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## **THE PARADOX OF POLICY: AMERICAN INTERESTS IN THE POST-9/11 CAUCASUS**

### **Introduction**

For the decade preceding September 11, 2001, the Caucasus was a “C list” foreign policy priority for the United States.<sup>3</sup> The region neither presented an imminent threat to the United States nor its security interests. American policy was focused on “securing the Cold War victory” whilst regional interests in the Caucasus were defined by economic considerations and a pseudo-policy of neo-containment of Russia. However, 9/11 changed American perspectives on its security interests. The sources of terrorism, the reality of the threat posed by failed states, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction became the new foreign policy dogma. Under these new circumstances, the Caucasus, arguably, migrated to a “B list” priority or one in which American interests were threatened.

Some continue to debate that the region’s value to the United States is only tangential, in that its proximity to other areas of interest such as the Middle East and Southwest Asia make it important. On the contrary, others argue that the Caucasus themselves are closely linked to American national security interests. In the post-9/11 world, the United States cannot afford to ignore the Caucasus, but it remains unsure of the extent to which it can readily influence regional policy given the obvious geo-political constraints. The reality of the constraints was very apparent in the recent agreements between Georgia, America’s most committed regional ally, and Russia, which resulted in Russian acquisition of 75%

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<sup>3</sup> Nye, Joseph S. Jr. (1999). “Redefining National Interests”. *Foreign Affairs* vol. 78,4, July/August 1999. In his article, Nye contends country’s national interests should be prioritized as “A” list threats (i.e., direct threats to a country’s survival), “B” list threats (i.e., imminent threats to a country’s security and interests), and “C” list threats (i.e., threats to interests but not an immediate threat to one’s security).

of the Telasi energy distribution network and yet unidentified political influence.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the region's propensity towards failed state status and its proximity to Chechnya, which provides an opportunity for Chechen separatists to infiltrate Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, and the ease of transit across the Caspian Sea make it a potential haven for terrorist groups. Second, the lack of effective border control and inspection make it an avenue for smuggling which may include material used in the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Major regional transshipment routes for WMD materiel, including high explosives, include a north-south route from Russia to Pakistan and an east-west route from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan. The region's weak detection and interdiction capabilities and a limited framework for detaining shipping on the Caspian are the major causes of its susceptibility.<sup>5</sup> Third, its value as energy transport corridor is well known. Fourth, the region is a test case for post-Soviet democratization. Success in the Caucasus may be viewed as an example for other regions. Thus, the region is geographically and politically germane to American interests as well as its recognized trans-regional impact.

Heightened interest in the region since 9/11 has exposed a number of structural paradoxes that confound the implementation of a coherent American foreign policy. Predominant among these is the extent to which American policy in the Caucasus is captive to the variable policy inputs that are simultaneously the strength of the American democratic system and a foreign policy weakness that increases ambiguity causing regional leaders to question Washington's ultimate intentions.

A second structural problem is the collision between the United States dual objectives or multiple missions of maintaining stability while promoting democratization in a region that is struggling with political transition, economic malaise and unresolved conflicts. While the values of democratization and stability ultimately coincide, short-term policy objectives are often more easily achieved by avoiding dramatic political

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<sup>4</sup> Berman, Ilan and Arten Agoulnik (2003). "How Russia Grabbed Power in Georgia". *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, 9 December.

<sup>5</sup> Moroney J. (2003). "US Government Security Assistance to the Caspian Region". Caspian Basin Security Conference, University of Washington, April.

changes that are linked to the more complex and potentially chaotic problems of democratization. One only needs to look as far as American policy towards Egypt and Saudi Arabia to understand the importance of stability. Pursuing a policy of stabilization, aimed at promoting incremental change within the governing system while seeking to contain extreme factions on both the right and left, requires a willingness on the part of the United States to accept a certain level of corruption. On the other hand, a policy advocating democratization, that seeks to fundamentally change the governing system, risks causing social dislocation and anarchy. Both of which may contribute to anti-Americanism and may be exploited by radical or reactionary forces. Over the past year, all three states in the region have held elections. The way in which the United States responds to the succession processes displays the complexities of these different policies. It also presents the fundamental question, does the United States risk its moral legitimacy and potential chaos by condemning the results of recent elections or does it accept the results while continuing to advocate incremental reforms in hopes of maintaining stability?

Finally, the Caucasus rests at the nexus of the United States' new strategic partnership with Moscow. Yet, the United States appears interested in increasing its presence in Moscow's sphere of influence. While this confluence creates tension between the two as each seeks to maintain or expand its influence, it also provides Washington and Moscow with an opportunity to develop a constructive policy towards the region.

