

RUSSIA, THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE CASPIAN:
A HANDBOOK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Caspian Sea area is shaping up to be one of the biggest sources of oil and gas in the world. A conservative estimate gives about one-sixth the amount of oil as there is in the Gulf area. Every major oil-connected company (including many Canadian companies) is involved today in the oil business in and around the Caspian. Other interests will pull the West, into the area.

The Caspian area – particularly the Caucasus – is extraordinarily complicated: there is no other like it anywhere. Dozens of distinct peoples claim it as their home. Many more peoples have arrived “recently” (ie in the past millennium). Since 1991, six wars have been fought in the Caucasus and none of them has produced a final settlement. There are at least nine outstanding border disputes – ten if one counts the Caspian Sea itself. The area is so uniquely complicated, with such an entanglement of ethnic and historical concerns, that ignorance of its complexities can be fatal for wise policy.

This paper is intended to be a reference guide and not to be read straight through; continuous reading would, therefore, reveal a good deal of duplication. The Table of Contents has been arranged so that the reader can directly turn to the sections of concern.

The sections are summarized below.

- **“Oil and Gas”** discusses current expectations of Caspian hydrocarbon reserves. It is thought that the Caspian area contains at least 100 billion barrels of oil and 500-600 trillion cubic feet of gas. But, as much is not yet explored, there may be more.
- **“The Land”** gives an overview of the geography of the territory under discussion.
- **“The Peoples of the Caucasus”** describes the extraordinary ethnography of the Caucasus in which are found, *at least*, twenty-six distinct peoples who call the area home. In addition to the “natives”, the years in the Russian and Soviet Empires means that many other peoples now make the area home.
- **“History”** sketches the major events of the Caucasus from early times to the present. Generally speaking, the Mountaineers (the peoples of the North Caucasus) were independent until conquest, after a tremendous resistance, by Russia in the Nineteenth Century. The South Caucasus had lost its independence centuries before to Ottoman and Persian power. It was conquered (if Muslim) or “liberated” (if Christian) by Russia during the Nineteenth Century until, by 1900, for the first time in history, one power ruled the whole Caucasus. All peoples tried for independence after the collapse of the Tsarist Empire but were brought under communist power. Demands for independence re-appeared after the fall of the Soviet Empire.
- Memories are long in the Caucasus and the section **“National Dreams and Nightmares”** recounts the national myths of the area. Georgians dream of the

Greater Georgia of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. Armenians cannot forget the massacres of Armenians by Turkish power. Azerbaijanis seek to find their identity whether as Turks, as Caucasians or as Muslims. Mountaineers dream of a Mountain Republic, free from outside power. The collapse of Soviet power liberated all these dreams and nightmares.

- **“Diasporas”** speaks of the large and influential populations of Armenians and Mountaineers who have transported their national myths to their new countries.
- **“Soviet legacies”** briefly touches on the problems and – even – the benefits of seventy years of communist rule on the area.
- **“Sufism-Wahhabism – An Islamic Fissure”** discusses a tension that has already caused strife in Chechnya and Dagestan and may cause much more. The traditional form of Islam in the east North Caucasus – Naqshbandi Sufism – appears to be under threat from a rigorously purist form of Islam from Arabia – Wahhabism.
- **“Post 1985 wars”** gives a brief account of the wars fought in the area since the Gorbachev reforms began to release the pressures built up by the communist system – the Karabakh war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis; the Ingush-Ossetian troubles; the Russo-Chechen war; the Georgian civil war; the war between the Abkhazians and the Georgians and between the Ossetians and the Georgians. This section is the most argumentative portion because the fairly widely held belief that Moscow started and maintained these troubles must be combated. In most cases, these wars have their origins in Stalin’s border decisions, which the world recognized in 1991 and 1992.
- **“Potential Border Disputes”** deals with some potential war-causing territorial and ethnic disputes. These have not so far caused any great amount of violence but could explode.
- **“Historical Hatreds”** attempts to describe the attitudes that Armenians and Azerbaijanis; Georgians and Russians; Chechens and Russians have towards each other. These attitudes – hatred or contempt for the most part – greatly affect relations in this small area.
- The sections **“Kalmykia”** and **“Tengiz Oil and Gas Field”** move the reader out of the Caucasus proper to the north end of the area. The Tengiz field is already producing and one of the possible pipeline routes from it passes through Kalmykia. Output may also be connected to the central Caspian fields and so this area may become connected to the Caucasus.
- **“Caspian Sea Borders”** discusses one of the initial problems: the littoral states cannot agree on how to divide up the Sea. However, now that Moscow has virtually agreed to the position that Baku has held all along, this issue is close to settlement and the entire area will likely be exclusively divided among the littoral states.

- “**Pipeline Routes**” briefly discusses the principal routes suggested for the exit of the oil and gas to their customers. A vexed question which has attracted some extreme statements, it seems that the Russian and Georgian routes will certainly be used while the others depend on the price of oil.
- “**National Interests**” sets out what the players can expect to gain from the Caspian hydrocarbons. President Aliyev of Azerbaijan has very cleverly involved almost all players in almost all possibilities. This represents a force for stabilization as nearly all can become “winners” of something. But, three players – Armenia, Karabakh and Abkhazia (and the last two are the local military powers) – have been altogether left out. Russia’s involvement is also discussed and it is argued that Moscow’s involvement is no more or less malign than anyone else’s and that any attempt to cut Moscow out of the profits is, simply, impossible.
- “**Federalism**” highlights what is probably the only stable long-term solution for the area in which a mono-ethnic “homeland” state can only be established by war.

A number of appendices complete the Handbook.

If there is as much oil and gas in the Caspian as there seems to be, the Caspian, and all the peculiar problems of the peoples who live nearby, will be the stuff of headlines, international meetings and briefings for years to come.

But for all that ‘our’ nationalists are merely reviving late 19th-century ideas typical of Central (including Germany) and Eastern Europe, and linked to the harassment and forcible deportation of ethnic minorities. These ideas are still alive.... But I believe this type of nationalism to be transient. Depending on the country, deliverance from it will take varying lengths of time.

-- Milovan Djilas [*Moscow News* No 18 1992]

... the role of the military-political factor has been weakened in the post-Soviet republics. As a result, no CIS state endeavouring to protect its territorial integrity by military means has succeeded. Russia has lost its war in Chechnya, Georgia in Abkhazia, Azerbaijan in Nagorny Karabakh, and Moldova in Transdnistria... Stalin had built the Soviet empire in a way that it could disintegrate only among blood and tragedies.¹

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the Caucasus was a long distance mentally from the capitals of the West. Whatever complicated and nasty things were happening there, it was of little concern to Washington, London or Ottawa. For most Westerners, the Russo-Chechen war was the first time they were introduced to the complexities and tensions of the area. But, recently, the world has started to pay attention to the Caspian Sea area. There is one simple reason why this is so – oil and gas. At present, proven reserves amount to about 100 billion barrels of oil equivalent and a conservative estimate would be that about three times as much again is undiscovered. Optimistic estimates range considerably higher. This does not make it a second Gulf region but it means that it may be a second North Sea. It may be bigger than that, however; large areas are unexplored and, despite the fact that Baku was the scene of the world’s first oil rush, it was only comparatively recently that the present supplies were discovered. What makes the Caspian oil bigger than that, however, is that most of the oil and gas will be available for export as the neighbouring countries have comparatively small needs.

The rest of the world is being drawn into the area through its oil companies, most of which are there today. This makes the stability of the area – or, based on past record, the instability – of prime concern to the outside world. Already we can see the pundits starting to talk about the area – for example such well-known national-security personalities as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger and James Baker are offering their services to oil companies as strategic advisors. Many analysts talk as if what is happening there is a “zero-sum” game – a Russian pipeline checkmates a Turkish pipeline, a contract with one company means that another is forever shut out. In particular, many advocate that the West should see to it that Russia is on the receiving end of the “zero”:

¹ Yevgeniy Kozhokin, Director of Strategic Studies Institute: “Everybody Needs A Strong Russia” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 6 Mar 1998

Will a neo-imperialist Russia (aided and abetted by Iran) dominate the development of Eurasian oil and its exports, or will Russia be an equal and fair player in the region...the West has a paramount interest in assuring that the Caucasian and Central Asian states maintain their independence and remain open to the West. Otherwise, Moscow will capture almost monopolistic control over this vital energy resource, thus increasing Western dependence upon Russian-dominated oil reserves and export routes.²

A popular theory, often uttered in the same breath as the “zero-sum” theory, is the assertion that Russia is busy de-stabilizing the countries of the Caucasus so that it can get a monopoly on the oil and gas:

The wars in Chechnya, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and in Georgia were started or exacerbated by the Russian military, and the outcome of these wars may determine who controls future pipeline routes...³

And

Moscow's strategy of reasserting its economic and military-political influence in the region includes the goal of dominating the production and transportation of Caspian oil to world markets... Russia is suspected of being behind efforts to destabilize Azerbaijan and Georgia as part of its long-term strategy to control the Caucasus and its oil wealth.”⁴

As this Handbook will make clear, these statements are cartoons of a very complex and involved reality.

