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**NAVAL
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**UNRAVELING THE GEORGIAN KNOT:
THE UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, AND THE
NEW "GREAT GAME" IN THE CAUCASUS**

by

C. Tim Carlsson

December 2009

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Douglas Borer
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**UNRAVELING THE GEORGIAN KNOT: THE UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, AND
GEORGIA AND THE NEW “GREAT GAME” IN THE CAUCASUS**

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ABSTRACT

The most recent manifestation of a new “Great Game,” or a resurgence of interest in the geopolitical competition taking place in the Caucasus, occurred in August 2008 when Russia invaded and occupied parts of the Republic of Georgia. Russia’s invasion, the first use of force outside its territory since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, has forced a reassessment of U.S. and NATO strategy toward Russia and its relationship with the Republic of Georgia. The United States and NATO have yet to develop a new strategy that balances their enlargement policy of supporting Georgian sovereignty and independence with concerns about growing Russian security interests in the region.

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine Georgia’s national security dilemmas and explain the principal components of U.S. engagement policies designed to manage its strategic predicament. This thesis examines whether these engagement policies contribute to U.S. and NATO interests, bring greater stability to the region, and enhance European security. The study also analyzes how U.S. engagement in Georgia affects Georgian and Russian interests and explores the implications for U.S.-Russian relations in terms of a new “Great Game” of geopolitical competition in the region.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Annual Action Program
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party
CRS	Congressional Research Service
EU	European Union
FSA	Freedom Support Act
GTEP	The Georgia Train and Equip Program
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HUMINT	HUMan INTelligence
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
ISAF	International Security Force Afghanistan
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OSCE	The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace Program
SCP	South Caucasus Pipeline
SSOP	Sustainment and Stability Operations Program
SVR	Russian Foreign Intelligence Service

UNSC	U.N. Security Council
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USEUCOM	United States European Command
WTO	World Trade Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, AND THE NEW “GREAT GAME” IN THE CAUCASUS

In the foreword to *The Great Game: the Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, Peter Hopkirk (1992), writing a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union, observed that:

Suddenly, after many years of almost total obscurity, Central Asia and the Caucasus find themselves once more back in the headlines, a position frequently occupied during the nineteenth century. Already political analysts and headline writers are calling this maneuvering for long-term advantage, the new “Great Game.” (p. xv)

The most recent manifestation of this resurgence of the “Great Game” and geopolitical competition taking place in the Caucasus occurred in August 2008 when Russia invaded and occupied parts of the Republic of Georgia. The Russian invasion, the first use of force outside its territory since the demise of the Soviet Union, has forced a reassessment of U.S. strategy toward Russia, including its relationship with the Republic of Georgia. It may have also accelerated a realignment already taking place in Europe, where members of NATO and the European Union have warned of the threat posed by a resurgent Russia.

This new “Great Game” is being shaped by geopolitical competition over ideas, resources, and access to an energy rich region located on the mountainous periphery of the former Soviet Union, between the Caspian and Black Seas (see Figure 1). This region has long been characterized by intense ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, as well as chronic instability and conflict. According to historian Craig Nation (2007), the Caucasus is an area that is “...plagued by many of the “typical” post-Soviet dilemmas, including: incomplete nation-building, deeply rooted corruption, regional conflict and separatism, fragile democratization, and thriving criminal networks” (p. 3). Despite these challenges, the region’s strategic significance and great power interest in the Caucasus has grown over the past two decades.

In particular, the Republic of Georgia’s search for independence and sovereignty as a modern nation-state has been hampered by significant internal and external challenges. Georgia is challenged internally by ethno-separatist conflicts, weak democratic institutions, poorly developed economic infrastructure, and widespread corruption. The most important external challenge to Georgia’s standing as an independent nation is a resurgent Russia that seeks to maintain its security through control over its “near abroad” in the Caucasus region. These internal and external tensions are exacerbated by great power rivalry between the United States and Russia over the issue of Georgia’s application for NATO membership and an assertive U.S. engagement policy that includes generous military and security assistance.

The 2008 Russian invasion of the Republic of Georgia has rekindled widespread interest in the South Caucasus and a search for a new U.S. engagement strategy. This new strategy seeks to balance the current U.S. policy in support of Georgian sovereignty and independence with resurgent Russian security interests in the region. This new strategy also plays a critical role in U.S., NATO, Russian, and Georgian relations for the foreseeable future.



Figure 1. The Caucasus and Central Asia (From: Central Asia Maps, 2009)

B. COMPETING THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: REALISM VS. IDEALISM

At least since Machiavelli published the *Prince* (1513), there have been two opposing schools of thought regarding the international relations theory and the nature of politics. These two schools of political thought differ fundamentally on the conception of man, society, and politics. The Machiavellian paradigm or “realist” school has been routinely contrasted with the “idealist” school of thought in politics and international affairs. Realists focus on state power as the ultimate authority in world politics. National interest is determined through a clash of conflicting interests, divide and rule, and the balance of power. In contrast, the “idealist” or Grotian school emphasizes the importance of authority, interdependence, and the even distribution of power. The idealist school focuses on the primacy of duty, natural laws and rights, and the conscience of mankind to determine what governments “ought” to prescribe as the ultimate authority in politics (Wight, 1991, pp. 1–3). There are two additional paradigms of international theory that include some idealist concepts. The Kantian paradigm stresses social progress, the spirit of the enlightenment, and the primacy of domestic policy. The Quaker (pacifist) paradigm stresses the brotherhood of man and repudiates international politics altogether (pp. 1–3).

Political Scientist Arnold Wolfers (1969) maintains that this “realist-idealist” debate remained largely academic and “power politics” and “realism” dominated state-to-state relations until the first leader of a major power, Woodrow Wilson, sought to transform the international system (p. 175). Wilson sought to create a new era that still influences Western politics today and included such idealist precepts as: democratization, collective security, international law, and the creation of a League of Nations. Wolfers maintains that American statesmen and the American public find themselves continually torn between the conflicting pull of idealist and realist thought. According to historian David Kennedy (2009), American foreign relations since 1914 has been heavily influenced by Wilsonian idealism, even if adjusted somewhat by the “realism”

represented by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Henry Kissinger (p. 19). Kennedy maintains that in the aftermath of 9/11 the “realism-idealism” debate has, if anything, taken on even greater vitality.

In their study on *Power and Interdependence*, Keohane and Nye (1989) maintain that world political realities are usually a combination of realist assumptions and idealism and the two approaches can be complementary (pp. 23–24). The authors assert that there are three integral assumptions to the realist vision: first, that states are predominant and they act as coherent units; second, that force is the most useful and effective means of wielding power; and third, that there is a hierarchy of issues in world politics headed by military security. Idealists challenge these assumptions and maintain that there are situations in world politics in which actors other than states participate, a clear hierarchy of issues does not exist, and force is often an ineffective instrument of policy. The authors define this second set of characteristics where there are multiple channels connecting societies, multiple sets of issues with no clear hierarchy, and military force is not used to resolve issues as complex interdependence (pp. 23–24). However, most authors concede that the realist and idealist viewpoints are ideal types, and that in the real world, most situations fall somewhere between these two extremes.

The debate about idealism versus realism may in fact reflect a fundamental contradiction that is at the very core of American foreign policy going back to the lofty principles of the founding fathers on the one hand and the messy practice of real-world politics on the other. This realist-idealist tension has been one of the key challenges for U.S. foreign policy in that its idealism, that goes back to the founding of the republic, is often symbolic, while the actual day-to-day practice must often be a realist calculus. This fundamental contradiction inherent in American foreign policy may help explain the current U.S. engagement strategy in the Republic of Georgia in practice. The present policy promotes an idealist agenda in the form of greater democratization, nation building, free markets, and close security ties with the U.S. while at the same time maintaining a realist calculus by maintaining ambiguity about a security guarantee to Georgia through NATO membership or bilateral agreements.

C. REALISM AND IDEALISM: U.S. ENGAGEMENT AND THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

Barack Obama and Joe Biden will address the challenge posed by an increasingly autocratic and bellicose Russia by pursuing a new, comprehensive strategy that advances American national interests without compromising our enduring principles.

“Meeting the Challenge of Resurgent Russia.” (2008, Foreign Policy Statement, www.barackobama.com)

The challenge for the United States is encapsulated in the above Foreign Policy Statement and highlights the current U.S. policy dilemma regarding the Republic of Georgia where principles may conflict with security interests. In the context of the current U.S. engagement strategy toward the Republic of Georgia, this dilemma is manifested in two contrasting schools of thought. The idealist school maintains that the current level of U.S. security assistance serves crucial U.S. interests in the South Caucasus and advocates containment of Russian influence in the region. The realist school maintains that although U.S. interests in Georgia and the Caucasus are important, they are not vital and that the current level of U.S. engagement in Georgia may contribute to instability in the region.

The proponents of containment maintain that a high level of U.S. engagement in Georgia and membership in NATO would strengthen its independence and sovereignty. This school of thought holds that U.S. aid is required to bolster Georgia’s security and independence, and to prevent the spread of terrorism in the area. The most important aspects of this activist engagement policy are support for Georgian NATO membership, robust military-security support arrangements, and democratic and market economic reform. Ariel Cohen (2009), a Senior Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Heritage Foundation, advocates a “vigilant” U.S. policy to defend Georgia’s territorial integrity and to extend NATO Membership Action Plans (MAPs) to both Georgia and Ukraine (p. 11). Concerning Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia, Cohen maintains that:

History has shown that the most dangerous times are the ones when new powers (or resurgent ones) attempt to overturn the status quo. The United States and its allies must remain vigilant and willing to defend freedom and prevent Russia from engendering shifts in the global power structure detrimental to U.S. national security interests. (p. 13)

Advocates of this strategy maintain that Georgia's membership in NATO would have deterred the Russian invasion in August 2008. Such an active engagement policy would also reduce Russia's influence and the probability of its interference in Georgia's internal affairs. Some advocates of this school also suggest that NATO's weak response (to the 2008 Russian incursion into Georgia) and continued failure to offer Georgia Membership Action Plan (MAP) status formally, encourages Russian assertiveness and constitutes a policy of appeasement. In their view, this failure acquiesces in Russia's illegitimate claim to a de facto sphere of influence in Georgia. Svante Cornell (2007) at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute asserts that, "Appeasement policies, which is what the United States has been attempting, have failed, for the simple reasons that appeasing a counterpart [Russia] motivated by zero-sum thinking is not possible" (p. 35). In Cornell's view, rather than restraining Russian conduct, such appeasement policies have emboldened an increasingly assertive and aggressive Russian policy (p. 35).

In addition, idealists assert that NATO enlargement to include Georgia is considered a positive-sum benefit for the international community that brings greater stability to the Caucasus region. NATO is viewed as not only a defensive alliance, but also as an effective mechanism for resolving disputes between nations and ameliorating conflict. Accordingly, many of the disputes in Central and Eastern Europe have tended to be attenuated as part of the NATO membership process. In Congressional testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried stated that "NATO enlargement has proven to be a strikingly effective mechanism for resolving disputes between nations" (U.S. Senate Hearing, 2008, p. 31). In this view, Russian attempts to undermine this process by opposing NATO enlargement in Georgia are viewed as outmoded, zero-sum thinking in Moscow.

Finally, the adherents of the idealist school maintain that an assertive U.S. engagement policy would also ensure continued Western access to the vital resources of

the Caspian Sea oil basin, secure regional allies and potential military access (over-flight and potential basing), and extend U.S. strategic reach into Central Asia. The European Union (EU) has also expressed interest in the transit of energy resources through the southern Caucasus as an alternative to exclusive Russian control over energy supplies from this region. In reference to U.S. energy and security interests in the Caspian energy region, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza declared that “we’re not embarrassed to say that energy is a strategic interest. We [also] have ...traditional security interests-meaning restoring the territorial integrity of the states in the region...and then we have a third set of interests, in democratic and market economic reform...based on our belief that stability only comes from legitimacy” (CRS Political, 2009, p. 1).

The realist school is concerned with the traditional balance of power and questions whether the southern Caucasus region is a vital U.S. interest necessitating enhanced U.S. security commitments and aid. This balance of power school maintains that the current U.S. engagement strategy, which promotes the Republic of Georgia’s membership in NATO, also encourages an assertive Georgian foreign policy, threatens Russia in its own back yard, and contributes to instability in the region. Dmitri Trenin (2008) at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace asserts that “the next U.S. administration will need to recognize that NATO’s expansion has reached safe limits, and that any more [movement] in the direction of Ukraine and Georgia is fraught with real danger” (p. 6). In this view, NATO’s enlargement encompassing the former Eastern Bloc, the Baltic region, and parts of the Balkans (with a total of 28 members) may have reached the limits of growth when balanced by a newly assertive Russia.

Realists assert that the weak U.S. response following the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 confirms the faults of containment as an engagement strategy. This policy left Washington little practical leverage when faced with a Russian application of raw military power in Georgia. In an article in the *New York Times*, journalist Tom Shanker reported that, “the Bush administration, after considerable internal debate, has decided not to take direct punitive action against Russia for its

conflict with Georgia, concluding that it has little leverage if it acts unilaterally and that it would be better off pressing for a chorus of international criticism to be led by Europe” (Shanker, 2008, p. A1).