These paradoxes are critical to understanding the ambiguity of American involvement in the region and its impact on regional security. Creating a new security environment necessitates regional states settling their disputes, encouraging positive involvement by external actors, and reducing domestic friction.<sup>6</sup> This brings me to the fourth point of this paper. Under the current circumstances, the perpetual threat of conflict has strengthened the political influence of the security sector. Only by resolving the region's currently dormant, yet still explosive, conflicts

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<sup>6</sup> Ayooob, M., ed. (1986). *Regional Security in the Third World*. London and Sydney: Croom Helm, p.4.

and reforming the region's security sector can the region's security dilemma be reduced. Only through reform can the burgeoning social separation between the security sector and society caused by corruption, fraud, and non-participation effectively be reversed. And, only with re-training and de-politization can the region's armed forces effectively contribute to the war on terrorism. When viewed within this context, security sector reform is a primary pillar supporting the broader US objectives and ultimately is critical to the coalescence of stability and democratization. This article distills the complexity of United States' foreign policy in the Caucasus and assesses its role in influencing security sector reform.

### **The Caucasus and the Paradoxes of American Foreign Policy**

Official American policy towards the Caucasus demonstrates a relative consistency. Generally, the United States promotes a regional policy based on the peaceful resolution of inter-regional conflicts, establishing an environment that is conducive to the advancement of democracy and market economics, and the maintenance of a balance of power that curtails both Russian and Iranian influence. Friendly relations with the regions' states remain crucial in order to provide strategic benefits in the war on terrorism. American influence is greatest in Georgia where a strategic partnership emerged after 9/11. Washington views Georgia as being critical to securing the transit of Caspian energy resources through non-Russian controlled area. The completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) will simultaneously decrease Turkey's growing energy dependence on Russia. Georgia also is a buffer between Russia and Turkey and has demonstrated democratic tendencies. A stable democratically oriented Georgia will provide an example to the rest of the region and help contain the conflict in Chechnya. Yet, achieving such objectives, even in the wake of "Rose Revolution" still requires willingness on the part of the United States and the West, in general, to commit time and resources.

Prior to Ilham Aliyev's succession, aides to President Bush characterized Azerbaijan's succession process as stabilizing the region and becoming a

“beacon for democracy.”<sup>7</sup> Although these highly principled statements speak of a neo-liberalism standpoint, American interests in Azerbaijan are more realistic. They rest on maintaining Washington’s access to the Caspian energy resources and increasing security cooperation with Baku to contain Russia and Iranian influence. As is the case with the conflicts between Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Georgia, the United States would like to see resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Caspian territorial disputes. In the case of the former, United States has demonstrated past leadership. However, the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict ultimately requires the two sides to be willing to seek peace. Non-governmental Armenian experts have correctly identified the failure to find a final resolution as being important to the leaders’ legitimacy in both countries and potentially to Georgia as well.<sup>8</sup> Two points are germane here. First, there is a hope that the peoples of both country tire of the costs of the current “no war no peace” circumstances. Second, gathering momentum from the Georgian “Rose Revolution,” hopefully future leaders in both countries will seek legitimacy through negotiating a peace settlement rather than the continued promotion of conflict. Thomas De Waal, in his book *Black Garden*, commented frequently that the conflict between Azeris and Armenians is not one of ancient hatreds<sup>9</sup>. Personally, I have experienced Azeris and Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh calmly discussing incremental steps towards cooperation and confidence building. Such experience lends credence to the idea that this conflict is resolvable. Finally, there is the military to military relationship with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan’s interests in joining NATO have been well documented. Azerbaijan granted overflight permission for American planes headed to Afghanistan. Of even greater interest are the on-going discussions about providing basing opportunities to the United States. An agreement providing the United States with a military facility in the region would benefit the new forward deployment strategy. Russian response would undoubtedly be

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<sup>7</sup> Cohen, Ariel (2003). “Washington’s Designs on Azerbaijan Depend on Democratic Transition”. [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org), 24 April.

<sup>8</sup> The author’s discussions with David Shahnazaryan, Reichenau (Austria), November 2003.

<sup>9</sup> De Waal, Thomas (2003). *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press.

negative to such a move. However, it is most important that the United States and Azerbaijan be cognizant of realities. Such an agreement risks raising Azeri expectations to a level exceeding the United States ability to fulfill, thus another paradox of American policy that will be discussed in more detail later.

American policy towards Armenia also reflects a goal of stability and the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As will be discussed later, the government-to-government ties are not as strong as may be possible because of the policies of the current leadership. While the United States seeks to initiate political reform, it recognizes that Robert Kocharian's deep ties with the security sector and Armenia's reliance on Russian security guarantees are obstacles. Yet, Washington is anxious to integrate Armenia into the region's energy transportation process both as a means of stabilizing the region and providing Armenia with much needed resources for economic development. Recently, some minor breakthroughs have occurred. Armenia has renewed ties with NATO and even permitted a Turkish officer to participate in the Partnership for Peace Cooperative Best Effort in 2003. Continued American engagement in Armenia can only benefit both the United States and Armenia in the long-term.

