S. Through historical analysis, Chapter 3 attempts to find the answers to numerous questions raised nowadays.

Washington's high stakes in the region and aspirations to create a perfect laboratory of democracy, amplified by Tbilisi's political and economic reliance on the

U.S., eased the path to the Rose Revolution. Moscow, troubled by prospects of instability on its periphery that had a potential to reach the center, but most importantly, displeased by Washington's interference into its assumed sphere of influence, was disgruntled with Tbilisi's pro-Western stance. The post-Rose Revolution Saakashvili's aspirations for NATO membership and the country's territorial integrity became the main sources of tension with Moscow. Chapter 4 describes the sequence of events leading to the Rose Revolution and the forces behind it.

The "frozen conflicts" of Georgia's separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, continue to aggravate Russo-Georgian and U.S.-Russian relations, and they pose a threat to regional security and hinder democratic development of the region. The conflict of the two with Georgia stems from their history, ethnic make-up and location, and they present two distinct cases. Chapter 5 provides an historical overview of the conflicts, discusses the part played by political leaders and international community, and analyzes the current state of affairs.

Since the dissolution of the USSR, energy resources have made major changes on the geopolitical map of the Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Chapter 6 examines the "energy question" and the role of the BTC pipeline, which connects energy-abundant South Caucasus to the West, with Georgia serving as the main transit and leaving Russia out in the regional contest for energy dominance.

For the past two decades, the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been a contentious issue in Moscow-Washington relations. NATO's "open door" policy to new members, the former Soviet states in particular, was perceived by the Kremlin as a threat to Russian security (Light 2010, 238). As

MacFarlane asserted, “the proposed inclusion of a number of Central European states in NATO ...intensified Russian perception of exclusion” (1999, 251). Therefore, the Kremlin strongly opposed Georgia’s ambitions for NATO membership. Membership in NATO has been viewed by Tbilisi as an assurance of regional stability. Through the examination of the NATO policy developments, Tbilisi’s pro-NATO stance and Moscow’s ill-favored reaction, Chapter 7 makes an analysis of the intricate issue of NATO expansion, Georgia’s aspiration to join the North Atlantic Alliance and the Russian security dilemma.

Chapter 8 focuses on the long-predicted 2008 five-day Russo-Georgian war, the imminent danger of a “New Cold War” and Obama’s “Reset” vis-à-vis Russia. The discussion unfolds with the succession of events that led to confrontation, deeply rooted causes and interpretations by both sides. The final section discusses how the “reset” amended the Russo-American relations, which hit its lowest point during the 2008 warfare, followed by the examination of the new hopes, the Kremlin’s new foreign policy and reinstates the main sources of tension between Moscow and Washington and the recent accomplishments.

Every chapter poses difficult questions and endeavors to look for answers. Be that as it may, the analysis of the faults and advances made by all the parties by no means leads to accusations. To blame any single actor would mean to underestimate the complexity of the situation. Ultimately, the question remains to what degree the solution to the Georgian conundrum depends on the development of the U.S.-Russian relations? Has the time gone when the empires could manipulate little states like chess figures or is Georgia a mere pawn in the geopolitical game of great powers?

## Chapter 1: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Post-Soviet Era

*I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.*

*Winston Churchill, October 1939.*

*Russia will work with others, but only on the basis of Russia's conception of equality and if Russia's goals and interests are central to that cooperation.*

*Roger Kanet, University of Miami, 2009.*

Throughout the Cold War, the relations between the U.S. and Russia have been through ebbs and flows. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), signed on November 19, 1990, which set commensurate limits for the NATO and the Warsaw Pact members, signified the end of the Cold War. Soon thereafter, the July 31, 1991 meeting of the U.S. President George H.W. Bush and the Soviet statesman Mikhail Gorbachev resulted in signing of the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), marking a new phase of the U.S.-Russian relations. The implosion of the USSR in December 1991 brought the Soviet era to a close. Political analysts idealistically forecasted an epoch of universal concord (Nuriyev 2007, 263). Sadly, events did not turn out as the elites predicted. Ironically, time has proven that the international community enjoyed the most extended period of stability during the most uncertain confrontation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Cold War that kept ethno-territorial disputes frozen (Nuriyev 2007, 155; Kremenyuk 1994, 106).

The end of the Cold War bipolarity raised a myriad of questions about distribution of power in the modern political landscape. Many politicians on both sides of the former Iron Curtain argued in favor of a new world order. Notwithstanding recognition of a cardinal metamorphosis on the international scene, some – like the former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in his “Diplomacy” – still disputed the possibility of a new world order and prognosticated a power structure grounded on the remnants of an old

system that prevailed throughout the course of the Cold War (Kissinger 1994, 25).

Likewise, supporters of political realism, despite constant reprobation for the failure to foresee the end of the Cold War, were not eager to leave their theory in the dust (Gaddis 1992; Kegley 1993; Lebow & Risse-Kappen 1995; Mastanduno 1999).

To create an accurate account of the dynamics of the post-Soviet U.S.-Russian relations, it is essential to recognize the evolution of relations throughout history. Prior to the WWII, Russo-American relations have been distant for the most part. The U.S. purchase of Alaska from the Russian Empire in 1867 and support for the post 1917 Revolution anti-Bolshevik White Forces in the Russian Civil War were the only significant encounters (Bailey 1950; Gaddis 1978). The first geopolitical controversy between the two countries dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Russian efforts to create its exclusive domain in China clashed with American ambitions (Zabriskie 1946). The post WWII strife for spheres of influence between the communist USSR and the capitalist U.S. led to the Cold War, which lasted for almost half a century.

In principle, the most notable manifestation of the post-Cold War period was that it provided both Moscow and Washington with new opportunities to cooperate. To take advantage of these propitious circumstances, the U.S. and Russia had to validate their new roles, generate original strategies and delineate their foreign policies. After the end of the Cold War, the U.S. dominated the global arena unilaterally, constituting the only power with unprecedented political capacity, unsurpassed economic capabilities and superlative military force (Mastanduno & Kapstein 1999, 1). Meanwhile, newly established Russia has been attempting to define its identity and restore its status. The Russian Federation emerged as the USSR's principle successor state. The country

inherited the Soviet Union's international treaty obligations, its seat with full veto power on the UN Security Council, its diplomatic institutions and its military might. Also, Russia was invited to join the informal G-7 gathering of the world's largest economic powers making it the G-8 in 1997. For all that, the question remained whether Russia, "a country still in search of its post-communist, post-imperial identity," ascertained "what it means to be a great power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Moscow). Numerous elements of the former superpower either disappeared or were reduced in value or size: its territory decreased, the sphere of influence shrank and its economy faced a serious crisis (Light 2010, 228).

The development of the Post Cold War relations between Moscow and Washington evolved through several distinct stages, with governments on both side of the Atlantic in search of strategies and means. The following discussion will strive to differentiate these periods of time, examine the major events that have taken place during each stage, analyze the role of political leaders, and determine peculiar features of foreign policies of the U.S. and Russia as well as sources of friction between them.

The period that immediately followed the demise of the USSR, described by Philip Zelikow (1994, 37) as "a genuine entente between Washington and Moscow," set out an opening phase of the post-Soviet relations. With the end of communism relations between the erstwhile enemies warmed up quickly. However, both Russian and American foreign policy conduct caused continual debates in the Kremlin and the White House. Some intellectuals viewed the commencing post Cold War U.S. foreign policy as ambiguous. In fact, in his 1992 campaign, then Democratic Candidate, Bill Clinton, harshly criticized the U.S. foreign policy course, blaming George H. W. Bush for "failing



to articulate clear goals” and “slow response to events in Russia” (Friedman, 1992). Scholars proposed various foreign policy prospects. For instance, the framework offered by Posen and Ross (1997, 100-134) suggested five potential strategies for the post Cold War U.S.: neoisolationism, selective engagement, collective security, containment, and primacy. Nevertheless, this thesis allies with the assumption supported by Mastanduno (1999, 139) that the U.S. authorities, despite their disparate approaches, were persistent in safeguarding the U.S. exclusive status of a superpower.

Meanwhile, Russian experts were convinced that their country’s prominence could be reinstated by developing consistent foreign policy (Light 2010, 229). Since the USSR’s demise, Russian foreign policy was played out in two realms: the other former Soviet republics (referred to as “near abroad”) and the broader international system (denoted as “far abroad”) (MacFarlane 1999, 219). Russia’s goals and capabilities in its former sphere of influence differed drastically from those in the West. So did its strategy: while balancing in the “near abroad,” Moscow was bandwagoning with the West.

In the early 1990s, Russian foreign policy in relation to the West was characterized by incoherence (Pravda 2001, 215). Deficiency in setting clear foreign policy goals by the Kremlin administration could be explained by a number of reasons. Most notably, during the recuperative years, the first elected Russian President Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister Kozyrev, a strong advocate of Atlanticism, were faced with lack of political culture (Arbatov 1997, 19). Compounding the situation was the fact that Russia, having suffered through seven decades of the communist regime, desperately needed an innovative foreign policy model that would stand out from either the conventional Soviet paradigm of ideological discord with the capitalist world or

Gorbachev's visionary agenda of "new political thinking;" without one, in efforts to replicate the U.S. democracy, Russia had to accept American guidance (Arbatov 1997, 17; Lukin 2008).

The main cause of "poorly articulated" Russian foreign policy (Rukavishnikov 2007, 54) was a dichotomy between Russia's "nostalgia for the past" (Kanet 2007, 3) as "a state with superpower memories and Great Power ambitions" (Pravda 2001, 224) and the harsh reality of decline (Pravda 2001, 215). According to Pravda (2001, 224), during 1992, a time of "full collaboration," Moscow's intention "to join the community of democratic states" made Russia pursue a "euphorically pro-Western policy" (Diplomateskii Vestnik 1992, 40; Light 2010, 238). Even a bid for NATO membership, as a part of international security consolidation was contemplated by Yeltsin (Pravda 2001, 225).

After becoming a new member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in June 1992, Russia expected to receive extensive financial aid, much needed to rebuild the impaired state; but having been provided with little assistance, Moscow felt discredited (Arbatov 1997, 18). As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia still bolstered U.S. policies regarding even the most challenging international issues that were often disapproved by the Kremlin. Adoption of the UN resolutions – such as imposition of economic sanctions against Yugoslavia, establishment of an arms embargo and air travel restrictions on Libya, and call for compensation payments from Iraq, among others – where Russia voted in accord with the U.S., became, as perceived by Russians, "a never-ending sequence of easily given unilateral concessions" (Arbatov 1997, 18). Be

that as it may, even though the U.S. quit treating Russia as an enemy, Washington still led a pragmatic course, negotiating over each matter (Arbatov 1997, 19).

The Kremlin began to realize that the ostensibly *bona fide* Russo-American alliance had been a one way relationship, benefiting the U.S., with Russia being taken for granted (Zelikow 1994, 57). The Russian right-wing opposition criticized Kozyrev for foreign policy's "humiliating course" that was "selling out Russian interests to the West" and appeared "detrimental to Russian prestige and economic, political and security interests" (Arbatov 1997, 18 & 19). Increasing disillusionment and vanishing hopes for strategic partnership replaced the initial pro-Western enthusiasm and the temperature started to drop (Drulák & Kratochvíl 2007, 18).

The 1993 Russian Foreign Policy Concept – finally approved by the Duma after denunciation of the previously proposed drafts – stated among its priorities "ensuring Russia an active role as a great power," and cautioned against unreasonable exposure to the West (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 30 April 1993). A compromise, tendered by the Russian authorities (instead of complete deference, expected by Washington) in response to American remonstrations to the export of Russian rocket engines to India, denoted the faltering U.S.-Russian relations and Moscow's recurring emphasis on preservation of Russia's national interests (Pravda 2001, 225). Although Moscow did not meddle with Washington in the Middle East, Haiti or Somalia (the areas with insignificant geopolitical interest to Russia), the Kremlin's approach shifted when it came to support of the January 1993 U.S. strikes in Iraq and the peacekeeping mission in Cyprus (Zelikow 1994, 55).

Moscow's assertive pro-Serbian policy in the Bosnian conflict was another reason of U.S. skepticism toward Russia. Upon NATO's air strikes threats in February 1994,

Moscow offered to insert 400 peacekeepers in Sarajevo, but received a cold response in Washington, leading to the first post-Cold War East-West crisis (Richter 1994). Such intrusion in the Balkans manifested the West Russia's great power capabilities and portended the Kremlin's potential reactions to the Kosovo crisis (Headley 2003, 213). The U.S.-Russian relations got even worse after Washington's disapproval of December 1994 Moscow's military action in Chechnya (Arbatov 1997, 20).

In the meantime, Yeltsin, pressured by the Russian armed forces, unambiguously stated in his renowned letter, addressed to the West, his discontent with the course of Russo-American relations, stressing in particular the issue of NATO's "open door" policy to new Eastern European members, perceived as a threat to Russian security (Cohen 1993, Light 2010, 238; Smith 2006, 55). Arms control was another major source of Russo-American discord. The disarmament initiative commenced successfully with the signing of the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) by presidents Bush and Yeltsin in January 1993 and ratified by the U.S. Senate three years later (U.S.-Russian Treaties and Agreements). However, the nationalist-dominated Russian State Duma had not only stalled ratification of the treaty till April 2000 (due to manifest opposition to the expansion of NATO), but also extended additional conditions.

Not surprisingly, it became more evident over time that U.S.-Russia partnership would not bring the expected results. At the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in December 1994 Yeltsin insinuated about Washington's intentions to decide "the destinies of continents and of the world community... from one single capital" and cautioned the U.S. of the onset of the "Cold Peace" (Kempster & Murthy 1994). The Kremlin still seemed to put efforts in mending relations with its "far abroad," but the

Russian foreign policy makers redirected their focus to the former Soviet allies (Arbatov 1997, 19). Concurrently, to Moscow's great discontent, the West started to show interest in the other USSR's successor states (Light 2010, 238). The fact that Yevgeny Primakov, the chief of the Foreign Intelligence Service and the last Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, superseded the pro-Western Kozyrev in January 1996 was a symbolic reflection of a change in U.S.-Russian relations (Pravda 2001, 226).

Primakov's advancement to the position of Foreign Minister signified a more pragmatic and less complaisant foreign policy course (Hufbauer, in Mandelbaum 1998, vii). His first statement assured that Russia's foreign policy goals were to revive the country's great power status and to establish reciprocal partnership with the West (OMRI 1996). The "excessive leaning toward the West" was replaced by the "Eurasianist" approach, characterized by "diversification of Russia's international ties;" in reality, merely a catch that vindicated Russia's interference in global affairs (Lo 2002, 19; Rossiiskaya Gazeta, January 10 1997). It became apparent that Moscow's foreign policy's resolute guidance and promotion of "multipolarity" – attempts to unite like-minded states into alliances to counterbalance the U.S., coined as the "Primakov Doctrine," – was a response to a "unipolar" world dominated by the U.S. (Ambrosio 2005, 166; Jurado 2008, 6; Kanet 2007, 2; Pravda 2001, 226 & 232).

Nevertheless, Russia's actions on the world arena of that period could be described as self-limiting assertiveness (Mandelbaum 1998, 32). Eager to regain global respect, the Kremlin restricted its ambitions. There has been a noticeable change in the thorny issue of NATO eastward expansion: aware of risks of further objections to NATO's expansion, Moscow wisely chose a path of negotiation. M. Albright, supporting

NATO's openness to the former Warsaw Pact members, affirmed that "it will take time for the process of trust to catch up with the process of change" (CNN, 18 March 1997).

Political pundits acknowledged that to improve Russia's international status, the country had to restore its economy (The Economist, 17 September 1998; Quinn-Judge & Graff 1998). Due to Primakov's diplomatic abilities, Russia ameliorated relations with the U.S. on the financial front: the IMF supplied the Kremlin with considerable sums (\$10.2 billion in March 1996 compared to \$6.8 million in 1995), provided to advance reforms and subsidize Yeltsin's re-election in summer 1996 and to assist during the economic decline prior to the financial crisis of August 1998 (\$17.1 billion) (Pravda 2001, 227). Following Primakov's appointment as Russia's Prime Minister in September 1998, his post in the Foreign Ministry was assigned to Igor Ivanov (The Jamestown Foundation, 14 September 1998). Up until the 2000 presidential elections, Russia, recognizing its economic decay and military deterioration, kept expanding its influence using soft power and, despite its own preferences, stood on the sidelines, as with the 1999 Kosovo war (Pravda 2001, 232).

At the turn of the millennium, both Russia and U.S. saw new leaders ascend to power: while handpicked by Yeltsin on his resignation on December 31, 1999, Vladimir Putin became an acting President, and won the spring 2000 elections, George W. Bush came into office in 2001; both to serve two consecutive terms. Having suffered through a decade of international discredit, the new Russian government, though aware of potential obstacles, was more than ever determined to restore the country's prestige (Gleason 2008; Oldberg 2007, 15). Russia's 2000 Foreign Policy Concept stated consistency, pragmatism, and predictability as foreign policy objectives (Light 2010, 231).

Analysts agree that the expeditious revival of Russia's economy, enabled by high energy prices, has broadened financial capabilities, stimulated military reconstruction (the area that was ignored during Yeltsin's presidency), and strengthened the feeling of national pride, thus leading to a more assertive foreign policy (Kanet 2007; Gleason 2008; Lukin 2008; Oliker 2009). As Strobe Talbott, the president of the Brookings Institution, stated, Russians sought an ambitious foreign policy course because now they had "the means and the motive to do so, with oil revenues pouring in and with a relish for pounding its chest a bit after years of tearing its hair and gnashing its teeth" (2007).

The intricate combination of unfolding events and tough political decisions caused further tensions between the two countries. As for the economic domain, even during his presidential campaign, Bush called for a suspension of IMF loans to Russia to stop financing "the bank accounts of corrupt officials" (Russia Funding 2000; *The Economist*, 2 September 1999). Yet, the U.S. seemed no longer as important to a resurgent Russia: not only has the country's economy been recovering, but also hardly any U.S.-Russian economic ties have been developing, with Moscow forming major trade connections with Shanghai and the EU (Oliker 2009, 126). Accusations of espionage of the Russian diplomats – a move perceived by Moscow as a chastisement for its aggressive foreign policy and was followed by the U.S. diplomats' ouster – showed strained Russo-American relations (BBC News, 22 March 2001; CNN, 22 March 2001). Despite its rhetoric, Moscow has not made any harsh moves.