Members of the realist school of thought point out that had NATO formally invited Georgia to join the alliance via the MAP process at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008 as advocated by some U.S. policy makers, the alliance may have come into direct military confrontation with Russia. In a December 2008 Hearing of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Jim Webb discussed the circumstances under which the United States might feel compelled to respond militarily to situations like the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict:

If Georgia had been a NATO member when this incident occurred, despite the tempestuous nature of the leadership in Georgia that was something of lighting a fuse on it...we would have had a different set of responsibilities to be looking at as a country. These are the kind of situations, I think that give a lot of people pause when we talk about expanding NATO in the way we've been expanding it. (U.S. Senate Hearing, 2008, pp. 42–43)

Furthermore, realists argue that the current U.S. policy of supporting Georgia's entry into NATO via the MAP process has created tensions within the alliance and over the security guarantee expressed in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This article calls for the mutual defense of all members in the event of an attack on any individual member. In his remarks to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator John Warner raised the issue of NATO enlargement and the requirements of Article 5:

Therefore as we proceed to try and advance the cause of democracy in various parts of the world, we have to be very conscious that a lot of these things are deep-rooted, deep-seated, and can start a flash fire which can burst on the scene into major conflict. That leads me to the question of the commitments, so to speak, to bring about admission of Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. What concerns me is that this action in Georgia, this confrontation, brings to the forefront this issue of admission of new nations, the potential set of conflicts that they bring to the table, and consequently all members of NATO must recognize that they could be involved in an actual shooting war. (U.S. Senate Hearing, 2008, p. 29)

Lastly, realists point out that a NATO security guarantee to Georgia would not only commit the Alliance to the defense of Georgia against external threats from non-NATO adversaries, but would also tie its mutual security to the unresolved internal conflicts in Georgia's separatist areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Trenin (2008) argues that "a Georgia in NATO still claiming ownership over Abkhazia and South Ossetia would turn those disputes into direct issues between NATO and Russia" (p. 6). According to this view, U.S. policy regarding Georgia's candidacy for NATO membership may have been a contributing factor in the Russian decision to invade the Republic of Georgia.

D. THE FOCUS OF THESIS RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Georgia's national security dilemmas and explain the principal components of U.S. engagement policies designed to manage Tbilisi's strategic predicament. This thesis examines whether these engagement policies support U.S. and NATO interests, bring greater stability to the region, and enhance European security. The study also analyzes how U.S. engagement in Georgia affects Georgian and Russian interests and explores the implications for U.S.-Russian relations in terms of a new "Great Game" competition for control over the region. Finally, the study addresses whether U.S. and NATO engagement policies increases the likelihood of continued Russian intervention in the Republic of Georgia.

Since the U.S. engagement policy is closely tied to what might be called a "Georgian Gordian knot," both the internal ethno-nationalist challenges, as well as external security relationships with Russia and NATO are explored in this thesis. In this case, the Gordian knot is used as a metaphor for a complicated problem for which it is very difficult to find a solution. The expression "cut the Gordian Knot" refers to Georgian efforts to solve its complicated problems forcefully or by some unexpected means (Gordian Knot, Wikipedia, 2009).

Chapter II attempts to unravel the Georgian Gordian knot first by exploring the historical context of Georgia's ethno-nationalist separatist movements and then by tracing the evolution of Georgia's post-Soviet national security policy of increasing integration

with the United States, NATO, and the European Union. The chapter uses political scientist Ted Gurr's (1993) theory of ethno-political action to explain Georgia's separatist movements and understand implications for European security.

Chapter III describes U.S. engagement policy toward the Republic of Georgia and discusses "Great Game" consequences that may contribute to instability in the Caucasus and within the NATO Alliance. This chapter also explores whether NATO membership and the promise of a security guarantee under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty may contribute to Georgian and European security. The chapter describes five major components of the current U.S. engagement policy with Georgia, which include: (1) U.S. support for Georgia's NATO membership and the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership; (2) the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP); (3) U.S. foreign aid and democratization efforts in Georgia; (4) U.S. policies regarding Georgia's separatist areas in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; and (5) U.S. economic and energy policies in Georgia.

Chapter IV analyzes Russian interests in the South Caucasus and attempts to explore its complex role in the tangled Georgian Gordian knot. The analysis includes a literature review of both internal and external sources of Russian conduct in Georgia since the collapse of the Soviet Union and particularly during former President Putin's tenure. The study discusses the sources of Russian disillusionment with NATO enlargement and other policies that have brought U.S.-Russian relations to a post-Cold War low point. The chapter also briefly discusses the causes of the outbreak of war in August 2008 and the conclusion reached by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia released in October 2009 by the European Union (IFFMCG, 2009).

The final concluding section of the thesis, attempts to adjudicate between the two realist and idealist schools of thought regarding the appropriate level of U.S. engagement in Georgia and describes how each approach can contribute to U.S. interests and enhance European, Georgian, and NATO security. Policy recommendations for a U.S. engagement strategy that protects U.S., NATO, and Georgian interests, while at the same time addressing resurgent Russian concerns are also made.

II. UNRAVELING THE GORDIAN KNOT: THE GEORGIAN SECURITY DILEMMA

The Georgian Gordian knot revolves around the country's determination to break its traditional close ties with Russia and seek security and independence through Western institutions, such as NATO and the European Union. In this case, the Gordian knot refers to a legend associated with Alexander the Great often used as a metaphor for an intractable problem that can only be solved by a bold stroke (Gordian Knot, Wikipedia, 2009). However, Georgia's unresolved separatist conflicts threaten to undermine its goals of greater political stability and integration with the West, while risking confrontation with Russia.

At the same time, Moscow seeks to undermine the prospects for Georgian membership in NATO by aggravating unresolved territorial conflicts and highlighting the issues of confrontation with Russia. In August 2008, Russia invaded and occupied the separatist areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and NATO deferred making a decision on Georgia's application for membership in the alliance to a time to be determined in the future. After a meeting in Strasbourg/Kehl on April 4, 2009, the Alliance heads of state reaffirmed Georgia's aspiration to join NATO "one day" in far more guarded form than in the previous Bucharest Summit Declaration (Razoux, 2009, p. 7). The meeting concluded with a declaration that implicitly states that "Georgia will not be able to join NATO until it has found a peacefully negotiated solution to disagreements between Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia" (p. 7).

European security as embodied in the European Union and NATO is directly affected by Georgia's ethno-nationalist, separatist wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As a candidate for NATO membership, the unresolved nature of Georgia's claims to its two separatist areas could spill over into direct conflict between Russia and NATO under the mutual security guarantee in Article 5 of the NATO Charter. In addition to multilateral ties with the European Union and NATO, Georgia has also fostered close

bilateral ties with the United States under the auspices of the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), the U.S. Global War on Terror (GWOT), and the 2009 U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership (CRS Political, 2009, pp. 4–5).

This chapter seeks to unravel the mysteries of the Georgian Gordian knot. The chapter examines Georgian nation building and security dilemmas against the backdrop of resurgent Russian and growing U.S. and European interests in the region. The first part of the chapter identifies internal challenges facing the Republic of Georgia and examines its complex historical past in the context of its relationship with the former Soviet Union and the separatist regions. Georgia's separatist conflicts date back to the early 1990s following the breakup of the Soviet Union and are rooted in ethnic differences going back hundreds of years. These internal conflicts are also directly related to the events leading up to the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia and have larger geo-strategic implications for the United States, NATO, and Russia.

The second part of the chapter examines Georgia's internal security challenges in the three separatist areas in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajaria using political scientist Ted Gurr's (1993) theory of ethno-political action (see Figure 2). Since Georgia's internal separatist wars are closely tied to its external security challenges, explaining the causes of separatism using Gurr's theory of ethno-political action may be one key to understanding the Georgian Gordian knot and developing appropriate U.S. and European security policies. The concluding section describes Georgia's efforts to overcome its security dilemmas and internal weaknesses by developing strong military, economic, and political ties with the United States, NATO, and the European Union.



Figure 2. Georgia's Separatist Areas in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (From: Wikipedia Online, 2009)

A. DAVID AND GOLIATH: GEORGIA'S SEARCH FOR SECURITY UNDER THE SHADOW OF RUSSIAN COLLAPSE AND RUSSIAN RESURGENCE

Since its independence in 1991, and following the “Rose Revolution” in 2003, the Georgian government has been single mindedly focused on rebuilding the Georgian state, resolving the secessionist conflicts and seeking NATO membership and economic integration into the European Union. In this regard, the Republic of Georgia has faced tremendous challenges on several fronts. Due to its volatile history, varied economic and social conditions, and ethnic diversity, it has traditionally been considered by outsiders to be an unlikely candidate for integration into Western institutions (CRS, 2008, p. 6). Additional internal problems include crime, corruption, terrorism, and narcotics trafficking.

Georgia's search for security and independence through alliance with a comparatively distant Euro-Atlantic community, despite its proximity and historic ties to Russia, has created great internal and external tensions in the region. Initially, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was established by Russia in December 1991 as a voluntary association loosely based on the European Union. Its membership included Russia and 10 other former Soviet Republics and was joined by Georgia in December 1993 and provided for limited defensive cooperation and consultation (CIS, 2009, p. 1.3). While its relations with Russia became increasingly difficult, Georgia and Russia did reach a bilateral agreement on closing Russian military bases dating back to the Soviet era and all personnel and equipment was withdrawn from these sites in December 2007 (p. 2.6).

Following the August 2008 War, President Saakashvili announced that Georgia would leave the CIS and the Georgian Parliament voted unanimously on August 14, 2008 to withdraw from the regional organization. This resolution by the Parliament of Georgia approving withdrawal from CIS became effective on August 18, 2009. Since the 2008 invasion, Russia has continued to occupy Abkhazia and South Ossetia and officially recognized the two separatist regions as independent countries on August 26, 2008. The Georgian Parliament passed a resolution declaring Abkhazia and South Ossetia to be "Russian-occupied territories" on August 28, 2008 (CIS, 2009, p. 1.3).

1. The Roots of Conflict

According to political scientist Christoph Zurcher (2007, p. 11), the geographical position and structure of the Caucasus explain two of the most notable peculiarities of the region: "the late and weak formation of statehood and the ethno-cultural complexity of the region" (see Figure 3). The Caucasus Mountains form an east-west barrier that divides the north from the south in a region traditionally home to a variety of mountain tribes that became highly resistant to outside rule. The difficult terrain made the establishment of direct control and conquest costly and hindered the establishment of

centralized power in the region. The South Caucasus in particular became a transit region, shaped by invasions, migration and retreats to safe havens in the inaccessible mountain valleys.

Not until 1783, under Peter the Great, did the Russian empire begin its conquest of the South Caucasus region. The Russians succeeded in dislodging the Persians and Ottomans from the region and the area was annexed into the Russian Empire by approximately 1801. By the early 19th century, the Russians began a pacification program in the still unsecured North Caucasus to link the newly annexed territories in the South Caucasus to the Empire. Although the wars in the North Caucasus officially ended in 1859 after years of internecine conflict, the region was in a constant state of unrest up to the end of the Tsarist period in 1917 (Zurcher, 2007, pp. 16–17).

The concept of a national agenda and cultural autonomy amongst Georgians did not emerge until late in the 19th century. By this time, the most Georgian upper classes had become completely integrated into the Russian service nobility. After the October Revolution in 1917 and the following the withdrawal of Tsarist troops, Georgia (by default) declared its independence in May 1918. However, Bolshevik control was reestablished with the advance of the Red Army into the South Caucasus and Georgia was incorporated into the Soviet State in 1921 after a brief period of independence (Zurcher, 2007, pp. 22–23).

2. The New Soviet-Georgian State and Ethno-Federalism

By the mid 1920s, the Soviet Union had consolidated its control over Georgia and imposed a political structure that balanced territorial control and ethnicity. According to Zurcher, the purposes of Soviet “ethno-federalism” were: first, to organize territorial authority into administrative units subordinated to a central hierarchy; second, to rein in and control nationalistic forces that had been awakened by war and revolution; and third, to build legitimacy for the Soviet state by granting at least *de jure* substantial rights to nations freed from Tsarist oppression by the Soviet Union (pp. 24–25). This new Soviet

state, according to Zurcher, was an asymmetrical federation comprised of “ethno-territorial units.” Each unit was delegated a certain amount of autonomy and privileges, which differed according to the status of the unit.

At the top of this hierarchy were Union republics established on the basis of international borders, significant non-Russian population, and sufficient socio-cultural development. Under this scheme, Georgia became its own *Union Republic* (SSR). The Abkhazia and Ajaria were eventually combined with Georgia in 1930 to become *Autonomous Republics* (ASSR). Autonomous republics were subunits of union republics and consisted of ethnic groups numerically smaller than the “titular” nations of the union republic. South Ossetia was founded as an *Autonomous Oblast* (AO) within Georgia. The AO was a third tier region within a union republic that represented a numerically small ethnic group settled in a relatively compact area of settlement. From 1936 until the collapse of the Soviet Union, this state structure remained essentially unchanged and was dominated at the center in Moscow by the Communist Party (CPSU) (Zurcher, 2007, p. 25).

This Soviet system of administrative-territorial control that linked certain groups with a given territory may have laid the groundwork for modern nation-statehood in Georgia. Up to the Soviet period, collective identity had been rooted in kinship, clan and regional and religious ties or in cities such as Tbilisi, allegiance to (Soviet) class consciousness. According to Zurcher, the concept of nation or nationality came to the Caucasus as a byproduct of its incorporation into the Soviet system (p. 31). However, he argues that although these Soviet-style sovereign nation-states looked “modern,” they were in fact only quasi nation-states. In his words, “...their parliaments had little influence, their borders little meaning, their symbols little allure and their freedom to maneuver was tightly restricted by the central hierarchies of the Soviet Union” (p. 32). After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the institutions in which quasi-sovereignty resided and the ethnic and political struggles that followed became the foundations of the current Georgian state.

3. Post-Soviet Realities: Internal Political Turmoil, the “Rose Revolution,” and the Separatist Wars

The Republic of Georgia was initially established under the shadow of the transformation of the collapsing Soviet super-state into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991. After a period of political turmoil and internal wars against separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a new leadership emerged out of the “Rose Revolution” in 2003, which sought to create a modern nation-state independent of Russian influence, integrated into the European Union, and aligned with the United States and NATO. The “Rose Revolution” of November 2003, which involved thousands of Georgian public protests against massive fraud in parliamentary elections, led to the resignation of then President Eduard Shevardnadze (Lynch, 2006, pp. 9–10).

Since then, Georgia has launched itself into the process of democracy and state building under the energetic leadership of President Mikheil Saakashvili with the support of the majority of the population. According to Cornell (2007), Saakashvili was able to market Georgia successfully as a “beacon of democracy” in the post-Soviet space (p. 7). Meanwhile, in Moscow, the Georgian revolution was regarded with fear and dismay. Cornell maintains that from 1999 onwards, Russia increasingly moved in a nationalistic direction and sought to manipulate Georgia’s territorial conflicts to undermine its stability and development (p. 31).