Official American foreign policy remains relatively consistent in its broader, more ambiguous objectives, yet policy implementation is complicated by multiple inputs that often are not understood by those unfamiliar with American foreign policy processes. The Caucasus is an excellent case study on how the variety of inputs on foreign policy decision-making creates regional confusion and frustration. For example, the Armenian Diaspora in the United States conducts a very successful public relations campaign that has positively influenced American policy towards Armenia probably to the detriment of American strategic interests in the region. Congressional support for an annual resolution commemorating the 1915 Armenian genocide, the implementation and maintenance of Resolution 907 of the Freedom Support Act, and the establishment of an American embassy in Yerevan within days of Armenian independence provide examples of the

influence the Armenian Assembly of America has.<sup>10</sup> Some argue that the suspension of Resolution 907 belie this fact. However, the suspension of Resolution 907 was initiated as a consequence of 9/11. In the highly charged environment subsequent to the attack, it is highly unlikely that any lobby promoting the interests of a foreign country, AIPAC included, would have succeeded in blocking the temporary suspension of a resolution, the waiver of which was seen as benefiting the war on terrorism. In fact, the success of Armenian lobby's efforts at maintaining Resolution 907 prior to the cataclysmic events of 9/11 indicate that it's influence on American policy has been significantly underestimated in the past. The influential lobby and Armenia's close Russian ties permit the Armenian government greater flexibility in dealing with the US government than the other regional states. Unlike Azerbaijan who, in spite of general opposition among its Muslim population, decided muted support for the war in Iraq, needed to avoid problems with Washington, Armenia was free to be critical. Moreover, Armenian criticism of American involvement in Iraq, its close ties to Moscow, and its lack of progress towards democratization apparently have failed to significantly erode support for Yerevan in Congress who still received annual assistance that is 50% more than that provided to Azerbaijan.<sup>11</sup>

While US policy towards Armenia has been greatly influenced by what Martin Spechler has called "cultural commitments", economic interest groups greatly influence the United States relationship with Azerbaijan.<sup>12</sup> It receives support from an American energy sector anxious to help develop Azeri energy resources. US-Azerbaijani links are also political. Azerbaijan's role as secular Muslim country that is positively predisposed to the United States is a significant political asset to Washington. Baku's direct military contribution to the war in Iraq was also a political "bonanza" for the Bush Administration. Azerbaijan also

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<sup>10</sup> Olcott, Martha Brill (2002). "U.S. Policy in the South Caucasus". *Connections* vol.1,3, July, p.64.

<sup>11</sup> According to the official Department of State statistics, in fiscal year 2002, Azerbaijan received a total of \$84.04 million in assistance from the United States. Armenia's total assistance was \$123.38 million.

<sup>12</sup> Private discussions with Martin Spechler, University of Washington, April 2003.

serves as a source of intelligence gathering on Iran.<sup>13</sup> Fourth, there are some in Washington who believe that Azerbaijan ultimately will be the United States' most strategic partner in the region. Notwithstanding, Azerbaijan lacks broad-based support in the United States. This is partially attributable to Azerbaijan being either unwilling or unable to launch a public relations campaign to broaden its support among American decision-makers or influence public opinion. Moreover, the recent elections and post-election actions will undoubtedly erode support. One gauge of American commitment will be next year's vote on the continued suspension of Resolution 907. Though successful in 2002 and 2003 in suspending Resolution 907, the Bush Administration faces an annual battle at keeping the Resolution from being re-invoked and this year promises to be a watershed debate.

Finally, Georgia's strong pro-western stance in the face of increasing pressure from Moscow, its value as a transit route for the BTC pipeline, and its frontline status in the war on terrorism have generated support from the White House, the Pentagon, and business sector. Although concerned that foreign extremists might flee American military actions and seek sanctuary in the Pankisi Gorge, both the Georgian government and population unequivocally supported the war on Iraq.

As is evident in the previous examples, American policy reflects a cacophony of interests that push and pull policy in various directions while the various opinions seek compromise. This bureaucratic model perpetuates uncoordinated action, allows for different interpretations of perceptions and actions, and promulgates the development of unfulfilled expectations. As a result, rather than successfully implementing what were perceived as clearly defined regional policy objectives, American policy reflects confusion. This is evident in divergent statements over Nagorno-Karabakh. In addressing the status of enclave, members of the National Security Council and the Departments of Defense and State have stated publicly that Nagorno-Karabakh is an intrinsic part of Azerbaijan. Simultaneously, Congress has allocated US \$20 million to

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<sup>13</sup> Mollazade. Jeyhun (2003). "Iraq and the Caucasus: How Will War Affect the Region?". CSIS/Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Conference Washington DC, April.



Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, expectations regarding anticipated American actions are raised by erroneous interpretations of previous events. For example, whereas Armenia sees NATO's actions in Kosovo as support for self-determination, Baku interprets them as being a responsible international action aimed at upholding United Nations resolutions. Thus, neither will be satisfied by any American action that appears to contradict these perceptions. Such circumstances increase anti-Americanism from both sides and hinder American mediation efforts.

Confusion among regional actors is further perpetuated by American policy initiatives that apparently fail to recognize the realities of the region. For example, to propose Armenian-Azeri security cooperation, when each is the other's main antagonist or to suggest that re-organizing the Georgian military will lessen rather than increase Georgian-Russian tensions, simply erode American credibility.<sup>15</sup> Finally, when American policy is clearly understood, it can force the region's states to make difficult choices. The American Service Members Protection Act (ASPA) forbids the US government from providing military assistance to a country that does not grant American armed forces personnel immunity from prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, the European Union (EU) demands that states recognize ICC jurisdiction as a prerequisite to admission to the EU. Thus, states are forced to balance future EU membership with the immediate gain of military assistance from the United States.

Such examples create the perception that American policy is unbalanced and favors one regional state over the other. Notwithstanding, the greatest risk to enhanced American influence in the region is establishing expectations that, for a variety of reasons, may be left unfulfilled. Creating unfulfilled expectations is more an act of misfeasance than malfeasance. Unfulfilled expectations contribute to regional instability. In the case of the Caucasus, the United States susceptibility to distractions that threaten to quickly re-focus policy

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<sup>14</sup> Shaffer, Brenda (2003). "Security in the South Caucasus: View from the Region". Caspian Basin Security Conference, University of Washington, April, p.31.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

attention elsewhere is a concern. The “War on Terrorism’s” fluidity presents a significant risk in this context. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has been seeking a definable foreign policy goal. The “War on Terrorism” provides the continuity of purpose, as the Cold War did before it. However, the “War on Terrorism” is far more dynamic. Thus, regional attentiveness will ebb and flow based upon where terrorist attacks occur and terrorist organizations reside. This has potentially dangerous repercussions for the Caucasus where the United States has raised expectations that it may not be able or willing to fulfill. The United States’ broadening relationship with Georgia has resulted in furthering Georgia’s western orientation and military cooperation in the context of the “War on Terrorism”. This enhanced relationship has also led Georgia to call on the United States to put its international legitimacy behind resolving the conflict in Abkhazia and to continue the re-organization and re-development of the Georgian military. In Azerbaijan, there have been discussions of providing the United States with basing rights. While the presence of American forces may provide many benefits to Azerbaijan including assisting its military on the path to civilian control, there should be no misconceptions about security guarantees. Forward deployed forces are positioned to facilitate action in the “War on Terrorism” and not to protect pipelines or defend Azeri territorial integrity. National transformation initiatives require extensive time and resources. However, they are taking place at a time when Iraqi and Afghani reconstruction is competing for a limited resource pool and the American population is increasingly questioning international commitments. Under these circumstances, it is critical for the United States either to control expectations or expend the resources to fulfill them in the Caucasus.

A second expectation is the United States commitment to democratization. As previously noted, democratization and stabilization do not necessarily immediately coincide. Two examples are pertinent. Although the United States fervently pressured both Azerbaijan and Georgia to conduct free and open elections, both were viewed as corrupt and “rigged”. The extent to which irregularities may be tolerated to avoid other instabilities creates a quandary for the United States. In the aftermath of Georgian elections, the United States initially pressured

President Shevardnadze to seek a compromise in order to avoid the unrest turning violent as occurred in 1991, and then pleaded for restraint on all side before embracing the new leadership when Shevardnadze stepped down. Such a stance was tenable because the police have not taken action against the demonstrators but if they had been deployed to protect Shevardnadze, the American position would have been much more difficult.

The situation in Azerbaijan is more complicated. The United States supported Ilham Aliyev becoming Prime Minister and continued to court him during the lead-up to and in the immediate aftermath of the presidential election. In September 2003, he was welcomed by Washington in spite of an on-going corruption investigation that threatened to reach the highest levels of his New Azerbaijan Party. After his election, he received a congratulatory phone call from Richard Armitage. The continuity afforded by Ilham and his party reassured the White House who was reasonably confident he would not pursue a new war with Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the succession process, which typified former Communist Party politics tempered by Yeltsin-Putinesque political maneuvering, caused concern. Washington's support has been undermined by Ihlam's willingness to use force, imprison opposition leaders, and limit access to Baku. Furthermore, Ilham's actions have increased the influence of the security sector in his administration. He has ignored democratic processes thus eroding the validity of American and others' democratization efforts and by inference the credibility of the United States. Finally, he may have accepted Russia's offer to guarantee his authority in exchange for increased influence, which further compromises the American position.<sup>16</sup>

Intangible ideals such as democratization are very difficult to fulfill. Set backs such as Ilham's election are to be expected but the impact on a society unfamiliar with new concepts is de-stabilizing. Thus, it is important to minimize both the number and effect of these reversals. In

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<sup>16</sup> The author's private discussions with a regional expert, University of Washington, April 2003.

the immediate aftermath of the elections, the United States' ability to do just that has had mixed results.