Although the first year of Bush's presidency was marked by the post-Cold War nadir in relations between Moscow and Washington, Russia's reaction to the tragic events of September 11, 2001 demonstrated that the Kremlin would support the U.S. in

what was viewed as a common cause, global “war on terrorism” (Kanet & Homarac 2007, 181). Putin was the first foreign statesman to call President Bush, later sending Foreign Intelligence Service officers to aid the U.S. in the war on Afghanistan, and allowing U.S. pilots to use a Russian airport (Rukavishnikov 2007, 57; Baker & Glasser 2005, 214). But the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, which would destabilize the area and imperil Russia’s energy-related interests, was strongly opposed by the Kremlin, with the 9/11 attacks viewed in Moscow as the *casus belli* (Rukavishnikov 2007, 57; Baker & Glasser 2005, 214).

Nuclear arms control was another heavy issue. The Bush administration’s every decision in the nuclear stability dimension – endorsement of the Senate’s rejection to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), disregard of the START, and the retreat from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty – encountered Moscow’s ill-favored reaction (Talbot 2007). Though the U.S. was the first signatory to the CTBT, the Senate did not ratify the treaty in 1999; with Russia ratifying it in 2000 (Scheinman 2003). After the 9/11 events, the U.S. negotiated with the Kremlin over modification of the ABM Treaty, pressing for establishment of the National Missile Defense (NMD), meanwhile neglecting the START II. However, Russia had its own plan: in 2000, the START II was ratified by the Russian Duma, with a condition to maintain the ABM Treaty unchanged. The U.S. reaction was expected: Bush withdrew the U.S. from the 1972 ABM Treaty, the basis of Soviet-American nuclear security, in 2002, and embarked on development of the long-disputed NMD (CNN, 13 December 2001). The next day, Moscow exited from the START II. The polemic over proposed deployment of the U.S. ABM defense site in Poland revealed the ever-increasing gap between Russia and the U.S. Moscow’s protests



against installation of missile interceptors on the territory of the former Warsaw Pact member were met with Washington's rebuttal that called the defense system a mere "protectionist measure," without "geographic or technical capacity to pose any threat to Russia" (Sacko 2007, 7). Not persuaded, the Russians threatened to install a long range intercontinental ballistic missile, the RS-24, targeted at Poland.

Moscow's and the West's agendas clashed again over Kosovo's independence. Russia affirmed that, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, it would use its veto power in support of its historic ally, Serbia, and, if recognized by the West, Serbia's Albanian-dominated breakaway region would set a precedent in international law (RIA Novosti, 21 December 2007; Deutsche Welle, 17 January 2008). During the 2008 five day war, a rift between Russia and the U.S. peaked and many pundits prognosticated a new Cold War. In 2009, 20 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, the newly elected U.S. President Obama called for a "reset" of the U.S.-Russian relations. Yet, the question remains whether Obama's reset vis-à-vis Russia was motivated by the weakened U.S. position or genuine intent to cooperate with Moscow.

## **Chapter 2: Russia, the United States and the Former Soviet Republics**

*Kremlin is still a prisoner of its imperial past.  
Egor Gaidar, the late Russian politician.*

The post Cold War relations of the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) with the United States and Russia unfolded in parallel with the development of the Washington - Moscow relationship. The following discussion will analyze the dynamics of the U.S.-FSU relations and relations between Russia and its "near abroad," with the focus on the evolution of U.S. and Russian foreign policies toward the FSU republics, grounded in the tangled combination of U.S.-Russian political, security and economic interests.

After the 1991 independence, all the FSU republics, including Russia, torn between abandonment of authoritarian rule and efforts to develop democratic institutions, were faced with vicissitudes of the transitional period. To understand U.S. and Russia's involvement in the FSU space, it is necessary to remember the two countries' geographic location and historic background: while the U.S. is geographically remote and without historic ties to the FSU states, Russia shares both borders and the imperial past with the region, historically considered its own "sphere of influence."

The formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991 determined the fate of the disintegrating USSR: its 15 republics were transformed into independent states, Russia being the largest and most powerful (Encyclopedia Britannica). Comprising Russia, Ukraine and Belarus on December 8, 1991, the CIS welcomed the rest of the former republics on December 21, 1991; with the exception of Georgia, which was present as an observer in 1991 and joined two years later, and the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), which declined membership (CIS Website: Agreement; Alma-Ata Declaration; Ratification Status, 15 January 2008). The CIS, characterized by Kiev as a "framework for civilized divorce," was designed to expedite recovery of the new sovereign states and facilitate interstate affairs (Pravda 2001).

After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia's relations with other FSU republics progressed through several phases. Described by Pravda (2001, 216) as an "optimistic *laissez faire*," the initial Russian attitude toward the newly independent states (NIS) was based on a quixotic conception of "a new happy family of sovereign states" with fair distribution of rights, means and obligations, resolution of possible disputes according to

the new world order and the CIS potential to become a confederation similar to the EU (Pravda 2001, 216; Lukin 1994, 72). However, it proved to be ineffective.

The euphoria of the post-Soviet honeymoon period dissipated and Russia had to pay a high price for its failure to develop an efficient foreign policy based on a thorough analysis of the sudden breakdown of the Soviet Union, recognition of mistakes of the communist past and the significance of solid relations with the NIS (Arbatov 1997, 18; Lukin 1994, 72). Additional factors contributing to a weak post-Soviet foreign policy in the “near abroad” were contentment of the authorities (based on the decades-long ties with the region), conflicting identity (originated in ambivalence of Kremlin’s emotional attachment to the big brother role and the present necessity to treat the FSU republics as equals) and the CIS *double-entendre* (designed, at least on paper, for “interaction on the basis of sovereign equality,” the organization was often criticized as “Moscow’s vehicle for influence”) (Pravda 2001, 216; Interstate Statistical Committee). Moscow was faced with a dismal reality: not only had its idealistic hopes vanished, but also many of the former republics, Russia one of them, had a hard time re-building their states, coping with security issues and establishing market economies (Lukin 1994, 73).

The prospect of political, economic and strategic advantages in the NIS was reflected in U.S. foreign policy toward the region. The preliminary U.S. post-Soviet rhetoric focused on building an entente with Russia. The initial U.S. objective in the Russian periphery was elimination of nuclear weapons to avoid “the possibility that there could end up being three or four nuclear-weapons states where before there was one” (Rutland & Dubinsky 2008, 8; Talbott 1995). The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, known as the Nunn-Lugar Initiative and “one of the most positive pieces of

legislation of the post Cold War era,” provided funding and expertise for the FSU countries to control nuclear, chemical and biological weapons (Talbot 1995, 175; Post-Soviet Nuclear and Defense Monitor, 14 March 1995, 4).

Humanitarian assistance was immediately provided to the NIS, with the U.S. leading the operation “Provide Hope” (US Department of State Dispatch). Yet, overall policy was lacking consistency. This could be explained by the dichotomy between uncertainties regarding the future – with predictions varying from the reinstatement of the unified imperial anti-West Russia, the schism of a multitude of conflicting nations or the establishment of true democracies – and understanding that the U.S., as the only superpower with high stakes in the outcome, could not stay inactive (Simes, 1992). Soon international attention turned to the energy potential of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, in particular Caspian oil, fueling U.S. interest (Nuriyev 2007, 286).

Concomitantly, disillusioned with the course of the Russo-American relations and wishing to restore its global image, Moscow declared a new foreign policy priority: re-establishment of power in the “near abroad.” The period of “growing assertiveness in the CIS region” was characterized by Russia’s more clearly defined objectives (Pravda 2001, 215-216). Other reasons behind this drastic change in foreign policy direction were the country’s socio-economic decline, resulted in growing discontent among Russian citizens, and explicit political opposition (Arbatov 1997, 19-20). Most importantly, the inability of the other CIS members to balance its neighbor, even though disintegrating, but still powerful on the regional level, stimulated Kremlin’s proactive *modus operandi* (MacFarlane 1999, 240). Striving to remain “the first among equals” in the post-Soviet space, Moscow tried to manipulate the former republics not only by application of

economic sanctions – such as the ban on imports or use of energy as leverage by multiple threats to cut off oil and gas supplies – but also by military intervention into conflict zones (Kanet and Homarac 2007, 177 & Oliker et. al. 2009, 95).

Compounding the situation was the increased instability in Russia's contiguous periphery. Contained under the central communist authorities, ethnic conflicts over contested territories in the former USSR exploded following the Soviet Union's breakdown. The post-Soviet period witnessed Moscow's military support for separatists of Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria, interference in the civil war in Tajikistan, attempts to settle the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and Kremlin's assistance to the Georgian breakaway enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Conflicts also arose on the territory of the Russian Federation. Russia's North Caucasus became a scene of two military confrontations: the conflict between the Ingush and the Ossetes over the Prigorodny Raion of North Ossetia and the city of Vladikavkaz and Russia's devastating war with Chechnya, Russia's secessionist republic. The first Russo-Chechen war had drastic consequences: even though the confrontation chilled the Kremlin's imperialistic ambitiousness and redirected Russian people's focus away from dreadful domestic problems, it further weakened the country's economy and soldiers' morale and diminished Russia's global image (Arbatov 1997, 20). Moscow's engagement in the settlement of regional conflicts – mediation between the parties, peacekeeping missions and direct military interference – raised many questions and speculations about Kremlin's neo-imperialistic ambitions (Light 2010, 234).

Moscow's desire to secure its historic "sphere of influence" and to restrict U.S. intrusion into what was regarded by the Kremlin as an exclusively Russian domain

became known in political circles as Russia's "Monroe Doctrine" (Zelikow 1994, 58). Such a foreign policy shift and insistent behavior in the periphery sounded toxic in the West. It was apparent that in case of further U.S. engagement in the area, Russia's expansionist tendencies could be impeded. Castigating Moscow's imperialistic encroachments in the FSU, Washington nevertheless started its own advancement into the region under the Clinton administration's new foreign policy agenda of "democratic enlargement" (Kanet & Homarac 2007, 181; Brinkley 1997, 111).

Meanwhile, directed by the Foreign Policy Concept of April 1993, which pronounced "furthering integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States," the Kremlin's unifying efforts brought about a sequence of institutions: an Economic Union in 1993 and a Free Trade Area in 1994 (ratified by all the CIS members except Russia). A Belarus-Kazakhstan-Russia Customs Union was founded in 1995, was renamed the Free Trade Zone in 1996, and turned into the Eurasian Economic Community, adding Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2000, Uzbekistan in 2005 (as members), and Moldova, Armenia and Ukraine between 2002 and 2003 (as observers) (Light 2010, 232).

However, these seemingly strategic accomplishments did not change the ineffectual nature of the elaborate CIS edifice: absenteeism, lack of productivity and indifference characterized the member-states meetings (Pravda 2001, 217). The explanation for such behavior was reflected in Allan Kagedan's statement: "For states in the process of self-definition, the notion of integration is self-contradictory" (1993). According to Margot Light (2010, 232), additional reasons for such unimportant CIS achievements were lack of supranational powers, Russia's economic and military dominance among the FSU republics and divergence between its rhetoric and actions.

To Russia, the issue of collective defense was of the utmost importance, resulting in three separate agreements: 1992 marked signing of the CIS Collective Security Treaty by Moscow, Minsk and Yerevan (Kiev, Ashgabat and Chisinau joined in 1993, but withdrew 6 years later after the treaty's amendment); 1995 marked the signing of the CIS treaty establishing external borders for collective defense (Baku, Chisinau, Ashgabat, Kiev and Tashkent did not join); 1996 marked the signing of the treaty founding a unified air defense system (Baku and Chisinau did not sign) (Light 2010, 233).

The atmosphere of disappointment with the CIS led to the 1997 amalgamation of the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, the regional coalition of the strongest of CIS's opponents (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), who aimed for eventual EU and NATO membership (GUAM Website; Today.az, 23 May 2006). Disappointment regarding CIS inefficacy led to the next phase of post-Soviet development, marked by Russia's drive for bilateral ties with the NIS.

Under Putin, the "near abroad" in general, and reestablishing ties with the CIS dissidents in particular, became a priority in the Kremlin's foreign policy, described as a "pragmatic and tough business-like approach" (Pravda 2001, 216-218). While Moscow worked in alliance with Washington for a short period of time, following the 9/11 tragedy, soon thereafter, tensions started to pile up. The Bush administration pronounced the national energy security a top priority and American relations with the CIS members took a new direction (Kalicki 2001, 120). Not only bountiful natural resources but strategic location of the FSU republics was the White House's target. The Pentagon needed conveniently located air bases for use in the war on terrorism and its leading group al-Qaeda, headquartered in contiguous Afghanistan.

At first cooperative, Moscow soon perceived U.S. aggressive behavior in its own “backyard” as a threat to its national security. The new Military Doctrine, approved by Putin in April 2000, stated: “The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons...in situations that are critical for the national security of the Russian Federation and its allies” (Russia’s 2000 Military Doctrine). Nevertheless, over time, U.S. involvement in the post-Soviet area stretched out on many fronts: from providing assistance in the so-called “color revolutions” to building new pipelines in the region; thus, turning Russo-American relations sour.

A politically stable and economically secure Russian periphery and the solid ties with each of the FSU republics were essential for Russia’s vitality and U.S. prosperity (Arbatov 1997, 18; Kanet & Homarac 2007, 175). Since Moscow’s furtherance of multilateral integration within the complex structure of the CIS has proved challenging, more efforts were put into establishment of bilateral relations with the NIS (Light 2010, 235). Relations with the countries of the FSU in the U.S.-Russian competition for influence over the post-Soviet region developed differently in each individual case.

The Baltic States, of all the former neighbors, were the least dependent on Moscow. Securing access to reputable Western organizations became a priority: they were the first FSU republics to join the WTO (World Trade Organization) (Latvia in 1998, Estonia in 1999 and Lithuania in 2001) and the only ones to join NATO (2004) and the EU (2004) (European Commission, April 2006; Lukyanov 2005). Russia suspected the Baltic republics to be puppets in skillful Western hands: non-signatories of the CFE, these new NATO members could potentially turn into an arsenal on Russia’s western border and, thus, the U.S. tool of influence (Pravda.ru, 20 March 2009). Russia remained



the primary gas supplier to the region and repeatedly threatened to cut off gas supplies (CNBC, 24 February 2011). The question of the Russian Diaspora was another issue: Moscow has persistently complained about discrimination of the large Russian population living in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania but did not play the ethnic card to interfere, relying on the West to solve the problem (Jelisejenko 2003; Pravda 2001, 219).

Due to its abundant natural resources and strategic location, Central Asia, the most remote area of the post-Soviet space, also became involved into the Russo-American tug-of-war (Curtis 1997). Central Asia's largest country, Kazakhstan, has been the favored ally of both Russia and the U.S. in their struggle for dominance in the region (Pannier 2006; Smith 2006). As John Ordway, the U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan, stated, having oil and "virtually every element of the periodic table" along with "good leadership and relatively little ethnic tension" helped Astana to "come out a clear winner" among the Central Asian states (CIC, 21 December 2006). Collaboration with Beijing resulted in the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline and work on gas pipeline. Turkmenistan remained isolationist under Saparmurat Niyazov rule (Oliker 2009, 99). Since Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov came to power, Ashgabat became a center of competition between the U.S., Russia, the EU and China for access to the country's supply of hydrocarbons (International Herald Tribune, 4 July 2008; Trilling 2009).

Uzbekistan, since its independence, had inconsistent relations with Russia and the U.S., as well as with the FSU republics. The country joined GUAM in 1999, making it GUUAM and quitting in 2005. At first, Tashkent actively collaborated with Washington and lent the Karshi-Khanabad base to the U.S. Air Force. In the aftermath of the May 2005 civil unrest, Uzbek President Karimov, dependent on Russia's pipelines to export

gas to Europe, and in response to Washington's criticism of human rights abuses, requested the U.S. to leave (Osborn 2005). Yet, in 2008, in order to attract Western investment, Uzbekistan, turned its back to Russia, withdrawing from the Eurasian Economic Community, Russia's led economic bloc (Blagov 2008). Until recently, the most impoverished CIS country, Tajikistan, considered Moscow its primary partner (Republic of Tajikistan 2010; Interfax, 29 March 2006). In February 2010, Washington initiated annual bilateral consultations with Dushanbe "to enhance cooperation on a broad range of policy and assistance issues" (Background Note 2010). Post-Soviet Central Asia's least stable and second poorest country with limited natural resources, Kyrgyzstan, after independence accepted assistance from both the U.S. and Russia. Washington helped Bishkek become a member of the WTO in 1998 and supported implementation of political, economic, health, and educational reforms. Following 9/11, the U.S. deployed the former Soviet air base at Manas, which became a key NATO refueling and transportation hub (Carden 2009). Since 2003, the Kyrgyz Republic made a move toward reintegration with Moscow, welcoming Russian border guards to take charge of Kyrgyzstan's border with China and allowing the Russian Air Force to use the Kant Air Base (Olcott 1996). In April 2010, displeased with Bishkek for extending the U.S. deployment of Manas air base, Russia helped overthrow the corrupt regime of Bakiyev, thus strengthening Moscow's presence in Central Asia (TRDefense, 4 April 2010).

The fertile Fergana Valley, the most densely populated area of Central Asia – running through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which for centuries has been the region's breadbasket, now one of the most perilous places of the former Soviet Union – witnessed a horrific bloodshed in summer 2010 (Recknagel 2010). The porous borders,

ethnic diversity, poverty, drug trafficking and increased Islamist extremism make the region politically instable and jeopardize the U.S. presence there (Cohen 2010).

Poverty-stricken Moldova's goal is EU membership (Leanca 2010). The status of the secessionist Transnistria, the transit route for Russian gas pipelines, remains a main source of tension between Moscow and, dependent on Russia's energy, Chisinau (Oliker 2009, 98). Washington's financial assistance and receptivity to Moldova's NATO access made Kremlin use economic sanctions. In 2008, Moldova proposed a deal to Russia: Moscow's recognition of Moldovan sovereignty over Transnistria in exchange for Chisinau's declining NATO accession (Rusnac 2008). Arranged by Moscow, dialogue between the Moldovan President and the Transnistrian leader took place in April 2008, after seven years of freeze, and, in 2009, Moldova cancelled its participation in the NATO military exercises (Gros-Verheyde 2008; Interlic, 30 April 2009).