However, increased political instability in Georgia in 2007 also raised doubts in the United States and NATO about the Saakashvili administration and its commitment to democratization. Several opposition parties launched demonstrations in 2007 demanding a change in legislative elections and calling for Saakashvili’s resignation. These demonstrations were forcibly dispersed by security forces. Saakashvili declared a state of emergency with enhanced powers for 15 days in November and maintained that the demonstrations were part of a Russian coup attempt (CRS Political, 2009, p. 25). Presidential elections were held in January 2008 and Saakashvili won 53% of the vote against five opposition candidates. A legislative election was held in May 2008 with 12

different parties and blocs competing for 150 seats. International observers and the OSCE assessed these elections as “broadly meeting its standards, but with some troubling irregularities” (p. 26).

Following the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008, President Saakashvili announced new democratization initiatives meant to strengthen Georgian independence. Opposition calls for renewed demonstrations, new elections, and Saakashvili’s resignation resulted in arrests of opposition figures and renewed accusations of a coup in the planning. In addition to the elections in 2008, a plebiscite was held that endorsed Georgia’s aim to join NATO (CRS Political, 2009, p. 26). According to Dov Lynch (2006) at the European Union Institute for Security Studies, Georgia’s continued democratization is particularly important to the West. He asserts, “The Georgian project is important because it reflects the core challenge of crafting democracy in a dysfunctional state embedded in a conflict-ridden region” (p. 10).

Georgia has fought several separatist conflicts since its independence. In 1990, Georgia fought to prevent the secession of the South Ossetia region, leading to approximately 1,500 deaths and tens of thousands of mostly ethnic Georgian displaced persons (CRS, 2008, p. 6). In 1992, Georgia fought another separatist movement in the Abkhaz region. This conflict resulted in about 10,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of displaced persons, mostly ethnic Georgians. At the end of 2005, the UNHCR reported that there were 234,000 displaced persons in Georgia (p. 6). A third separatist movement in Georgia’s southern Ajaria region, inhabited by Islamic ethnic Georgians, was successfully resolved after a crisis in 2004 and is discussed further in the second part of the chapter.

Although ceasefires had been declared for South Ossetia and Abkhazia, neither had developed beyond the fragile confidence building stage when war broke out with Russia in August 2008 in South Ossetia and expanded into Abkhazia. In a six-point peace plan negotiated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Russia agreed to withdraw its troops from positions in Georgia proper, but continues to occupy the separatist areas of Georgia and has recognized the two breakaway regions as independent nations (Allison, 2008, pp. 1159–1161). The current Saakashvili government effort to reassert

Georgian authority in the southwestern autonomous republic of Ajaria led to a major crisis that was successfully resolved early in 2004. This success in Ajaria may have encouraged Saakashvili to intensify his efforts, without success, in the breakaway region of South Ossetia and resulting in direct conflict with Russia in 2008 (Rayfield, 2008, pp. 2–5). Since the August 2008 invasion by Russia over the issue of separatist areas, the Republic of Georgia must now painfully reexamine its approach to security and nation building.

4. Economic and Energy Challenges

Georgia's security and independence are also tied to its economic and energy resources. It does possess some mineral resources, but does not produce mineral products in quantities of more than regional significance (Levine, 2006). However, due to its relatively rich agricultural production of wines, alcoholic beverages, and citrus fruits combined with its Black Sea coast tourist industry and black market economy, it managed to have a much higher living standard during the Soviet period than most other Soviet republics.

Of more recent importance to Georgia's economy is the building of an east-west energy transportation corridor through its territory that links the Caspian Sea and Central Asian oil and natural gas to Western Europe. Newly constructed oil and gas pipelines completed during the late 1990s include the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and the South Caucasus Gas Pipeline (SCP). These pipelines are crucial to Georgia's future and reduces its dependence on Russian gas and oil while at the same time making Georgia a transit region for westward-bound energy. In addition, these pipelines directly threaten Russian control over key energy transfers to Western Europe because they bypass Russian territory. U.S. and European interests have encouraged Georgian economic and energy independence through private ventures, as well as military and economic support (CRS Political, 2009, pp. 32–35).



Figure 3. Ethno-linguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region (From: Wikipedia Online, 2009)

B. ETHNO-NATIONALISM AND GEORGIA'S SEPARATIST WARS

Since its declaration of sovereignty in March 1990, Georgia has fought three separatist wars. This includes the 2008 war, which resulted in outside intervention by Russia, in support of separatist groups in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and established autonomous, semi-independent entities in the two breakaway regions (see Figure 2). A third separatist movement in Ajaria was peacefully resolved in 2004. Russia's recent invasion of the Republic of Georgia in August 2008, in support of the separatist areas of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, demonstrates that ethno-nationalist threats continue to present challenges to Georgia's security and independence. Furthermore, Moscow is able to undermine the prospects for Georgian membership in NATO by aggravating Georgia's unresolved territorial conflicts and highlighting the issues of confrontation with Russia.

This section of the thesis seeks to explore the conditions that may have contributed to political mobilization of communal groups in Georgia's separatist areas in the context of theories of ethno-political action. The chapter also briefly considers other sources of separatist violence that may have contributed to the success or failure of Georgia's three separatist movements, such as economic, political, psychological, or social-psychological factors. A final section of the thesis evaluates the prospects for resolving these separatist conflicts through the institutional framework provided by NATO membership.

1. Theories of Ethno-Political Action: Why Minorities Rebel

In his general theory of ethno-political action, political scientist Ted R. Gurr (1993) maintains that most theories of conflict analysis focus on two principal, competing perspectives of *relative deprivation* and *group mobilization* (p. 123). The *relative deprivation* theory holds that peoples' discontent about unjust deprivation is their primary motivation for political action. In contrast, the *group mobilization* theory stresses leaders' calculated mobilization of group resources in response to changing political opportunities. Gurr maintains that mobilization and strategy of politically active ethnic groups is based on an *interaction* of both of these factors. This combination of shared grievances and a strong sense of group identity and common interest is the fuel that can spark spontaneous political action and sustained conflict (p. 124).

In Gurr's (1993) analysis, four predisposing traits shape disadvantaged communal group's sense of grievance and affect their potential for acting on it. Significantly, in the case of Georgia, this theory applies not only to disadvantaged groups, but can also potentially apply to advantaged minorities whenever they are threatened by the loss of advantages, such as in the case of Abkhazia. The four traits in Gurr's analysis that predispose communities to political action are (pp. 124–129) the following:

- The extent of collective disadvantage
- The salience of group identity
- The extent of group cohesion and mobilization
- The repressive control by dominant groups

This analysis attempts to apply these four criteria to the Georgian separatist areas of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajaria, and draw conclusions about ethno-political conflict and implications for U.S. and European security and appropriate engagement strategies.

2. Ethno-political Conflict in Abkhazia: The Advantaged Minority

The Republic of Georgia has a multinational population. In 1989, it had 5.4 million inhabitants of whom 70 percent were Georgians, 8 percent Armenians, 6.3 percent Russians, 5.7 percent Azeris, 3 percent Ossetians, and 1.8 percent Abkhazians (Zurcher, 2007, p. 117). There are three autonomous, ethnically defined regions within Georgia: the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia in the north and the Autonomous Regions of Abkhazia and Ajaria in the west, on the Black Sea coast (see Figure 2).

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia was an Autonomous Republic within the Georgian (Soviet Socialist) Republic (SSR) with a population of 525,000 inhabitants. The Abkhazians are a minority in their own breakaway area comprising only 17.8 percent of the total population with Georgians making up the largest ethnic group at 45.7 percent, followed by 14.6 percent Armenians, and 14.3 percent Russians (Zurcher, 2007, p. 119).

a. The Extent of Collective Disadvantage

According to Gurr (1993), the extent of a communal group's collective disadvantage vis-à-vis other groups is a principal source of its members' grievances and perceptions that they have a common interest in collective action (p. 126). During Soviet times, Abkhaz fear of Georgian demographic and political dominance and competition over resources led to compensatory measures from Moscow that led to the Abkhazians gaining disproportionate access to resources and key political positions. By 1990, Abkhazians controlled 67 percent of key government positions and most of the economy (Zurcher, 2007, p. 119). After the Soviet collapse, increasing Georgian nationalist rhetoric threatened to reduce Abkhazian regional autonomy and privileges within the confines of a new Georgian state and decrease its collective advantage.

b. The Salience of Group Identity

Gurr (1993) maintains that a sense of common identity must be strong enough to overcome more narrow loyalties to clan, class, and communities within the group (p. 126). The Abkhazian language group belongs to a different family of languages than the Georgian group. There are both Muslim and Orthodox (Christian) believers among the Abkhazian population. After the Soviet collapse, when the nationalist tide grew stronger among both Abkhazians and Georgians, each group began to promote its discourse about past injustices. Fears of ethnic discrimination, Abkhazian special privileges, and nationalist rhetoric on both sides fueled separatist agendas and strengthened group identities.

c. The Extent of Group Cohesion and Mobilization

Mobilization is defined by Gurr (1993) as the extent to which group members are prepared to commit their energies and resources to collective action on behalf of their common interests (p. 127). Due to the Soviet system of ethno-federalism, the Abkhazians were already well prepared for collective political action. Throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, Abkhazian cultural movements, the intelligentsia, and communist party functionaries had been pushing Moscow to integrate Abkhazia into Russia (RSFSR). Before independence, in June 1988, some 58 key Abkhazian Communist leaders had requested uncoupling of Abkhazia from the Georgian SSR (Zurcher, 2007, p. 120). Georgian nationalist threats increased Abkhazian cohesion and mobilization efforts to separate.

d. The Repressive Control by Dominant Groups

Gurr (1993) holds that to the extent that a group's disadvantages (or advantages) have been established by force, its grievances and identity are intensified (pp. 128–129). A mass demonstration in Abkhazia took place in March 1989, promoting Abkhazian status as a union republic (Soviet) and implying succession from Georgia. The Georgian nationalist movement reacted to this Abkhazian mobilization with mass demonstrations combining anti-communist and anti-Abkhazian slogans. Violent

suppression of demonstrations resulted in radicalization of nationalist forces on both sides, and moderate voices were almost completely sidelined. Nationalist rhetoric greatly troubled minorities that had regional autonomy within Georgia and added to their fears of Georgian dominance.

Gurr's theory of ethno-political action does provide a useful framework for understanding the Abkhazian separatist movement. In this case, the advantaged minority demonstrated a combination of shared grievances and a strong sense of group identity that may have sparked political action and sustained the conflict. Gurr's four criteria also help explain how a disadvantaged communal group's sense of grievance created potential for acting on it once their privileged (minority) autonomous status was threatened.

3. Ethno-political Conflict in South Ossetia: The Disadvantaged Majority

After Abkhazia, the second breakaway area to emerge from the Georgian search for independence was South Ossetia. South Ossetia had a population of 100,000 of whom 66.2 percent are Ossetian and 29 percent are Georgian (Zurcher, 2007, p. 124). Until 1988, problems between the two groups were relatively stress free. However, in 1989, increasing Georgian nationalism began to create tensions and push South Ossetia along the same path as Abkhazia. In this case, however, it was a disadvantaged Ossetian majority seeking to prevent relative deprivation resulting from a loss of autonomy that mobilized political opposition to an increasingly nationalistic Georgian state.

a. The Extent of Collective Disadvantage

In the case of South Ossetia, language and desire for greater autonomy were key determinants in the development of feelings of collective disadvantage vis-à-vis other groups. A war of laws escalated in 1989 when the Ossetians countered a Georgian law making Georgian the official language in South Ossetia. The Georgian nationalist movement used increasing tensions to mobilize demonstrations in South Ossetia resulting in violent clashes and contributing to South Ossetian fears of Georgian domination.

Consequently, South Ossetia appealed to the Kremlin for an increase in its autonomy. Georgian nationalist opposition perceived these initiatives by South Ossetia as a step toward secession and a threat to the goal of Georgian independence.

In August 1990, the Georgian Supreme Soviet passed a law that reduced participation of regional groups and excluded South Ossetian parties from participating in elections. The collective disadvantage of the South Ossetians as a group became a principal source of grievance that led to the development of common interest in collective action. This action resulted in South Ossetian regional authorities proclaiming South Ossetia a Democratic Soviet Republic and requesting Moscow that it remain a part of the Soviet Union. The Georgian parliament declared this action invalid and suspended the autonomous status of the region (Zurcher, 2007, pp. 124–127).

b. The Salience of Group Identity

The salience of common identity among South Ossetians would not appear to be particularly strong. Although Ossetians comprise 66.2 percent of the region's population, about one-half of all families in South Ossetia are of mixed Georgian and Ossetian origin. Furthermore, about 100,000 Ossetians live outside the region in other parts of Georgia. An additional 335,000 Ossetians live in North Ossetia, which now belongs to the Russian Federation and is linked with South Ossetia by a tunnel running through the Caucasus Mountains (Zurcher, 2007, p. 124). One source of group cohesion is the Ossetian language, which is related to a different family than the Georgian language group. The majority of Ossetians are Orthodox Christians, while a minority is Sunni Muslim.

The source of the South Ossetian group identity sufficient to overcome narrower loyalties may have developed relatively recently, rather than through long standing historical animosity. Between 1918 and 1921, Menshevik-ruled Georgia violently suppressed a Bolshevik revolt of the Ossetians. According to Zurcher (2007), this event may have had a significant effect on the "...Ossetian discourse on the wrongs suffered throughout the group's history" (p. 124). He maintains that relations between Georgians and Ossetians living in South Ossetia were mostly amicable until the

beginning of the breakup of the Soviet Union in the late 1988. Despite this lack of a strong South Ossetian group identity, shared grievances and the threat of repressive control by a dominant group may have strengthened group cohesion.

c. The Extent of Group Cohesion and Mobilization

In response to the decision of the South Ossetian Legislature to increase regional autonomy within Georgia in 1989, Georgian nationalists mobilized and bused 30,000 Georgian protest demonstrators to the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali (Zurcher, p. 125). Clashes followed, which resulted in the formation of the first South Ossetian militias to counter the Georgian nationalist forces. Although the extent of group cohesion and mobilization in South Ossetia does not appear to be high, increasingly nationalistic actions by Georgian authorities to thwart Ossetian desire for greater autonomy and poor control over the newly formed Georgian National Guard units may have had the combined effect of increasing South Ossetian cohesion and mobilization.

d. The Repressive Control by Dominant Groups

In 1991, the Georgian government imposed an economic blockade on South Ossetia and cut off the supply of electricity and gas (Zurcher, p. 125). This blockade was followed by an attack on Tskhinvali by elements of the newly formed Georgian National Guard and local militias, which were accused of looting and attacks on the local population. The Georgian paramilitary forces were forced to retreat from the area after a few weeks of intensive clashes with increasingly determined and better organized South Ossetian militia. Attempts at repressive control and unjust deprivation by Georgian nationalist forces had resulted in group mobilization and increasing political opposition by South Ossetian forces.