The Azeri government's muted support of American intervention in Iraq raised another issue of democratization. According to Richard Giragosian, an Armenian lobbyist, the Azeri government marginalized public opinion by supporting intervention in the face of general opposition.<sup>17</sup> In developed democratic societies such differences are understood and expected, but in transitional states ignoring public opinion risks reinforcing the society's belief that change is not occurring. Giragosian's assumption indirectly raises the question of the extent to which the creation of the civil society is a single event or multi-event oriented. In Azerbaijan, not only did the government support the intervention even though the majority of the population objected to American military force being used against another Muslim country, but opposition parties also felt compelled to support the intervention or face suppression.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the actions may have slowed the democratization process.

Finally, unfulfilled expectations are a double-edged sword. As is evident, the Caucasus are an extremely complex region, thus change will occur slowly. Yet, if progress and successes do not materialize, the United States risks developing a "Caucasus fatigue" that will result in resources being allocated elsewhere as is the practice in a bureaucratic policy model. Thus, it is beholden of the regional states to take a proactive role in promoting reforms to maintain the momentum and American interest.

A third paradox emerges from the juxtaposition of the role the United States wishes to play in the Caucasus and the impact that role will have on Washington's newly emerging strategic partnership with Moscow. Some experts see the region as an area of enhanced cooperation between

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<sup>17</sup> Giragosian, Richard (2003). "Iraq and the Caucasus: How Will War Affect the Region?". CSIC/Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Conference, Washington DC, April, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Mollazade, J.

the two countries.<sup>19</sup> Russia grudgingly permitted the deployment of US troops in Georgia and has more enthusiastically embraced the training of Armenian officers by American specialists. Furthermore, discussions have been held among the US, Russia, and NATO on establishing joint peace operations in Nagorno-Karabakh. Still, disagreements exist. For the past few years, Moscow has displayed a non-military interventionist policy in the region that is de-stabilizing. Controlling power supplies to Georgia, encouraging continued friction in Abkhazia, and sending the Minister of Interior to talk with Ilham Aliyev immediately after the election are poignant example. Certainly, Russia desires to play a leadership role in a region within its sphere of influence. It is also willing to de-stabilize the region to pursue its interest. The United States is quite aware of Russia's efforts and is seeking to reduce Russian economic dominance, by promoting regional security and integration through a reconstituted GUUAM<sup>20</sup> and maintaining its own engagement. The extent to which either country can impinge upon the other's interest in the Caucasus without significantly affecting their broader relationship remains to be seen. Yet, it is clear that the United States will not trade constructive relations with Moscow for constructive relations with Tbilisi, assuming that the Russians do not use military force in the region. Furthermore, it is quite conceivable that Russia has a good understanding of the ephemeral nature of American foreign policy and is simply waiting for American interests to be re-directed elsewhere, thus eliminating a temporary American presence. Recently, the Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov made it clear that Moscow sees the need for American military forces in Central Asia as diminishing and that the request for departure is inevitable. While it is unlikely that Washington will respond more favorably to Moscow's requests for departure than to the pleas of regional states that it stay, such a circumstance are not

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<sup>19</sup> In his article "Russia Back Dynastic Political Succession Scenario in Azerbaijan", [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org), 8/7/03, Igor Torbakov says that the US and Russia share an interest in regional stability. Stephan Blank in private conversations with the author cited NATO-Russian cooperation in the war on terrorism illustrated through the Ivanov-Robertson meeting in February 2001 and Putin's May 2002 statement that Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) states might collaborate with NATO as being indicative of an opportunity for the development of a constructive policy.

<sup>20</sup> [www.guam.org](http://www.guam.org).

conducive to establishing Russia as a positive rather than negative force in the region. Fundamentally, all parties must recognize that Russian involvement is needed to resolve the conflicts of the region. It is the responsibility of the United States, the European Union, and the regional states, through a combination of “carrots and sticks,” to develop a constructive Russian involvement.

In the Caucasus, stability is needed to prevent failed states, resolve conflicts, contain Iranian or Russian aspirations, and insure access to and security of energy resources. Ultimately, however, democratization is primordial to securing these objectives for the long-term and having the Caucasus become an example for other regions to emulate. In both cases, security sector reform is the foundation of democratization and the means by which these objectives may be met. The next section discusses this process.