The Russian partnership with Belarus, its closest ally in political and economic dimensions, was consolidated by creation of a Community of Sovereign Republics in 1996, which became a Union of Sovereign Republics in 1997, and turned into a confederal union state two years later (discrepancies between the two states economic and legal systems suspended the functioning of the union) (Light 2010, 236). The U.S.-Belarusian relations have been deteriorating due to mutual denouncements: Washington criticized the undemocratic one-man rule of Lukashenko; whose country did not follow "color revolutions;" Minsk reproved the U.S. for meddling in its domestic affairs (Telegraf, 12 March 2010). Upon Belarusian membership of the Eastern Partnership Program, the EU initiative, in 2009, the Russo-Belarusian relations descended, leading to Minsk's refusal to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia that Lukashenko initially

pledged to do. Summer 2009 Moscow's provisional ban on dairy imports from Belarus, known as the Milk War, was interpreted by Minsk as a political measure (Barry 2009). The Kremlin's assault on the authoritarian Belarusian president was seen in Washington as an attempt to replace Lukashenko with a pro-Russia leader (Cohen 2010).

Since its independence, Ukraine, a transit state for Moscow's energy exports to the West and a large consumer of Russia's energy itself, sought to build relations with the EU, the U.S. and NATO, thus straining its ties with Russia (Oliker 2009, 96). Moscow, in turn, used energy as leverage, especially after the U.S. backed Orange Revolution. Lately, under the new pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovich, Moscow-Kiev relations have improved. In 2010, the solution to the knotty issue of Sevastopol, the point of a territorial dispute between Russia and Ukraine in 1993, has been found: the twenty-five year lease extension of the Russian Naval Base located in Sevastopol, which the Kremlin used to thwart Ukraine's NATO membership, was ratified; the step condemned by the former Ukrainian President Yushchenko as "trading sovereignty for gas" (Batanov 2010).

No doubt, the most contested area of the FSU, which Washington and Moscow have locked horns over, is the South Caucasus states, strategically located and rich in natural resources. Discovery of ample energy resources in Azerbaijan, back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, led to an oil fever comparable only to the gold fever in Klondike (The Ministry of Culture and Tourism). Controlled by communists for seventy years, once independent, the country immediately drew international attention. In early 1990s, Moscow-Baku relations deteriorated due to the Kremlin's assistance to Armenia in the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Recently, Baku has angered Moscow by playing a major role in the West's efforts to construct an alternative energy export route from the

Caspian Basin. After the BTC pipeline was built, Azerbaijan tried to maintain good relations with the U.S., Russia and Iran (Oliker 2009, 100). Moscow and its South Caucasus' ally, Yerevan, have worked in unison on a number of issues, especially in the security field. In 1997, they signed the treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Understanding and ratified a treaty allowing Russia to maintain military bases in Armenia for a period of twenty-five years (Eastern Europe 1999). Recently, Moscow prolonged the lease of the Gyumri military base until 2044 and promised protection against Turkey and Azerbaijan (Klimentiev 2010). The formation of the unified Russian-Armenian troops assured the guardianship of Armenian border with Iran (Cohen 2010). Since Georgia's withdrawal from the USSR, disagreements between Moscow and Tbilisi kept piling up. From Georgia's standpoint, Moscow's support for Georgia's separatists, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the presence of the Russian peacekeepers, and suspended evacuation of the Russian military bases from the Georgian territory were the greatest sources of discord. On the other hand, Moscow was displeased by Georgia's Western realignment that led to the Rose Revolution, aspirations for NATO membership and the construction of the BTC pipeline. Russian-Georgian relations hit new low with the 2006 financial war, with economic sanctions and tit-for-tat diplomatic moves. Displeased by Georgia's unchanging Western course and the politics of ethnic nationalism, but, most importantly, avoiding the possibility of sharing its border with the NATO member, Russia was trying to influence NATO's decision on Georgia's entrance into the Western military bloc. As a result, at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO members gave Saakashvili no firm timetable for future membership. Tensions culminated in the 2008 five-day military

confrontation. After the August 2008 war, Georgia withdrew from the CIS and Russia-Georgia diplomatic relations were cut off.

In order to understand the complexities of the Georgian crisis in the context of U.S.-Russian relations, it is vital to find parallels between Georgia's problems with other FSU republics. To improve welfare of their citizens and prevent ethnic violence, the regional FSU authorities have to stimulate development of democratic institutions, promote transparency in their political systems, motivate economic recovery, extirpate the local drug lords' sanctuaries and find a solution to minority issues (Cohen 2010). As for relations with the external actors, open ties with the U.S., Russia and regional powers, should guarantee a productive outcome.

The future of the Soviet successor states is determined by the course of U.S.-Russian relations. In light of the recent Obama "reset" vis-à-vis Russia, there is a great possibility for active collaboration. The foundation for Washington-Moscow partnership, in spite of all the tensions, lies in implementation of existing treaties and comprehensive development of new ones to enhance tactical cooperation in areas of mutual political, economic and security interests: struggle against international terrorism, energy geopolitics, removal of the threat of nuclear annihilation and stabilization of the post Soviet area (Lukin 1994, 75; Kanet & Homarac 2007, 180).

### **Chapter 3: Georgia: From Ancient Times to Independence**

*The bridge between East and West.  
Michael Woods.*

Strategically located east of the Black Sea in Southwestern Asia, Georgia borders Russia in the north, Turkey and Armenia in the south, and Azerbaijan in the southeast. This relatively small country (69,700 sq km) controls much of the Caucasus Mountains and

the routes through them. As of July 2010, Georgia's population consisted of 4.6 million, among them 83.9% Orthodox Christian, 9.9% Muslim, 3.9% Armenian-Gregorian, 0.8% Catholic and other; with Georgian spoken by 71%, Russian by 9%, Armenian by 7%, Azeri by 6% and others (CIA - The World Fact Book 2010). From the old days, not only its pivotal location on multiple empires' peripheries but also Georgian historic internal disintegration intensified exposure to a myriad of invaders.

The ancient kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia, comprising tribes of Laz, Svans, Karts and Mingrelians, were the first states on the territory of the present-day Georgia (Braund, 1994). Colchis, the earliest Georgian formation in the western part of modern Georgia, depicted in the famed Greek myth of the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece, was founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Toumanoff 1963, 69). The kingdom of Iberia or Kartli (the former name used by the ancient Romans and Greeks and the latter by Georgians) was established in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, after the successful coalition of the eastern and southern regions by various tribes speaking the Kartvelian language (Sunny 1988, 13). From early on, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Mongols, Turks and Russians sought to subjugate this country. In the epoch of pre-Christianity, Georgia was turned into a battlefield of persistent contest between Greece, combating for influence from the west, and the Persian Empire striving to dominate from the east (Salia 1983, 182-83).

The rivalry over Georgia continued until the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC when the country came under the influence of the Roman Empire (Toumanoff 1961, 74). The most significant Roman impact on the political and cultural progress of Georgia was the adoption of Christianity by Georgians in 330 AD. Not only was this newly found belief a crucial factor in the process of consolidation of the Georgian nation, but also it helped to

preserve national identity (Surguladze 1989). The Christianization turned Georgia, one of the first countries in the world to accept the Christian faith, into “an outer bulwark of Christendom in the pagan Orient,” bestowing the Georgian nation with identity that contributed to the country’s centuries-long resistance to foreign rule (Lang 1962, 25-26).

Having remained rather independent until the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia observed the struggle for dominance revive with Persians again attacking from the east and now Byzantine from the west (Makhnach 2003, 2). In the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, the area was vanquished by the Arabs who, despite all their attempts, were incapable of forcing Islam upon Georgia. In the meantime, as a result of the Caliphate’s active trade, Tbilisi became a midpoint at the crossroads of a handful of major trade routes (Nuriyev 2007, 38). The end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century marked the growing opposition to the rule of the Arab Caliphate. The deterioration of the Arab authority sequentially fostered unification of the multiple Georgian kingdoms and principalities under their first king Bagrat III at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Melikishvili 1970). The country was coalesced under the appellation “Sakartvelo” (meaning “the place of the Georgians”) connoting various ethnic groups living together in place of the former name “Kartli,” which denoted one of the Georgian tribes, progenitor of the Kartvelian language (Alasaniya 1996).

The period of relative stability came to the end when Seljuk Turks conquered Georgia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and transformed newly possessed lands into pastures. Formed by King David IV, the regular army and peasant militia were able to withstand Georgia’s colonization by liberating the country from the Arabs and expelling the Seljuk Turks. The reign of Georgia’s greatest monarch, King David IV’s Agmashenebeli (“the Builder”) (1089 – 1125) signified the country’s prosperity, cultural and educational developments,



territorial expansion and unification of Georgians (Nuriyev 2007, 39). The rule of Queen Tamar (1184 – 1213) embarked on Georgia's Golden Age: the pinnacle of Georgia's development in politics, economy and culture. The Mongol invasion of 1236 led to the country's gradual decline and fragmentation. The 14<sup>th</sup> century marked a transitory revitalization of Georgia's might preceding the prolonged strife for dominance over Georgia between two powerful empires, the Ottoman Turks and Persians.

However, a new interested party, that would define an utterly new age in Georgian history, appeared on the South Caucasus stage. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Grand Princes of Moscow had begun to advance towards the Caspian Sea. The initiation of Georgian relations with Russia was marked by 1492, when King Alexander of Kakheti (Eastern Georgia) dispatched an embassy of friendship to Ivan III of Moscow. Half a century later, subsequent appropriation of Kazan in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1556 by Russia, led the Kakhetian King Levan to accept Cossacks for protection from Tsar Ivan the Terrible (Habberton 1965). Even though the Cossacks pulled back, due to threats from the Persians, their stay symbolized the beginning of Georgian-Russian relations; a further Russian expansion into Caucasus became a matter of time (Lang 1962, 33). Be that as it may, from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Georgia, which had gone into complete ruin and disintegration, still remained the object of strife between the Ottomans and Persians, notwithstanding frequent Georgian petitions for Russian military assistance.

The momentous rapprochement occurred when Georgian King Erekle II (1744 to 1798), exhausted from the constant Ottoman and Persian aggression, asked his Orthodox neighbor for protection, appealing to the common faith (Itonishvili 1997). The legendary Georgievski Treaty was signed in 1783, establishing Georgia as a Russian protectorate in

exchange for military assistance (Suny 1988, 58). In 1801, Russian Tsar Paul I signed a decree on the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire (Avalov 1906, 186). Despite the note of protest from Garsevan Chavchavadze, the Georgian envoy in Saint Petersburg, the Georgian heir to the throne, David Batonishvili, was deposed, and the government headed by General Ivan Lasarev was arrayed to govern over annexed Georgian principalities. Victory in the Russo-Turkish war and triumphal Persian expeditions helped Russia to secure complete control over Georgia. In 1811, the Russian Orthodox Church abolished the Autocephalous status (independence) of the Georgian Church (Itonishvili 1997). Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church turned the Georgian Church into its exarchate by dominating all churches and monasteries, forbidding the Georgian liturgy and profaning the icons throughout the country (Dowling 1912).

Russian incorporation of Georgia denoted a fundamentally different phase of Georgian history. At first, the Russian high officials ignored local laws and traditions, giving rise to discontent among Georgians, followed by a conspiracy by nobility in 1832 and a revolt by peasants and nobles in 1841. However, in 1845, a newly-appointed commander-in-chief and viceroy of the Caucasus, Mikhail Vorontsov, successfully won over the local aristocracy by his appreciation of Georgian culture and promotion of Georgian gentry into the government (Rhineland 1990, 169). In essence, annexation by imperial Russia brought about both advantages and disadvantages for Georgia. On the bright side, newly constructed roads and railroads allowed the country to industrialize. The best universities and academies of St. Petersburg were now open to Georgian youth. Other reforms, on the other hand, led to controversial consequences. Abolition of serfdom, gradually started in 1864, gratified neither the Georgian gentry whose revenues

depended on villeins' labor nor the peasants whose destitution had not been diminished. The status of the nobility, the backbone of Georgian society, declined gradually over the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, creation of a new class of bourgeoisie by the urban Armenian minority caused dissatisfaction among the old Georgian elite (Jones 2005).

Moreover, the imperial program of administrative Russification, intending to extirpate Georgian customs and language, began gathering opposition to tsarist Russia (Suny 1994). Certainly, the Georgian nationalist movement, the most successful in the Russian Empire, headed by Marxist followers and distinguished thinkers Ilya Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, was a response to such policy (Jones 2005). These patriots were inspired by the idea of Georgian national liberation – “desire to restore Georgia's right to self-government and their own civic rights, to preserve their national characteristics and culture” (Lang 1962, 109). It was not long until unrelieved discontent with the socio-political situation fomented a revolutionary movement (Suny 1994). It was led by the Social Democratic Party with Joseph Stalin (born Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili), a young Russified Georgian himself, as its head. He represented the radical Bolshevik faction, advocating for an autonomous union with Russia, and confronted the Mensheviks, protagonists of independence and national liberation.

During World War I, the revolutionary movement was suspended. The Caucasus, with Georgia at its heart, once again became a battlefield between contestants fighting for control over the area. The year 1918, following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, marked Georgia's independence. The Democratic Republic of Georgia was established and the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church was restored. Georgia's independence was recognized by the major European states and in May 1920 even by

Communist Russia. In spite of that, in 1921, the Russian Red Army, led by an ethnic Georgian, General Sergo Orjonikidze, attacked Georgia and after a quick war subdued the country making it a part of the recently formed Soviet Union in 1922 (Menteshashvili & Surguladze 1990; Menteshashvili 2002; Nuriyev 2007).

The 1922 recurred acquisition of the Caucasus by the USSR signaled the beginning of complete political and economic control, which lasted seven decades. At first, all three South Caucasus republics - Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia (containing Abkhazia and South Ossetia) - were united in the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (TSFSR). According to a new Soviet Constitution, the TSFSR disintegrated into three separate republics in 1936; Georgia emerged as the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Noticeably, during World War II, Georgia contributed many soldiers to the Soviet Army and also served as one of the major points of supply of munitions and textiles. Meanwhile, some Georgians formed the Georgian Legion aiding the Germans. After the war was over, countless deportations were ordered by Stalin. Many history pundits consider gaining access to the Caucasus oilfields as one of the main goals of Hitler's invasion of the USSR.

Under the Soviet Union, Georgian nationalism and anti-Soviet national upheavals were obfuscated by intentionally delineated administrative borders and the Soviet appeal for patriotic unity. One of the means used to maintain the Communist rule and weaken opposition was the Soviet "Great Terror" implemented by yet another Georgian, chief of secret police, Lavrentiy Beria (Knight 1995, 57). Like the rest of the USSR under Stalin's rule, Georgia had undergone rampant repression of the intelligentsia; the most notorious among them in 1924 (aristocracy) and in 1936-37 (artists and academics).

The beginning of unrest was marked by March 9, 1956 riots costing the lives of about a hundred Georgian students. In 1978, Georgian nationalism and Soviet rule disaccorded again, after a Moscow order to give an equally official status to the Russian language in Georgia (Cornell 2002, 162). As a response to Tbilisi mass demonstrations on April 14 (remembered as the Day of the Georgian Language), the Soviet authorities had to approve Georgia's reinstatement of its constitutional guarantee, leaving Georgia one of only two Soviet republics (along with Armenia) with a national language other than Russian. The turbulent late 1980s marked the beginning of persistent struggles between a Kremlin challenged by perestroika and revived Georgian nationalists as well as Georgia's ethnic minorities. A pivotal event that propelled Georgian people to disapprove continuation of Soviet rule and long for independence happened in 1989. April 9, later promulgated as the Day of National Unity and called by President Eduard Shevardnadze "a deep and unhealed wound" for Georgians (at the meeting of the Georgian Security Council, as cited in Vignansky, 1996, 5) was marked by twenty Georgians dead and hundreds wounded in the suppressed by Soviet soldiers of peaceful demonstrations in Tbilisi.

A growing pro-independence spirit of Georgians promoted the rise of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a political prisoner and dissident, to power. The Georgian Parliament, the first among other Soviet republics, declared independence from the USSR on April 9, 1991. Yet, the newly elected president was unable to realize Georgian hopes of "a new democratic society with a legitimate government and a free multi-ethnic family of citizens" (Nuriyev 2007, 75). Gamsakhurdia's "bizarre ethno-nationalist rule" based on a "Georgia for Georgians" doctrine fueled vehement ethnic confrontations, resulting in

secessionist wars of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Khutsishvili 1994, 3). His autocratic style, inability to establish international ties and failure to recover the country's economy led to public protests and, eventually, a civil war. Deposed in December 1991 by a coup d'état, Gamsakhurdia fled to Armenia and subsequently to Chechnya (Gladman 2003, 177). The military junta, which took power, was incapable of restoring order in the country, entangled in a chaos of domestic and foreign affairs.

In March 1992, the Soviet Foreign Minister in the 1980s and *de facto* leader of Soviet Georgia (head of the Georgian Communist Party since 1972), Eduard Shevardnadze, became interim head of state, to be elected President in 1995. At first, Shevardnadze's regime was praised for its establishment of new political institutions and support of young politicians; by late 1990s, however, it was criticized for nepotism and flagrant corruption. Georgia was the last former Soviet republic to be admitted to the UN, on July 31, 1992. Even though Moscow's relations with Tbilisi were heightened under Shevardnadze rule, they climaxed in 2003, when Mikheil Saakashvili took power in the 2003 Rose Revolution (Oliker 2009, 97).

#### **Chapter 4: Road to Democracy: Georgia's Western Realignment and the Rose Revolution**

*Georgia's Rose Revolution was hailed in the West as a breakthrough for democracy in the post-Soviet world.*

*Charles King.*

*Russia greeted the Rose Revolution with dismay.*

*Svante Cornell.*

For three weeks in November 2003, the world watched the unfolding events in the small South Caucasus republic of Georgia. The political unrest, incited by fraudulent parliamentary elections and demonstrations of unified opposition, resulted in the

bloodless uprising. The event, known as the Rose Revolution, led to the resignation of Soviet patriarch Eduard Shevardnadze and brought into power a young pro-Western Mikheil Saakashvili.

Georgia's democratic tradition distinguished this small country from its neighbors, starting from the "Golden Age" and heightening during 1917-1921, at the time of the first Democratic Republic of Georgia. Throughout the Soviet regime, Georgia was the most vocal among FSU republics. Moreover, during the years following its independence from the USSR, the liberal atmosphere in Georgia amplified: independent media and freedom of expression (both rare in the FSU republics), along with discontent with the corrupt regime of Shevardnadze, provided favorable conditions for this small nation in the South Caucasus to undergo radical changes (Cornell 2007, 5).