Gurr's theory of ethno-political action also provides a useful framework for understanding the South Ossetian separatist movement. In this case, the disadvantaged Ossetian majority demonstrated that although its group identity did not appear particularly strong, a common language and a desire for collective autonomy were key determinants in the development of a feeling of collective disadvantage vis-à-vis

other groups. Moreover, repressive control by a potentially dominant Georgian group could have led to greater group mobilization and cohesion where group identification had been weak.

4. Ethno-political Conflict in Ajaria: Language Trumps Ethnicity

Ajaria is the third autonomous territory within the territory of the Republic of Georgia. It has a population of 392,000 of whom 86 percent are Georgian, 8 percent Russian, and 4 percent Armenian. It is estimated that approximately 67 percent or 250,000 of the Georgians living in Ajaria are, in fact, Ajar Muslims (Zurcher, p. 206). However, due to the fact that Muslim Ajars speak a version of Georgian, they were classified by Soviet demographers as Georgian, and therefore, not considered a distinct ethnic group. Soviet passports reported ethnicity, but not religious affiliation. Since Soviet ideology did not allow religion to be an indicator of ethnic difference, the Georgian communist authorities were able to pursue an effective Georgianization program. By 1980, most Ajars spoke Georgian, and due to the politics of Soviet secularization, Ajars and Georgians were brought closer together culturally, although Ajars continue to maintain many aspects of traditional, Muslim culture.

Despite this cultural alignment, Georgian nationalism did in fact also threaten Ajaria's autonomy. Some historians have maintained that violent conflict was avoided because not enough cultural difference existed between Georgians and Ajars to motivate Ajars to seek independence. This school holds that Moscow's policies had allowed Georgia to pursue an assimilationist policy there and prevented Ajar cultural identity from becoming politically relevant. Using Gurr's criteria, the extent of relative deprivation (threat) combined with group mobilization never reached the critical threshold in Ajaria. Therefore, the crucial difference in the three separatist movements was that South Ossetian and Abkhaz identity became ethnicized, and Ajar identity did not.

Still other sources point to the historical importance of circumstance in the Ajaria case, for instance, when one of the principal nationalist Georgian proponents in favor of abolishing Ajaria's autonomy was killed and/or the critical role of Russian peacekeepers

in the Ajaria. Zurcher (2007) argues that although the above ethnically based arguments go a long way in explaining Ajaria's stability, a critical factor was the mobilization of Ajars under the influential leadership of Aslan Abashidze (p. 206). Abashidze ruled Ajaria as a personal fiefdom, and convincingly was able to guarantee Ajars that civil strife would not materialize from Georgian ultranationalist and private militias. Abashidze's highly personal reign over Ajaria was supported by a consensus among the population, and his militias were very effective at guarding Ajaria's internal border with Georgia from nationalist militias and providing internal security. In the final analysis, Zurcher maintains that Ajaria remained stable, not only because of the non-politicized nature of the cultural differences between Ajars and Georgians, but also thanks to a regime based on a high level of elite continuity, well-established networks of patronage, and was supported by an informal power and revenue sharing agreement between the patrons of Ajaria and Georgia (p. 208).

Gurr's theory of ethno-political action provides a useful conceptual model for explaining the causes of separatism in Georgia's three breakaway areas. In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a potent combination of *perceived* collective disadvantage to threats of Georgian control and repression generated greater group cohesion and mobilization that led to war. In the case of Ajaria, it is not clear if language trumped ethnicity or if unique historical circumstances intervened to prevent a separatist conflict there. Although the causes of Georgia's separatist conflicts discussed in this chapter have concentrated on largely internal factors, other external factors have also played a pivotal role in undermining efforts at conflict resolution, state formation, and democratization in the region. The following chapters examine these external factors in detail.

C. CONCLUSION: THE GEORGIAN GORDIAN KNOT AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Since its founding in 1991, the Republic of Georgia has provided a challenging model for the exploration of the issues concerning European security and ethno-nationalism. Probably the most difficult challenge to the Republic of Georgia is resolving its internal separatist wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In this regard, the

lessons of the cases presented here support the importance of ethnic demography in increasing the risk of internal wars. Specifically, it points to the heightened risk of escalation where one group is able to assert its dominance within “its” territory at the expense of other groups to maintain its privileged access to resources and key political positions. However, other explanations, such as a combination of more creative policies associated with regional autonomy, assimilation, pluralism, power sharing, and leadership dynamics, were also critical in determining the success or failure of Georgia’s separatist movements.

Unfortunately, the lessons learned through the cases presented here are likely to be frozen in place for the foreseeable future as a result of the August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict. The most authoritative investigation into the causes of the conflict, which has brought relations between Russia and the West to a post-Cold War low, was completed by the European Union Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia in October 2009. After a lengthy inquiry, investigators concluded that Georgia initiated last year’s war with Russia by attacking separatists in South Ossetia and rejected the Georgian government’s claim that the attack was defensive. However, this finding was balanced by the conclusion that Russia created and exploited the conditions that led to war (EUIIFFCM, 2009, p. 10).

Russia’s continued occupation and subsequent recognition of Georgia’s two separatist areas as sovereign nations continue to present challenges to European security and NATO for the foreseeable future. A 2009 meeting of Alliance heads of state reaffirmed Georgia’s aspiration to join NATO “one day.” However, implicitly, the Declaration states that “Georgia will not be able to join NATO until it has found a peaceful negotiated solution to the disagreement between Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Razoux, 2009, p. 7). The proponents of NATO enlargement maintain that the Russian intervention in August 2008 would have been deterred by Georgia’s membership in the Alliance and that its internal conflicts would have been attenuated through the institutional framework provided by NATO membership. As a result, in 2008, Moscow

was able to undermine the prospects for Georgian membership in NATO by aggravating Tbilisi's unresolved territorial conflicts and highlighting the issues of confrontation with Russia.

Critics of NATO's enlargement maintain that Alliance membership for Georgia is provocative in that it risks war with Russia at a time when NATO is already preoccupied and divided by a protracted war in Afghanistan. They maintain that a U.S. policy of unlimited support for Georgia's NATO membership has encouraged an assertive Georgian nationalist policy in the separatist areas (Abkhazia, South Ossetia) vis-à-vis Russia that reduces incentives for peaceful conflict resolution. In this regard, NATO membership is viewed by the Saakashvili regime primarily as a means to protect the country from Russia, not as a means to boost internal reform and development in its separatist areas (Razoux, 2009, p. 7).

III. U.S. INTERESTS AND THE GEORGIAN GORDIAN KNOT

The security and success of the Republic of Georgia is important to U.S. interests. Not only is it a key strategic pivot for transportation of energy resources, but it also represents a possible model for successful state-building and democratic development in both the former Soviet Union and the Middle East region as a whole. According to Svante Cornell (2007) at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, the United States has three inter-linked sets of interests in the South Caucasus and Georgia, specifically:

[First] The building of Georgia's statehood and democracy is important both symbolically and practically; [second] the growing scarcity of energy supplies makes the Caucasus a critical bottleneck; and [third] the increasing importance of the South Caucasus in regional security matters (p. 16).

The United States has pursued close ties with Georgia ever since the pro-Western former Soviet foreign minister, President Eduard Shevardnadze assumed power in 1992. Faced with calls for support, President H. W. Bush and Congress extended U.S. aid to Georgia under the FREEDOM Support Act in October 1992. Since then, the U.S. relationship with Georgia has continued to grow under the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), the Millennium Challenge Account, and other economic and energy initiatives from 1992 to 2005. In congressional testimony in March 2005, Gen. James Jones, then head of United States European Command (USEUCOM), stated that:

The Caucasus is increasingly important to our interests. Its air corridor has become a crucial lifeline between coalition forces in Afghanistan and our bases in Europe. Caspian [Sea] oil, carried through the Caucasus, may constitute as much as 25 percent of the world's growth in oil production over the next five years...this region is a geographical pivot point in the spread of democracy and free market economies to the states of Central and Southwest Asia. (CRS, 2008, p. 28)

In June 2006, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza stated that the United States has numerous sets of inter-related of interests in the Caucasus. These interests include energy, traditional security interests, such as fighting terrorism,

preventing military conflict, and in some cases, restoring or preserving the territorial integrity of the states of the region, and lastly, promoting democratic and market economic reform (CRS Political, 2009, p. 2).

Against this background and because of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, some area specialists and policy makers have questioned whether U.S. interests in Georgia are important enough to risk confrontation with Moscow over the wider set of issues facing U.S.-Russian relations. They also urge caution in adopting policies heavily involving the United States in a region beset by ethnic and civil conflicts. Dmitri Trenin (2008) at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace warns that a Georgia in NATO risks direct confrontation with Moscow (p. 6).

Despite its policy statements of support for Georgia's territorial integrity, and democratic and market economic reforms, the Bush administration demonstrated that ultimately, it did not consider Georgia worth a military confrontation with Moscow during the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. Shortly after the conflict, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stressed that he was not predicting a return to the Cold War, and maintained that, overall, the U.S. response to the crisis had been restrained. "The United States spent 45 years working very hard to avoid a military confrontation with Russia," Mr. Gates said [and] "I see no reason to change that approach today" (Myers, 2008, p. 2). Still, not much is known about the U.S. diplomacy in that crisis and whether the Russians decided not to occupy Tbilisi because of some kind of a warning from the U.S., or because of some other considerations. Unfortunately, this will not be known until the relevant documents are declassified.

Other observers argue that U.S. policy now requires more active engagement in the region to strengthen Georgian independence and "contain" Russian and Iranian influence, as well as reduce the threat of Islamic extremism. Cornell (2007) and Cohen (2009) advocate strengthened U.S. commitment to Georgia's NATO membership and the development of a proactive rather than reactive U.S. policy. Cornell maintains that current U.S. appeasement policies have emboldened an increasingly assertive and aggressive Russian policy (p. 35). This continuing debate between advocates of containment and the realist power balancing schools may be a reflection of the inherent

contradiction between the promotion of U.S. principles abroad and the reality of world politics and narrower security interests on the ground. The following section of the thesis examines the nature and extent of U.S. engagement policy with the Republic of Georgia since establishing its independence in 1991.

A. U.S. ENGAGEMENT POLICY AND GEORGIA

To deal with these threats and challenges to the Georgian nation-building project, the current U.S. policy includes security assistance to train and equip Georgian military forces and programs to improve human rights, political, and economic reform. Georgia has been a “premier partner” in the Global War on Terrorism and provided troops for coalition operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the past Administration viewed Georgia as a model for free market democratic reform and a “close partner” in supporting U.S. democratization goals in Soviet successor states. The U.S. security assistance to Georgia for the time period FY1992–FY2007, including law enforcement was \$542.27 million (CRS Security, 2009, p. 39). In addition to this assistance, the U.S. has advocated NATO membership for Georgia and this was a source of disagreement within the alliance at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008.

In addition to security assistance and support for Georgia’s NATO membership, the current U.S. engagement policy toward the Republic of Georgia involves a high level of military, political, and economic assistance. Total U.S. foreign aid to Georgia for the time period between FY1992–FY2008 was \$1,898.64 million or almost two billion dollars over a 16-year period (CRS Political, 2009, p. 35). In the aftermath of its short, disastrous war with Russia in August 2008, the U.S. has committed an additional \$1 billion in combined military, humanitarian, and economic assistance to rebuild the Republic of Georgia (CRS Security, 2009, p. 3). This infusion would make Georgia one of the largest recipients of American foreign aid after Israel and Egypt and is viewed by some observers as part of a strategy of “soft containment” of Russian influence in the region.

1. U.S. Support for Georgia's NATO Membership

In 1994, Georgia became one of the first former Soviet republics to join the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP) as part of a policy designed to bring it into eventual membership in NATO. In 2004, the North Atlantic Council approved the first Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) for Georgia. The Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs) are open to countries that have the political will and ability to deepen their relationship with NATO. The IPAP program requires signatories to complete military and civil-military reforms. If the IPAP were successful, Georgia would have good opportunity to be granted Membership Action Plan (MAP) status, which is usually considered one of the final steps on the way to NATO membership (CRS Security, 2009, pp. 24–25).

NATO membership provides a security guarantee under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty calling for the collective defense of any member attacked by a non-NATO country. The security guarantee offered to all NATO members under Article 5 was invoked for the first time in NATO's history after the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States. This attack was considered an attack on a NATO member nation, and subsequently, generated the support of all members for the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan. At the December 2001 Bonn Conference, the International Security Force Afghanistan (ISAF) was created under the authority of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 (UNSCR 1386) with forces and assets from 18 other countries. In 2003, NATO assumed the leadership of the ISAF operation (NATO, 2009).

Significantly for Georgia, the credibility of the security guarantee under Article 5 (if it were a NATO member) has been weakened by a system of national "caveats," where contributing members' combat role is strictly proscribed by national legislatures at home based on domestic political support for the war [against terrorist organizations] in Afghanistan. Such a system of national caveats could weaken the credibility of NATO's security guarantee to Georgia if it were admitted to the alliance and attacked by a major power such as Russia.

In fact, whether to grant MAP status to Georgia was a matter of contention at the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest. In the end, the Alliance pledged that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually become members of NATO (CRS Security, 2009, p. 25). In the wake of the Russia-Georgian conflict in August 2008, the United States agreed to a British plan to not push for MAP status for Georgia at the December 2008 NATO foreign ministerial meeting. Instead, it was agreed to develop an Annual Action Program (AAP) for Ukraine and Georgia. Under this confusing formula, the two countries would be able to work towards Alliance membership without formally undertaking the MAP, but they would still be tasked with meeting the requirements of the MAP. The allies also agreed to set up work within the NATO-Georgia Council to facilitate Georgia's eventual NATO membership, and to prepare annual reports on Georgia's progress toward eventual membership.