The complexity of the Caucasus is unparalleled – more than 20 distinct peoples claim the Caucasus as their homeland; many more peoples have arrived “recently” (ie in the past millennium). Since 1991, at least six wars have been fought in the Caucasus and none of them has produced a final settlement. There are at least nine outstanding border disputes – ten if one counts the Caspian Sea itself. All the major powers now have interests in the area, thanks to the oil and gas. None of the territories to the west could be described, even by the most optimistic, as being stable. At best, one could say that they are less unstable than they were five years ago. No conceivable pipeline route passes through stable or undisputed areas – and that includes the sources of the oil and gas themselves. Compared with the Caucasus, the Gulf area is simple – only a handful of actors, few territorial disputes, comparative stability of the governments, uncomplicated geography.

² Ariel Cohen, Senior Policy Analyst, The Heritage Foundation “The New ‘Great Game’: Oil Politics in the Caucasus and Central Asia”; 25 Jan 1996. He advocates involving Russia in any deal but it’s clear that he really wants Russia either out altogether or marginalized.

³ Cohen, Op Cit.

⁴ Rossen Vassilev: “The Politics of Caspian Oil”; *Prism*; The Jamestown Foundation; 12 January 1996.

WHY THIS HANDBOOK

The Caspian is going to be a topic of briefing notes and conferences for years to come. The principal points of this Handbook are these:

The Caspian is an extraordinarily complicated area;

Policy makers must know something about the complexities;

Ignorant meddling could ignite a disaster.

This Handbook is intended to give policy makers background about the Caucasus. Here all the Caspian issues meet. The largest amount of oil and gas yet discovered is in waters claimed by a Caucasus state – Azerbaijan. The one operating pipeline route passes through the North Caucasus, which is part of the Russian Federation in international law although Chechnya, through which the line passes, claims independence. The other probable route passes through Georgia and close to Abkhazia, another area which claims independence. This Handbook, therefore, is intended for policymakers so that they may at least get an idea of some of the currents in the area and may define policy that does not go against local reality too much. This is not a hypothetical problem – on at least two occasions well intentioned, but ignorant, interference from Westerners has made things worse.

A very good example of policy which, because it was based on an ignorance of the “situation on the ground”, resulted in an undesired result, is given by Karabakh, Armenia and its then-President Levon Ter-Petrossyan. From the beginning, Baku has insisted that there are only two participants in the issue – itself and Armenia: Karabakh should not be allowed to participate.⁵ At the OSCE summit in Madrid in 1996, three principles for settlement were presented: restoration of the old USSR borders of Azerbaijan, autonomy for the Karabakh Armenians and international guarantees. The Minsk Group plan called for a two-step process: step one, an Armenia/Karabakh withdrawal from the occupied territories and, step two, a discussion of the modalities of Karabakh autonomy. Agreement by Baku and Yerevan was solicited – Stepanakert, because of Baku’s objections, was not. The plan neglected two important facts: 1) Karabakh is a player and Armenia can neither speak for it nor “deliver” it and 2) the Karabakhians have real reasons to fear rule from Baku. And, what are “international guarantees” worth to people who fear that they may be dead or driven from their homes before the guarantees can be activated? Ter-Petrossyan tried to make the point that the Karabakhians would not accept a two-step plan – they insisted on simultaneous action: they could be persuaded to give up something real (the land) but only for something real in return, not for future considerations or promises. But, foreign diplomatic pressure had its effect and, eventually, Ter-Petrossyan grudgingly accepted the plan. This won him praise from foreign diplomats but cost him his post at home. He brought the President of

⁵ A common diplomatic problem of course – for Azerbaijan to sit down at a conference table with Karabakh on the other side would be tantamount to recognizing Karabakh’s independence. But, if you don’t get the conflicting sides together, you’ll never get an agreement.

Karabakh into the government as Prime Minister hoping to buy some time but he was forced to resign when his support evaporated. Prime Minister Kocharyan became Acting President and, on 30 March 1998, was elected President of Armenia.

If there is a man who symbolizes Karabakh and its struggle, it is Robert Kocharyan. Born in 1954, he was a deputy to the first Supreme Council of the Republic of Nagorniy-Karabakh. He was active in organizing the first political organizations there and was one of the founders of Karabakh's armed forces. In August 1992 when, as an Armenian source puts it, "the Azeri army occupied half of Nagorno-Karabagh territory", he became the Chairman of the Karabakh Defence Committee and Prime Minister. It was after this that the Karabakh forces first drove out Azerbaijani forces and then extended their control into Azerbaijani territory. In December 1994, the Supreme Council appointed him President and he was elected to that post in November 1996. He is, therefore, much more than a representative of Karabakh's interests – he is perhaps the most effective spokesman that they could have. He will be strong in the defence of Karabakh's interest. Karabakh's minimum demands are that its relations with Azerbaijan cannot be "vertical" (ie subjected to Azerbaijan's jurisdiction) and that it have direct access to Armenia.⁶ The OSCE plan will now, if it is to progress at all, be forced to take this into account. But a more knowledgeable approach would have been to have done so in the first place.

As one observer wrote, there is a lesson from all this:

On the other hand, a broader lesson has been learned: however well-meant, international pressure on leaders of democratic or even democratizing countries may quickly become counterproductive if it fails to take into account popular attitudes in those countries. Ter-Petrosyan was prepared to go along with the Minsk Group. As he stressed in his resignation speech, he was the leader of the party of peace in Armenia.

But the Minsk group did not take into account Armenian popular attitudes and did not appear to many Armenians to be even-handed in its dealings with the parties to the conflict. Also, it did not provide Ter-Petrosyan with the concessions he needed to remain in power.

Now, the Minsk Group program is at best on hold, and the dangers of a renewed conflict in the region are far greater than they were before Ter-Petrosyan's departure.⁷

Another case of ineffective activity based on incorrect assumptions was the involvement of the so-called Friends of Georgia (FOG) after the Georgian defeat in the Abkhaz war. The FOG was afraid that Russian "influence" would be too great if only Russians provided a peacekeeping force along the Georgia-Abkhazia border. The FOG was presumably animated by the belief that Moscow had armed the Abkhaz and incited the war in order to force a weakened Georgia to enter the CIS and allow Russian troops to be stationed there. But none of these states was willing to provide

⁶ *Nagorno-Karabagh: A White Paper*. (Supplied by the Armenian Embassy, Ottawa) 27 March 1998.

⁷ RFE/RL Daily Report, End Note "Why Ter-Petrosyan Fell" by Paul Goble, 6 Feb 1998.

its own troops to form a peacekeeping force. Thus, the Georgians had no alternative but to accept a “CIS” peacekeeping force that, in practice, was entirely Russian. FOG’s policy, therefore, only succeeded in irritating Moscow and raising unrealistic hopes in Tbilisi. In the end, Georgia “fell under Russia’s influence”.⁸

Therefore, in the Caucasus, knowledge is necessary if outside interference is not to make things worse. If this Handbook serves any purpose, it will be to convince the reader that assertions that Russia has started wars in the Caucasus are such gross over-simplifications, based on such a penetrating ignorance of the circumstances as to be practically worthless. Outside interference is not the predominant factor here. There is lots of combustible material already in the area and plenty of people with matches.

OIL AND GAS

According to a recent edition of *The Economist*⁹, proven reserves in the Caspian Basin amount to 28 billion barrels of oil and 243 trillion cubic feet of gas. Estimates of what is actually there range from 70 billion to 200 billion barrels of oil. A conservative estimate therefore would be about 100 billion barrels of oil and 500-600 trillion cubic feet of gas. The two areas when oil and gas have been found are at the Tengiz field in Kazakhstan (at the northeast corner of the Sea) and just off Baku in the seabed. However, as there is oil and gas in the Russian Volga basin and in Iran, it is probable that there will be further finds in the Caspian seabed (both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have put out for tenders to explore their parts of the Caspian). Thus, the Caspian Sea is an important oil and gas area, which could become much more important if more were found. It is not likely, however, that it is a “second Gulf” – the proven reserves there are 600 billion barrels of oil and 1600 trillion cubic feet of gas. Thus, the Caspian reserves are somewhat smaller but still very substantial.

THE LAND¹⁰

In the USSR, the Caucasus was the land of eternal sunshine, beautiful beaches, mountain sports, holidays and exotic agriculture. The Georgians tell the story that, when God was assigning land to all the newly-created peoples of the world, the Georgians were holding a party and missed the distribution. When they finally asked God where they were to live, He gave them the land He had been saving for Himself.¹¹

The Great Caucasus Range runs about 1,200 kilometres southeastward across the Caucasian isthmus and forms the border of the Russian Federation and the South Caucasian republics. North of the Great Caucasus stretches the Russian steppe –

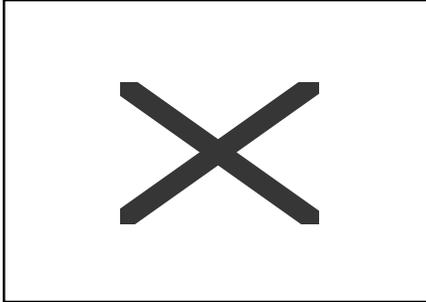
⁸ It didn’t, of course, because Russia’s intentions were also read wrong.