In the first decade after the demise of the USSR, newly independent Georgia, destabilized by civil war and bloody separatist wars, was still politically and economically dependent on its big northern brother. In 1995, Shevardnadze affirmed that his country had "no other partner...in the world" besides Russia (Die Tageszeitung, 3 November 1995, 57). Nonetheless, Russia's military presence in its former republic, support for separatists and manipulations of Georgia's economy angered Shevardnadze and made him look across the Atlantic. The end of the 1990s signified Georgia's reorientation toward the West. With approximately a billion dollars in aid during Shevardnadze rule, Georgia became one of the world's largest per capita recipients of U.S. financial assistance (King 2008). A sequence of events confirmed Tbilisi's strengthening ties with the West: the 1999 foundation of the framework for the future BTC pipeline that would bypass Russia, Georgia's entrance into the Council of Europe in

the same year, WTO membership in the following year, and the 2000 Ministry of Foreign Affairs publication of the Georgian international strategy, stressing cooperation with NATO and the EU (MacKinnon 2007, 94; WTO News 2000; Darchiashvili 2002, 116).

The Western interest in the geopolitical location of the region, fueled by the development of the BTC pipeline project and enhanced after the 9/11 events, helped the Georgian army find a benefactor. The Pentagon not only increased military spending, but also sent 130 military consultants, initiated two training programs (the 2002 Georgia Train and Equip Program and the 2003 International Military Education and Training Program), and provided assistance in reorganizing the Georgian police (Deyermond 2007). These developments led to an official U.S. military presence in the region, thus angering the Kremlin and straining U.S.-Russian relations.

On many occasions, Moscow accused Tbilisi of sheltering Chechen rebels in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge near Chechnya, who, as thought by the Kremlin, used the area as a staging ground for terrorist attacks on Russia (Kanet & Homarac 2007, 177). Tensions grew in 2002, when Moscow made threats of counterattacks on Chechen terrorists and Tbilisi had to consent to cooperative border patrols. When the Pentagon sent its military advisers to train the Georgian army to conduct counterterrorist operations in February 2002, President Bush defended the move to Putin, referring to reports of a possibility of al-Qaeda terrorists seeking refuge in Georgia (U.S. Military Advisers Arrive in Georgia 2002). The Russian president, however, seemed unconvinced and critical of Georgia's Western alignment. Such was the political atmosphere around the time of the upcoming Rose Revolution.



This chapter will discuss the unfolding of the political events, examine major political opponents, investigate the underlying causes of the Rose Revolution, taking into considerations both U.S. and Russian sources, analyze Washington's and Moscow's stakes in the outcome of the political situation in Georgia, and, in light of all that, the development of U.S.-Russian relations.

The Rose Revolution happened at the time of authoritarian relapse in Russia, Ukraine and Central Asia. President Shevardnadze's reputation as a brilliant politician, capable of balancing relations between the West and Russia, and able to confront violent opposition by overcoming assassination attempts in 1995 and 1998, armed revolt in 1998 and mass rally protests in 2001, was scrutinized once again in the fall of 2003 (Nuriyev 2007, 82). The emphasis on democratic development of the region by the Bush administration made Saakashvili an attractive candidate for Georgia's presidency.

The pre-revolutionary state of domestic and foreign affairs in Georgia revealed a politically and economically crumbling state. If the mid-1990s were characterized by gradual political stabilization, economic growth and democratic development, by the late 1990s, particularly after the 1998 Russian economic crisis, issues started to pile up. Dysfunctional political and social institutions furthered endemic corruption, human rights violations, weak rule of law, and high crime rates, thus impeding the country's development. High unemployment rates, energy shortages and tax collection at only 14 per cent of the country's GDP illustrated stagnant economy. The unreformed security sector, characterized by extortion, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling and kidnapping, as well as unresolved conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and incapability to control the country borders only made matters worse. Many viewed Georgia as a model of a

failed state, which resulted in declining international assistance and reduced financial aid (Lynch 2006, 21-22). Interestingly enough, Eduard Shevardnadze, burdened by political quagmire and the country's economic decay, followed in the footsteps of his predecessors: just like the earlier Georgian rulers, he switched sides, decreasing Tbilisi's engagement with Washington, and turning for help to Moscow.

The U.S., displeased by Shevardnadze's balancing act, accentuated the significance of the upcoming free and fair parliamentary elections in November. Moreover, former Secretary of State James Baker was sent as President Bush's personal envoy to Tbilisi to facilitate an agreement between Georgia's government and the opposition over the most contentious issues, specifically, the composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Georgia's official governmental body. Therefore, on November 2, when the large-scale inconsistencies between the results submitted by the CEC and the reports of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) "Fair Elections" appeared, revealing the failure of the "Baker Plan," Washington's tolerance for the Shevardnadze regime reached its low.

The critical political actors included pro-Shevardnadze united forces "For a New Georgia" that contended with such political parties as Saakashvili's "United National Movement," the "Burjanadze-Democrats" bloc (that united the former Parliament Speaker Zurab Zhvania and then Parliament Speaker Nino Burdjanadze), the "Aghordzineba" (pro-Russia democratic union for the revival of Georgia, headed by the authoritarian leader of the Adjara Autonomous Republic, Aslan Abashidze), the "Labor Party of Georgia" (that gained popularity during the previous parliamentary elections), the right wing, pro-Western movement "New Right Party" and supported by local

businessmen the party "Industry Will Save Georgia." While the CEC reported the pro-governmental bloc "For a New Georgia" gaining the majority of votes, the Fair Elections announced Saakashvili's "United National Movement" a clear winner.

Mikheil Saakashvili (or "Misha," according to Georgian tradition to use hypocorisms in referring to the country's political leaders) was a young, multilingual, Western-educated former Minister of Justice, who, in a sign of protest against flagrant corruption and unwillingness to reform, left the government of Shevardnadze. Saakashvili's political agenda included the country's territorial integration, implying re-annexation of separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and eventual NATO's membership. The popular domestic political objectives of Saakashvili's National Movement Party entailed raising pensions, providing social services to the poor, fighting corruption, and increasing state revenue.

The sequence of events unfolded as follows. Shevardnadze proclaimed the November 2<sup>nd</sup> elections with "all doors... open" and the head of the CEC, Nana Devdariani, pronounced them as "a good dress rehearsal" for the upcoming in 2005 presidential elections (Chikhladze & Chikhladze 2005, 4). The strongest leaders of the opposition (the former Shevardnadze protégés Saakashvili, Zhvania and Burdjanadze, who represented "a class of young, English-speaking intellectuals hungry for pro-Western reforms"), united in the so-called "opposition troika" (Wall Street Journal, 24 November 2003). Condemning the electoral infringement, they appeared in the first protest demonstrations on November 3, exhorting the Georgian citizens to resist the electoral results and delivering an ultimatum to the authorities. On November 9, Shevardnadze met with the opposition leaders, but no compromise was found. In the

following days, thousands of Georgians began “peaceful mobilization” in front of the parliament to support the opposite cause. The youth organization “Kmara” (“Enough”) actively participated in protest activities. On November 13, Saakashvili, who became the opposition’s unquestionable leader, appealed to the public to participate in mass demonstrations and request Shevardnadze’s resignation. The very next day, Shevardnadze announced that he was “ready for dialogue” with Burdjanadze and Zhvania, and “even ready to meet with Saakashvili” (Chikhladze & Chikhladze 2005, 11). Russia’s Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who flew from Moscow to play the role of mediator, found himself unable to change the course of events. After a weekend break was announced, there was not a single soul in front of the Georgian parliament, but committees of civil disobedience started to form throughout the country. On Monday, November 17, the pro-Shevardnadze Adjarans took the empty space in front of the parliament, soon to realize its efforts were in vain. On November 21, the U.S. State Department announced the results of the elections to be fraudulent. In response, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on Georgians to not allow violence. On that night, the world was stunned by the vivid images broadcast by the Georgian TV station Rustavi 2: thousands of cars were rushing to the capital from all over Georgia (Chikhladze & Chikhladze 2005, 13).

The November 22 demonstration attracted about fifty thousand Georgians. At the time of Shevardnadze’s opening remark at the first session of the new parliament, the opposition, headed by Saakashvili, entered the Parliament, carrying roses in their hands as a symbol of peaceful intentions and shouting “Resign!” After the 75-year-old President was hastened out by his own security, Burdjanadze assumed the position of acting

president, as required by the Constitution. On that evening, Shevardnadze made a public announcement on the TV station “Imedi,” announcing his decision to leave politics (Chikhladze & Chikhladze 2005, 19). Shevardnadze’s forced resignation, which happened more than a decade after the country’s independence, still proved that the political norm of installing a new leader remained the same (King 2008, 231). In January 2004, Saakashvili was elected president with unprecedented 96 % of votes. Following cancellation of the results of the fraudulent November 2 parliamentary elections, the united opposition won the majority in the new parliamentary elections.

So what were the main factors that led to the Rose Revolution in Georgia? To answer this question, we will discuss the framework offered by James V. Wertsch (2005). In his analysis of the events of November 2003, Wertsch argues that although “corruption, government ineptitude, and economic decline, coupled with Shevardnadze’s blatant manipulation of the parliamentary election” were important determinants of the revolution, they have also characterized other countries and have not led to revolutions there (2005, 132). According to Wertsch, what made the Georgian case stand out was the combination of the following factors: firstly, a vibrant civil society, specifically, the proactive role of NGOs; secondly, the role of free media; and, thirdly, weak state authority.

Many pundits acknowledged a significant role played by “a raft of NGOs...supported by American and Western foundations” – in particular, the Liberty Institute, sponsored by George Soros (Wall Street Journal, 24 November 2003). Comprising approximately 4,000 agencies at the time of the Rose Revolution, the “ubiquitous and influential” NGOs, serving as “powerful proponents of the principles of

civil society” became the “most powerful and trusted sector” of modern day Georgia (Wertsch 2005, 133). By filling in the vacuum “to create a form of social order...that to some degree replaced that of the state,” Georgian NGOs established the foundation for the November 2003 events by not only helping “to stay focused on the positive agenda for change,” but also inventing a new political tendency by replacement of violent confrontation with “civil opposition” (Wertsch 2005, 134-135). It is worth mentioning (because it reinforces the role of NGOs) that after the Rose Revolution, Russia forbade foreign investments into NGOs. Another factor, examined by Wertsch, is the role of free critical press: having independent outlets able to freely express their views, like TV station Rustavi 2, critical of the Shevardnadze regime and supportive of the opposition, turned Georgian media into an engine of the Rose Revolution (2005, 135-136). The Georgian public considered NGOs and media more trustworthy than government institutions. Consequently, Georgia’s weak state authority, “not so much a force behind the Rose Revolution as a vacuum that invited other forces to come into play,” became another factor leading to the revolution (Wertsch 2005, 137). As ancient Greek philosophers thought of a revolution as an undesirable result of societal breakdown, the Georgian state of affairs in 2003 proved them right. Economic collapse, widespread corruption, Shevardnadze’s inability to control any other part of the country besides Tbilisi and his detachment from the U.S. generated drastic public disapproval. 42 % of Georgians stated moderate faith in authorities in 1996. The number went down to 25 % in 1998; with 67 % reported having no confidence in Parliament or the President in 2000 (Human Development Report: Georgia 1999, 57; Human Development Report: Georgia 2000, 74). Evidence of the weakened state was presented by the Rose Revolution itself:

not only had the state authorities enabled the NGOs and media “to emerge and fill a vacuum,” and to eventually challenge and ultimately erode it, but also they changed the loyalty of the army and police, making the fall of Shevardnadze’s regime unpreventable and providing the opposition with the reigns of power (Wertsch 2005, 137).

The opposing view, predominantly held by Russian scholars, asserts that the events of November 2003 had been planned and sponsored by the U.S. (Kara-Murza 2005). This position is supported by the many U.S. interests in the region and some evidence of U.S. involvement. The Russian authors name such U.S. incentives for external manipulation of the Georgian events as Washington’s interest in having a poster-child for democracy and Georgia’s strategic geopolitical position as transit country for the pipeline routes and the Middle Eastern neighbor. On the one hand, by investing in the Georgian “laboratory of nascent democracy,” Washington wished to teach nothing but a successful lesson in state-building. In this context, President Bush’s 2005 visit to Tbilisi, the first ever of a U.S. leader to the region, and his speech, where he pronounced Georgia a “beacon of liberty,” signified the symbolic importance of the small Caucasus country (President George W. Bush Archive, 2005). On the other hand, Georgia’s reliance on the U.S. made the country “malleable to western demands for democratization” (Cornell 2007, 5).

Although Soros publicly stated that “the Rose Revolution was entirely the work of Georgian society,” the Kremlin attributed a significant amount of financial and organizational assistance of the Georgian NGOs to the work of the Liberty Institute, sponsored by Soros (New Europe, 5 June 2005). Other indications of the U.S. involvement in Georgian affairs, examined by those supporting the Russian side,

included modeling of the Rose Revolution upon the 1989 Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution (such as protest activities of the youth organization “Kmara” being similar to the “Otpor,” training of the leaders of the opposition, and the role played by U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles) and hand-picking pro-Western Mikheil Saakashvili as a leader. That being said, this position requires more solid evidence.

Although success in the Rose Revolution guaranteed Saakashvili ascendance into power, it left him with “a bankrupt, enfeebled and deeply corrupt state, with no control over large parts of its territory and declining international support” (Lynch 2006, 22). Moreover, as stressed by late Zurab Zhvania in his interview following the November 2003 events, the opposition realized that if they “do not move ahead with really substantial changes, everything will go back to what it was before” and that changing the system would be “much more difficult than making a revolution” (Zhvania 2005, 40). The initial enthusiasm – inspired by such achievements as an anti-corruption drive, increased state budget revenues, effective cooperative relations with the international financial institutions, reintegration of Adjara (perceived by President Saakashvili as “the beginning of Georgia’s territorial integrity”), and remodeling of the army and police forces – dissipated soon thereafter (Papava 2005). If immediately after the Rose Revolution it was unclear whether it brought a positive change, just a few years down the road, many political analysts began to question whether the Rose Revolution had wilted (Wertsch 2005, 140). Ineffective reformation of political institutions (the news media, the judiciary, electoral system and political parties) coupled with economic decline and the notorious death of Zurab Zhvania provided a frustrating disappointment to many Georgians (Richter 2005).



Georgia became the first domino to fall in the following color revolutions in the post-Soviet space. The Rose Revolution inspired the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the 2006 Jeans Revolution in Belarus. However, these revolutions did not bring about the expected outcomes: the Ukrainian Orange Revolution only strengthened the “tainted with corruption” authoritarian regime (D’Anieri 2010; Eke 2010; Hiro 2010); the Kyrgyz leader, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was overthrown in 2010; and the Belarusian movement, initiated by youth groups, did not bring a regime change. Not only had the “color revolutions” revealed the frailty of the post-Soviet democracies, but also they discounted Moscow’s resolution to reinstate its influence in the “near abroad” and to prevent pro-Washington leaders gaining power (Eke 2010). As time went by, the Kremlin made every effort to install pro-Russia leaders in the FSU states. Such political fiascoes resulted in Washington’s attempts to shun possible criticism for its self-interested policy of democratization, and, thus, enhanced U.S. interest in making the Georgian story a success (Cornell 2007, 8).

The fall of Shevardnadze’s regime and success of the Rose Revolution was attributed to a thriving civil society, role of NGOs, free media and Georgia’s weak state authority. The Russian reaction was also rather expected: Moscow, having reverted to authoritarianism, blamed the U.S. Overall, although the Rose Revolution reinstated Georgia’s democratic tradition and brought initial euphoria, it left Georgia with more questions than answers. Following the Rose Revolution, the new Georgian government, eager to follow its aspirations, even at the expense of damaging relations with Russia, established a very pro-Western regime. Discontented with Georgia’s ambitions to pursue NATO membership and to restore its territorial integrity, Russia declared a diplomatic

war, using political and economic sanctions to punish its noncompliant southern brother. Washington's support of Tbilisi in the Rose Revolution encouraged Mikheil Saakashvili to become overconfident through his reliance on U.S. assistance; a quality that played a role in inciting the 2008 confrontation with Moscow.

## **Chapter 5: Russo-Georgian territorial disputes – the “Frozen Conflicts” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia**

*The conflicts are not frozen at all. It is the settlement that is frozen.  
Nicu Popescu, the Center for European Policy Studies.*

The unresolved, so-called “frozen conflicts” of the pro-Moscow breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with pro-Washington Georgia, which in the past have flared up into wars, simmer beneath the surface, and if unsettled, present a danger of escalation into a military confrontation. Throughout history conflicts in the South Caucasus have been fueled by geopolitical transformations: the confrontations in 1918-21 followed the fall of the Russian Empire; repeated attempts to separate from Soviet Georgia occurred at times of political shifts within the USSR; permissive political climate of the late 1980s and the ensuing disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the secessionist wars, leading to *de facto* independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Nuriyev 2007, 177). Likewise, the recent geopolitical strife for ascendancy in the post-Soviet space between the U.S. and Russia stirred up a hornet's nest, resulting in the 2008 five-day Russo-Georgian war.

The status of secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia is currently a source of international debate (Sonne 2008). While the two separatist regions have been recognized as sovereign states by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru followed the 2008 five-day war, they are still officially considered the territory of the Georgian state by Georgia

and the rest of the world (See Table 1 & Civil Georgia 28 August 2008). It is necessary to point out the statement made by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: “ongoing efforts to find a common solution on the way forward in the crisis in Georgia within the Security Council may be complicated” (China View, 27 August 2008).

The conflicts remain a major cause of political, social and economic instability, raising numerous questions in political and academic circles. Do South Ossetia and Abkhazia present similar cases? How did different presidents approach the issue? What strategies do Russia and the U.S. use to pursue their interests in the region? Do Moscow and Washington help to manage the conflicts or do they exacerbate them? Does the international community provide assistance in settlement of the conflicts or does it provoke further problems by posing international legal dilemmas or by recognizing Kosovo’s independence? Why did the conflicts erupt into warfare in Georgia, not in another FSU republic? How should we interpret the history of the region if Georgian scholars and their Abkhazian and South Ossetian counterparts, zealous to prove the other side wrong, accept the occurrence of the same events, but support their stances with questionable data? The following discussion will endeavor to tackle the difficult task of seeking answers to those questions while striving to deliver an objective analysis.