The NATO foreign ministers wrapped up the Brussels meeting in December 2008 with a "broad agreement" on policy towards Georgia and Russia. However, the agreement failed to resolve Georgia's "strategic predicament," in that it deferred a final decision on Georgia's membership. The current U.S. administration still supports the continued Georgian push for membership, despite strong opposition from France, Germany, and Italy. The compromise plan worked out by the United Kingdom offers the possibility of eventual Georgian membership, but avoids giving Tbilisi the MAP and calls for maintenance of an "intensified dialogue" with the Alliance. The intensified dialogue is a non-binding arrangement, which may or may not lead to full membership (Oxford Analytica, 2008, p. 2).

The issue of Georgia's NATO membership does raise important issues concerning the nature of the alliance, its credibility, and what constitutes an ally. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Assistant Secretary of State, Daniel Fried, confirmed the nature of the U.S. commitment when responding to questioning by Senator John Warner:

Senator Warner...That leads me to the question of commitments, so to speak, to bring about admission of Georgia and the Ukraine into NATO. Once in NATO, you have Article 5, which says an attack on one is an attack on all. Had Georgia been in NATO, I assume Article 5 would have required NATO to join Georgia with the actual use of force in defending its sovereignty. Would that be correct?

Secretary Fried. Yes. (U.S. Senate, 2008, p. 29)

A second related issue about the nature of national commitments and NATO security guarantees was addressed during the same Senate Hearings on “The Current Situation in Georgia and Implications for U.S. Policy,” regarding the issue of national caveats. The issue of national caveats has been a particularly contentious issue within NATO and its participation in ISAF in Afghanistan. In a speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in Munich in 2008, Secretary of Defense Gates asserted that the alliance is at risk of becoming a “two-tiered alliance of those who are willing to fight and those who are not. Such a development with all its implications for collective security, would effectively destroy the alliance” (p. 30). In U.S. Senate Hearings, Senator Warner echoed the Defense Secretary’s comments and maintained that the issue of national caveats could be “particularly troublesome” with regard to Georgia if it were a member of NATO (p. 30).

A third contentious issue relating to Georgia’s NATO aspirations is related to the true nature of a mutual defensive alliance and the security responsibilities required of all its members. At the same September 2008 Senate Hearings on “U.S. Policy and Georgia,” Senator James Webb maintained that had Georgia been a member of NATO in August 2008, the United States would have had a different set of responsibilities. Senator Webb also alluded to the connection between NATO membership and Georgia’s internal and external conflicts being similar to the sort of entanglements that preceded World War I” (U.S. Senate, 2008, p. 42). He pointed to the long history of instability in the Caucasus and asserted that:

We need to be very careful in sorting out what is an alliance and what is not. If you look at the movement in NATO [eastward], I think if we were to apply historical terms we have been bringing in a series of protectorates in traditional terms rather than allies. You would define an ally as a nation

that actually bolsters your security or your collective security by joining. A lot of these countries [such as Georgia], it's hard to imagine their meeting that standard. (p. 42)

Georgia does in fact contribute to both U.S. and NATO security through participation of its armed forces in both Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and as part of ISAF in Afghanistan.

The discussion at the September 2008 Senate Hearings on “U.S. Policy and Georgia” goes to the core of the debate about NATO’s evolving role as a defensive alliance in a post-Soviet world. NATO was originally created primarily as a military alliance designed to contain the Soviet expansion into Western Europe. However, its secondary role was to create an institutional framework in which the national rivalries within Europe, which had resulted in centuries of wars, could be resolved. Many proponents of NATO enlargement maintain that this has proven to be an extremely effective mechanism for resolving disputes between nations and many of the disputes in Central and Eastern Europe have tended to be attenuated through the NATO membership process. Such a process does, however, presuppose that Russia is a NATO partner, not an adversary. Although not unique, Georgia’s distant location in the Caucasus region and the unresolved nature of its separatist movements with a major non-NATO regional power does create exceptional challenges for the management of national rivalries within NATO’s current institutional framework.

2. The U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership

Since the Russia-Georgia conflict and the American presidential elections in 2008, strong U.S. support for Georgia was reflected in the new U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed in January 2009. This agreement states that “our two countries share a vital interest in a strong, independent, sovereign, unified, and democratic Georgia” (CRS Political, 2009, p. 4). More specifically, in the security realm, the agreement states U.S.-Georgian intent to expand the scope of their ongoing defense and security cooperation programs and to promote peace and global stability. The

agreement also states that such cooperation will “increase Georgian capabilities and ...strengthen Georgia’s candidacy for NATO membership” (CRS Political, 2009, p. 4).

At a Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony on Georgia held on August 4, 2009, on the anniversary of the Russian-Georgian conflict, U.S. Ambassador and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Alexander Vershbow, testified to the “reset” of U.S.-Russia relations and deepened U.S. support for Georgia. In his testimony, he stated the Obama administration’s support for Georgia remains steadfast and that the U.S. is on the right course with its policy in the region (U.S. Senate, 2009, p. 1). Vershbow also maintained that U.S. policy rejects any notion of “spheres of influence” in the region and noted the Vice President’s (Biden) comments on his recent visit to Georgia that there can be no military option for reintegration of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (p. 3).

Before the signing of the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, the Georgian Foreign Minister, Grigol Vashadze, hailed the accord, stating that it represented a “stepping stone which will bring Georgia into Euro-Atlantic structures, into membership with NATO, and into [the] family of Western and civilized nations” (CRS Political, 2009, p. 5). At the event, and after the Georgian Foreign Minister’s comments, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Matthew Bryza stressed that the charter does **not** provide security guarantees to Georgia. According to this formulation, the United States reaffirmed its high strategic interest in Georgia’s fate, without actually committing to its territorial defense in the event of a Russian attack.

Some observers maintain that this ambiguous policy constitutes U.S. (and NATO) acquiescence to a resurgent Russian presence and sphere of influence in the Caucasus. Others maintain that the United States should re-evaluate the nature of its commitment of support for Georgia and should rethink any question of a U.S. backing for Georgian territorial integrity. The United States is, in fact, already committed to the territorial defense of the Baltic Republics, Eastern Europe, and some of the Balkan states by virtue of the security guarantee under Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty required for all NATO members. In addition to these commitments, the United States has signed similar

bilateral security accords with Ukraine through the U.S.-Ukraine Charter signed in 2008 and the U.S.–Baltic Charter signed in 1998 with Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia (CRS Political, 2009, p. 4).

3. The Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) and Sustainment and Stability Operations Program (SSOP)

In addition to earning U.S. support for its membership in NATO through the PfP, IPAP, and the AAP, Georgia also receives generous security assistance from the United States. Begun in 2002, the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) was an American-sponsored 18-month, \$64-million plan designed to increase the capabilities of the Georgian armed forces. Originally coordinated by USEUCOM, the program was intended to train and equip four 600 man battalions in light infantry airmobile, mechanized, and mountain tactics, and medical and logistical methods (CRS Security, 2009, pp. 39–40). The program was tied to Operation Enduring Freedom and U.S. counter terrorism efforts and reluctantly accepted by Russia as part of its campaign against Chechen terrorists thought to be operating in Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge area.

Although GTEP formally came to a close in April 2004, U.S. military assistance continued with the Georgia Sustainment and Stability Operations Program (Georgia SSOP). This program involved preparing Georgian units for operations with the U.S. Forces in Iraq. Launched in January 2005, the Georgia SSOP was designed to solidify the progress made during the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) of 2002–2004 and assist in the implementation of Western standards for the Georgian armed forces in preparation for participation in OEF and eventual NATO membership. The first part of the program (SSOP I) lasted about 18 months and cost approximately \$60 million and was extended for another year in July 2006 and funded at \$30 million ending in September 2007 (CRS Security, 2009, pp. 40–41).

Prior to the August 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, the United States was providing military training to the Georgian 4th Brigade for its eventual deployment to Iraq in the Winter 2008. The cost of this training was budgeted at \$35 million (p. 41). The CRS report on Security Issues in Georgia maintains that the GTEP and SSOP provided

training to a major portion of Georgia's armed forces and that one of the successes of the program included the encouragement of democratic values in the armed forces. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) report on regional security also noted that the U.S. military training appeared to sometimes strain Russian relations with the United States due to Russian concern about the possible use of U.S. trained Georgian troops in actions in the breakaway South Ossetia region in 2004.

In April 2007, the U.S. Congress approved the NATO Freedom Consolidation Act, which urged NATO to grant MAP status to Georgia and to allow it to receive security assistance funding directly from NATO. This funding has allowed Georgia to participate in NATO-led operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. At a press conference in March 2009, General James Cartwright, the Deputy Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced that the U.S. military would soon start training for Georgian troops that is "focused on the defense of Georgia, and on its self and internal defense...[as well as determining]... what new types of equipment are necessary for their homeland defense" (CRS Political, 2009, p. 32). At the time, President Saakashvili stated that Georgia is building a "modern, top-level, much stronger armed forces, [including] increasing the number of personnel, increasing the number of soldiers, increasing the amount of our weaponry and, most importantly, raising the level of training" (p. 32). He also stated that the U.S. training would help Georgia to increase its participation in peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan.

4. U.S. Foreign Aid and Democratization in Georgia

The United States is by far the largest bilateral aid donor to the Republic of Georgia. Between FY1992 and FY2005, Georgia received more than \$1 billion in U.S. aid (CRS Political, 2009, p. 27). This amount has enabled Georgia to regularly rank among the top recipients of U.S. aid per capita in the world. This U.S. assistance includes Freedom Support Act (FSA) programs, food aid (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Peace Corps, and security assistance. In addition to bilateral aid, the United States contributes to multilateral institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank (IBRD) that aid the region.

In 2004, Congress approved a major new global assistance program, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). According to the CRS (2009), countries that participate in the MCC are chosen on a competitive basis in accordance with 16 indicators designed to measure a country's effectiveness at ruling justly, investing in people, and fostering enterprise and entrepreneurship. The main purpose of the MCC is to encourage economic growth in the recipient countries (p. 27). The program also emphasizes good economic policies in recipient countries. The MCC determined Georgia to be eligible for assistance as a democratizing country, although it fell below its criteria for anti-corruption efforts. In 2005, the MCC signed a five-year, \$295.3 million agreement with Georgia to improve infrastructure, create small business, and promote agriculture. As of July 2008, the MCC had disbursed \$51.3 million. After the 2008 August Russia-Georgia conflict, the MCC announced plans to spend an additional \$100 million for road-building, water and sanitation projects, and a natural gas storage facility (CRS Political, 2009, p. 27).

In the wake of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Defense and State Departments provided Georgia with additional humanitarian assistance. On September 3, 2008, then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced a multi-year \$1 billion aid plan for Georgia (p. 28). This amount would be in addition to the existing aid Georgia receives under the Freedom Support Act and Millennium Challenge Corporation funds. Most of this aid was planned for additional humanitarian assistance, reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by the Russian invasion, and for "safeguarding Georgia's continued growth" (p. 28).

Despite the Russian incursion into Georgia in August 2008, a consensus appears to exist among most U.S. policymakers on the desirability of promoting democratization, free markets, trade, investment, integration with the West, and use of U.S. power to bring security and development to the area. The 2009 U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership calls for the two countries to "pledge cooperation to bolster independent media, freedom of expression, and access to objective news and information" and to strengthen the rule of law (CRS Political, 2009, pp. 4-5). The United States has also

provided \$41.54 million to Georgia from 1992–2007 for law enforcement assistance to train judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and police officers (CRS Security, 2009, p. 38).

Since the 2007 Rose Revolution, Georgia has firmly committed itself to the process of democratization. President Mikheil Saakashvili won 53% of the votes in the presidential elections held in Georgia in January 2008. Legislative elections were also held in May 2008. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) assessed these elections as “broadly meeting its standards, but with some troubling irregularities” (CRS Political, 2009, p. 26). In September of 2008, President Saakashvili declared new democratization initiatives meant to strengthen Georgian independence and prevent Russia from undermining its statehood. In addition to the elections in 2008, a plebiscite was held that endorsed Georgia’s aim to join NATO. Some critics maintain that increased political instability in Georgia in 2007 and 2008 has raised doubts in the United States and NATO about the Saakashvili administration’s commitment to democratization.

5. U.S. Policy and the Separatist Movements in Georgia

U.S. efforts to promote peace and economic development in Georgia have been hampered by ethnic conflict. The South Caucasus region has been the most unstable part of the former Soviet Union in terms of numbers, intensity, and length of ethnic and civil conflicts. The borders of the countries do not coincide with ethnic populations. Efforts by ethnic minorities to secede have been the primary source of conflict in Georgia. These separatist conflicts have been transformed over the years into Russia-Georgia disputes. After the 2008 conflict, the majority of the remaining residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were granted Russian citizenship and appeared to want their regions to become either independent or a part of Russia (Trenin, 2008, p. 6).

Up until the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, U.S. policy generally urged Georgia to work within existing peace settlement frameworks for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This policy allowed for the presence of Russian peacekeepers in the separatist regions, while remaining critical of some Russian actions in the area. U.S. policy began to shift in 2008

due to an increasing number of Russian actions that appeared to threaten the territorial integrity of Georgia. Such actions included increasing government-to-government ties between Russia and the regions, such as increased consular services and increasing Russian trade and investment. The change in U.S. and Western policy was reflected in the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) discussion in April 2008 in which France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States stated that they “are highly concerned about the latest Russian initiative to establish official ties with...Abkhazia and South Ossetia without the consent of the Government of Georgia...we call on the Russian Federation to revoke or not to implement its decision” (CRS Political, 2009, p. 13). Throughout the summer, tensions continued to build over Russian, Abkhaz, and South Ossetian actions in the separatist regions, despite negotiations on the various Georgian peace plans offering greater autonomy for the separatist areas.