### **Security Sector Reform: Stabilization and Democratization United**

The unity between stability and democratization, while desirable, does not necessarily occur simultaneously. One of the primary vehicles used by the United States to accelerate the desired union is security sector reform. To succeed, it is imperative to change the security sector’s perception of its role in society and the society’s perspective of the security sector. Successful security sector reform requires the dispersion of political control of the security sector aimed at eliminating corruption, balancing elite and executive control with that of other governmental institutions to ease oversight, and implementing legalistic controls. It demands transparency in the management of security sector forces; at a national level it includes the integration of the security sector to reduce social divergences and at an international level examples of actions and methods should be provided, and personnel reforms including the downsizing of the general officer corps and replacing those who are resistant to change. Security sector reform is a long-term initiative that may be influenced through training and education, joint and cooperative exercises, and interactions including the presence of democratically controlled forces in a region. Finally, effective security sector reform is

susceptible to shifts in both the international and domestic security environment.

In the Caucasus, the idea of security sector reform may easily be confused with the concept of developing national security forces. Among the states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the security sector development process has three levels. The first is the creation of national military and security forces. This has already occurred in the Caucasus although all three still lack qualified personnel, technical capabilities, and adequate training and education. The second is the operational processes of placing the security sector under civilian control and re-focusing its loyalties on the state or constitution rather than the current regime. This requires addressing manpower and training issues, eliminating party control in the military, establishing initial civilian control such as occurred when Yeltsin, a democratically elected president, assumed some control over the security sector in Russia, and re-establishing a proper chain of command that stops “democratic” tendencies in which military-based interest groups were free to express their interests and criticize command decisions.<sup>21</sup> The third level is establishing real civilian democratic control of the forces including civilian leadership and expertise in the Ministries, open media coverage of the military, free debate over security budgets, and balanced oversight responsibilities between the legislative and executive branches.

Armed forces are critical to the development of new states because they defend sovereignty, promote national unity, and contribute to internal stability.<sup>22</sup> However in the former Soviet Union, the development of national security sectors has been tainted with a high degree of Soviet legacy. This is not surprising since those charged with establishing national security services learned under the Soviets. The Soviet legacy remains a serious obstacle to security sector transition within the security services and between the security and society and needs to be eradicated.

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<sup>21</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the issue military democracy see: Barylki, Robert V. (1998). *The Soldier in Russian Politics*. New Brunswick (NJ): Transaction Publishers.

<sup>22</sup> Feinberg, Jared (1999). *The Armed Forces of Georgia*. Center for Defense Information (CDI) monograph. Washington DC, March, p.1.

The Soviet legacy perpetuates corruption and feeds the military's natural conservatism and resistance to change.

In Armenia for example, the former Minister of National Security, Edward Simoniants, has argued against opening the Turkish-Armenian border for fear of jeopardizing Armenia's industrial development and increasing external pressure on resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.<sup>23</sup> In Georgia, Shevardnadze preferred to maintain up to seven distinct security services in order to maintain a balance among those forces, thus discouraging further coup attempts. Institutional practices such as the hazing of new recruits continue as well and inhibit developing societal respect for the military. Rampant corruption such as recruitment officers taking bribes from families in order to insure a recruit is assigned to better units plague the Georgian and Azeri armies and also enhances social dissatisfaction with the security sector. Poor infrastructure, including failure to pay troops, poor and even inedible food, and the lack of uniforms contributes to the willingness of border guards to either look the other way when appropriately compensated by smugglers or to become knowing accomplices in smuggling and the sale of military *materiel*. Low morale, disease, and the institutionalized hazing of recruits results in an increasing number of "draft dodgers," which is a further indication of the society's lack of respect for the military and erodes the military's effectiveness.

While most of these issues plague the regular military, the security forces are held in even worse regard by society and require extensive reformation. Past experiences such as playing an active role in the crackdowns in Tbilisi in 1989 and Baku in 1990, implementing "operation ring" aimed at isolating Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992, and carrying out two coups in Azerbaijan to oust Ayaz Mutalibov and President Abulfaz Elchibey, have established society's general suspicion of security forces. These suspicions were only reinforced by the use made of the security forces against the population or the political opposition such as occurred in Baku in November 2003.

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<sup>23</sup> Security Watch on-line at [www.isn.ethz.ch/infoservice](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/infoservice), 6/27/03.