Located on the Black Sea, Abkhazia shares a long history with Georgia. The Abkhaz call their country “Apsny” (“a country of the soul” in Abkhaz), while Georgians refer to it as “Abkhazeti” (Hewitt 1992, 2). Abkhazians and their language are related to the Adyghe group of the North Caucasian people (Zverev 1996, 37). The most arguable evidence relates to the pre-Soviet period, where both the Abkhaz self-governance and unity with Georgia can be disputed. Some sources affirm that the territory of modern-day

Abkhazia was a part of the ancient Georgian kingdom of Colchis (Great Soviet Encyclopedia 1969; Khorava 2008, 19). Some claim that after the fall of Byzantium, Abkhazia was politically autonomous, only later to become a part of Georgia (Hewitt 1998). Some argue that sovereigns of oft-disintegrated Georgian kingdoms were feudals of Abkhazian rulers, at times coalescing with them (Zverev 1996, 39). Other arguments range from denial of the Abkhaz presence in Abkhazia until the 17<sup>th</sup> century to claims of the modern Georgian territory to be known as “Abkhazia” from 8<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ingoroqva 1954; Alasaniya 1996). Becoming a protectorate of the Russian Tsar in 1810, Abkhazians were integrated into the Russian Empire in 1864.

From the Georgian standpoint, validity of claims in support of South Ossetia’s sovereignty is more questionable than that of Abkhazia. The very term “South Ossetia” (or “Samkhret Oseti,” the name from earlier Georgian literature) is excluded from use in Georgia: refusing to recognize South Ossetia’s connection to North Ossetia, Georgians use the feudal appellation “Samachablo” (fiefdom of the Machabeli family), Shida Kartli (Inner Kartli, and, thus, a misnomer), or the Tskhinvali region (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 22, 1992). Scholarly attempts to link the case of South Ossetia to the one of both Korea and Germany have been disregarded by Georgians, who argued that there had never been one state that united the territories of Southern and Northern Ossetes (Nodia 1996, 83). While North Ossetia became part of the Russian Empire in 1774, a South Ossetian region was formed within the Tiflis (former name of Tbilisi) governorate after the Russian annexation of Georgia, during the period of 1846 to 1859.

Tensions intensified after the fall of the Russian Empire. Following the 1917 Revolution, Abkhazians, hoping to gain independence, formed the Abkhaz People’s

Council. In 1919, after their attempts failed, the Abkhaz had to agree on Abkhazia's inferior status within the Democratic Republic of Georgia (DRG). This short-lived union disintegrated, when the Soviet Army took over Tbilisi and Sukhumi: an independent Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was established on March 31, 1921 and lasted until December 1921, when it coalesced with the Georgian SSR under a Treaty of Union (Zverev 1996, 39). In 1931, Abkhazia's status was lessened to an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR. Meanwhile, South Ossetia's support of the Bolsheviks in occupied Georgia led to a 1918-1920 confrontation with Georgia. In 1922, when Georgia became a SSR, South Ossetia was granted the status of autonomous region.

Such Soviet "matryoshka-style" hierarchy, known as "ethnofederalism," where the Kremlin controlled relations between the different levels of power – the central power (Moscow), the Union republics (in the case of Georgia), the autonomous republics (in the case of Abkhazia) and the autonomous regions (in the case of South Ossetia) – aimed to assure Moscow's dominance (Nodia 1996, 83; Zurcher 2007, 23-25; Nuriyev 2007, 47; Freitag-Wirringhaus 2002, 91; Zverev 1996, 39&66). In the short term, this strategy increased Moscow's ability to shape events in the Caucasus, enabling the center to play groups against one another (Zurcher 2007, 26). In the long run, however, Soviet "divide and rule" principle laid the foundation for development of secession movements following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Nodia 1996, 83). Throughout the Soviet period, Abkhazians' and South Ossetians' national identity, their language and culture were suppressed by forced "Georgianization." Numerous requests for higher status, especially by Abkhazians in 1956, 1967 and 1978, resulted in independent media and preservation of cultural traditions (Zverev 1996).

The collapse of the USSR combined with heightened Georgian nationalism caused ethno-territorial tensions within Georgia. National resistance movements in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia eventually turned into secessionist wars. If in the late 1980s Abkhazians had a pro-Soviet stance, after the USSR's disintegration they strove for independence. Fearing that Tbilisi's February 1992 restoration of the 1921 DRG Constitution implied the abolition of Abkhaz autonomous status, Abkhazia announced secession from Georgia in July 1992. In August 1992, a war broke out. Georgian military entered Abkhazia intending to restore the country's territorial integrity in a blitzkrieg (Lynch 2006, 18). At first, luck was on the Georgian side, with the Abkhaz having been forced out of Sukhumi and the Georgians having occupied the Abkhazian northern coast. However, in the fall of 1992, supplied with Russian arms and supported by various groups from Russia – the Cossacks and the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus among them – the Abkhaz forced out the Georgian army from the north. Russian assistance to separatists resulted in strained Russo-Georgian relations. Due to the UN efforts, a ceasefire agreement was signed in July 1993. However, a surprise Abkhaz offensive ousted all the Georgian military from Abkhazian territory along with more than 200,000 Georgian civilians in September 1993.

South Ossetia's secessionist movement began in 1989, when the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet voted to amend its political status from a region to an autonomous republic within Georgia. In September 1990, after a year of persistent tensions, Tbilisi made an unwise political move by abolishing the South Ossetian republic: the conflict had not only erupted into a war, but also the consequent Russian assistance to separatists, as in the case of Abkhazia, was justified (Nodia 1996, 83). A ceasefire agreement was

signed in June 1992. The war took several hundred lives and resulted in about 60,000 refugees and IDPs, mostly Ossetians fleeing to North Ossetia (Lynch 2006, 19).

Following the cease-fire agreements, the CIS deployed its peacekeepers, consisting mainly of Russians, to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The UN established the Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) to monitor the activities of the CIS peacekeepers. Initiated by the UN, Geneva negotiations made little progress: the conflicts have been frozen, but no settlements have been reached, the IDPs still have been scattered throughout the region and tensions remained high (Lynch 2006, 19). Embarrassed by defeat and under Moscow's pressure, Georgia joined the CIS in 1993. The Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities declared their independence from Georgia and commenced to establish all the institutions of statehood. The Kremlin used every opportunity to retain the *status quo* and to orchestrate both *de facto* independent states (Cornell 2005, 31).

The situation in Abkhazia was exacerbated by the CIS sanctions imposed in 1994 and only ceased by Russia in 1997. Two areas – Gali district, populated by the ethnic Georgians, and the Upper Kodori Valley, controlled by Georgians – have remained constant sources of tension, with fighting intensifying in 1998 in Gali and in 2006 in Kodori. The 2004 presidential elections drew international attention, when pro-Russia Raul Khadjimba was defeated by Sergey Bagapsh. After the Abkhaz Supreme Court cancelled the electoral results and Bagapsh, as a presidential candidate, allied with Khadjimba, as a vice presidential candidate, it became apparent that the Kremlin would not allow any drastic shifts in Abkhazia's political arena. Following the demise of

President Bagapsh on May 29, 2011, the Parliament of Abkhazia passed a resolution to have elections on August 26, 2011 (RIA Novosti, June 8 2011).

Compared to Abkhazia, the conflict in South Ossetia was smaller in scale and followed by considerable reconciliation, return of refugees and reestablishment of economic ties with Georgia (Lynch 2006, 19). However, Saakashvili's government, protesting against the increasing Russian influence, demonstrated strenuous efforts to reintegrate South Ossetia. The Georgian plan focused on liquidation of smuggling activities that served as a considerable financial source for separatists. The 2001 South Ossetia presidential elections brought about pro-Moscow Eduard Kokoity, who still holds this post. In summer 2004, South Ossetia underwent another wave of military confrontations, when the Georgian leadership, in attempts to bring the breakaway republic back under its control, formed an alternative pro-Tbilisi government for South Ossetia in Tbilisi and closed down an essential black market complex (Foreign Affairs, 25 August 2004). The 2008 war resulted in Russia's recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's sovereignty.

Although South Ossetia and Abkhazia share some similarities, they are different in many respects. South Ossetia, which is historically connected to the republic of North Ossetia, a federal subject of the Russian Federation, could have conceded to unification with its northern brother, hence, becoming a part of Russia. On the contrary, Abkhazia has enjoyed *de jure* independence in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and strives for sovereignty. Also, the conflict in Abkhazia has been larger in scale than that in South Ossetia. Another striking difference between Georgia's two enclaves is their ethnic composition. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ethnic Ossetians represented the majority of



South Ossetia's population. Meanwhile, the Abkhaz community comprised the minority during the Soviet rule, presenting a major controversy in their "case for partition" (King 2008, 216). Specifically, according to the last Soviet Census of 1989, the ethnic Abkhaz formed only 17.8 per cent of Abkhazia's total population, whereas the ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia amounted to 45.7 per cent; in contrast with South Ossetia, where there were 65.9 per cent of Ossetians and 29 per cent of Georgians (Tables 2 & 3). Recognizing this factor, it is interesting to compare this statistics to Georgia's demographic of the same year: 70.7 per cent of Georgians, 3 per cent of Ossetians and 1.8 per cent of Abkhazians along with other nationalities lived in Soviet Georgia (Table 4).

Such a phenomenon has a historic explanation. Comprising only a small fraction of the Abkhaz population throughout the Soviet period, Abkhazians remained in a majority until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Table 5). Two fatal events led to the ethnic population being reduced to a minority on their own land: the exodus of the Abkhaz Muslims to the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a Georgian policy of Georgians' planned resettlement into Abkhazia that started in early 1930s and increased in the post WWII period. It is essential to affirm that despite a small percentage of ethnic Abkhaz in Abkhazia, their upward mobility was extremely high: as of 1989, not only did they constitute 67 % of the republican ministers and 50 % of the district and city communist party chief executives, but also 41 % of the legislative body consisted of representatives of Abkhaz origin (Dale 1993, 49). Such statistics can be explained by the fact that Abkhazia had its own governing structures and special quotas to ensure sufficient number of high level posts for ethnic Abkhaz in the political system throughout the Soviet rule (Hewitt 1998).

Another factor that deserves special attention is the role of religion. While the 15<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman conquest forced many Abkhazians to convert to Islam, quite a few were confirmed into the Christian faith under Russian rule (Hewitt 1993; Zverev 1996, 37). The 1866 and 1877 Abkhaz insurrections against Russian rule pushed many Abkhaz Muslims to seek refuge in the Ottoman Empire. It has been part of the Georgian campaign to depict the Abkhazians as followers of Islamic fundamentalism. However, the Abkhaz author Gulia wrote in his autobiography: “we, Abkhazians, are equally cool to both Islam and Christianity” (Hewitt 1998). Meanwhile, a majority of the South Ossetians have followed Eastern Orthodoxy since the Byzantine influence, although there are some adherents of Islam (Freitag-Wirringhaus 2002, 122-127).

In order to provide a thorough analysis of Georgia’s frozen conflicts, it is essential to examine the role of political leaders. What has each Georgian president done in regard to conflict resolution or conflict exacerbation? Georgia’s first post-Soviet president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who only ruled the country from 1991 to 1992, has been blamed for incitement of conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Gamsakhurdia’s infamous “ethno-nationalist” doctrine with its slogan “Georgia for Georgians,” combined with the permissive political climate of the late 1980s-early 1990s, fueled the ethnic minorities’ wish to protect their rights (Nodia 1996). A number of discriminatory laws and regulations – such as making Georgian the sole official language, banning regional political parties from participation in parliamentary elections, revoking South Ossetia’s autonomous status, censorship of liberal newspapers and denunciation of intermarriages – were aimed at extirpating Georgia’s minorities, the “ungrateful guests in the Georgian home,” “with a red-hot iron” (Kaufman 2001, 110). Gamsakhurdia blamed “devil

Russia's support for secessionists and condemned Abkhazians and South Ossetians as "pawns of the Kremlin" (English 2008, 3). Gamsakhurdia's extreme nationalism strengthened the minorities' demands for sovereignty. While Eduard Shevardnadze struggled to gain control over the country's shattered domestic and foreign affairs, both breakaway republics became *de facto* independent. In need of support, Shevardnadze had to accede to Moscow's pressure to legitimize the Russian military bases and allow the Russian peacekeeping forces in Georgia (King 2006, 288). Mikheil Saakashvili used the detrimental state of affairs to draw attention to the frozen conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Rehabilitation of Gamsakhurdia as a "great statesman and patriot" in 2004 became a symbol of Saakashvili's intentions (English 2008, 4). While the 1990s polls showed little significance of the frozen conflicts among the Georgian population, they became a top priority for Saakashvili's government (King 2006, 294). If Gamsakhurdia's ethnic nationalism worsened because of the lack of political institutions, the post Rose Revolution state's improved capacities prevented Saakashvili from returning to his predecessor's doctrine. However, imperfections of the nascent institutions allowed revolutionary nationalism, resulting in violent conflicts (Aphrasidze & Siroky 2010, 1).

Taking into account Moscow's significant part in the development of the conflicts, it is essential to examine Russian conflict management, Russia's strategy and its security dilemma. Russia has been criticized by Western scholars for its imperialistic ambitions in the South Caucasus (Nuriyev 2007). In this context, the Kremlin's management of the regional conflicts has been viewed as "a pretext for strengthening Moscow's influence" (Freitag-Wirringhaus 2002, 102). Political experts listed many reasons to prove that Moscow's intervention exacerbated the state of affairs. For instance,

they affirmed that Moscow put pressure on Tbilisi by forcing Georgia to join the CIS and to recognize Russian military presence through the CIS Peacekeeping Forces and Russian military bases. Another factor was the drastic effect of the two Russian wars with Chechnya, resulting in destabilization of the region. Moreover, Russia's close relations with Armenia aimed to make Yerevan an outpost of Moscow's regional dominance. The Kremlin's political, economic and military support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia proved to be crucial in *de facto* independence of the secessionist provinces. Furthermore, not only South Ossetian and Abkhazians were exempted from a visa requirement imposed on Georgia in 2000, but also from June 2002, the Kremlin began granting citizenship to the residents of the breakaway republics (Cornell 2005, 25).

The Kremlin revealed that maintaining the *status quo* was in its best interest (Cornell 2005, 25). According to Trenin, prior to the 2008 war, Russia's policy toward Georgia focused on avoidance of military confrontations to "discredit Georgia's portrayal of Russia as a belligerent aggressor," replacement of Saakashvili with a pro-Moscow leader and derailing Georgia's "NATO train" (2006). The goal of Moscow's economic sanctions imposed on Tbilisi was to forewarn Kiev and other pro-Western capitals. Discouraging Washington from investing in war-torn regions and financial benefits from arms smuggling and drug trafficking have been Russia's incentives for leaving the conflicts unresolved. Yet, Moscow was uncertain whether to support separatists or not. The Kremlin's concern was that its assistance of South Ossetia and Abkhazia may encourage Chechnya, Tatarstan, Dagestan and others to strive for independence. Russia's security dilemma has encompassed such questions as the presence of Russian military bases on Georgian territory, the problem of peacekeepers and "passportization"

of Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Much controversy had been caused by deliberate evacuation of the Russian military from Georgia. Four Russian military bases remained in Georgia since the 1991 Soviet collapse: Vaziani Military Base (near Tbilisi), Gudauta (Abkhazia), Akhalkalaki (Javakheti) and Batumi (Adjara). The bases served as an indication of Moscow's regional preponderance. Russian soldiers have been engaged in arms trading and assisting the separatist leaders. Moscow agreed to its retreat from the Vaziani and Gudauta bases and to an agreement with Georgia on the status of the other two by the end of 2001 at the 1999 OSCE Summit (Cornell 2005, 25). The Russian soldiers left Vaziani military base on June 29, 2001. Six years later, they withdrew from Akhalkalaki military base (on June 27, 2007) and from Batumi military base (November 13, 2007). However, since the Gudauta military base was located in the territory of Abkhazia, it remained under the Russian control.

Yet, several thousand remained as peacekeeping forces ("Mirotvorcheskie Syly") in the conflict zones under the CIS mandate, despite protests from the Georgian government, presenting another major stumbling block between Tbilisi and Moscow. On the one hand, Russia guaranteed regional security through its peacekeepers (BBC News, 30 April 2008). On the other hand, Saakashvili, accusing Moscow of actively working to destabilize the situation, raised the question of neutrality and called for a more active role for the EU and the U.S. The Kremlin insisted that only it had "the power and the influence to broker a peace deal" (Corso 2005). At the 1993 UN General Assembly, Kozyrev affirmed: "Russia realizes that no international organization or group of states can replace our peacekeeping efforts in this specific post-Soviet space" (Fedarko 1993).

Washington, condemning Moscow for its “damaged credibility as a neutral peacekeeper,” called for its replacement (EU Observer, 10 October 2006).

Another highly contested issue surrounding the conflicts was a policy of widespread distribution of Russian passports to South Ossetians and Abkhazians. No doubt, a Russian passport opened the gates to the world for Abkhazians and South Ossetians, securing education, job and higher living standards. At the same time, referred to as “manufacture of nationals,” Moscow’s granting citizenship to almost 90 per cent of separatists strengthened Washington’s suspicions of Moscow’s imperialistic intentions (Green 2010). The Kremlin’s argument was expressed by Dmitry Rogozin, Russia’s ambassador to NATO: “The recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states is a refusal from annexation... a response to those political speculators, who claimed that Russia needed new lands” (Pravda.ru, 26 August 2008).

To complete this analysis of the frozen conflicts, the closing part will discuss the role of the international community, specifically, the role of the UN, problem of refugees and IDPs, application of international law and recognition of Kosovo. Reports indicate controversial assessments of the UN role. The UN Security Council Resolutions, 1716 (2006) and 1752 (2007), evaluated the role of peacekeepers as “constructive and positive, meaning that without them the parties would resume hostilities” (Khutsishvili 2009). In contrast, political pundits affirm that the UNOMIG had no influence over the Russian peacekeepers, who, along with Georgian paramilitaries, Abkhaz and South Ossetian forces have been involved in illegal business (Cornell 2005, 19).