⁹ 7 Feb 1998.

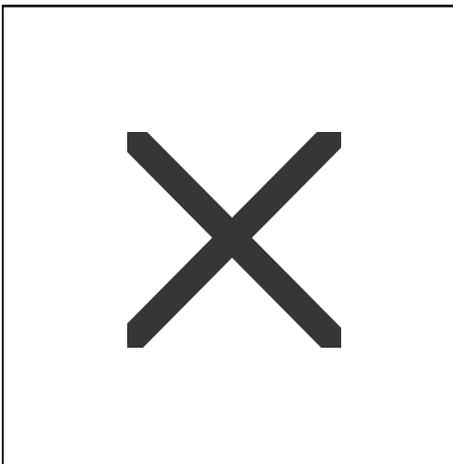
¹⁰ Most of this is taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

¹¹ The Abkhazians also tell the same story.

fantastically rich black earth in the Kuban territory changing to semi-desert near the top of the Caspian. The range itself contains some of the highest mountains outside of Central Asia or South America – Mount Elbrus at 5642 metres is higher than anything in the Alps and anything in North America except Mts. McKinley and Logan. Historically there are three routes across the range – along the coast of Abkhazia where the mountains nearly meet the Black Sea, via Derbent on the Caspian and



through the Darial Pass in the centre. Two other passes to the east and west are seasonally traversable. The range is criss-crossed with steep valleys that are very difficult of access most of the year. Movements in and around the Great Caucasus are therefore severely constrained by geography.



South of the Great Caucasus is a parallel valley gradually rising to a high point around Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. On the Black Sea coast is the alluvial Kolkhida Lowland, site of ancient Colchis. On the Caspian side there is a similar floodplain. The Little Caucasus Range extends southward to the Armenian Highland that extends into Anatolia in Turkey. These mountains – the highest is about 4000 metres – are significantly smaller than those of the Great Caucasus.

The Great Caucasus acts as a weather barrier and to the north the climate is semi arid becoming somewhat desert-like to the east. Between the Great and Little Caucasus the climate is generally mild with adequate rainfall. Altogether then, the climate in Transcaucasia is somewhat Mediterranean with the exception of the high mountains and the Armenian Highland.

In the steppe the vegetation was typical grasses but is today mostly agricultural land; in the east it is characteristic of semi desert areas. The slopes of the Great Caucasus are very heavily forested (although, it is said, in many places the typical casual communist approach to the environment has denuded many of the slopes). Forests run to an altitude of about 2000 metres and from then alpine meadows are found up to about 3000 metres where snow and glaciers take over. Forests remain in parts of the South Caucasus but generally speaking, cultivation has replaced them.

The area is relatively rich in natural resources – oil and gas, of course, are found north of the Great Caucasus and in the Caspian Sea. But the mountains also have deposits of iron, copper and molybdenum and manganese. The area is also famous throughout the former USSR for its mineral waters. These were developed in the Soviet period and many streams were controlled for hydroelectric power. As ever

in the former USSR, one comes across large and grubby industrial structures that are not very active today.

Agriculture, however, is what the area was best known for. The Caucasus produced tea, citrus fruits, bamboo, tobacco, grapes (and wines and cognac) and various fruits – great novelties in the primarily root vegetable diet of the Slavs to the north. In the higher elevations of the Caucasus, the primary activity is livestock raising (mainly sheep and cattle), although the people there also grow some mountain crops and pursue a few domestic crafts. Tourism, a major industry in Soviet times, is greatly depressed today because of political instability, the general inadequacy of Soviet tourist facilities and economic depression. Added to which, the hotels of Georgia are filled with refugees from Abkhazia.

The Caucasus is, however, collectively poor. Not the least of the problems in the area is the presence of large numbers of unemployed young men. A survey in 1991 placed the North Caucasus near the bottom of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic and nothing since the fall of the USSR has happened to change the fact – if anything, it is worse off with the wars and consequent disruption. At that time, the lowest living standards in the RSFSR were found in Elista (Kalmykia),¹² Groznyy (Chechnya) and Makhachkala (Dagestan). Groznyy also had the lowest dietary standards and the highest pollution. Nalchik (Kabardino-Balkaria) was the third worst. On the other hand, the lowest rates of infant mortality, illness and industrial accidents were found in Groznyy and Makhachkala.¹³

THE PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS

The Caucasus has been famous since antiquity for the great variety of peoples who live there. There is probably no other part of the world where so many mutually unintelligible languages are spoken in such a small area. The Caucasus has always been on the edge of great movements of peoples; it has been the edge of great empires and a physical barrier to easy movement. It is an area of very high mountains and steep and inaccessible mountain valleys. For millennia, therefore, small groups of people have settled or left their genes there and, isolated in a remote valley, preserved their ancient ways. Such a terrain creates peoples who are proud, warlike and independent and such are the Caucasians, especially the Mountaineers.

The usual method – at least in the USSR – of cataloguing peoples is by their languages. There is a reasonably clear relationship between language and ethnicity (leaving aside imperial languages like English or Latin). Soviet scholars have done a great deal of work on this subject and the grouping of the principal peoples of the Caucasus given below is a result of their studies. The listing, which is generally accepted today, betrays, however, some disputable decisions made by the Great Ethnographer, Iosef Stalin. Some authorities, for example, would argue that more

¹² See Kalmykia section, p 54.

¹³ RFE/RL 20 Jun 1991.

distinctions should be made: that Mingrelian, for example, is a different language from Georgian (and the Mingrelians therefore a different *gens* from Georgians¹⁴) and that more distinctions should be made among the peoples the Soviets lumped together as “Georgians”. But Stalin was a Georgian, and a patriotic one in his youth, so perhaps that is why this category is as it is. One could question the division of the Circassians into four peoples on ethnic grounds (although there are historical differences). Likewise, one could argue that Chechens and Ingush should be grouped together as Vainakhs.

The following table lists the principal groupings with their principal location and rough population numbers as of the 1989 USSR census (which is the only available data).¹⁵

INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE FAMILY	
Iranian Language Group	
<i>Ossetian</i>	-- Russian Federation (North Ossetia-Alania – 334,000) and Georgia (South Ossetia –164,000), Azerbaijan (1700)
<i>Kurd</i>	-- Azerbaijan (Karabakh – unknown), 4700 in CIS ¹⁶
<i>Tat</i>	-- northern Azerbaijan (10,000) and southern Dagestan (12,000)
Armenian Language Group	
<i>Armenian</i>	-- Armenia (3,080,000) Georgia – (448,000) (Azerbaijan – 200,000 ¹⁷) Russian Federation (532,000) large diaspora in CIS and elsewhere
CAUCASIAN LANGUAGE FAMILY ¹⁸	

¹⁴ Like so much in the Caucasus, this is disputable – sometimes passionately so. The author has been told by Georgians that Mingrelian is Georgian and by a Mingrelian (who, however, did not speak it) that Mingrelian and Georgian were not mutually comprehensible.

¹⁵ Figures are rounded off. Note that individuals of these peoples were spread all over the USSR. For example, in Kazakhstan, which was a favourite place of exile in the Stalin years, the 1989 USSR Census shows 49,000 Chechens, 20,000 Ingush, 14,000 Lezgins, 4000 Ossetians, 3000 Balkars, 3000 Avars, 2000 Karachay, 2000 Dargins, 1000 Laks, 1000 Kabardins and 1000 Tabasarans from the Caucasian peoples. Principal source is *Íàðñäü Ðññèè Ýìöèèèíäèèÿ*; (Peoples of Russia Encyclopaedia); Moscow 1994. Naturally it concentrates on data concerning Russia (but, as at least one representative of all these peoples is to be found there, all peoples have an entry). The 1989 Census data published there, however, is for the Russian Federation only with mere sketches for the former USSR republics. None of the successors to the USSR has conducted a census since 1991 (although Russia carried out a mini-census in 1996). The data therefore must be taken with a grain of salt. The communist regime adjusted figures and definitions to suit political purposes. See Appendix I for map.

¹⁶ A major definitional event has happened here – the 1979 Census gives 116,000 for the USSR (*Íàñäèáíèà ÑÑÑÐ*, (USSR Population) Moscow 1980).

¹⁷ This is the author’s estimate in the absence of data from the 1989 Census. 1979 USSR Census gives 475,000 Armenians in Azerbaijan and total population for Nagorniy-Karabakh as 161,000 (*Íàñäèáíèà ÑÑÑÐ*, 1980).

¹⁸ A partial list this, of course, for it does not include Akhvakhs, Andis, Archis, Bagulals, Bats, Bezhtas, Botlikhs, Budukhs, Chamalals, Didos, Godoberis, Hinukhs, Hunzibs, Karatas, Khinalugs, Khvarshis, Kryz, Tindis or Udis (See <http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/languages.html>). Et cetera – the closer one looks into the Caucasus, the more detail appears.