Domestic circumstances have embedded the region's security sector into the political processes and thus inhibit reform. In Armenia, where the society's perception of the security sector and the military is generally positive, because of their "victory" in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the security sector is intrinsically involved in most aspects concerning the political life. The war provided an opportunity for merger of the political and military elite. President Robert Kocharian, former head of the Nagorno-Karabakh State Defense Committee, and Serzh Sakarsian, the current Defense Minister, Kocharian's campaign director and the country's wealthiest man, maintain direct control over defense, foreign affairs, and justice and thus epitomize this merger. Moreover, Armenia's security doctrine reinforces a strong role for the security sector in politics by focusing national attention on the fear of Turkish intervention and securing the gains in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In Azerbaijan, the security sector has been interjected into domestic politics as evident in the two previously noted coups and the recent post-election crackdowns. Notwithstanding, the Azeri military is an impotent institution. Heydar Aliyev targeted the military both to eliminate it as a potential source of political opposition to him and to reduce the emphasis on the continued conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh to placate NATO. His efforts succeeded in furthering eroding the society's respect for the military, whose reputation was severely damaged by the poor performance in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. By 2000, it was estimated that as many as four Azeri divisions were only at 40% strength and by 2002 it projected that it was incapable of launching a war to recapture Nagorno-Karabakh for 5 to 10 years.<sup>24</sup> Even if some sectors remain obsessed with re-capturing Nagorno-Karabakh through military means, it appears unlike that the military will re-emerge as a significant political force. More so, the military has demonstrated an increasing desire to reform. The Azeris have agreed to the transition to a civilian-led military which will probably result in Defense Minister General Safar Abiyev resigning his commission and assuming the role of a civilian minister.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> De Waal, T., p.278.

<sup>25</sup> The author's interview with an anonymous government source, November 2003.

While Aliyev, a former KGB chief, weakened the military, other parts of the security sector, with whom he was more comfortable, remain powerful. One of the greatest threats to security sector reform in Azerbaijan is Namik Abbasov, the Minister of Internal Security, who was also a presidential candidate for a period. Although the security forces' role in the new government is unclear, their influence will undoubtedly have increased with their use in suppressing and imprisoning the opposition after Ilham's election. Ilham's ability to astutely balance the myriad of forces arrayed against him remains to be seen. He was a choice of convenience for Azerbaijan's "old guard" and surely owes a number of political debts. Second, his leadership qualities are at best unclear and it is unlikely that he has a sufficiently strong power base to effect reforms. At worst, he is being characterized as somewhere between Kim Il Jong and Bashir Asad by the Armenian lobby which does not resonant well for being able to bring the sides together on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Georgia simultaneously represents the best and the worst of efforts at security sector reform in the region. Whereas the Armenian military legitimacy and identity results from its role as protector of the state, the Georgian military is generally characterized by corruption, distrust, and incompetence. Moreover, the security sector has simply proliferated. Corruption is so excessive that the United States refuses to deal with certain units. Georgia has the lowest defense budget in the Commonwealth of Independent States, considered canceling conscription for a year, cannot pay its arms suppliers, confronted a mutiny in May 2002 over the lack of pay, and faced the resignation of 102 officers and men who could not perform their duties under such circumstances in Spring 2003.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Information on these points and the collapse of the Georgian military is available from: Osidze, Archil and Ivliane Haindrava (2003). "Security Sector Reform in Georgia" (presentation). PFP Consortium Security Sector Reform Working Group Meeting, NATO Defense College, Rome, April; Mikeladze, M (2002). "Military Civil Relations in Georgia", in A. Nikitin, *Democratic Control over the Military Sphere in Russia and the CIS*. Moscow: Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF); Doyle, Claire (2002). "Azerbaijan Bluster Masks Military Weakness". [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org), 13 December;

In spite of these dire circumstances, Georgia is committed to managerial re-organization of the Ministry of Defense under western guidance, including the appointment of a civilian Minister of Defense by 2004. Georgia also has been the recipient of the most significant amount of military assistance through the Georgia Training and Equip Program (GTEP), funded by the US Department of Defense. Allocated to enhance Georgia's ability to contribute to the "War on Terrorism," particularly in controlling the Pankisi Gorge, the GTEP represents both a tactical and strategic success. According to unnamed officials in Washington, the GTEP is "the only thing functioning in Georgia" and represents the first "bottom to top re-organization of the armed forces ever undertaken."<sup>27</sup>

To date, the GTEP has trained four infantry battalions and a mechanized army battalion to NATO standards, including interoperability with NATO forces. The success of the GTEP program and the on-going American presence in Georgia is multidimensional. It has resulted in cleaning up the Pankisi Gorge, generating a high level of transparency between the US and Georgia, and has generated interest among NATO allies which promises increased efforts at security reform in the region. It also has improved civil-military relations at the societal level. The Georgians no longer fear the military as a result of seeing these forces. The GTEP is a major success story for the policy of funding, training, and continued engagement and rests as an example of merger between security sector reform and democratization.

The GTEP's success extends beyond Georgia however. It is leading the United States to closer relations with the other Caucasus states and former Soviet republics in spite of some jealousy. It has demonstrated that cooperation is possible with countries close to Russia. Third, it may stabilize Russia's periphery and thus entice those elements positively disposed to NATO to cooperate further.<sup>28</sup> If such a situation occurs, the GTEP and its successor programs will play a significant role in transforming the region's security sectors and broaden the opportunities

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"Cut spending or lose loans, IMF tells Georgia", Security Watch, [www.isn.ethz.ch/infoservice](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/infoservice), 30 April 2003 and 16 July 2003.