According to the report of the Independent International Fact Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, these tensions exploded in conflict on the night of August 7-8, 2008, when a sustained Georgian artillery attack struck the town of Tskhinvali. This initial attack, and a subsequent Georgian advance into South Ossetia, resulted in fighting involving Russian, South Ossetian and Abkhaz military units and armed elements. The report found that this initial Georgian advance was countered by actions of the Russian armed forces. These Russian actions were reported to include air strikes, movement of elements of the Russian Black Sea fleet into the Georgian port of Poti, and Russian ground forces advancing deep into Georgian territory. Subsequently, the Russian armed forces advanced to a position cutting across Georgia’s main east-west road, but stopped short of the capital city, Tbilisi (IIFFMCG, 2009, p. 10).

On August 15, the Russians agreed to a French-brokered, six-point ceasefire that left Russian forces in control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Although Russia withdrew most of its military forces from Abkhazia and South Ossetia on August 22, substantial forces remained in both separatist areas and this action was condemned by the United States, NATO, and the EU as a violation of the ceasefire accord. This condemnation was followed by President Dmitry Medvedev’s announcement of official recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on August 26, 2008 (CRS Political, 2009,

p. 17). The Russian recognition has been widely condemned by the international community and the only countries in support of this action have been Nicaragua and Venezuela.

An on-going international conference in Geneva has continued to hold discussions on security, repatriation, and status issues relating to the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. These discussions have resulted in an agreement in principle on some form of “incident prevention and response mechanism” be developed to reduce tensions, investigate violent incidents along the conflict borders, and monitor delivery of humanitarian assistance. This “mechanism” has yet to be clearly defined or approved for implementation. Russian calls for Georgia to sign a non-use-of-force agreement and an international arms embargo of the country have also not been supported by the international community.

U.S. actions have included the announcement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of the \$1 billion multiyear aid package to help Georgia rebuild following the conflict. In addition, visits by then Vice President Dick Cheney in September 2008, Vice President Joe Biden in July 2009, and other high-ranking Members of Congress, have promised continued support and assistance from the United States. Legislation was also passed by Congress expressing U.S. support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. At their first meeting in April 2009, Presidents Obama and Medvedev issued a joint statement where the two sides agreed to “disagree about the causes and sequence of the military actions” [of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict] and promised “effective cooperation in the Geneva discussions [on security, repatriation, and status] to bring stability to the region” (CRS Political, 2009, p. 1).

6. U.S. Economic and Energy Policy in Georgia

In the realm of economic and energy policy, the Bush Administration pushed for privatization and the creation of free markets to open markets for U.S. goods and services and provides sources of energy and minerals. Bilateral trade and investment agreements providing for normal trade relations and investment guarantees have been signed between the United States and Georgia. In June 2000, Georgia was admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO) with U.S. support (CRS Political, 2009, p. 32).

The 2009 U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership calls for the two countries to pursue an Enhanced Bilateral Investment Treaty, to expand Georgian access to the General System of Preferences, and explore the possibility of a Free-Trade Agreement (CRS Political, 2009). Energy security goals include “increasing Georgia’s energy production, enhancing energy efficiency, and increasing the physical security of energy transit through Georgia to European markets” (p. 4).

Although Georgia has no significant energy reserves, it has proven to be a valuable alternative transportation corridor around Russia’s current near-monopoly of energy supplies in the region. Although the U.S. Energy Department estimates 7–13 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and 30–48 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves in neighboring Azerbaijan, critics argue that this is a tiny percent of world exports (CRS Political, 2009). The Bush Administration argued that these energy exports would nevertheless reduce European energy dependence on Russia, and thereby, promote Western energy security. The United States has accordingly encouraged the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and South Caucasus natural gas pipelines (SCP), which were completed in 2006 and 2007, respectively, and which offer a sizeable energy corridor through Georgia (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey) that effectively circumvents the Russian near monopoly of pipelines for Central Asian energy resources. The BTC pipeline has a capacity of about 1 million barrels per day (p. 33).

The completion of the BTC and SCP pipelines has increased European awareness of the strategic importance of the Southern Caucasus region. The United States has signed a memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation for construction of other pipelines that provide EU members with sources of supply for Caspian Sea oil that bypass Russia. The U.S. Trade Development Administration has also supported feasibility studies to build trans-Caspian pipelines that can link to the BTC and SCP pipelines already in place and boost energy supplies outside of direct Russian control (CRS Political, 2009, pp. 33–34). According to Dov Lynch at the Institute for Security Studies, although the EU does not share an immediate external border with Georgia (although Turkey and NATO do), it matters because of its importance as a transit route

for energy goods from the Caspian Sea region and as part of the overall EU concept of self-defense based on security interdependence with regions beyond its borders (Lynch, 2006, pp. 8–9).

B. CONCLUSION: U.S. ENGAGEMENT POLICY AND THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

The proponents of containment maintain that a high level of U.S. engagement in Georgia and membership in NATO would strengthen its independence and sovereignty (Cornell, 2007; Cohen, 2009). This school of thought holds that U.S. aid is required to bolster Georgia’s security and independence, and to prevent the spread of terrorism in the area. The most important aspects of this activist engagement policy are support for Georgian NATO membership, robust military-security support arrangements, and democratic and market economic reform. According to Cornell, American interests in the region can be arranged into three important categories, “from the “softer” to “harder,” these include sovereignty and democracy, energy and trade, and security” (p. 5).

Realists maintain that the spread of democracy, increasing globalization, and interdependence have not altered the conduct of international relations based on the balance of power and power politics. Anthony Cordesman (2008) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies maintains that Russia’s recent invasion of Georgia is, “a reminder that the world is not shaped by democratic values, international law, good intentions, globalism, rational bargains, or the search for dialogue” (p. 1). Although these and other factors such as “hard power” and “soft power” do play an important role in international politics, he maintains that classic power politics are just as real as ever. Trenin (2008) warns that a more democratic (softer) Russia might not necessarily mean a more pliable Russia, but a more demanding partner and effective competitor (p. 6). In his view, the Russian leadership and military could view high levels of U.S. engagement in Georgia and NATO enlargement from a realist calculus as evidence of “Washington’s pawns, ready to become platforms for the Pentagon” (p. 5).

Despite its limitations, the current U.S. policy of deliberate ambiguity does give the United States (and NATO) a range of options if Georgia’s political instability and/or

separatist wars spill over into a major regional conflict with Russia. Dmitri Simes (2007) at the Nixon Center contends that American interests do not warrant activities that risk provoking a potential nuclear contest with a resurgent Russia. Such a policy of deliberate ambiguity allows the United States to remain committed to Georgian independence and territorial integrity through its continued integration with NATO (as a permanent candidate for membership), EU, and U.S. bilateral agreements. On the other hand, the lack of an absolute U.S. or NATO security guarantee for Georgia avoids the risk of a direct confrontation with Moscow. Such a policy might also persuade Tbilisi to conduct a more nuanced policy towards its separatist areas and encourage conflict resolution with Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The current policy of deliberate ambiguity might also create uncertainty for Russia about U.S. and NATO intentions and could have a restraining influence on Moscow with regard to Georgia. Critics of this policy, such as Cornell (2007) or Cohen (2009) would argue that it constitutes appeasement and only encourages Russian control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In this view, an ambiguous policy might also promote efforts by Russia to destabilize the Saakashvili regime either directly through military incursion or by indirect means designed to bring about Saakashvili's ouster from office.

Finally, it is possible that the current U.S. policy of not extending a security guarantee to Georgia is not one of deliberate choice or purposeful ambiguity. This policy could instead be a reflection of the realist-idealist contradiction at work in the day-to-day conduct of U.S. foreign policy. This contradiction between American principles and U.S. security interests can often lead to inconsistency in policy and ambiguity in practice as currently manifested in U.S. engagement policy toward the Republic of Georgia.

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IV. RUSSIAN INTERESTS AND THE GEORGIAN GORDIAN KNOT

A. RUSSIA, NATO, AND GEORGIA

I don't think Russia will follow the United States' way. I don't think Russia will follow the French way. I'm sure Russia will find its own way.

Anatoly Chubais, Russian economist and politician, an architect of the “loans-for-shares” privatization program. (PBS, 2000)

In the film, *Fog of War* (2002), former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara maintained that one critical factor in the successful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis was empathy. Based on his years of experience as a key decision-maker in the Cold War, McNamara identified eleven lessons of life that all leaders should seek to be aware of in times of crisis. McNamara's first lesson was, “to empathize with your enemy.” In the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy's decision to empathize with his enemy and respond to the first (soft) telegram from Khrushchev, rather than the second (hard-line) message proved decisive in breaking the impasse and avoiding a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. McNamara warned that it is always necessary to try to put ourselves in the skin of adversaries so as to better understand the thought behind their decisions (*Fog of War*, 2002). Although widely condemned and hardly analogous to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Russia's actions in the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict may be better understood by analysis of *its* point-of-view, as well as those of Georgia, the U.S., and NATO.

1. Russia and NATO Enlargement: Putin in Munich

Idealists consider NATO enlargement into the areas of the former Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union as a triumph of democratic values, a natural expression of national self-determination, and a rejection of past Russian/Soviet domination. On the other hand, Realists consider NATO enlargement as a reflection of the current balance of power, Russia's relative decline vis-à-vis the United States and the necessity of NATO filling a

power vacuum left by the Soviet collapse. From the Russian point of view, NATO's eastward expansion is considered a breach of a (verbal) promise. Then Russian President, Vladimir Putin, in a 2007 speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, expressed this Russian point of view on NATO enlargement:

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have a right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? ...I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: "the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee." Where are these guarantees [now]? (Putin in Munich, 2007, p. 7)

At the same conference, Mr. Putin was asked whether the situation was a case of NATO expansion or an expression of self-determination by democratic states wanting NATO membership. It was also asserted at the conference that NATO enlargement (eastward) has made Russia's borders more reliable and more secure. President Putin responded to this assertion by stating:

Regarding our perception of NATO's eastern expansion. I already mentioned the guarantees that were made that are not being observed today. ...But alright, forget it. Forget these guarantees. With respect to democracy and NATO expansion...NATO is not a universal organization, as opposed to the UN. It is first and foremost a military and political alliance. Well, ensuring one's own security is the right of any sovereign state. We are not arguing against this. Of course we are not objecting to this. But why is it necessary to put military infrastructure on our borders during this expansion? Can someone answer this question? Unless the expansion of military infrastructure is connected with fighting against today's global threats? Let's put it this way, what is the most important of these threats for us today...the most important [threat] for Russia, for the USA, and for Europe...it is terrorism and the fight against it. (p. 14)

Despite the impression by President Putin and Russian elites about an agreement on NATO enlargement, Mark Kramer at the Harvard University Cold War Studies Project maintains that there was actually no formal accord concluded between the former Soviet Union and NATO on eastward expansion (Kramer, 2009, p. 54). Kramer

maintains that declassified materials confirm that no pledge or commitment was ever made to Gorbachev in 1990 regarding alliance expansion into any other East European countries and that none of the other discussions on the enlargement of NATO went beyond the question of Germany (pp. 40–41). In July 1990, former German Chancellor Kohl and Russian President Gorbachev did agree to an American sponsored nine-point plan that recognized a reunified Germany as a member in the NATO integrated command structure and that German troops could be stationed on the territory of the former GDR (p. 54).

Despite this, controversy surrounding the issue of a pledge by the West to not expand NATO into Eastern Europe continues. In September 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov insisted that in 1990 the United States, “made a commitment not to expand NATO” and has “repeatedly broken this commitment” in years since (Kramer, 2009, p. 40). Complicating the situation further, some Western officials, such as Jack F. Matlock, the former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1990, have endorsed this view and insist that Gorbachev did receive a “clear commitment that if Germany united, and stayed in NATO, the borders of NATO would not move eastward” (U.S. Congress, 1996, p. 31). These assertions have been sharply challenged by other U.S. policymakers directly involved in the German reunification process in 1990.

Although it is probable that no formal written or verbal agreement on NATO expansion was actually made by any Western leader with Gorbachev in 1990, it could be more important that Russian elites *believe* that an informal promise was made. Such perceptions can become reality and could have the effect of feeding a Russian sense of betrayal by the West over the issue of NATO enlargement. Although the possibility of another “stab in the back” conspiracy theory developing in Russia seems remote, such legends have had potent domestic political effects on the conduct of foreign policy in the past in both Europe (Versailles) and the United States (Vietnam).

One possible approach for resolving these disputes between NATO and Russia is the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). The NRC was established in 2002 to serve as a mechanism for improving relations between NATO and Russia. It seeks to maintain a dialogue on security issues, identify emerging problems, and build cooperation in the

conduct of joint operations (NATO NRC, 2009). However, following Russia's military action in Georgia in early August 2008, the Alliance suspended formal meetings of the NRC and cooperation in some areas, while it considered the implications of Russia's actions for the NATO-Russia relationship. The Secretary General of NATO declared that Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia [as independent nations] violated numerous UN Security Council resolutions, including resolutions endorsed by Russia (NATO NRC, 2009). Some cooperation has continued in key areas of common interest, such as counter-narcotics and the fight against terrorism. A decision to resume formal meetings and practical cooperation was taken in March 2009, but has reported no progress on improving relations between NATO and Russia since the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict (NATO NRC, 2009).

2. Russia's Transition to a "Normal Country"

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's transition to a "normal country" (capitalist democracy) has been a continuing source of debate over its direction and in the conduct of its foreign policy. Some Russian area specialists emphasize Russia's unique historical experience as being a key to understanding contemporary Russian foreign policy. Dr. Stephen Kotkin (2007), a professor of Russian and Eurasian Studies at Princeton University, maintains that Russia is a "normal country" because, like most countries of the world, it has a "ramshackle authoritarian system with some democratic trappings" (p. 1). However, he maintains that, Russia is not in transition to or from anything. "*Russia is what it is*" (p. 1). He maintains that part of the problem of understanding the Russia reality today is due to U.S. reporting that is poorly sourced and overly obsessed with Kremlin politics and its leadership.

Based on his discussions with Russian officials, Kotkin asserts that the notion that Russia is a normal country in transition to either dictatorship or democracy is overly simplistic. He maintains that the popular idea in the U.S. that the Russian political system has been taken over by a KGB-dominated Putin group that controls the country is incorrect. In actuality, he believes that there is considerable internal chaos and division inside the ruling team. The fact that Putin comes from the KGB and has brought in many

of his colleagues from the KGB is not reflective of internal unity or a move in the direction of a security regime, but evidence of the highly personalistic nature of the Russian political system. In Kotkin's view, "Putin's regime falls far short of being a dictatorship and should be viewed on its own Russian terms, not in the context of a transition to dictatorship or democracy" (p. 3).