Kartvelian Language Group

Georgian – (includes Mingrelians, Svans, Ajarians) Georgia (3,787,000) Russian Federation (130,000)

Laz – Turkey (33,000)

Adygey-Abkhazian Language Group

Abkhazian -- Georgia (Abkhazia – 95,000)

Kabardin – Russian Federation (Kabardino-Balkaria – 363,000)

Cherkess – Russian Federation (Karachay-Cherkessia – 40,000)

Adygey – Russian Federation (Adygey Republic – 95,000)

Abazin – Russian Federation (Karachay-Cherkessia – 27,000)

(Note: Kabardins, Cherkess, Abazins and Adygeys may be grouped together as Circassians)

Chechen-Dagestani Language Group

Chechen – Russian Federation (Chechnya – 734,000 and Dagestan – 57,000)

Ingush – Russian Federation (Ingushetia – 163,000)

Avar – Russian Federation (Dagestan 496,000) Azerbaijan (44,000) Georgia (4000)

Lezgin – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 204,000) and northern Azerbaijan (171,000)

Dargin – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 280,000)

Lak – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 91,000)

Tabasarany – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 78,000)

Rutuly – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 15,000)

Tsakur – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 5000) Azerbaijan (14,000)

Agul – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 13,000)

URAL-ALTAIC LANGUAGE FAMILY**Turkic Language Group**

Nogay – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 28,000)

Karachay – Russian Federation (Karachay-Cherkessia – 129,000)¹⁹

Balkar – Russian Federation (Kabardino-Balkaria – 70,000)

Azerbaijan – Azerbaijan (5,800,000) Georgia (307,000) Armenia (89,000)

Iran (9,500,000) Turkey (630,000)

Kumik – Russian Federation (Dagestan – 231,000)

These peoples arrived in the Caucasus at different times. The peoples of the Kartvelian, Adygey-Abkhazian and Chechen-Dagestani Language Groups appear to be autochthonous. These peoples lived there for years with no record of them but reports of travellers and other literate foreigners. It is always difficult to know how long an illiterate people has been in one place because they have no lasting records and only the Georgians (of these language families) had a written language. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that these peoples are the descendants of the inhabitants of pre-historic times. It further appears that they have not moved around

¹⁹ It is possible that the Karachay are the descendants of the Khazars.

very much and that, for the most part, they may be considered to be living on their ancestral territories.

The Armenians likewise date from great antiquity as inhabitants of their land. A significant difference between Armenians and the others, however, is that in ancient times Armenia stretched far into Anatolia (today's Turkey) with an extension in Cilicia on the Mediterranean.

The Iranian Language Group speakers are more recent arrivals. The Ossetians are the remnants of the Alans, a horse people, once with a mighty empire, who arrived in the area about 1500 years ago. Presumably so did the others from the Iranian group.

The last of the "native" arrivals are the Turkic peoples whose ancestors would have started to appear in the area 1500 to one thousands years ago. The Nogay, however, are leftovers from the Turko-Mongol Golden Horde of about 700 years ago (although pushed into their present area about 400 years ago by the Kalmyks arriving from Central Asia) while the Kumiks are the descendants of the Cumans who were a power in South Russia before the Mongol invasions. The Azerbaijanis are, to some (arguable) degree, descended from the autochthonous inhabitants.

Many other peoples living in the Caucasus have been there from great antiquity. For example, the Jews of Georgia may even date from the time of the Babylonian Captivity but more likely to the times of the Roman Empire. Some of the Greeks claim descent from the classical Greek colonies on the Black Sea.

Since then, many other peoples have arrived to live in the area, particularly since the Caucasus was incorporated into the Russian Empire in the Nineteenth Century.

Thus, the Caucasus is one of the *oldest* areas of human habitation in the world; a significant part of the population claims millennia of settlement and some may be descendants of the first humans to settle in the Caucasus. From an ethnic point of view it is extraordinarily complex – there are dozens of tiny groups of people, each a self-aware ethnos with great pride in its antiquity and ancestry, sensitive to its rights and liberties but impossible to form into an independent state. A chauvinist can choose from centuries of history and centuries of national expansion and contraction, to pick his defining national moment, which he wants to re-create today. Any imaginable political entity will have dozens of minority groups. Any attempt to build an ethnically based state will lead to tension and in the Caucasus, where a weapon is a normal part of a man's dress, tensions soon lead to killings. It is probably the most dangerous part of the world to build a nationality-based state that will be the homeland of one dominant people. Only federations and confederations have any chances of stability. The oil and gas of the Caspian basin is pulling the rest of the world into this web of ancient claims and counterclaims.

Cossacks

Something should be said about the Cossacks of the area. Cossacks are not really a “people” as, for the most part, they are ethnic Slavs²⁰. The word itself comes from the Turko-Mongol word for free warriors and that is what the Cossacks began as. But, by the time the Russians started moving into the Caucasus, the Russian government had tamed the Cossacks. Catherine emplaced Cossacks along the Cossack Line – the Kuban Host and the Terek Host, the first centred around Krasnodar (old name Yekaterinodar – Catherine’s Gift) and the second around Groznyy (“threatening” – threatening to the Chechens and other neighbouring Mountaineers that is). It is said that the Terek Cossacks intermarried with the Mountaineers to so great an extent that they are today part Mountaineer. Most Cossacks opposed the Bolsheviks during the Revolution and Civil War and few more strongly than the Kuban and Terek Hosts; many were killed in the war or went into exile. They therefore suffered greatly after the Soviet victory. Famines and the brutality of collectivization struck very hard at the Kuban Cossacks in the 1930s. Therefore, one may wonder how many survived. Nonetheless, organizations claiming to be the proper heirs of these Hosts exist today.²¹ What effect they will have is very unclear. Cossack organizations have demanded the right to carry arms or have offered (demanded even) to patrol the Russia-Chechnya border. Moscow has recognized many Cossack Hosts but, thus far, has not acceded to the proposition that Cossacks, as they did in the past, should guard Russia’s borders. But, factored into the tremendous complexity of the Caucasus must be Cossack organizations that might easily get enthused about ideas like “One Russia, Orthodox and Indivisible”. Armed men putting that into effect along a re-constituted Cossack Line would not help to stabilize the area.

HISTORY

History is very important in the Caucasus because so much of what is happening today or has happened recently is a product of that history, whether that history be real or imagined. Much of the unhappy post-Soviet history of Georgia is a consequence of an inflated and inaccurate view of Georgia in which Abkhazians and Ossetians were regarded as recent and illegitimate inhabitants of “Georgian land” or, as was said at the time, Georgians were the “hosts” and the others the “guests”. Chechens have robustly based historical reasons to hate and fear Russians and want to

²⁰ Some Kalmyks were Cossacks, but one can confidently assume that the principal Cossacks of the area were Slavs.

²¹ The author met the so-called Ataman of the Kuban Host in Krasnodar in 1994. When the point was put to him that there couldn’t be many descendants left alive today, he insisted that there were. Membership was by proving descent. He referred to the Kuban Cossacks as a “nationality” suggesting that he believed that intermarriage with the Mountaineers had made them into a different *gens*.

be independent of them.²² No Armenian can rest happy under the rule of Turkic peoples. More recent history, through the malefic effects of Stalin's ethnography and territorial adjustments, has its effects today. With contrary decisions by Stalin, the world would have recognized quite different borders than it did and several wars would not have happened at all.

It is precisely because the myths and hero stories, the claims and counter-claims, the resentments and the grievances, are alive today that they can fuel passion in the wars of the post Soviet. Not to have at least a superficial understanding of the Caucasus' history is, quite simply, to have no understanding of the area.

Before Russia

The Greeks and Romans knew the Caucasus (as Colchis, Iberia and Albania) but their knowledge tapered off as one approached the Caspian and the peoples of the high Caucasus were little known. Colchis (probably today's Abkhazia and western Georgia) was the land of the Golden Fleece²³. Xenophon's *Anabasis* describes fights with the Colchians as the Greek force fought its way through the Georgian valley to Trapezium (Trebizond) and the safety of the Greek colony there. The Mountaineers were vaguely known and known to be fierce and exotic²⁴ and the high Caucasus was the area of legends (the Amazons were supposed to live somewhere around there). The Roman Empire briefly incorporated parts of today's Georgia and Armenia but the legions eventually withdrew. The passes of Derbent and Darial were battlefields between the Arabs approaching from the south and the Khazars holding north of the Great Caucasus twelve hundred years ago. In short, the Caucasus was generally a field of action for the great powers to the south.

Christianity arrived very early in the area – indeed Armenia and Georgia have the distinction of being the two first nations to adopt the religion. Generally speaking, however, 1500 years ago the Caucasians were at least superficially Christian – even the Mountaineers who today are almost all Muslim, Islam having arrived in the area with the Arab invasions.

The peoples of the South Caucasus have rarely been independent. As they first emerge into recorded history, they are subject to invasions and incorporations into the Persian Empire, then the Arabs conquer them, then the Mongols then Persians and Turks again until Russia becomes the last conqueror. The Mountaineers, however,

²² Alas, Russians ought to have strong historical reasons to know that one does not start wars with Chechens.

²³ Herodotus even says that the Colchians were Egyptians. He says he was the first to notice this and that the truth of it is attested by the fact that the Colchians have "black skins and woolly hair" and that they practise circumcision (Book II). This position does not seem to be widely accepted. Perhaps it is an indication of how little the Greeks knew of Colchis.