The unfortunate result of the ongoing conflicts is a large number of refugees and IDPs (Cornell 2005, 19). The government data presents the evidence of about 260,000

IDPs, mostly women and children. Confronting numerous problems related to health, education, employment and housing, and forced to live in wretched conditions and obtain new roles in a shadow economy, the IDPs are one of the region's major sources of instability (Cornell 2005, 32). While some 50,000 South Ossetian refugees, who fled to North Ossetia, are now willing and able to return to their homes, the Georgian refugees cannot come back to their homes in Abkhazia (Refworld, 3 September 2010).

International recognition of Kosovo's independence caused heated polemics all over the globe, giving fresh impetus to other separatists, who believed that Kosovo set a precedent for such cases. Moreover, international law dilemma over right of self-determination vs. national sovereignty/territorial integrity (the principles that contradict each other) played its role as well. Given that self-determination supersedes territorial integrity in legal debates, the international community should be prepared for secessionist crises to fall one after another (King 2006). Since the disintegration of the communist states, the international community has only been recognizing the highest level of federal entity in former federations. Recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty was a shift in such policy and presented a challenge in distinction between Kosovo's case and the rest (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 11, 2006).

For the past two decades, Georgia has been a scene of ethnopolitical conflicts. The Soviet arbitrary rearrangement of ethnic boundaries resulted in the sharpening of nationalist claims. Following the collapse of the USSR, the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been marked by separatist tendencies, economic collapse and political instability. The geopolitical strife between the external actors – the U.S. and Russia, in particular – not only prevented resolution of the conflicts, but exacerbated the situation

and eventually led to the 2008 war. The protracted negotiations, initiated by the international community, brought no tangible results. The frozen conflicts of South Ossetia and Abkhazia present us with more questions than answers. Does Georgia's democratization, sponsored by the West, promote peace or fuel tensions? Does economic development of the region depend on political stability or vice versa? Provided that Georgia becomes pro-Russia, would Moscow stop assisting the separatists? Does the struggle between Tbilisi and its enclaves, presenting a sorrowful account of thousands of killed, many refugees and IDPs, obscure the "human factor" in the complexities of the geopolitical game? Be that as it may, not recognized, but *de facto* independent, Abkhazia and South Ossetia exist in an international limbo, presenting a threat to regional security.

### **Chapter 6: The Caspian Energy Geopolitics and the BTC Pipeline**

*The ongoing crisis in the Caucasus is intimately related to the strategic control over energy pipeline and transportation corridors.*

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The "energy question" in the former Soviet space has been a contentious issue for the past two decades. The demise of the USSR, once the world's largest oil producer, resulted in a new geopolitical "great game" over abundant energy resources of the Caucasus and Central Asia (Arvanitopoulos 1998, 18). As with centuries ago, political actors have been interested in power, prosperity and energy security, but now the strife involved unresolved conflicts, political transformations, and multinational corporations' rivalry, compounded by a lack of local expertise, financial deficit and insufficient legal framework (Forsythe 1996, 6). Following the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the new political boundaries, which would distribute gas and oil resources among the NIS, had to be created (Gilinsky 1997, 61). Energy, as an essential force in socio-economic



development of the region, became a major source of tension. The unevenly dispersed oil and gas resources divided the FSU republics into the energy-rich and energy-poor. While Russia turned into the main oil and gas producer in the region, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan became other large oil-producers and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, major gas-producing states (Gilinsky 1997, 61).

Apart from being the main energy producer, the Kremlin also had exclusive control over the pipeline routes, which connected the former Soviet bloc with the West, and frequently used its position to compel the former republics to abide by Moscow's directives (MacFarlane 1999, 237). Therefore, the possession of natural resources has not been the only guarantee of profits for the Soviet successor states; the countries that served as transit pipeline routes, such as Ukraine and Georgia, have also become a vital part of a great geopolitical competition. The landlocked position led the Caucasus and Central Asia's key energy exporters to rely on their neighbors for access to Western markets.

The West, heavily dependent on Middle East energy prior to the 1990s, saw the gas and oil reserves of the Caspian basin as an alternative energy market. Securing a potential source of energy became the central U.S. objective in the region. American and European companies began to invest in the development of energy resources. However, Moscow's monopoly over the region's pipelines presented a major obstacle to the West. The solution to this problem was found promptly. A pipeline from the Caspian Sea through Georgia and Turkey, constructed by Western companies, would serve two main purposes: not only would it provide an uninterrupted energy flow to the West, but it would also restrain Russia's ambitions to keep the export of hydrocarbons under its sole control (Rutland & Dubinsky 2008, 8). Displeased with Washington's persistent moves

in its own “backyard,” the Kremlin saw the energy competition in the Caspian basin as “a zero-sum game in which U.S. advances would come at Russian expense” (Rutland & Dubinsky 2008, 8). Thus, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project, which provided a direct oil route from South Caucasus to the West and detoured around Russia’s energy transport infrastructure, did not win applause in Moscow (Pearlstein 2008). The remaining of this chapter will examine the energy security issue in terms of the U.S.’ and Russia’s ambitions regarding control of oil deposits and pipeline routes in the Caspian.

The oil crisis of 1973-74 changed the global structure of the oil industry by shifting control of oil resources from the multinational companies to a few OPEC-members and forced the West to seek alternative sources of energy. Further, the fall in oil prices in the 1980s increased oil imports: while in 1973 world oil consumption was 57 million barrels a day, in 1994 it approximated 68 million barrels (Forsyth 1996). As a world leader in oil consumption, with over half of it imported, the U.S. has been interested in diversification of energy supplies. Development of oilfields in the Caspian Sea did not only reduce oil price but also constituted an alternative source of energy for the U.S. (Washington Quarterly 1996, 71-99).

From a geopolitical standpoint, the Caspian Sea region has been important for centuries (Gray 1977). Under Russian control during the 19th century, Baku’s oil fields were producing half of the world’s oil supplies, attracting foreign capital and technology (Tolf 1976, 50). During WWI, after the collapse of the Russian Empire, Germans, Brits and Turks competed for control over the region’s oil fields; in WWII, one of Hitler’s major plans was to seize Baku. The Soviets, incapable of keeping up with the demands of

offshore drilling, maintained these areas as reserves, while exploiting oil deposits in Siberia and Tatarstan (Yergin 1991). Situated at the cross-roads of Europe and Asia, at 394,000 square kilometers in area, the Caspian Sea is the world largest inland lake, bordered by Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Azerbaijan. Compared to Europe's proven reserves of about 50 billion barrels of oil, the Caspian Sea's deposits of an estimated 200 billion barrels put the region on a par with Iraq. Moreover, the area's gas reserves of about 8 trillion cubic meters, as much as those of the U.S. and Mexico combined, raise the stakes higher (Forsyth 1996, 6). The Caspian region might not be comparable to the Persian Gulf, with its 670 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and an open access to the world markets; yet it presents an alternative source of energy, especially in light of the expected exhaustion of the deposits of the North Sea and Alaska and the instability in the Middle East.

The debates over the unsettled legal status of the Caspian Sea open a can of worms. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, backed by the U.S. and Turkey, consider the Caspian Sea an "international sea," under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, consequently enabling division according to each state's amount of coastline (Lloyd 1995). Russia and Iran, on the other hand, take a firm stand, claiming that the Caspian Sea is an "inland lake," meaning that it is not subject to the Law of the Sea and, thus, exploitation of its deposits must be subject to an agreement among all five littoral states. This issue is complicated by the 1921 Friendship Treaty between the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) (the USSR was established only in 1922), and Persia (Iran did not exist then either), dividing the Caspian between the two states and declaring that no changes could be made to the treaty without the agreement of

all littoral states (Cohen 2002). Lack of legal structure over rights of resources has prevented some oil exploitation projects and construction of undersea pipelines (Cutler 2010).

The West's ambitions to secure a new energy market clashed with Moscow's plans to retain the region's energy resources under its own control, leading to geopolitical strife, which unfolded in two dimensions: first, control of the Caspian oil production and, second, domination of pipeline routes. Economically, through development of the Caspian oil and gas industry, Washington expanded investment opportunities for the U.S. oil and construction companies and secured lower energy prices. Politically, the U.S., allied with Turkey, aimed to weaken Kremlin's influence in the region by withdrawing the FSU republics from Moscow's control, preventing Russia's monopoly over the pipeline routes and isolating Iran (Muller 2000, 189).

While the Soviet Union solely viewed energy as a hard currency earner, the newly established Russia was aware of energy's geopolitical role and intended to use its energy resources as a means of achieving its foreign policy goals; moreover, Moscow wanted to have a say in oilfield development projects and pipeline routing in the Caspian region (Ebel 1996). Furthermore, the Kremlin, anxious about deprivation of its historic sphere of influence and troubled by potential loss of Western investments into the oil fields of Siberia and the Far East, hastened to improve its geostrategic relations with Tehran.

Following the collapse of communism, the ex-Soviet republics of the Caspian Sea saw their natural resources as a key to their economic recovery, political stability and independence from Moscow; however, the local industry's lack of technology, expertise and financing made them seek cooperation with the West. On the bright side, the West

was assured that the bulk of the oil was intended for export, since the domestic consumption of the FSU republics was not expected to rise significantly. On the down side, political instability, caused by persistent conflicts and frequent changes of government, obstructed the restructuring of the oil industry (Muller 2000). Prospects of economic growth in light of current issues incited a heated discussion of whether prosperity will promote stability, resolution of conflicts and help the littoral states develop like Norway, with its transparent democracy, sustainable economy and environmental protection, or will the FSU republics follow in the footsteps of Nigeria, burdened by corruption, atrophied economy and chronic ethnic disputes (Nuriyev 2007).

Georgia's pivotal location in the major East-West energy corridor made it a strategic player in a great geopolitical game. The role of transit state, if its transit function was used correctly, would bring unprecedented advantages to Tbilisi: annual transit fees, investments into political, economic and social sectors, which would promote establishment of democratic institutions, the increased weight in the Caspian region and in the West, and improved chances of EU and NATO membership. Be that as it may, investors wanted a politically stable and economically secure country. As a center of ethnic-territorial conflicts, Georgia decreased its geostrategic significance. On numerous accounts, the security of pipeline routes has been connected to the resolution of the separatist conflicts.

Transportation of oil to the West became a major obstacle to exploitation of energy reserves in the Caspian basin. Unlike other oil producers, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were landlocked states. The Kremlin held the ace with the existing pipeline routes going through Russia. To the U.S., eager to destabilize the Russian

pipeline network, the issue of pipeline routing has become of considerable geopolitical significance. Idealistically hoping to construct a system of multiple routes to avoid overdependence on any single country, the littoral states and investors started to explore alternatives. Bolstered by Moscow, the 1,411 kilometer northern pipeline from Baku to Novorossiysk, the Russian port in the Black Sea, which began operating in November 1997, served as a temporary solution. This route through politically unstable Dagestan and Chechnya, which was excessively controlled by Moscow, met disapproval in the White House (Nuriyev 2007). Commissioned in April 1999, the 850 kilometer pipeline from Baku to the Georgian port of Supsa, which completely avoided Russian territory, has been destabilized on numerous occasions by the Kremlin who exacerbated the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Tbilisi strongly believed that this route could serve as a guarantor of future regional stability (Georgia Profile April 1996, 17). The southern route, which would go through Iran, with its well-developed pipeline system, presented the most practical alternative, but was vetoed by the U.S. (Arvanitopoulos 1998, 22). Completed in July 2009, the 2,228 kilometers Atyrau (Kazakhstan)-Alashankou (China) pipeline was a costly project, mainly supported by Beijing. The proposed construction of the south-eastern route that would go from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and later to India did not meet required support due to political instability in the proposed region.

Concerned with the future of pipeline politics in the region, investors were trying to predict which route would ensure the most reliable flow of oil to the Western markets. Proposed by Turkey in 1992 and long-debated western route, named after the cities it connects – the Azeri capital Baku, Georgian capital Tbilisi, and a port on the south-

eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey Ceyhan – BTC oil pipeline runs from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field, the largest field in the Azeri part of the Caspian Basin, about 100 kilometers east of Baku, to the Mediterranean Sea. The initial proposals to construct a pipeline through Armenia were not approved because of proximity to the Karabakh conflict zone. Favored by Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia and the U.S., this “most important project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” as the Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit stated at the signing ceremony in Ankara, spurred serious security concerns due to its geopolitical location. Moreover, the excessive costs made this pipeline a doubtful enterprise. NGOs numerous reports on environmental concerns and human rights abuses, attempted to prevent the BTC project from launching, but all in vein. The construction of the 1,768 kilometer BTC pipeline began in April 2003, with the official opening in May 2005, when the first oil was pumped in Baku, and reaching Ceyhan in May 2006. The U.S. stressed that politically stable Georgia would serve as assurance of a smooth functioning of the BTC pipeline.

The BTC pipeline significantly changed the status of the regional states and formed a new pro-West bloc: the U.S., Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The unfortunate consequence of the BTC project was exacerbation of the separatist conflicts, incited by the Kremlin, furious about the Western interference in its sphere of influence. While accusations of Russia’s plots to sabotage the BTC pipeline were easy to negate, Moscow’s use of energy as a political weapon clearly intended to punish those involved, Tbilisi in particular. On numerous occasions, Russia used energy cutbacks for Georgia, which for the lack of domestic energy resources, was dependent on Russian imports. For instance, the Kremlin resorted to power politics in January 2006, when it left Georgia

cold and dark for a week. The Russian authorities accused Saakashvili of wanting to have the best of both worlds: to ally with the West and become a NATO member and to exploit Russia's energy (Corso 2005).

The control of Caspian energy resources and pipeline routes has become a detrimental factor of geopolitical influence in the region: it decides the political and economic future of Russia, FSU republics and Turkey; it establishes Tehran's regional status; it determines the relations between the U.S., Russia and China; moreover, it is strategically important as an alternative energy source (Arvanitopoulos 1998, 28). However, the question remains, whether the Caspian region will turn into a center of regional controversy or a model of international cooperation.

### **Chapter 7: Georgia, NATO Expansion, and the Russian Security Dilemma**

*The nature of new security challenges is such that NATO can only become successful if it builds partnerships wide and strong.*

*Gábor Iklódyat, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges.*

*Countries that have unresolved conflicts cannot become NATO members.*  
*Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, Berlin, March 10, 2008.*

*If Georgia enters NATO, Russia will take steps aimed at ensuring its interests along its borders.*

*General Yuri Baluyevsky, Russian Deputy Chief of Staff.*

For the past two decades, the issue of NATO expansion has been a source of discord in U.S.-Russian relations. NATO's "open door" policy to new members, especially the states in Russia's contiguous periphery, was perceived by the Kremlin as a threat to Russian security (Light 2010, 238). Moscow blamed Washington for diminishing Russia's standing in the post-Soviet space while extending its military alliance along the Russian borders (Berryman 2009, 161). As a consequence, Moscow resisted Georgia's



intention to enter NATO. Compounding the situation was the Russian military presence on Georgian territory. Meanwhile, Georgia tried to establish a working relationship with the Western military bloc. Membership with NATO has been seen in Tbilisi as a guarantee of regional political stability by counterbalancing Moscow. Through a discussion of NATO policy developments, Tbilisi's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and Moscow's reaction, the following section will examine the complex issue of NATO expansion, Georgia's ambitions for NATO membership and the Russian security dilemma.

Since NATO's formation in 1949, there have been several additions to this military bloc, which was created to enact a system of collective defense. The 12 founding members – the U.S., the U.K., France, Italy, Canada, Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg, Denmark, Norway and Iceland – were joined by Greece and Turkey in 1952, West Germany in 1955, and Spain in 1982. Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty allows other European states to join the alliance by “unanimous agreement” of the existing parties and by “depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America” (Article 10, North Atlantic Treaty, 4 April 1949).

Throughout the Cold War, while implementing numerous policies in their contest for global influence, both the U.S. and the USSR were cautious of disturbing the stability of the Central and Eastern Europe. The U.S. chose the strategic policy of containment. Meanwhile, the Soviet government had not attempted to test Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which affirms to the parties that “an armed attack against one or more of them... shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently... each of them... will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert

with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force” (Article 5, North Atlantic Treaty, 4 April 1949).

In 1955, to retaliate against NATO’s formation and in response of the integration of West Germany into the Western military alliance, the communist governments, under the Soviet Union’s directive, coalesced into the Warsaw Treaty Organization of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. Commonly known as the Warsaw Pact, the communist bloc originally consisted of the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, Albania and Romania. Like the NATO members, the Warsaw Pact signatories pledged the mutual defense of its members under attack. However, the liberating atmosphere of the late 1980s resulted in deposition of the communist governments of the Central and Eastern Europe and the consequent dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization in July 1991.

Following the disintegration of the USSR, the NATO initiatives led to formation of a number of establishments. Formed in December 1991, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) united NATO with 9 Central and Eastern European states in an advisory forum. NASS welcomed all the CIS members in March, with Georgia and Albania joining in June 1992. Another NATO enterprise, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program was commenced in January 1994, connecting the Alliance with other European states and the FSU republics. Tbilisi signed the PfP agreement in March 1994, with Moscow becoming a signatory three months later (CBS News, 27 June 1994). Formed in May 1997 as a successor to the NACC, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) consisted of 50 members, the 28 NATO member states and 22 partner states and worked in tandem with the PfP. The Membership Action Plan (MAP) was created by the Alliance

to work one-on-one with states aspiring to NATO membership. Yet, the political observers in Moscow criticized NATO's new institutions as vehicles for expansion.

The Kremlin hoped that the ex-Warsaw Pact members and the former western Soviet republics could configure a zone of cooperation between Moscow and the West and potentially build conjoined security architecture, based on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (Berryman 2009, 167). However, such hopes did not align with NATO's plans. Frustrated with Washington's disapproval of its attempts to put forward a pan-European security structure, Russia and some other post-Soviet states formed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Established in May 1992, this intergovernmental military bloc comprising Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus joined the CSTO in 1993 and the treaty became effective in 1994. However, when the time came to renew the treaty in 1999, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan abandoned the institution, with Uzbekistan returning in 2006, after it left GUAM.

Despite Washington's rhetorical objectives of strategic partnership with Moscow, NATO eastward expansion has been gaining momentum since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Smith 2006). Determined to escape from Moscow's influence, the former Soviet satellites along with some newly established post-Soviet states, aspired to join NATO. NATO's post-Cold War expansion advanced through three distinct stages, with the five year period between them: 1999, 2004 and 2009. March 1999 was marked by NATO's accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The Kremlin's reaction was quite predictable: while rather displeased with the Czech Republic's and Hungary's NATO acceptance, Moscow was furious about Poland's membership, which expanded NATO's

security zone by 750 kilometers and interrupted the European strategic *status quo* (Bogaturov 1998, 84). To appease Russia, NATO signed a Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security in May 1997, outlining the plan for NATO-Russia collaboration to “build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area” and to reaffirm that the military alliance had no plans of deployment of nuclear weapons on the territories of the new NATO member states (Founding Act).