A second key factor in understanding contemporary Russia on its own terms, according to Kotkin, is its dynamic, stable society. Russia has a growing state and corporate middle class that has a huge stake in maintaining stability. This middle class is smart in that it is largely apolitical and is not ready to sacrifice its hard-earned position to push for rule of law and democracy. Rather, it is interested in preserving its wealth and privileges. Accordingly, Russian society is appreciative of order, but is not consolidating around any type of Putin dictatorship. In any event, with the collapse of ideology, it would be difficult for the Russian state to impose any type of military control over society or its now globalized market economy in Kotkin's view. He maintains that, "Russian society is not transitioning to dictatorship or democracy, but is evolving in accordance with its own Russian sensibilities and based on its own experience" (p. 3).

A third key factor in understanding Russia and the conduct of its foreign policy is related to its emergence as a revived, assertive, and sometimes resentful regional power according to Kotkin (2007). He asserts that Russia's newly assertive foreign policy is not indicative of a return to Cold War-style confrontation. Accordingly, Russia's emergence as a strategic power with interests of its own that may conflict at times with Western interests is not unusual (p. 3). The principal potential danger in Trenin's (2008) view is that there is an absence of rules for the emerging U.S.-Russian relationship and "Now, U.S. global hegemony is directly challenged by Russia's regional great power ambitions" (p. 2). Like other emerging regional powers, such as China or India, Russian power continues to be felt. However, a resurgent Russia that can protect its interests and project real power does create challenges for NATO enlargement, particularly in the Republic of Georgia and Ukraine.

3. Resurgent Russia and Georgia: Soft Power vs. Hard Power

Realists maintain that the spread of democracy, increasing globalization, and interdependence (soft power) have not altered the conduct of international relations based on the balance of power and power politics (hard power). According to Cordesman (2008) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the crucial factor in this century will be “real power,” not “soft power” or “smart power,” just as it has been decisive in every other century in human history (p. 1). In this context, Russia’s invasion of Georgia in August 2008 illustrates some of the limitations of evaluating Russia by current, Western standards. In Cordesman’s view, although Russia may not be a peer power with the United States, it is becoming an increasingly strong regional power that has proven it can and will act on its perception of its own interests. Like Kotkin (2007) and Trenin (2008), Cordesman maintains that these interests are based on goals and values that differ from those of the United States. “There is no reason for them [Russia] to be enemies, and they may often be partners, but they will also be competitors and act with a degree of ruthlessness that we will sometimes be able to contain and other times have to accept” (p. 1).

Historically, Western measures of “soft power” and “hard power” have been particularly suspect when attempting to evaluate Russian/Soviet capabilities and intentions. Even at the height of Soviet power and influence abroad, its domestic economy was considered poorly developed and it was dependent on the United States for grain imports. Despite its dysfunctional economy and weak political institutions, by virtue of its geostrategic location, vast natural resource potential, and large, highly educated population the Soviet Union was able to project real power. This seemingly contradictory mixture of poorly developed economic and political institutions combined with “hard power” projection capability predated the Soviet Union and resulted in military defeats of more sophisticated Western powers during its previous wars.

The 2008 invasion of Georgia raises the issue of Russia’s place in the world as a regional power given its historic legacy. The Russian armed forces are in poor condition; its territory has been reduced; it possesses no empire or satellites; it barely has a sphere of

influence; it lacks meaningful alliances; its economy is weak; and its political system has no appeal for developing countries. Despite these and other weaknesses, Russia's ability to overcome such shortcomings (albeit at great cost) may indicate that traditional Western measures of effectiveness do not quite capture the current Russian reality. Although these and other factors, such as "hard power" and "soft power" do play an important role in international politics, Cordesman (2008) maintains that classic power politics are just as real as ever. In his view, "as long as countries still possess weapons, more powerful states will try to bend or break the rules if it is in their interest to do so and no opposing power bloc can present a convincing threat to them" (p. 1).

4. Sources of Russian Power in its "Back Yard"

Over and underestimating Russian power is a well-established cottage industry in the West and is closely related to current, often technocratic assessments of Russia's dismal economic circumstances, weak political institutions, and poorly developed military forces. With its currency crashing, foreign capital outflow, and decrease in energy revenues, the Western perception may be that Russia is on the verge of collapse. As the result of this anomaly, Western countries sometimes believe that Russia's capability to project power abroad has been correspondingly reduced. STRATFOR analysts Laura Goodrich and Peter Zeihan (2009) at the Global Intelligence Group maintain that the art of assessing Russia is different from "a normal country" in that, "Russia rarely follows anyone else's rulebook" (p. 1).

Goodrich and Zeihan (2009) maintain that although Moscow's centralized system is highly inefficient, because of Russia's huge size and poor transportation options, it is the best solution under the circumstances. They question whether a Western finance-driven development model is even feasible for Russia. What this means for understanding Russian power is that many of the traditional Western measures of (economic) success, (which in the West often underlies calculation of political and military strength) may be irrelevant for Russia (p. 4). Accordingly, the reality of Russian power looks, smells, and tastes differently than a normal (Western) country and may cause the West to sometimes underestimate or misunderstand Russia.

In their article, Goodrich and Zeihan (2009) suggest that there are six pillars of Russian power that are different for most countries but are more than ever before relevant for Russia today. Probably, the first and most significant pillar of Russian power, is geography. Russia has a geographic advantage over the U.S. in its own “backyard.” “Russia can project all manner of influence and intimidation there on the cheap, while even symbolic encounters are quite costly for the U.S.” (p. 5). Outside its zone of geopolitical advantage, in Latin America, Africa, or Southeast Asia, Moscow has correspondingly little influence.

The second pillar of Russian power is the authoritarian nature of the Russian government, which serves as a source of stability and domestic support and control (p. 5). The authoritarian nature of Russian government is supported by a third pillar, which is a social system that the government can count on to support the state and keep the country going with minimal protest over poor conditions (pp. 5–6). This pillar is supported by a growing middle class that is largely apolitical, appreciative of order, and interested in preserving its wealth and privileges. The fourth pillar is Russia’s wealth of natural resources in food, precious metals, timber, natural gas, and oil. Although these commodities may make the Russian economy subject to market swings, they provide Russia with a valuable source of foreign capital and can be used for political purposes for short-term political gains (p. 6).

The fifth pillar of Russian power is the military, which is in the process of a broad modernization and restructuring effort following its poor performance in its recent conflict in the Republic of Georgia. According to Goodrich and Ziehan (2009), Russia’s low-level war fighting capability is compensated for by close proximity to its “near abroad” and relatively minimal power projection requirements. “Russia can project power into its vital backyard areas relatively cheaply and win even when its military performs poorly” (p. 6). In fact, Russia’s rapid victory over Georgia in August 2008 surprised Western observers because the conflict contrasted sharply with Moscow’s protracted conflict in Chechnya from 1994 to 1996 and 1999 to 2000. However, according to Political Scientist Roger McDermott (2008), the Russia-Georgia conflict did expose fundamental weaknesses in Russia’s armed forces (p. 1). McDermott cites two

critical factors that led to decisive results in the short 2008 conflict. The first key factor in the speed of the Russian military victory was the opening of a second front in Abkhazia using mechanized infantry. The second critical factor was the rapid collapse of the Georgian armed forces due to poor management and limited combat capabilities (p. 2). However, despite its critical shortcomings, the Russian armed forces succeeded in executing a short, decisive victory over Georgia in August 2008.

Russia's sixth pillar of strength is its intelligence capability. According to Goodrich and Ziehan (2009), Russia has one of the most sophisticated and powerful intelligence services in the world (pp. 6–7). Since the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) relies heavily on human resources, it is relatively inexpensive to run, and obtains a high rate of return because of its long experience in running relatively low-tech HUMAN INTelligence (HUMINT) operations. This intelligence apparatus is particularly effective in conducting operations in areas along the Russian periphery, and in its “near abroad,” on the cheap.

Accordingly, even with weak political institutions and its economy in a free-fall, the Russian state is able to maintain domestic stability and project power in its backyard at relatively low cost. Although Western metrics may not accurately capture the reality of Russian power, McDermott (2008) maintains that the war did expose serious shortcomings in the performance of the Russian military. “It is unusual, to say the least, that a successful war should come to be regarded as a catalyst for military reform” (p. 13). He asserts that 2008 conflict has led to a concerted effort at military reform to close the gap between image and reality in Russia's armed forces. However, the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict demonstrates that Russia is capable and willing to use “hard power” options when it believes its security is threatened, particularly if it lacks many “soft power” policy options.

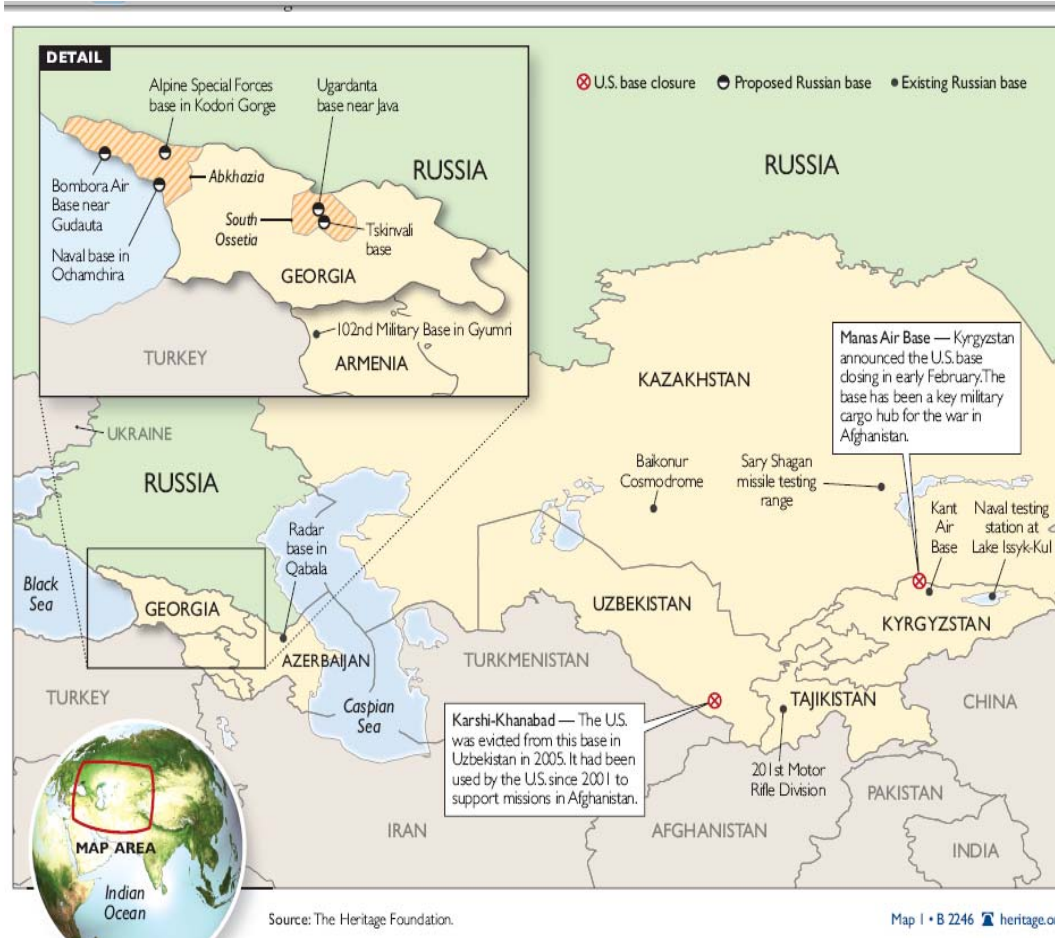


Figure 4. Russian Bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (From: Heritage Foundation, 2009)

5. “Resurgent Russia’s Campaign to Coerce Georgia”

British scholar Roy Allison (2008) maintains that there are two schools of thought regarding the motivations and objectives of Russia’s campaign in Georgia. The first school holds that the Russian operation was essentially a retaliatory, although exceptionally large-scale, response to a Georgian attack on South Ossetia. The second school argues that Russia’s core justification for the invasion, the protection of Russian citizens, served as a cover for its main purpose of using raw military force to enforce compliance by neighboring states and to demonstrate Russian regional superpower status (pp. 1145–46).

In reviewing the situation leading up to the 2008 crisis, Georgians have claimed that the Russians helped and supplied the South Ossetians in the initial 1991–92 conflict that followed its declaration of independence from Georgia in 1990. The ceasefire, mediated by Russia in June 1992 (the Sochi Agreement), created joint Russian-Ossetian-Georgian patrols as part of a peacekeeping operation (p. 1146). In reality, however, this ceasefire agreement froze the conflict in place and resulted in a de facto separation of South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia.

During Putin’s tenure as president, Russia continued to increase its security presence in the separatist areas. Tensions increased in 2004 over the election of Georgian President Saakashvili on a platform of restoring his country’s lost territories. These strains occurred at the same time that Georgian-Russian tensions were increasing over Georgia’s growing security relationship with the United States and NATO. Leading up to the 2008 conflict, Allison asserts that it is likely that both Georgia and Russia had contingency plans for military operations in South Ossetia (p. 1149). Although it is difficult to determine Russian strategic intentions based on its force disposition, Allison argues that the nature of its deployments constitutes “strong evidence” that the Russian invasion was planned, rather than spontaneous (p. 1149).

According to Allison (2008), Russia’s justifications for the 2008 invasion of Georgia have included several arguments. At first, Russia maintained that its actions were motivated by concern for force protection and self-defense. This reason has been used successfully by the U.S. in the past to justify protection of its peacekeepers to provide for emergency assistance or evacuation, but not to support a large-scale (offensive) military operation. Other justifications used by Russia included Article 51 of the UN Charter authorizing the right to self-defense, defense of Russian citizens in South Ossetia, and the intent to prevent humanitarian disaster and/or ethnic cleansing (pp. 1151–55). The international community, because of Russia’s poor record concerning the protection of *any* civilians during the conflict, has skeptically received these claims justifying Russia’s disproportionate response to Georgia’s initial actions.