²⁴ "All speak different languages because of the fact that, by reason of their obstinacy and ferocity, they live in scattered groups and without intercourse with one another." Strabo: *Geography*; 11.2.16.

preserved their independence throughout: they were too fierce in defence of their mountain fastnesses and there was little profit to be gained from conquering their impenetrable hills and forests.

The Russian Empire

At the end of the Eighteenth Century Russian power stood at the line of the Terek and Kuban Rivers in the Caucasus and at Astrakhan at the north of the Caspian. The Ottoman Empire held the western half of the South Caucasus and Persia the eastern half. The Christian Georgians were thus menaced by two Muslim imperial powers and appealed to Russia for help. Specifically, the King of Kartli-Kakhetia died and ceded his kingdom to the Russian Emperor.

The Russian acquisition of the Caucasus and the South Caucasus took place in four phases. The invitation from Kartli-Kakhetia gave it an entering point across the mountains through the Darial Pass. During the second phase the Russians gradually drove Persian power out and acquired modern Azerbaijan and the Khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan. In the third phase, it was the turn of the Ottoman possessions; by the late nineteenth century Russia had acquired the rest of modern Armenia and Georgia. But in the Caucasus Mountains a powerful resistance, combining nationalist and Islamic elements, threatened Russia's rear. A charismatic military and religious leader, the Imam Shamil, led the struggle. Despite putting up tremendous resistance for decades, Shamil was eventually overwhelmed and surrendered to the Russians in 1859. The last Mountaineer resistance came from the Circassians who were finally overcome in 1864. When Turkey ceded another piece on the western border in 1878, the Russian Empire occupied all the territory with which we are concerned²⁵. Many Muslim Caucasians – especially Circassians and Abkhazians – left their ancient homelands for territories in the Ottoman Empire where their descendants are to be found today. For the first time in history, therefore, one power ruled all the Caucasus and made its power felt in every valley.

The Russians did not acquire settled territories with neatly defined borders: they conquered khanates, pieces of the Turkish or Persian Empires and the fragments of once-mighty kingdoms. It is important to remember, in the border disputes today, that today's borders (based on the USSR's, which is to say Stalin's, divisions) have little resemblance to those of the Russian Empire²⁶. They, in turn were quite different

²⁵The Treaty of Kars returned most of this last to Turkey in March 1921. It included Mount Ararat sacred to the Armenians.

²⁶ The Russian Empire was divided into *guberniy* or provinces. Before the 1917 Revolutions, the Caucasus area was divided into ten *guberniy*. The North Caucasus was made up of three (from west to east the first included roughly today's Krasnodar Kray, Adygeya and Karachay-Cherkessia; the second Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya; the third Dagestan). Today's Georgia was in three *guberniy* (one of which was roughly today's Abkhazia); today's Armenia was two and so was today's Azerbaijan. Therefore, only Dagestan today has had much the same borders for a century or more.

from the borders in 1800 and they, in turn, from any other borders in the long history of the Caucasus.

In short, there are no historically sanctioned borders in today's Caucasus.

After The Russian Empire – 1917-1921

The South Caucasus

Turkey joined the alliance against Russia in 1914 in expectation of seizing the South Caucasus. But its attack towards Baku was a disaster and, on the rebound, Russian forces pushed deep into Turkish Armenia. After the February Revolution, however, the Russian armies began to disintegrate as the conscripts simply left for home. At this time there was no thought of the South Caucasus splitting up into three independent countries – it's not even certain how clear that concept would have been given that the area was home to several peoples and divided into seven provinces in the Empire.²⁷ In November, a Transcaucasian commissariat was formed with the intention of governing the territory until the Russian Empire-wide Constituent Assembly would determine the future. A truce was effected with the Turkish forces in December, but the Turks, again seeing their chance to occupy the whole South Caucasus, especially the important Baku oilfields, kept up military pressure. The South Caucasians realized that they had little chance of retaining the territories conquered since 1914 and, in March 1918, proposed negotiations to restore the 1914 frontier. As their commissioners were setting out, they heard the news that, by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Bolsheviks had already conceded the frontier.

The Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd had passed without much notice in Transcaucasia where, in any event, there were few Bolsheviks outside of Baku (where a Bolshevik coup seized power in March 1918) and Tiflis (Tbilisi). The South Caucasians now realized that there was little to be hoped for from Russia: the Bolsheviks had dissolved the Constituent Assembly that the Caucasians and others were expecting to resolve outstanding issues. The Bolshevik dictatorship had little support outside of Baku. Turkish pressure was relentless. Accordingly Transcaucasia had no option but to declare independence in the spring and a cabinet mixing Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis was formed. The following month, the Treaty of Batum recognized Turkish gains but the Turks continued their relentless advance on Baku.

At this point, the Transcaucasian Federation fell apart. The Georgians secured a treaty with Germany and, feeling that they were now protected from Turkish ambitions by Turkey's principal ally, declared independence in May 1918, forcing Azerbaijan and a very unwilling Armenia to follow suit. Georgia now felt itself

²⁷ It was also true that a Georgia that contained Abkhazia and South Ossetia would have been (and was) a highly contentious creation; there was little national consciousness among what we today call Azerbaijanis and Armenia, as it is today, would have been considered as only a part of the Armenian that should exist.

secure, the Azerbaijanis were not unwilling to be absorbed into a Greater Turkey, and Armenia was left alone against its ancient enemy. In September 1918, Turkish forces entered Baku and installed the Azerbaijan government there.

But all this was a side-show: Turkey had been defeated in the larger war and was compelled to pull back. For the next ten months, British power dominated the South Caucasus. British aims were to secure the communications between Baku and Batum (so as to get the Caspian oil out to the Black Sea), defeat Bolshevik intentions and support the White forces under General Deniken.

There were no generally agreed borders for these three new states and wars and guerrilla campaigns were continuous on the frontier areas. As well, Georgians and Abkhazians and Ossetians were fighting each other. Georgia and Armenia fought a brief war in December 1918 but the main fighting was between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the areas of Nakhichevan, Karabakh and Zangezur where Armenian and Azerbaijan villages were intermixed. The new British governors took a hand in these issues and in November 1918 persuaded the Armenian commander, on the point of taking Shusha²⁸, to stop and let the great peace conference at Versailles work out the details. The British commander then installed an Azerbaijani as governor and did little to stop him reducing Armenian strongpoints. The British were unable to get the Armenian forces out of Nakhichevan and, after coming to realize that many of the leading Azerbaijanis were supporting Turkey, awarded Nakhichevan and Kars to Armenia. Almost as soon as the British left, in August 1919, an uprising drove Armenian forces out of Nakhichevan and fighting broke out once more in Karabakh and Zangezur.

At the start of 1920, therefore, the South Caucasian states were on their own. Armenia and Azerbaijan were fighting all along their points of contact, Georgian forces had invaded Abkhazia and were attempting to suppress the Ossetians, the Turks were massing their power and the Bolsheviks, as their victory in the civil war was being solidified, were eyeing Transcaucasia. British recognition of the three states in January 1919 and vague talk about mandates at the Versailles Conference made no difference now. The Bolsheviks moved first – in April 1920 the Bolsheviks in Baku rose up, the Red Army invaded, the government collapsed and Azerbaijan was put into the Soviet bag. Armenia was presented with an ultimatum to withdraw from Karabakh and Zangezur and a Bolshevik uprising was fomented in Alexandropol (today's Gjumri). The Yerevan government crushed the revolt but realized that it had must treat with Moscow and talks began. Meanwhile the Red Army invaded Zangezur and Armenia was forced to accept the "temporary" occupation of Zangezur, Karabakh and parts of Nakhichevan. The next month Turkey again attacked Armenia and seized the key fortress-city of Kars. This was the final straw for Armenia and it chose the lesser evil and in December 1920 the government resigned itself to a Bolshevik takeover of Armenia.

²⁸ Scene of more fighting post-1989.

The Cheka, deportations, arrests and the revenge of Armenian Bolsheviks for their defeat in Alexandropol accompanied Bolshevik rule. The brutality sparked off a revolt that began in Zangezur and led to Dashnak forces taking Yerevan in February 1921. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks were busy in Georgia, which they had invaded in February 1921 – despite their recognition of its independence – and swiftly overrun. As soon as Tiflis (today's Tbilisi) was occupied, the Red Army returned and crushed the Armenian fighters. The final act was the Treaty of Moscow that established the border with Turkey and finally awarded Nakhichevan and Karabakh to Azerbaijan and Zangezur to Armenia where they are today, recognized by all the world. The Bolshevik government combined all the states and would-be states south of the Great Caucasus into the Transcaucasian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic; in 1936 that entity was broken up into the three states which attained independence in 1991.