Following the 9/11 attacks, the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), founded in 2002 as a diplomatic tool of “consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision and joint action,” allied 28 NATO members with Russia (NRC: NATO’s Website). However, when the U.S. proposed a missile defense system in Eastern Europe, which was perceived by Russia as a direct threat, Washington-Moscow relations once again went downhill. In spite of Moscow’s rhetoric, exclaiming that “every state has the right to decide whether to seek NATO membership,” as Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov affirmed, efforts have been made to secure a buffer zone of nonaligned nations that were supported by Finland and Sweden (Kramer 2002, 748). Still, all three Baltics along with Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia joined NATO in March 2004. Another five years down the road, in April 2009, Albania and Croatia accepted NATO membership.

Since its independence from the Soviet Union and despite Moscow’s pressure, Georgia has been continuously seeking closer ties with NATO. The NATO-Georgia collaboration advanced when Tbilisi joined the newly established NACC in 1992, the PfP in 1994 and signed the PfP Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) in 1995 (ratified by the Georgian Parliament in 1997). In 1996, Georgia submitted its first Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). The 1998 opening of the diplomatic mission signified the beginning

of official NATO-Georgia relations. In 1999, Tbilisi became a part of the PfP Planning and Review Process, joined the Kosovo peacekeeping forces and in 2001 hosted a joint PfP military training “Cooperative Partner 2001.” In 2002, Tbilisi was connected to the Virtual Silk Highway, a computer networking project for the Caucasus and Central Asia and hosted another multinational PfP military exercise “Cooperative Best Effort 2002” (How Did Relations with Georgia Evolve: NATO 2008).

Following the Rose Revolution, one of the main goals of the new Georgian government was promotion of the country’s entry into NATO. Tbilisi’s aspirations for NATO membership made Georgia the first state to implement the IPAP. At the same time, the Georgian military joined the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The 2004 NATO Summit in Istanbul brought the Caucasus into the spotlight, with a special NATO liaison officer appointed to the region. In 2005, a transit agreement, which allowed NATO and the ISAF armed forces to deliver equipment and supplies to their troops in Afghanistan through the Georgian territory, was signed between NATO and Georgia. Moreover, to increase the national support of NATO, an information center was opened in Georgia under NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division. In 2006, Georgia started an Intensified Dialogue with the Alliance, with the IPAP implementation interim assessment team coming to Tbilisi and in April 2006 reviewing the assessment report at NATO headquarters in Brussels (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia). The January 2008 non-binding referendum yielded 77% public approval of Georgia’s NATO membership.

As NATO continued to admit new states and improve relations with Tbilisi, tensions between Russia and the West have been escalating. The issue of NATO

expansion and the admittance of Georgia and Ukraine, in particular, incited disputes at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit. Both Tbilisi and Kiev had unresolved issues: the low level of popular support in Ukraine, and separatist conflicts in Georgia. Furthermore, Georgia's geographic location spurred much controversy, since Article 10 of the Treaty limits membership to European states (BBC New, 3 April 2008). The Allied leaders concluded that Georgia and Ukraine could join the bloc, once they solve these problems (Civil Georgia, 3 April 2008). The final decision was anticipated at the meeting of Foreign Ministers in December 2008 (NATO Denies Georgia and Ukraine 2008). However, neither Kiev nor Tbilisi was offered MAP due to predicted Moscow's ill-favored reaction (BBC News, 25 March 2008).

Saakashvili, overconfident of Western support, decided to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. Eager to decrease Tbilisi's eligibility for NATO membership and to cause antagonism inside the Ukrainian society, the Kremlin was anxious to "defrost" Georgia's separatist conflicts. Following the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, NATO-Russia relations were tainted. The North Atlantic Council criticized Moscow for disproportionate military action, incommensurable to its peacekeeping mission in the region; for recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia sovereignty and pledged to withdraw Russian troops from the region and change its mind in regard to the breakaway provinces' independence; the NCR meetings have been suspended. However, no major action followed. The 19 August NATO emergency meeting called for a lasting solution to Georgia's conflict and assistance with re-establishment of the country's infrastructure, recovery of the air traffic system, and consulting on cyber defense issues (NATO Website). Considered by both the Prime Minister of Georgia Gurgenedze and NATO

Secretary-General Scheffer “a milestone” in relations, the NATO-Georgia Commission was constituted in September 2008 to supervise the implementation of support measures proposed at the Bucharest Summit (Civil Georgia, 15 September 2008).

Moscow denounced the NGC 2009 regular meetings, devoted to Georgia’s defense reforms and proposed NATO exercises on Georgian territory, as “an overt provocation...in a place where there was just a war” (The Nation, 1 May 2009). In turn, NATO condemned the May 2009 South Ossetia elections and Tbilisi expelled two Russian diplomats on espionage charges. In spring 2010, NATO and Georgia established the PfP Trust Fund to assist Georgia in the disposal of explosive remnants of war and Tbilisi agreed to provide military personnel to the Operation Active Endeavour, NATO’s counterterrorist project in the Mediterranean. The NATO-Georgia relations reached the high point, with NATO Liaison Office inauguration in Tbilisi in October 2010. At the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, the Allied heads of states reinstated their support for Georgia’s territorial integrity and continued development of reforms required for the Euro-Atlantic advancement, although the MAP has not been offered to Tbilisi.

In the meantime, Washington showed willingness to reboot its ties with Moscow. As the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted, it was “time to move ahead” (NATO Agrees to Restart of Top Level Talks with Russia 2009). The NRC was resumed and NATO asked Moscow for help in Afghanistan. Such improvements provoked heated discussions of Russia’s contingent plans to join NATO. While in 1992 Yeltsin spoke of possibility of NATO membership, in 2000 Putin stated that Russia could join the Alliance once. Recently Western experts put forth their proposals of the Russian inclusion into NATO (The Independent, 5 March 2000). In April 2009, the Polish Foreign Minister

Radoslaw Sikorski claimed that the Alliance needs Russia “for the resolution of European and global problems” (Reuters, 31 March 2009). In March 2010, German defense specialists presented an open letter arguing in favor of Moscow’s admission into NATO to assist in offsetting nascent Asian powers (Der Spiegel, 8 March 2010). Interestingly enough, the Kremlin’s response was expressed by Dmitry Rogozin, Russia’s envoy to NATO: “Great powers don’t join coalitions, they create coalitions” (Pop 2009).

Assuming the role of great power, Russia, nevertheless, does not exclude a future possibility of joining the alliance, but would Washington welcome Moscow on board? The answer is unclear. However, recent developments have proven closer NATO-Russia ties. On May 9, 2010, for the first time NATO troops joined the Russian military in the annual Victory Parade. The Lisbon Summit in November 2010 was marked by signing of NATO’s new strategic concept that emphasized the bloc’s “effectiveness as the globe’s most successful political-military Alliance” and stressed “strategic importance” of “NATO-Russia cooperation...as it contributes to creating a common space of peace, stability and security” (NATO’s New Strategic Concept). During the NRC meetings in summer 2011, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen accentuated the importance of NATO-Russia “strong and constructive partnership based on mutual confidence, transparency and predictability” (NATO’s New Strategic Concept).

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Alliance accepted 12 new members. According to the new strategic concept, NATO’s “open door” policy has made a significant contribution to European security. Taking into account that the potential of further enlargement and the sense of collaborative defense have enhanced



European security, the new strategic concept stated the eventual integration of all European states as NATO's ultimate goal (NATO's New Strategic Concept).

That being said, the question remains whether NATO's enlargement indeed advances European security. Critics of NATO expansion assert that any time the Alliance admits a new member; it can potentially lead to a major conflict. Particularly, in the case of Georgia, many European members were afraid that the unresolved conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia could pull NATO into a conflict with Russia, since Article 5, the American security guarantee, assured the collective defense of the state under attack (Rauchhouse 2001). Therefore, predicting that the Kremlin would recognize Georgia's separatists to retort for the West's recognition of Kosovo's independence, the Allies have been reluctant to agree with the MAP for Georgia. On the other hand, proponents of NATO enlargement maintain that if Georgia was accepted into NATO at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, Russia would not have interfered. Thus, the supporters of NATO expansion believe that making conflict resolution a requirement for Georgia's membership would be a miscalculation, since it would provide Moscow with a *de facto* veto over Georgia's NATO aspirations and guarantee no conflict resolution for the separatist conflicts. Aiming to prevent NATO membership for Georgia, the Kremlin uses Abkhazia and South Ossetia as aces for blackmailing Tbilisi (Jackson 2010). Therefore, Moscow is not interested in conflict resolution. Consequently, NATO expansion proponents equate Georgia's entry into NATO with regional conflict resolution. To support their stance, the advocates of NATO expansion provide an example of the Baltic States that have significant Russian minority population. To prevent Estonia, Latvia and

Lithuania from NATO membership, the Kremlin refused to ratify the border treaties; but once the Baltics entered NATO, the treaties have been ratified.

NATO's post-Cold War eastward expansion has been perceived by Moscow, which sees the post-Soviet space as its exclusive sphere of influence, as a threat to its security. Therefore, the Kremlin has been opposed to NATO's closer ties with the FSU republics – Georgia, in particular. Russia's ambitions to keep the North Atlantic Alliance beyond the "red line" have been linked to changes in Washington-Moscow relations. In recent debates, political pundits have been seeking an answer to the following question: What kind of NATO-Russia cooperation would assure resolution of Georgia's frozen conflicts?

## **Chapter 8: The 2008 Russian-Georgian War, the Peril of a "New Cold War" and**

### **Obama's "Reset" vis-à-vis Russia**

*If Moscow controlled the troops into Georgia, it could wipe Georgia from the energy map and impose Russia as the sole territory of transit of oil.*

*Zbigniew Brzezinski.*

*If Moscow and Washington fail to develop a working relationship, it could lead to a devastating international crisis.*

*Rose Gottemoeller, former director of the Carnegie Moscow Center.*

Chronic tension between Moscow and Tbilisi climaxed in August 2008. While the 2008 Summer Olympics Opening Ceremony was taking place in Beijing, the unresolved Georgian disputes escalated into a serious military conflict. Saakashvili's imprudent decision, motivated by his wish to re-establish Georgian sovereignty, did not bring the desired results. Russia swiftly responded by attacking Georgia, defeating the Georgian forces, detaching Abkhazia and South Ossetia and recognizing their independence. Provoked by both sides, the five-day Russo-Georgian war resulted in redrawing of the region's geopolitical map. In awe, the world scrutinized the Kremlin's grand new strategy

of restoring its dominance in the post-Soviet space: demonstration of its readiness to use armed force not only in the separatist regions, but even in Georgia proper (Green & Waters 2010). The Russo-Georgian military confrontation and the events that followed resulted in a restless geopolitical atmosphere in the region and put Moscow-Washington relations in jeopardy. This chapter will analyze the underlying causes of the 2008 war, the Russian and Georgian interpretations of the events, the international response and the recent thaw in Moscow-Washington relations stimulated by Obama's "reset" vis-à-vis Russia.

What were the deep-rooted causes of the 2008 conflict? Long-predicted by many experts, the August 2008 military intervention was the product of a complex array of factors. Many considered the war to be a repercussion of the spring 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit. No doubt, the Kremlin was infuriated by Tbilisi's pro-Western policy, its continuous attempts to join the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, and its support for a U.S. missile defense system in Eastern Europe. Another important reason was Georgia's geostrategic location as the "energy corridor" for the BTC and other pipelines, the "air corridor" for Allied aircraft flying to Afghanistan and the transit zone for the Western troops. Moreover, political pundits predicted that the international recognition of Kosovo independence in February of that year would set a precedent for the *de facto* independent Abkhazia and South Ossetia. From the Georgian perspective, there also have been many reasons to initiate the war. The government of Mikheil Saakashvili was tired of Moscow's assistance to separatists. Moreover, the active Russian peacekeeping forces incensed the Georgian military. Last but not least, President Saakashvili's overconfidence in the Western support led him to make an ill-considered move.

The lingering tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi intensified in 2006 in the full scale financial and diplomatic warfare. A sequence of politically motivated tit-for-tats started in spring 2006. In revenge for the launching of the BTC pipeline, the Kremlin, pretentiously stating “health grounds,” banned the import of Georgian wine and mineral water, the country’s main exporting goods, 90 % of which had gone to the Russian market. In response to these economic sanctions and being informed that Putin would not have time for a tête-à-tête meeting, Saakashvili disregarded the July 2006 CIS Assembly. Two months later, four Russian military officers were accused of espionage and expelled from Georgia. In reprisal, Moscow recalled the Russian Ambassador from Tbilisi, and cut transportation links and mail service. Furthermore, the Russian Federal Migration Service deported many Georgian nationals, depriving their Georgian families of remittances. In spring 2008, simultaneously with restoration of air travel, sea and postal links between Moscow and Tbilisi, Russia established semi-official ties with separatist administrations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Such Kremlin moves strained Russo-Georgian ties: Tbilisi condemned the action as a violation of international law and accused Moscow of planning the republics’ “*de facto* annexation.”

Throughout spring and summer of 2008, the belligerent rhetoric intensified from both sides, with Moscow and Tbilisi blaming each other for inciting warfare (BBC News, 31 May 2008; BBC News, 9 July 2008). By June, flying jets over the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia that violated the early 1990s ceasefire agreements, deployment of Georgian and Russian troops and military hardware to the borders of the enclaves and daily clashes had become a routine (Der Spiegel, 25 August 2008). In July 2008, both countries conducted parallel military exercises: the joint U.S.-Georgian

Immediate Response 2008 and the Russian Caucasus Frontier 2008 (Georgiandaily.com, 1 August 2008; Russian Ministry of Defense 2 August 2008). Accusing Washington of complicity in Georgia's preparations for a military conflict, Yuri Popov, Russia's Ambassador-at-Large, stated on August 5 that Moscow would intervene to protect its citizens (BBC News 5 August 2008).

On the night of 7 to 8 August 2008, persistent tensions exploded into a military confrontation, with Georgia, determined to restore its territorial integrity, launching an attack on Tskhinvali, the capital of the *de facto* independent South Ossetia; the conflict resulted in shelling and occupation of the city (Green & Waters 2010, 1). The immediate response by the Russian 58<sup>th</sup> Army that moved beyond South Ossetia's boundaries was justified by the Kremlin as humanitarian intervention aiming to protect Russian citizens and peacekeepers. The conflict swiftly spread to Georgia's other secessionist region, Abkhazia, with the second front at the Kodori Gorge, held by the Georgian forces (Allison 2008). After five days of fierce fighting, the Georgians were defeated.

On August 12, the French leader and acting EU president, Nicolas Sarkozy, managed to reach a preliminary ceasefire agreement. Dmitry Medvedev agreed to end the war with Georgia, asserting that "the operation has achieved its goal; security for peacekeepers and civilians has been restored. The aggressor was punished, suffering huge losses." (RIA Novosti 12 August 2008). Sarkozy's six-point peace accord constituted a roadmap intended to halt the warfare: 1) no recourse to the use of force; 2) complete cessation of hostilities; 3) free access to humanitarian assistance; 4) required withdrawal of the Georgian Armed Forces to their permanent positions; 5) obligatory retreat of the Russian Armed Forces to the former locations; with permission given to the Russian

peacekeeping forces to enforce extra security measures prior to the formation of international mechanisms; 6) an international discussion of the future status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and course toward permanent conflict resolution (Pare 2009).

The peace accord was initially composed of the first four points, but Moscow negotiated the addition of the other two. Tbilisi proposed return of refugees and an international discourse regarding the status of the separatist regions based on the decision of the UN and OSCE were denied. Signed by Medvedev, Saakashvili, South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity and Abkhazian leader Sergei Bagapsh, the peace plan led to the immediate cessation of open hostilities. The peace settlement took place on September 8, but it failed to impose the complete retreat of Russian forces. As a matter of fact, the Kremlin kept its military in the separatist regions and Georgia proper until October; moreover, new bilateral agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia ensured deployment of considerable Russian military forces. The EU sent 200 observers to the region to keep close watch over compliance with the agreement: the observers were able to enter the buffer zones, but access to the interior, including the separatist republics, was blocked (Pare 2009, 19). Furthermore, not all hostilities immediately stopped. According to Moscow Defense Brief, active raids on military bases in Georgian territory have taken place, with the separatists capturing and destroying Georgian weapons.

The aftermath of the conflict was devastating for Georgia. Georgia did not receive the much-desired NATO membership. The country lost whatever nominal control it had over the separatist regions and Moscow recognized their independence. On August 29, 2008, Tbilisi cut off diplomatic relations with Moscow; Moscow retaliated by withdrawing its Ambassador. In turn, Tbilisi left the CIS. The five day war left hundreds

of killed and, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 30,000 Ossetians and 128,000 Georgians IDPs behind (Office of the UNHCR).

Even though the scope of this research does not cover implications of international law to the Russo-Georgian war, it is necessary to point out that this conflict raised many questions pertaining to international law and international order. One of the issues is the right of self-determination of Georgia's separatist enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Another question is the issue of self-defense used by Moscow as legal justification of its military activities. This particular problem concerns protection of nationals abroad used in case of the Russian peacekeepers and the Abkhazians and South Ossetians who hold recently obtained Russian passports. In this regard Georgia presents a rather unique case because of its policy of mass "passportization" of ethnic Abkhaz and South Ossetians by the Kremlin, which gained momentum on the eve of the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia (Green & Waters 2010). Each of the above questions deserves an extensive analysis.

The global equilibrium, established after the end of the Cold War, has been shaken by the 2008 five-day war. The Russo-Georgian war strained the Kremlin's ties with the West, Washington, in particular. The initial American reaction to the conflict was very critical of Russia, with U.S. President Bush denouncing Russia's policy in its "near abroad:" "Bullying and intimidation are not acceptable ways to conduct foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (USA Today, 15 August 2008). On 15 August, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice traveled to Tbilisi to bolster Georgia against the Russians. Some political pundits predicted a new Cold War. Immediately after the conflict, a grand-

scale information war involving both the Russian and Georgian media broke out, with each side blaming the other. To establish truth, there have been a number of fact-finding commissions formed. For example, in September 2009, a thorough report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, set up by the EU Council, was published (IIFFMCG Report 30 September 2009). The report by the Amnesty International found fault with both sides (Amnesty International 2008). Likewise, the Human Rights Watch released a comprehensive report, accusing both Russia and Georgia of using indiscriminate force on civilians (Human Rights Watch 2009; Barry 2009). The 2008 conflict has given rise to the controversial Georgia vs. Russia case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ 15 October 2008).