<sup>27</sup> The author's interview with an anonymous government source, November 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

for democratization. Notwithstanding, some skepticism regarding the use of the GTEP-trained units remains. Good soldiers obey the chain on command. In a system in which the effectiveness of military forces is dubious, political leader may be persuaded to deploy better-trained troops to more restless spots in western Georgia. It has also been speculated that specialized training creates a dichotomy within the armed forces, thus inhibiting broader reform efforts rather than promoting it.<sup>29</sup>

Security sector reform is also intrinsically linked to the perceived threats of an individual state as well as the dynamics of the international system. Nothing has demonstrated this latter point more than 9/11. The “War on Terrorism” changed the international system’s perception of threats, which resulted in countries re-assessing the nature of their threats and renewed American interest in the security environment. Somewhat neglected during the Clinton Administration, security issues have re-emerged as the predominant issue of foreign policy. As a result, in addition to pursuing more unilateral initiatives such as the GTEP, the United States has also pursued a concurrent multilateral approach. While Washington feels that many multilateral efforts have had only marginal impact on reform, it does support combined unilateral and multilateral efforts at reforming the security sector. Washington continues to promote the further development of GUUAM as a security organization, supports Partnership for Peace efforts, and encourages favorable bilateral relations such as those pursued between Turkey and Azerbaijan. These multi-level interactions have had positive results. Turkey’s influence and Azerbaijan’s participation as a PFP member in peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations have been credits with causing a fundamental improvement in the Azeri military. One US government source noted that “we are starting to see an impact in their (Azeri) soldiers’ behavior when returning from Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Just functioning with our military, they have a better understanding of what NATO means when we speak of NCOs, human rights, etc.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The author’s discussion with Dov Lynch, European Union Institute for Security Studies, (EUISS) at Reichenau (Austria), November 2003.

<sup>30</sup> The author’s interview with an anonymous government source, November 2003.

On the contrary, multilateralism has had only negligible impact on Armenia. While being the most motivated and probably most capable force in the Caucasus, the Armenian military and security sector generally see little need to reform. Although they have renewed ties with the PFP, the security sector continues to benefit from the promotion of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the predominance of military men in political control. Thus, neither military corporate interests nor individual interests are currently served by reforming the existing circumstances. Second, Armenia's primary benefactor, Russia, hardly offers a viable example for reforming the security sector nor would Russian interests be served by the political changes that would be necessary to effect meaningful reform.

## **Conclusion**

The fundamental question that remains is whether the West is prepared to make the necessary commitments in terms of time and resources to establish grass roots stability that perpetuates reform, to secure the victories of the "Rose Revolution", and to sow the seeds of democratization that will ultimately integrate the Caucasus with the West. At the heart of this question is whether the Caucasus are sufficiently important in themselves to warrant the required commitment or is it simply their proximity to other regions that make them valuable to the United States in particular? If the latter is true, then American interest will wane and the region will be left to its own devices. However, the reality is that the former appears to be truer. The Caucasus is consistently mentioned within the context of the United States global energy security policy. Furthermore, they are certainly recognized as an important area for the forward deployment of American forces fighting the war on terrorism. Third, it is a pivotal region for containing Russia, and to a lesser extent Iran, and extending American influence into Central Asia and the Middle East.

Yet, it is important that all parties view American interests in the region with a degree of reality. First, as previously stated, only under severe circumstances can Washington be convinced to exchange its new relationship with Moscow for one with any of the region's states.

However, the United States must seek to leverage the new Russian relationship that is simultaneously beneficial and important to Moscow to promote a more constructive, rather than destructive, Russian role in the region. Positive Russian involvement is critical to resolving the region's conflicts. Stabilization will also be served by settling the regional conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Concurrently, positive Russian involvement lessens one of the quandaries of American policy by reducing the risks of American involvement.

Second, the United States and the EU should move forward the prospects for stabilization and democratization by implementing security sector reforms including de-politicizing national armies and reducing paramilitaries. Concurrently continued efforts at the creation of a sound civil society through financial support, NGO development, and marketization initiatives need to be pursued because ultimately stability is only achieved through democratization. Within this context, it is important to note that the EU may play a more pivotal role than the United States because the EU's long-term goals and connections with the region may be more significant.

Third, it is critical that the region's states play a proactive and positive role in reform. Successes towards democratization and reform are essential to avoiding "Caucasus fatigue" and the deflection of American attention. While the region's states must be realistic in their expectations regarding their relationship with the United States, there is nothing like a democratic success such as the "Rose Revolution" to focus American attention and generate American support. The Caucasus is a germane region to American interest, but the United States needs to be reminded of their importance. Simultaneously the region must recognize how it fits into the broader strategic goals of the United States.

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