The North Caucasus

In the North Caucasus, the news of the collapse of the Empire and the Provisional Government's declaration of the rights of peoples inspired the creation of a North Caucasian assembly of all the Mountaineers which, on 11 May 1918, proclaimed the independent Republic of the North Caucasus. Unfortunately for this first North Caucasian republic of the Twentieth Century, to the north, in the Cossack lands, was the main strength of General Denikin's White²⁹ army. For him, whose slogan was "one indivisible Russia", an independent Mountaineer state was inadmissible and he turned his forces against it and succeeded in destroying it. But the Mountaineers did not give up and an "Emirate of the North Caucasus" was proclaimed in southern Chechnya in 1919. The Bolsheviks recognized and supported the Emirate against Denikin and when they had defeated Denikin in February 1920, they entered the North Caucasus. At first the Mountaineers welcomed them because of their apparent sympathy with their aspirations. This soon changed when the Mountaineers got a taste of "war communism" and they rose. In August 1920, a new war began in the south of Dagestan. However, after initial successes, the superior numbers and artillery of the Bolsheviks overwhelmed resistance by May 1921.

Meanwhile in January 1921, the Bolsheviks convened a congress of Mountaineers in Vladikavkaz which Stalin, then Commissar for Nationalities, attended. He proposed the creation of a Mountain Peoples' Autonomous Republic comprising the territories of the Chechens, Ingush, Ossetians, Kabardins, Balkars, Cherkess and Karachays, while Dagestan and Abkhazia were to be autonomous Soviet Republics. The assembly accepted this proposal, which accorded well enough with their aspirations, with the addition that traditional *Shariya* and *adat* law was to be continued. But the Bolsheviks only conceded this while they were digesting their new acquisitions in the South Caucasus and the autonomy did not last. Gradually the Republic was whittled away until it finally disappeared altogether in the USSR Constitution of 31 January 1924. Likewise, Dagestan and Abkhazia lost their

²⁹ Anti-Bolshevik.

autonomies over the next decade, the one being absorbed into the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic and the other into the Georgian SSR.

In 1929, it was decided to introduce agricultural collectivization in the USSR starting with the North Caucasus. The political police moved in and began arrests. The Chechens immediately rose and their revolt reinforced their earlier demands that the communist authorities keep the promises they had made in 1921. To damp down the immediate revolt, the communists immediately promised everything but the OGPU moved in and arrested the ringleaders as soon as they had dispersed. As usual, the Chechens were not daunted: serious fighting began in December 1929 and the communists moved in enormous forces to subdue Chechnya; by April 1930, they had forced their way into the centre of the resistance. The fighting finally stopped when Stalin announced a (temporary, as it turned out) easing of the collectivization targets.

The Soviet Empire

After the bloody conquest of the North Caucasus, the Emperor in St Petersburg had been wise enough to rule lightly – the Mountaineers were allowed their traditional law and were exempted from conscription. Small Cossack posts were established at the mouths of the valleys and the garrisons – many of whom were North Caucasians anyway – were careful to mind their own business. The area remained very wild.³⁰ The Georgian noble families were absorbed into the aristocracy³¹. There was a tendency, here as elsewhere, under Nikolay II to Russify the area, but St Petersburg's hand lay lightly on the Caucasus.

The Bolsheviks, however, did not leave things alone. The communist policy on nationalities, neatly summed up by Stalin's famous apothegm, was "nationalist in form, socialist in content". That is, national groupings – all carefully enumerated³² – could wear their local costumes and have their national dance troupes, but all real power was in the hand of the communists and they spoke as one. The borders and existence of the national homelands, which were the political embodiment of the policy, were constantly changed. These changes in the Stalin and Khrushchev periods

³⁰ An entertaining book by a British mountaineer who explored the area in the late Nineteenth Century described the habits of the Svans in northern Georgia. In essence, living in their fortified villages, their immediate reaction when they saw a stranger approaching was to open fire. The Cossacks down the valley stayed quietly in their posts. (Freshfield, Douglas W: *The Exploration of the Caucasus*; 2 Vols London; Edward Arnold 1902)

³¹ The famous example is Prince Bagration from the Georgian (and Abkhaz too, after a dynastic marriage in the Tenth Century) royal family who commanded one of the armies at the Battle of Borodino.

³² In the communist days an individual was classified both in *citizenship* (Soviet) and *nationality* (eg Chechen, Kabardin, Georgian, Russian etc). Official documents recorded both. All nationality designations were "pure": that is, it was not possible, despite the fact that many people actually were of mixed origin, to be classified as Russian/Chechen or German/Ukrainian or any other combination. This fact, often overlooked in discussions of the national issue in the USSR, made the whole mix look appear to be much more distinct than it actually was.

have borne their poisonous fruits today. Indeed, it is generally true that, while most of the post-USSR conflicts in the Caucasus (and elsewhere) have historical roots, *most of these roots don't go much deeper than the 1920s*. That is to say that, if Karabakh had been part of Armenia in the first place, it would be no more troublesome today that is Nakhichevan, which was another disputed area. Likewise, without Abkhazia's subordination to Georgia in 1931, there would be no war there either. The world, and the USSR successor states, recognized the 1991 borders. Had the USSR broken up in 1930, for example, the world would have recognized quite different borders – all Transcaucasia would be one country, Crimea would be part of Russia, Belarus would be somewhat smaller, Moldova would not exist at all.

But Stalin did what he did, and so did Khrushchev³³. The beginning of the present round of Georgian-Abkhaz troubles was a rally in March 1989 in which the participants demanded that Abkhazia be given the status of an SSR – in other words, status as a union republic and therefore with equal standing to Georgia. The Karabakh wars are an attempt to reverse the decision, of the British first and then of Stalin, to award this Armenian-populated area to Azerbaijan. A Kurdish Autonomous area enjoyed a passing existence and briefly re-appeared in June 1992 after the Karabakhians established the “Lachin corridor” linking Karabakh with Armenia, when a group claiming to represent them declared the restoration of the Kurdish area and its secession from Azerbaijan.³⁴ The Chechen-Ingush ASSR was abolished when Stalin deported the populations to Central Asia in 1944 and some of its territory was given to Ossetians. This sparked off fighting between returned Ingush and Ossetians now occupying their land in 1992. The Mezkhethians, deported from Georgia by Stalin, were the victims of massacres in Uzbekistan in 1989 and today are miserable refugees in Moscow.³⁵ For

³³ Most of the borders are Stalin's work. Khrushchev's two contributions are the inclusions of the territories north of the Terek into Chechnya and the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine from the RSFSR.

³⁴ Nothing since has been heard of this and it was probably nothing but an attempt to manufacture a justification for the Lachin Corridor being taken out of Azerbaijan.

³⁵ They are indeed miserable today. Most of them are still refugees in Moscow to which the Soviet government evacuated them. Another Georgian pamphlet, this time from the Shevardnadze period, while declaring that Georgia throughout history has had the “honourable and at the same time tragic destiny of sheltering various ethnic groups” regrets that “The return of the Meskhs-Muslims is a complicated and controversial business”. So, they stay in Moscow. (Staff of the Head of the Georgian Republic: *On Ethnic Composition of the Population of the Georgian Republic*; Tbilisi; 1993; p 11). This pamphlet, by the way, is altogether much soberer than the Menteshashvili (see note 46) one although it sticks to the same general line that there never was any trouble in Georgia except that which was imported. It also completely avoids all mention of the Gamsakhurdia period. Thus no reason for the troubles, other than Russian meddling or the evil intentions of communists is presented to the (presumably Western) reader. Gamsakhurdia is gone, but it doesn't look as if things are much better for the Mezkhethians under Shevardnadze. The law of December 1997 on the rights of people repressed in Georgia during the communist period states, in Article 1: “This law extends to the citizens of Georgia, who were subjected to political reprisals on the territory of Georgia between 25 February 1921 and 28 October 1990. This law does not extend to ethnic groups or the people belonging to such, that

some reason, when the Chechen-Ingush Republic was re-established by Khrushchev in 1957, traditional Russian territories north of the Terek River were included. This hasn't yet sparked off violence, but it will. Thus *the past is present everywhere in the Caucasus*.

The greatest disaster to befall the peoples of the Caucasus was surely the deportations. The invading Germans had managed to get some distance into the Caucasus in their drive to secure the Baku oilfields (among the largest in the world then). When they were pushed out, Stalin took it into his head that entire peoples had been guilty of collaboration and were to be punished. Accordingly the police rounded up all the Chechens, Ingush, Karachay and Balkars³⁶ they could find and deported them to Central Asia. It is likely that the mortality, *for the transit alone*, was in the order of twenty percent. This is neither forgotten nor forgiven.

NATIONAL DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

When communism disappeared as the ostensible uniting ideology of all these peoples (assuming that it had ever been effective), other ideas appeared. The effects of these ideas have been tragic and deeply destructive for the Caucasus; thousands of lives have been sacrificed to them. They are the root causes of the wars and disastrous post-1991 experience. The Georgians dream of the time when Georgia ruled the area and all non-Georgians bowed to Georgian power. The Armenians are animated by a nightmare: no Armenian can be left under Turkic rule. The Azerbaijanis are torn – are they Turks dreaming of pan-Turanism or are they not? The Mountaineers dream of their Mountain Republic and freedom at last.

Many people argue that nationalism broke up the USSR, or at least was a very large contributing factor to the stresses that broke it up. The author does not agree that nationalism was the leading factor but certainly its effects were important³⁷. It is worth talking about the *type* of nationalism that was current in the USSR because it was this phenotype of the genus nationalism that was very important in determining the first few years of the post-USSR in several of the successor states.

were deported during 25 February 1921 and 28 October 1990, whose order for rehabilitation will be determined separately.” (OSCE Mission to Georgia, Activity Report No 3/98 (16-28 Feb 1998). So, for the Mezkhethians – wait longer. For a good summary on the Mezkhethians see Charles Blandy: “The Meskhetians: Turks or Georgians?”; Conflict Studies Research Centre; Royal Military Academy Sandhurst; Camberley, UK; S34 Feb 1998.