The political camp split over the analysis of the consequences of the 2008 conflict. On the one hand, some experts aligned with the opinion of those who, like Fareed Zakaria, considered the 2008 Russo-Georgian military confrontation “a diplomatic disaster for Russia, a major strategic blunder, turning other former Soviet states (for instance, Ukraine) toward the West” (Zakaria 2008). In striking contrast, others – like George Friedman, founder and CEO of private intelligence agency Stratfor – thought that, in fact, “both the 2008 war and the Russian foreign policy increased Russia’s influence” (Friedman 2008). To complicate matters, the parallel with Moscow’s policy of “passportization” has been drawn to other parts of the former Soviet space. For instance, the Kremlin has been granting Russian citizenship for Ukrainians and Moldovans, including Transnistrians; thus, leaving a possibility for the Georgian scenario to repeat itself in the future. In order to prevent this from happening, the North Atlantic



Alliance seeks to strengthen relations with the neighboring states in the East. It remains to be seen what it would take to ensure the regional security in the future.

Not surprisingly, Russian and Georgian interpretations of the 2008 conflict differed. But, as the Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel stated: “It is rare that all the blame is on one side. In fact, both sides are probably to blame” (EU Observer 18 August 2008). Interestingly enough, the Russian interpretation went as follows: the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali was presented by the Russian authorities and state-controlled media as a straightforward insult to its dominance in the region, “an unprovoked attack by an aggressor that resulted in a well-deserved and forceful rebuff aimed at protecting Russian citizens” (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009). The Kremlin viewed this military confrontation as an opportunity to retain control of its pro-Western periphery and “to take a stance against Western encroachment” (Indyk 2009). On the contrary, the Saakashvili government and media explained the five day war as “a long planned invasion of a small nation’s sovereign territory by a huge military power intent on re-annexing it into its empire” (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009). The reasons for such drastically different interpretations, with both sides trying “to reject the other account out of hand, dismissing it as profoundly uninformed, if not simply a delusion or malicious fabrication” were not only the state-controlled media as many suggested by the use of collective memory (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009). Contrasting examples of the media interpretation of the August 2008 events are the 2009 pro-Russia movie “Olympius Inferno” by Igor Voloshin (that reinforces Saakashvili’s ill intents and the Western support of Georgia) and the 2011 Hollywood pro-Georgia movie “5 Days of War” by Renny Harlin (that depicts innocent Georgia and evil Russia).

Russo-American relations, which hit their lowest point during the 2008 five-day war, were significantly improved by Barack Obama's reset. The Georgian crisis proved that Russia and the U.S. have missed the chance to establish a working relationship that satisfied both parties (Gottemoeller 2008, 1). Additionally, not only was the depth of the crisis between the U.S and Russia revealed in August 2008 in Georgia, but it became apparent that its consequences could only be minimized by a dramatically new approach (Orlov 2008). Therefore, when the newly inaugurated U.S. President proposed a fresh start for Moscow-Washington relations, that approach seemed to be established. Claiming that "America wants a strong, peaceful and prosperous Russia" and that "on the fundamental issues that will shape this century, Americans and Russians share common interests that form a basis for cooperation," Barack Obama approached the Kremlin (Burns 2010).

While Obama brought new hopes to the global community, Russia's "tandemocracy" headed by the new President Dmitry Medvedev and Vice-President Vladimir Putin made many uncertain about future prospects. Definitely, it was not the Russia of the early 1990s. Moscow's financial independence, enabled by high energy prices and pragmatic economic policies made the loser of the Cold War desire to re-establish its great power status in the global arena (Lukin 2008). Following the 2008 warfare between Russia and Georgia, Medvedev openly declared the five new objectives of the Russian foreign policy: 1) observance of the fundamental principles of international law; 2) Russia's objection to a world order in which "one country makes all the decisions" and the multipolarity of the international system; 3) "neither isolation, nor confrontation," a quest for friendly relations with other states; 4) establishing one of

Russia's priorities as the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of the Russian diaspora and the future foreign policy decisions based on the need to protect Russians abroad; 5) the Russian President's focus on the "regions in which Russia has privileged interests" (BBC News 1 September 2008).

As time went by, there has been some noticeable progress in the main areas of tension between the U.S. and Russia. In 2009, following in the footsteps of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission and Bush-Putin Dialogue, Obama and Medvedev formed the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC), a joint enterprise aiming to improve U.S.-Russian relations (The White House Official Website, 6 July 2009). The Commission was coordinated by the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and consisted of 17 groups in major political and socio-economic sectors (ranging from nuclear security and space cooperation to business development and cultural exchanges), led by senior-level U.S. and Russian officials (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 March 2010). Moreover, President Obama made "a conciliatory gesture with the end of the missile defense plan for Central Europe" (Carpenter 2009; BBC News 20 September 2009). It has been well established by both Moscow and Washington that nuclear arms control was one of the few policy areas where Russian and U.S. views were "likely to easily align" (Oliker 2009, 189). Thus, signing of an arms control treaty in Prague on April 8, 2010 signified the most significant shift in Washington-Moscow relations since the Russo-Georgian war (Baker & Bilefsky 2010). The treaty was ratified (with 71 to 26 votes) by the U.S. Senate on December 22, 2010 and by the Russian Parliament on January 26, 2011 (Arms Control Association 2011; The New York Times, 26 January 2011). Other successes have been

the January 2011 U.S.-Russian 123 Agreement on peaceful nuclear cooperation, discussions of Russia's accession to the WTO, and the Putin-Biden talks and Clinton-Lavrov talks on a simplified visa regime between the two countries. But as the discussion by the former Ambassadors to Moscow and Washington indicated: "the U.S.-Russia reset is off to a solid beginning, but it is incomplete in many respects; while the countries have made good progress in their relationship, much remains to be done" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 March 2010).

How has Obama reset influenced U.S. relations with the former Soviet republics? Immediately following Obama's visit to Moscow, Vice President Joe Biden's tour to Georgia and Ukraine and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton trip to South Caucasus implied that Washington's reset with Moscow did not equal abandonment of the FSU republics. Trying to not anger the Kremlin, nonetheless, Washington wanted to establish that Russia's post-Soviet neighborhood is not Moscow's exclusive sphere of influence (RIA Novosti, 6 July 2010). However, the Kremlin attempted to undermine the U.S. position in the region, supporting pro-Russian leaders as in the case of financing the Presidential campaign of Yanukovich in Ukraine and overthrowing the corrupt regime of Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan, thus fortifying its influence in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Russian foreign policy was played out in two realms: establishing relations with the West and reasserting itself in its “near abroad.” This thesis has followed Neil MacFarlane’s argument, which was made long before the 2008 military confrontation between Russia and Georgia, but still predicts Russia’s foreign strategy and behavior on the international scene. On the one hand, the Kremlin demonstrated its willingness to develop strategic relations with the West, choosing to bandwagon with Washington. On the other hand, often blamed for its neo-imperialistic ambitions, Russia, eager to regain its major power status, made every effort to strengthen its position as the dominant actor in the former Soviet space, its traditional sphere of influence.

Moscow’s euphoric hopes of the Western integration of the early 1990s have vanished due to Washington’s triumphalism and Russian authoritarianism. Through the years, U.S.-Russian relations have been deteriorating, as the Kremlin felt that its concerns have been neglected on a wide range of issues: the NATO “open door” policy to the Central and Eastern European members, bombing of former Yugoslavia during the 1999 military confrontation over Kosovo, a unilateral response to the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent occupation of Iraq and the construction of a missile defense system in Central Europe. Nonetheless, when it came to Georgia, Russia’s periphery and the area of Moscow’s “privileged interests,” as Dmitry Medvedev called it, the Russians were ready to apply its own “Monroe Doctrine.” Washington’s attempts to gain influence and restrict Russia’s role in the South Caucasus and Central Asia – proposition of NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine, the construction of the BTC pipeline, which

bypassed the Russian territory, international recognition of Kosovo independence – have been escalating tensions between Russia and the U.S. and eventually exploded into the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

This thesis has looked at the complex development of the post Cold War U.S.-Russian relations in light of the Georgian crisis. Starting with examination of the unfolding Russo-American relationship, the thesis then scrutinized the Washington-Moscow-Tbilisi triangle through the prism of developing relations with the newly independent states, where Georgia's issues coincided with its neighbors'. The thesis reinstated the significance of this small South Caucasus country in the new geopolitical Great Game over the influence in the region by a thorough analysis of the Georgian crisis, including the historic background, which reemphasized Georgia's turbulent past due to its geostrategic location on multiple empires' peripheries and internal disintegration; its independence and transition to democracy via the Western-sponsored Rose Revolution and the "frozen conflicts" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Furthermore, NATO's eastward expansion and competition for energy resources, especially the politics behind the BTC pipeline, which resulted in the 2008 five-day war, which, in turn, led to the threat of a new Cold War, but with Obama's recent "reset" brought hopes for U.S.-Russian partnership, reinforced our belief that the Georgian crisis is symptomatic of Moscow's foreign policy dynamics. Be that as it may, a wide range of global issues and problems pertaining to the regional stability of the former Soviet space depends on U.S.-Russian relations, urgently calling for strategic collaboration between Moscow and Washington.

## **List of Abbreviations**

ABM – Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty  
CEC – Central Electoral Commission of Georgia  
CFE – Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe  
CIA – Central Intelligence Agency  
CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States  
CSCE – Security and Cooperation in Europe  
CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization  
CTBT – Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty  
DRG – Democratic Republic of Georgia  
EAPC – Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council  
EU – European Union  
FSU – Former Soviet Union  
GDP – Gross Domestic Product  
SSR – Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic  
IDPs – Internally displaced persons  
IMF – International Monetary Fund  
ISAF – International Security Assistance Force  
KGB – Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (in Russian) or Committee for State Security  
NACC – North Atlantic Cooperation Council  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
NGC – NATO-Georgia Commission  
NGO – nongovernmental organization  
NMD – National Missile Defense  
NRC – NATO-Russia Council  
OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
START I – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I  
START II – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II  
TSFSR – Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic  
UN – United Nations  
UNOMIG – United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia  
US – United States of America  
USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  
WTO – World Trade Organization  
WTO – Warsaw Treaty Organization  
WWII – World War II

## Tables

**Table 1: Formal Recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as Sovereign States by UN Member States. Source: RIA Novosti.**

<i>State</i>	<i>Date of Recognition</i>	<i>Diplomatic Relations Established</i>
Russia	August 26, 2008	September 9, 2008
Nicaragua	September 5, 2008	September 10, 2009 – Abkhazia April 14, 2010 – South Ossetia
Venezuela	September 10, 2009	July 9, 2010 – South Ossetia July 12, 2010 – Abkhazia
Nauru	December 15, 2009 – Abkhazia December 16, 2009 – South Ossetia	December 15, 2009 – Abkhazia December 16, 2009 – South Ossetia

**Table 2: Population of Georgia According to Ethnic Group 1926-1989. Source: The Soviet Census (1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989).**

Ethnic Group	Census 1926		Census 1939		Census 1959		Census 1970		Census 1979		Census 1989	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Georgians	1,788,186	66.8	2,173,922	61.4	2,600,588	64.3	3,130,741	66.8	3,433,011	68.8	3,787,393	70.7
Azeris	137,921	5.2	188,058	5.3	153,600	3.8	217,758	4.6	255,678	5.1	307,556	5.7
Armenians	307,018	11.5	415,013	11.7	442,916	11.0	452,309	9.7	448,000	9.0	437,211	8.1
Russians	96,085	3.6	308,684	8.7	407,886	10.1	396,694	8.5	371,608	7.4	341,172	6.3
Ossetians	113,298	4.2	147,677	4.2	141,178	3.5	150,185	3.2	160,497	3.2	164,055	3.0
Yazidis	2,262	0.1	12,915	0.4	16,212	0.4	20,690	0.4	25,688	0.5	33,331	0.6
Kurds	7,955	0.3										
Greeks	54,051	2.0	84,636	2.4	72,938	1.8	89,246	1.9	95,105	1.9	100,324	1.9
Ukrainians	14,356	0.5	45,595	1.3	52,236	1.3	49,622	1.1	45,036	0.9	52,443	1.0
Abkhazians	56,847	2.1	57,805	1.6	62,878	1.6	79,449	1.7	85,285	1.7	95,853	1.8
Assyrians	2,904	0.1	4,707	0.1	5,005	0.1	5,617	0.1	5,286	0.1	6,206	0.1
Jews	30,389	1.1	42,300	1.2	51,582	1.3	55,382	1.2	28,298	0.6	24,795	0.5
Others	65,961	2.5	58,711	1.7	37,015	0.9	38,665	0.8	39,690	0.8	50,502	0.9
<b>Total</b>	2,677,233		3,540,023		4,044,045		4,686,358		4,993,182		5,400,841	



**Table 3: Population of Abkhazia According to Ethnic Group 1926-1989. Source: The Soviet Census (1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989).**

Ethnic Group	Census 1926		Census 1939		Census 1959		Census 1970		Census 1979		Census 1989	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Abkhaz	55,918	27.3	56,197	18.0	61,193	15.1	77,276	15.9	83,087	17.1	93,267	17.8
Georgians	67,494	33.6	91,967	29.5	158,221	39.1	199,596	41.0	213,322	43.9	239,872	45.7
Russians	12,553	6.7	60,201	19.3	86,715	21.4	92,889	19.1	79,730	16.4	74,913	14.3
Armenians	25,677	12.8	49,705	15.9	64,425	15.9	74,850	15.4	73,350	15.1	76,541	14.6
Greeks	14,045	7.6	34,621	11.1	9,101	2.2	13,114	2.7	13,642	2.8	14,664	2.8
<b>Total</b>	201,016		311,885		404,738		486,959		486,082		525,061	

**Table 4: Population of South Ossetia According to Ethnic Group 1926-1989. Source: The Soviet Census (1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989).**

Ethnic Group	Census 1926		Census 1939		Census 1959		Census 1970		Census 1979		Census 1989	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Ossetians	60,351	69.1	72,266	68.1	63,698	65.8	66,073	66.5	65,077	66.4	65,200	65.9
Georgians	23,538	26.9	27,525	25.9	26,584	27.5	28,125	28.3	28,187	28.8	28,700	29.0
Russians	157	0.2	2,111	2.0	2,380	2.5	1,574	1.6	2,046	2.1	2,128	2.1
Armenians	1,374	1.6	1,537	1.4	1,555	1.6	1,254	1.3	953	1.0	871	0.9
Jews	1,739	2.0	1,979	1.9	1,723	1.8	1,485	1.5	654	0.7	648	0.7
Others	216	0.2	700	0.7	867	0.9	910	0.9	1,071	1.1	1,453	1.5
<b>Total</b>	87,375		106,118		96,807		99,421		97,988		99,000	

**Table 5: Demographic Changes in Pre-Soviet Abkhazia. Source: Hewitt, 1992.**

Ethnicity	1886	1897
Abkhazians	58,961	58,697
Georgians	3,989	25,875
Russians	972	5,135

## Maps



**Map 1: Ancient Georgia. Source: Andrew Anderson, 2004.**

**The Caucasus and Central Asia**



**Map 2: The Caucasus and Central Asia. Source: Energy Information Administration.**



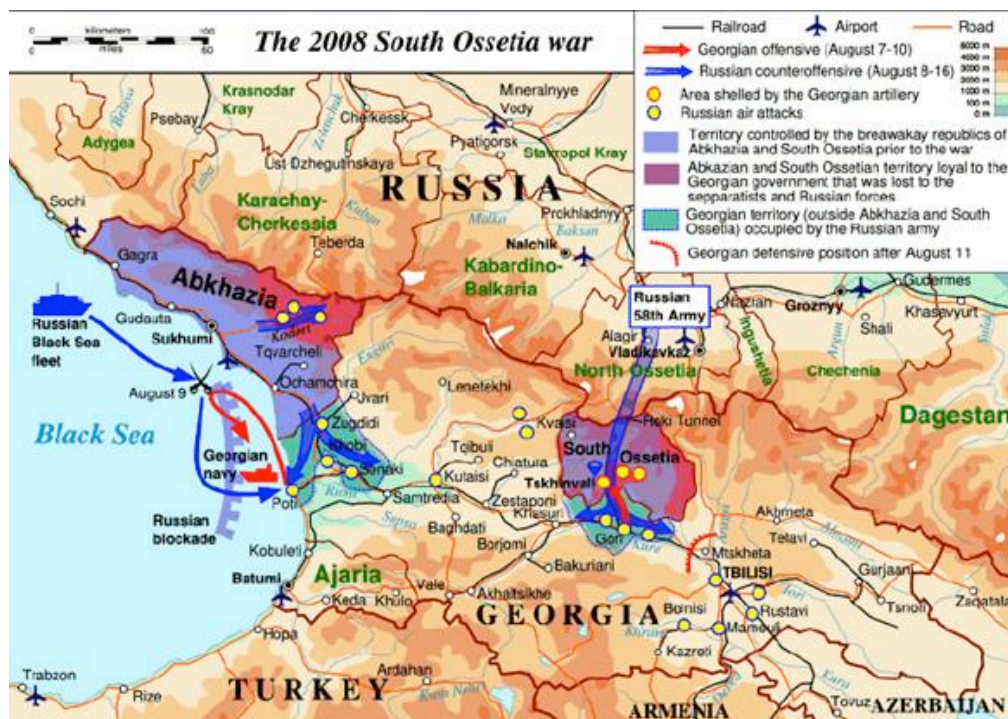
Map 1: The BTC and South Caucasus Gas Pipeline routes

[www.petroleum-economist.com/maps](http://www.petroleum-economist.com/maps)

Map 3: The South Caucasus Oil and Gas Pipelines. Source: [www.petroleum-economist.com/maps](http://www.petroleum-economist.com/maps).



**Map 4: The Existed and Proposed Alternatives to the BTC Pipeline. Source: Energy Information Administration.**



**Map 5: 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Source: Andrei Nacu, University of California, Davis campus, 2008.**

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