Allison (2008) maintains that the real motivation behind the Russian invasion into Georgia is a complex mixture of local, regional, and geopolitical concerns. “Although

probably not the expression of a master plan,” he asserts that Russia has created “new facts on the ground” that have diminished decisively the attractiveness for NATO of the option to offer Georgia or Ukraine membership in the Alliance (pp. 1161–62). The Russian intervention has also created divisions within NATO between France, Germany, Italy and the United States over American policy in support of Georgia and the question of NATO enlargement. According to a NATO Defense College Research Paper, the conflict has isolated Georgia and seriously undermined its power and prestige in the eyes of European public opinion (Razoux, 2009, p. 2). This isolation has resulted in Ukraine reducing its ties with Tbilisi and refusal by Ukrainian President, Viktor Yushchenko, to take his country out of the CIS (p. 2). According to Trenin (2008), only 20 percent of Ukrainians actually support NATO membership and 44 percent have sided with Russia in its war with Georgia (p. 2). Even within NATO, many member states regarded Ukraine as not ready for accession and pointed to the fact that the Ukrainian public was opposed to NATO entry (Kamp, 2007, p. 4).

Allison (2008) argues that the Russian use of force in Georgia in 2008 is evidence of its strategic determination to counter the NATO and U.S. presence in neighboring states. “Moscow’s defiant and not very persuasive justification for engaging in major combat operations suggests that its main purpose is strategic competition with the West rather than local conditions in Georgia or South Ossetia” (p. 1170). He also points out that Russia’s actions in Georgia may also be a reflection of domestic political considerations. However, Allison warns that overreaction by the West to Russia’s new assertiveness could reinforce Moscow’s insistence on being acknowledged as a regional super power in its own right.

B. CONCLUSION: RUSSIA’S ZERO-SUM PROBLEM

Yet another perspective on Russian interests and the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict that is commonly used in the literature of international relations is related to the concept that power is zero-sum. The idea that power is zero-sum describes a competitive situation where one side’s gain, is the other side’s loss (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 18–19). In this context, the Russian invasion of Georgia is often portrayed in the West as an example

of zero-sum thinking by Russia that fails to appreciate the fundamental changes that have taken place in an increasingly globalized world. The 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict is viewed as a crude, outmoded attempt by Russia to maintain its security at Georgia's expense and prevent it from joining the (Western) community of nations as embodied in NATO and the EU. In this context, Georgia's security win (NATO membership) is considered by Russia as a net security loss.

A positive-sum strategy is a win-win situation where everyone benefits. It can also be considered a conflict resolution strategy that aims to accommodate all the disputants (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 18–19). According to this view, national and international security is tied to an increasingly beneficial web of growing interdependence (idealism) that makes the old system of geopolitical alliances and security guarantees obsolete (realism). The positive-sum view regards Georgia's membership in NATO and the EU as a modernizing project enhancing security and create economic growth for the benefit of all nations, Russia included. NATO enlargement to include Georgia (and Ukraine) would expand economic interdependence and enhance the security of Georgia, NATO, and Russia. In this context, NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine is a win-win policy and an effective mechanism for conflict resolution for all the disputants.

Historian Craig Nation (2007), at the U.S. Army War College, maintains that “A zero-sum “Great Game” for leverage in so fragile an area is not in the best interests of either major external actors or the region's peoples” (p. vii). He suggests that policy needs to go beyond the current assertive, zero-sum framework and focus on a mutual security model more appropriate for the Russian-American relationship (pp. 32–33). However, Nation asserts that although the United States has “no vital” interest at stake on the Russian periphery, U.S. engagement in the Caucasus does not threaten Russian interests (p. 32). Editor Thomas de Waal (2009) at the Institute for War and Peace refers the current situation in the Caucasus as resembling “a geopolitical suicide pact” rooted in regional conflicts that gives birth to polarized, zero-sum thinking (p. 1). He believes a broader engagement by a large international organization, such as the European Union, is the best hope for transformation and overcoming internal divisions in the region.

In reconciling these alternate views about zero-sum thinking, security and interdependence using McNamara's first principle (empathy), one might consider the proposition that national security policies tend to be positive-sum for distant threats, but very zero-sum in close proximity to insecure national borders despite globalization and the end of the Cold War. The positive-sum school views the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia as an aggressive (zero-sum) act of a declining power, while the zero-sum school views it as a predictable, defensive act by an insecure regional power in transition (with few positive-sum options).

V. CONCLUSION: U.S. ENGAGEMENT POLICY, GEOPOLITICS, AND THE GEORGIAN KNOT

A. DELIBERATE AMBIGUITY OR REALIST–IDEALIST CONTRADICTION

Under the formulation of the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership signed in January 2009, the United States reaffirmed its high strategic interest in Georgia's fate without actually committing to its territorial defense in the event of a Russian invasion. The agreement also promised cooperation between the two countries "to increase Georgian capabilities and ...strengthen Georgia's candidacy for NATO membership," without actually offering it a security guarantee at the present time (CRS Political, 2009, p. 4). Such a policy of possibly offering a security guarantee at a time to be determined in the future could be construed as duplicitous in that it affirms U.S. commitments to an area (and people) publicly deemed vital to U.S. interests, but reserves the unstated option of no security guarantee in the event of an invasion by Russia. For the purposes of this thesis, this policy has been defined as one of deliberate ambiguity.

Such a policy of deliberate ambiguity could also be construed by Russia as acquiescence to its sphere of influence in the Caucasus, and perhaps, other parts of the former Soviet Union, and could encourage a more assertive Russian policy abroad. It might also undermine Georgian confidence, already shaken in August 2008, in U.S. commitments to the region and reinforce the notion that Georgia's independence and security could be sacrificed on the geopolitical altar of larger "Great Power" U.S.-Russian geostrategic interests. Such a policy might also signal to the newer members of the NATO Alliance in the Baltic region, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe, a lack of U.S. commitment to oppose Moscow's more forceful policy in Russia's "near abroad."

On the other hand, continued U.S. commitment to Georgia under the U.S.–Georgia Strategic Partnership and in NATO without a security guarantee could also be part of a U.S. policy of deliberate strategic ambiguity that maximizes deterrence, while at the same time preserves flexibility required for a large, unwieldy alliance, such as NATO

under the circumstances. Such a policy does reduce the risk of a direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia over Georgia, and can enhance deterrence through uncertainty and the diplomatic fog of potential war.

Unfortunately, the third option of offering Georgia membership in NATO with the Article 5 security guarantee would leave the Alliance with few strategic options if Russia did in fact decide to act unilaterally and invade. As this study has sought to demonstrate, this event, though unlikely, could occur as the result of deliberate Russian policy or through miscalculation, or as in August 2008, as the result of events tied to Georgia's ethno-nationalist separatist movements.

Although a security guarantee and NATO membership for Georgia would offer some deterrent value against Russian invasion, in conventional military terms, it might be perceived as a weak deterrent. First, it might be perceived as weak if some major allies such as France, Germany, and Italy expressed reservations about supporting a military option to defend Georgia. Second, Georgia's geographic isolation from the Alliance and direct proximity to Russia would make its military defense difficult for NATO. Third, NATO is currently engaged in fighting a war in Afghanistan (and the United States is engaged in both Afghanistan and Iraq) and this might make the deterrence value of the NATO mutual defense guarantee less credible. Fourth, some NATO countries in Afghanistan are able to meet their current defense commitments under Article 5 only under an inequitable, divisive system of national "caveats" to maintain domestic political support for the war. Given the current divisions within the NATO alliance on extending membership to Georgia (and Ukraine), it is hard to imagine unity on the question of defending Georgia's territorial integrity in the event of a Russian invasion. The absence of unity on this question may continue to dissuade some Allies from offering Georgia membership in the Alliance. In this case, Georgia may remain outside of NATO indefinitely.

Finally, and despite the poor performance of Russia's military during the August 2008 conflict, it demonstrated a capability to cut across Georgia's main east-west road, reach the port of Poti, and move into positions just short of the capital city, Tbilisi, in a matter of days (McDermott, 2008). Russia does not necessarily need a competent

military to threaten Georgia if it feels its interests there are threatened. Despite its faults, the current U.S. policy of deliberate strategic ambiguity does give the United States and NATO greater flexibility and might provide a more effective deterrent to a Russian attack under the circumstances. The worst case scenario, that Russia would attack Georgia even with a NATO Security Guarantee when the Alliance is weakened by internal dissension, divided by a system of national caveats, and overextended in a long-term counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan, although unlikely, is not impossible.

In conclusion, it is possible that the current U.S. policy of not extending a security guarantee to Georgia is not one of deliberate choice or purposeful ambiguity. This policy could instead be a reflection of the realist-idealist contradiction at work in the day-to-day conduct of U.S. foreign policy. This contradiction between the promotion of American ideals and the protection of U.S. security interests creates a tension in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy that is often hard to reconcile with the messy reality of world politics. This contradiction between American principles and U.S. security interests can often lead to inconsistency in policy and ambiguity in practice as currently manifested in the U.S. engagement strategy towards the Republic of Georgia.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

NATO was originally created primarily as a military alliance designed to contain the Soviet expansion into Western Europe. Its secondary role was to create an institutional framework in which the national rivalries within Europe, which had resulted in centuries of wars, could be resolved. To date, NATO enlargement has proven to be an effective mechanism for resolving disputes between nations and many of the disputes in Central and Eastern Europe have been mitigated through the NATO membership process. This mechanism for resolving disputes between nations might work even more effectively with greater inclusion, rather than exclusion of all the parties concerned.

One such mechanism for conflict resolution is the currently moribund NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which suspended formal meetings after the 2008 Russia-Georgia Conflict. More recently in September 2009, the NATO Secretary General, Anders Rasmussen gave his first major public speech on “NATO and Russia: A New

Beginning.” In the speech, Mr. Rasmussen outlined his views on a strategic partnership with Russia and outlined proposals for an improved relationship and a rejuvenated NATO-Russia Council. In his address, he argued that, “Quite simply, NATO-Russia cooperation is not a matter of choice—it is a matter of necessity” (NATO Newsroom, 2009, p. 1).

NATO should consider the possibility of admitting countries on its distant periphery that border Russia as “associate members.” An associate status might entitle members to all the benefits of NATO membership to include the right to join an alliance of its choice and integration into the NATO military structure without a territorial security guarantee. This NATO policy would then be more in line with the current U.S. policy of deliberate ambiguity that supports Georgia’s continued integration in NATO security structures, while at the same time, allowing for some flexibility in the event of a crisis. Under such a policy, NATO cooperation and support for Georgian independence and sovereignty as a democratic nation would be undiminished, while at the same time, recognizing that some Russian defensive concerns along its immediate border are warranted.

NATO “associate status” would be for countries on NATO’s far periphery that are important, but are difficult for the Alliance to defend credibly. NATO’s credibility has already been strained by the extension of its security guarantee to twelve new post-Cold War members, its troubled performance in ISAF, and a divisive policy of national caveats for combat in Afghanistan. At the same time, a policy of strategic ambiguity would still give NATO a credible deterrent in the event of a crisis under a variety of circumstances.

The United States and NATO should explore the possibility of expanding the current NATO-Russia Council into a mechanism used for eventual admission of Russia into NATO as an “associate member.” Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia are all of critical importance to the Euro-Atlantic security and integrating their defense/military establishments into NATO (for combined security operations) could bring greater security to the Alliance. Such a policy could enhance European security by continuing to use NATO as a mechanism for resolving disputes between nations within the alliance, and secondarily, as a mutual defense organization aimed at preventing conflicts with

external actors. One of the major reasons that Russia's membership has never been seriously considered in the past is that NATO does not want to be obligated to defend Russia in third party conflicts with outside powers, such as China.

The current policy of dividing Europe into NATO and non-NATO countries creates insecurity on the continent and is reminiscent of the failed security structures of the last century. Having the world's two major nuclear powers in the same alliance would also enhance efforts at nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear and conventional force reductions, and ballistic missile defense that have been slowed by Cold War security structures that inhibit progress. Such a policy would also allow for greater cooperation in other areas of common interest such as combating terrorism, drug trafficking, and other economic and environmental problems.

The United States should continue its close bilateral engagement with Georgia and through NATO and seek avenues of cooperation and conflict resolution with regard to its unresolved separatist wars. However, a U.S. policy of unlimited support for Georgia's NATO membership could encourage an assertive Georgian nationalist policy in the separatist areas (Abkhazia, South Ossetia) vis-à-vis Russia that reduce incentives for peaceful conflict resolution. In regard to Article 5, NATO membership could be viewed by Georgia as a way of protecting the country from Russia, rather than as a means to boost internal reform and development (Razoux, 2009, p. 7). Unlimited U.S. support for Georgia's NATO membership also could undermine incentives for Georgia to seek out regional sources of security in the South Caucasus and greater Caucasus region. Regional defensive initiatives that build on local and regional sources of national security, such as a Caucasus Regional Security and Cooperation initiative between Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, have not been fully explored.

Georgia does have the right to join the collective defense alliance of its choice; however, the NATO alliance has an equal obligation to ensure that its members can credibly fulfill the commitments it has made. In this light, the military capabilities of new member states should be a central consideration for continued enlargement, rather than political considerations in accordance with NATO Defense Paper number 33. The

Defense Paper recommends, “The contribution that a new member can make to the Alliance’s collective capabilities should be the deciding factor for membership (Kamp, 2007, p. 4).

Finally, even if no formal pledge or commitment was ever made to Gorbachev in 1990 regarding Alliance eastward expansion (Kramer, 2009), NATO enlargement to include Georgia as a full member with a security guarantee would likely be *perceived* by Russia as evidence of yet another Western betrayal of post Cold War arrangements and an affront to its professed status as a resurgent great power (p. 54). A U.S. bilateral security guarantee to Georgia would fuel even greater geopolitical tensions with Russia and could increase uncertainty in the region. As a result, Georgia’s search for an absolute security guarantee, could risk unleashing unintended “Great Game” consequences that might also threaten its sovereignty and independence.

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