³⁶ The figures of Caucasian peoples living in Kazakhstan suggest that the deportations took in more peoples than that. (See note 15).

³⁷ A long subject this, and one for which a final answer is still many years away. The author believes, however, that Marxism-Leninism had simply reached the limit of its possibilities in all areas and that that is what started the process. The actual breakup of the USSR, however, he believes to have been a very much more contingent event and one which could have turned out otherwise with different actors and different events.

Marxism-Leninism holds that the principal determinant of the relationships between humans is their position in the structure of production relations – their *class* in short. National feelings, therefore, are supposed to be secondary to class relations and, over time, will be displaced by class-consciousness. However, during the Civil War, the Bolsheviks needed a policy to win over or neutralize the national groups that were trying to create their own independent states. As the collaboration between the Bolsheviks and the Emirate of the North Caucasus illustrates³⁸, such a policy could help the Bolsheviks win the war. So their dilemma was how to appeal to nationalist/independentist sympathies without actually permitting real independence. The solution was found in Nationalities Commissar Stalin’s famous apothegm “nationalist in form, socialist in content” and the historical fiction that all parts of the USSR had voluntarily united. In other words, a given nationality could be as nationalist as it wanted so long as that nationalism was carefully channelled and constrained by Marxist-Leninists. Or, to put it bluntly, *a nation could be only as nationalist as made no practical difference*.³⁹ Accordingly, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was nominally a federal structure of national areas.⁴⁰ At the same time, citizenship (always “Soviet”) and nationality (any one of several hundred) categorized every Soviet citizen. Every official document bore these two qualifiers.⁴¹

However, as we have seen in the history section of this Handbook, the USSR was actually a highly centralized state in which the centre never stopped fiddling with the borders of the national statelets. The centre also fiddled with the very definitions and numbers of the peoples of the USSR: for example, in 1926 there were said to be 194 ethonyms, 99 in 1939, 109 in 1959, 104 in 1970 and 1979 and 128 in 1989.⁴² The Soviet nationality policy therefore had three effects that were to shape the actual phenotype of the nationalism genotype that was revealed in 1991:

³⁸ See page 16.

³⁹ The Sultan-Galiyev affair in 1923 nailed the issue down with Stalinist finality. Mirza Sultan-Galiyev was the leader of the Tatar Bolsheviks. He sought more autonomy for Tatarstan and, by extension, for the other national groups. He was condemned at the XII Party Conference in 1923 for plotting against the security of the state and expelled from the Party. He was arrested in 1936 and disappeared in the purges. His “crime” was “bourgeois nationalism”. His expulsion set the limits of Stalin’s policy.

⁴⁰ For example, in descending order of status, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Adygey Autonomous Oblast, the Ust-Ordynsk Buryat Autonomous Okrug. These different formations had different ostensible rights and statuses. But, in practice, the Party ran everything so most of this was for show.

⁴¹ For example, anyone applying for a visa to visit Russia today will find these two categories presented for his puzzlement. (For some inexplicable reason visas and customs entry documents to the Russian Federation are still the old Soviet ones with all the now irrelevant questions about printed material and meaningless currency control information).

⁴² 172 in the 1994 mini-census. The pattern is clear: the system began in the 1926 census, Stalin was successfully creating Homo *Sovieticus* in 1939 which implied the disappearance of groups as class consciousness displaced national consciousness. Khrushchev was freer, Brezhnev returned to building Soviet Man and the pressures were reducing in 1989 and had vanished by 1994. (Emil Pain and Andrey Susarov quoted in *Rossiysikiye Vesti*, 30 Nov 1997).

- Every individual was made aware of his ethnic identity (even when it was irrelevant or even false⁴³) every time he met officialdom.
- Every individual was reminded, every time he met officialdom, that the Communist Party actually ruled and that any real national aspirations were treason.
- The fact that nationalism was both *encouraged* and *prohibited* at the same time prevented nationalist consciousness from evolving.

From the perspective of the 1920s, the Soviet nationality policy was quite clever in that it channelled nationalist feelings into areas where they did not challenge Party control. But it required continual effort from the centre to suppress any desire to *act* on nationalist definitions. Therefore, over a longer period, the contradiction of Stalin's policy became apparent – the peoples of the USSR were constantly reminded of their otherness and constantly prevented from acting on it. It was the worst possible combination – an itch that one cannot scratch. Thus, the Stalin policy had constructed a time bomb.

But what really made the bomb dangerous was that the policy prevented the evolution that has taken place, for example, in Europe. Thus, what was preserved in the USSR, frozen as it were, was the Nineteenth Century notion of nationalism – *one people; one language; one religion; one territory*. Another characteristic of this obsolete form of nationalism is that it is *exclusive*. The rights of one nation are generally exclusive of another's and, often, contraposed to it. The question of whether Alsace-Lorraine should be in Germany or France has killed quite a few people in its time, but today, in the context of the European Union, free travel and international corporations, it hardly seems to be an issue at all. But the question of what country Karabakh should be in is an issue today for which no compromise is possible – either Armenians or Azerbaijanis must lose everything. And that question has killed a lot of people.

This obsolete nationalism, founded on exclusivity, the enemy view and the cultivation of grievance, is the form of nationalism that was taken out of the deep freeze when the USSR collapsed. This is the intellectual foundation of the wars in the Caucasus. We return to the statement of a Georgian politician whom the author met in 1990⁴⁴. And no better example of this old-fashioned thinking can be given than his opening statement that the primary element of an individual's consciousness was national origin⁴⁵ and, to give authority to his statement, that he quoted *Hegel*.

Therefore, when the Union Republics of the USSR found themselves suddenly independent in 1991, the model that they had for state building was that given by

⁴³ The falsity comes from the fact that, as a matter of fact, very few people are ethnically "pure". This is especially true among the Russians, very few of whom have four "Russian" grandparents. Nonetheless, the bureaucratic system insisted that every generation write itself down as "pure" Russians, Jews, Germans or Chukchi or whatever.

⁴⁴ See page 40.

⁴⁵ What would people today say it was? Gender, sexual orientation, race?

exclusive nationalism – one people, one language, one religion and one territory. But, in the Caucasus, where one can hardly find a village that is mono-ethnic, *a mono-ethnic state can only be built by murder or deportation*. The dreams and nightmares of selective national histories provided the fuse for the bomb Stalin had built.

Georgia – King David the Builder and Queen Tamar

The Georgian dream is reasonably completely summed up in a quotation from a 1992 pamphlet devoted to countering claims that Ossetians and Abkhazians might have for independence:

The most important fact to be pointed out is that when Georgia was declared an independent state on the 26th of May 1918, its frontiers contained only a part of those territories which used to belong to it since the time of formation of the Georgian ethnos and statehood, ie for some millennia. Not an inch of this land which is now the country of Georgia, has ever been conquered by it, and the national minorities inhabiting its territory, except the Abkhaz, have lived together with the Georgians from time immemorial when they had come to Georgia in search of better life and shelter and safety, leaving their homelands.⁴⁶

Now the Georgians are a very ancient people and, as far as anyone knows, have lived in their present territory for many thousands of years. But a *self-conscious* Georgian ethnos is somewhat more recent and, as the following will make clear, a Georgian *state* controlling the territory of present-day Georgia (or the Georgia of 1918-1921) is much shorter yet. Also, notice in the quotation the assumption that 1918-1921 Georgia (not substantially different in territory from today's Georgia) is considered to be "only a part" of that ancient Georgia. Here is an illustration of the importance of history – or, more correctly, historical myths – in the catastrophe that has been modern Georgia. This passage, and the many others just like it at the time, were the fuse for Stalin's bomb.

The first attempt at establishing a unified Georgian kingdom occurred in the Fifth Century under King Vakhtang Gorgasiani, but Persian and Arab conquests checkmated that. The Greater Georgia to which the author is referring existed for about 200 years⁴⁷ and followed upon the overthrow of Arab rulers. King Bagrat III (*reg* 975-1014) succeeded in uniting the numerous principalities into one Georgian state. Tbilisi, however, was only recovered from the Muslims in 1122 by David the Builder (*reg* 1089-1125). Greater Georgia reached its apotheosis under his granddaughter, Queen Tamar (*reg* 1184-1213). During that time, one Georgian state ruled most of the South Caucasus and its power stretched into today's Russia and Anatolia. The eastern part of this Greater Georgian state was destroyed by the Mongol

⁴⁶ Note how precisely this fits the definition of exclusive nationalism given above. Introduction, by Prof Levan Alexidze to Avtandil Menteshashvili: *Some National and Ethnic Problems in Georgia*; Samshoblo Publishing House; Tbilisi 1992.

⁴⁷ This of course begs the question of what was happening in the area in pre-literate days. For example were the Colchians Georgians (Kartvelians) or Abkhaz? And how politically organized was Colchis anyway? Even less is known of Iberia, which was another name for the area.

invasions. A remnant of a united Georgia survived in western Georgia until Alexander I (*reg* 1412-43). After his death, the kingdom was divided among his sons and, from then until the Twentieth Century, the territory of today's Georgia was divided into numerous kingdoms and principalities ever fearing danger from destructive invasions from the south.

The root of the chauvinist Georgian position today is the notion that this Greater Georgia of eight hundred years ago is the "true Georgia". It was precisely this sort of talk, very common in the Gamsakhurdia period – indeed the official version – that sparked off wars of independence by the Ossetians and the Abkhaz. Exactly the same thing happened in the first independent Georgia of the Twentieth Century and, in its short existence, it had wars with the Ossetians and the Abkhaz as well as border scuffles with Armenia.⁴⁸ And thus history repeated itself in the second independent Georgia.

Few Georgians can bring themselves either to admit the Georgian responsibility for the disaster of the second independent Georgia of the Twentieth Century or can they bring themselves to understand why Ossetians and Abkhazians might feel a little uncomfortable in a "Georgia for Georgians". Such statements as "Nature has outlined the borders of Georgia and history has confirmed them"⁴⁹ would naturally make Abkhazians or Ossetians nervous about how they would be accommodated. So it is all explained away. The pamphlet quoted above is at pains to argue that Abkhazia *ought* to be ruled by Georgia today because 1) there are many ancient churches there⁵⁰ 2) because King David ruled Abkhazia⁵¹. The troubles in Abkhazia and Ossetia (both in 1920 and more recently) are put down to communist machinations.

It is difficult to know how strong the dream of a Greater Georgia is today in 1998. Tbilisi has many problems that are more pressing – Abkhazia and Ossetia have effectively seceded, Ajaria very much goes its own way. As of the spring of 1998, the assassination attempt on Shevardnadze has induced the Georgian authorities to attempt to disarm the people of Mingrelia where Zviad Gamsakhurdia's supporters have their base. More fighting in Abkhazia has re-driven out all those who were driven out in the first wars. All this trouble in the heartland makes the idea of re-

⁴⁸ "The free and independent Social-Democratic government of Georgia will ever remain in my memory as a classical example of an imperialistic minor nationality both in relation to its seizure of territory within its own borders and in relation to the bureaucratic tyranny inside the state. Its chauvinism exceeds the highest limits." (Carl Eric Bechhofer quoted in Denikin's *Russia and the Caucasus, 1919-1920*, London 1921). Menteshashvili gives several reports of conversations in which British officers go to Georgian officials to complain about the way Abkhazians or Ossetians are being treated and are given a history lecture by the rather patronizing Georgian interlocutor.

⁴⁹ Menteshashvili *Op Cit*, p 33.

⁵⁰ But the Abkhaz, like most Circassians, were Christian before Arab and Turkish conquests turned them to Islam.

⁵¹ But actually, he was joined by descent to the Abkhaz ruling house.

creating the glories of Queen Tamar rather hypothetical. But there are still many Georgian actors who hanker after that.

Thus Georgian chauvinist behaviour, informed and fed by the dream of a Greater Georgia into which all non-Georgians had come, by invitation – an invitation which was now revoked – was the greatest single cause of the attempts by Ossetians and Abkhazians to get out of a state which seemed to have no place for them.

Armenia – Greater Armenia and the Tragedy

Historical Armenia was much bigger than the state we see on the map today. The Armenians are a very ancient people, their territory was once much greater and they were more powerful than they are today. Like Georgia, it was alternately a prey of the great powers around it and independent. Its high point was about 2000 years ago when it controlled quite a large territory stretching into Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. It was later conquered by the Romans and then by the Sassanid Persians. It regained independence and adopted Christianity in 303 (the first nation to do so). The Armenian kingdom was conquered by the Arabs in 642, but regained its independence in 886. The Seljuk Turks conquered it in the Eleventh Century and from thence to the Twentieth Century, Armenia was never again independent. Armenians generally welcomed the Russian advances in the Nineteenth Century and, the Ottoman Turkish Empire's suspicion of their motives triggered the tragedies of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. So, like the Georgians, the Armenians have a memory of a time when they were a great power in their area.⁵²

The other great historical memory for Armenians the world over is the massacre of 1915. At the outbreak of the First World War there were about one and a half million Armenians living in the Russian Empire (the border of which included some territories now in Turkey) and about two million living in the territories of ancient Armenia in the Ottoman Empire. Life for the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire had always had its difficulties for the small, economically active Christian population but it became insupportable during the wars between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. It was easy for the Ottoman rulers to assume that Armenians were effectively a fifth column for the Russians and it is probably true that Armenians looked to Russian victories for deliverance. Massacres followed the Russian victory in the war of 1877-78. Intervention by the European powers on behalf of the Armenians in 1895 impaired relations and tens of thousands perished in massacres then. The coming to power of the "Young Turks" in 1908 worsened matters for Armenians and more were killed in disturbances, by now almost unceasing. But the worst was yet to come. During the war the "Young Turks" had become imbued with a notion of building a new Turkish-dominated state – the Armenians therefore came to

⁵² There are indications from time to time that the Dashnak Party would love to raise the question of Armenian expansion into Anatolia – especially to Kars, Erzerum and Mt Ararat – but knows that it is impossible.

be seen not as one religious minority among many living in a multi-national empire but as a hostile *nation* standing in the way of the Turkish *nation*.

The Turkish campaign against the Russians at the start of the First World War was disastrous – in an attempt to break through to the Caspian Sea, the Turkish armies suffered heavy defeats, in part at the hands of Armenian formations fighting in the Russian Army. Many of these were former Ottoman subjects who had fled into Russian Armenia for safety.

Now Istanbul decided that the Armenians must be dealt with. After the Ottoman victories in the spring of 1915, troops re-occupied some of the Armenian areas that had been captured by the Russians. Those Armenians who had not retreated with the Russian armies were massacred. Armenian troops serving in the Ottoman forces were disarmed and many put to death. The Turkish government ordered the deportation of the Armenian population, not just in the war zone, but elsewhere in the Ottoman territories, to Syria and Mesopotamia. In the course of this forced exodus through desolate territory, hundreds of thousands were killed, starved to death or died of disease.

At the end of the process most of the two million or so Armenians who had been living in the Ottoman Empire were dead or in exile. Between 500,000 and a million and a half died in what the Armenians insist on calling “the Genocide” – indeed the first genocide of the Twentieth Century.⁵³ The Turkish government has never accepted responsibility or ever admitted that such an *intentional* slaughter took place. Many Armenians are dedicated to preserving the memory of the disaster and having it commemorated and admitted to by Ankara.

No Armenian today can ever forget this. Great efforts are devoted to keeping the memory of the massacres alive and in getting world governments to acknowledge it. The Armenians of the Russia Empire have also their massacres to remember – chiefly in 1905 in today’s Azerbaijan. With all this heavy weight of history, no Armenian can look at an Azerbaijani – whom he will consider to be just another “Turk” – with equanimity.

Azerbaijan – Turanians, Muslims or Albanians?

Azerbaijan, unlike its two neighbours, has no strong national myth. Most ethnologists appear to agree that the Azeris are the turkicized descendants of the original inhabitants with a considerable degree of intermarriage with Turkic rulers. But this can cause some confusion today: what are Azerbaijanis? The original inhabitants of an ancient territory, or recently arrived (recently by Caucasian standards that is) Turks?

The ancients knew the territory as Albania but had little real knowledge of it. In the days of Armenia’s greatest power, under Tigranes II the Great (*reg* 95-55 BC),

⁵³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gives a cautious 600,000; Armenian sources claim up to one and a half million.

Albania was under Armenian power and Armenian cultural ascendancy endured, including conversion to Christianity, until the Arab conquests severed the connection and began the conversion of the population to Islam. Turkic influences appeared with the Seljuk Turks in the Eleventh Century and, from then until the Eighteenth century, Azerbaijan was subject to waves of Turko-Mongol conquerors and the language became Turkic. With the assassination of Nadir Shah, the Persian ruler, in 1747, central power dissipated in Azerbaijan and a number of quasi-independent khanates appeared. It was these small, fragmented and divided entities which Russia conquered in two wars with Persia in the early part of the Nineteenth Century. The present border with Iran was established by the Treaty of Turkmanchay that left many Azeris on the Persian side of the border.

It cannot be said that there was much national consciousness among the Azeris a century ago. In any case, today's Azerbaijan constituted two *guberniy* – Baku and Elizavetpol – in the Empire. Were Azerbaijanis Turks or Albanians? Their adoption of Shiism in the Sixteenth Century set them apart from the Sunni Turks, but their language attached them to them. But the question hardly came up: under the Russian Empire, Azerbaijan was a fragmented backwater until the discovery of oil in Baku in the Nineteenth Century. This transformed Baku into a typical boomtown and attracted numerous non-Azeris – especially Armenians – to the world's first oil rush. The combination of fast money in the capital and poverty in the countryside exacerbated strains and violence broke out in 1905, showing itself in fighting between Armenians and Azeris. Nonetheless, the 1905 revolution started the process of national consciousness among the Azeris and Azerbaijan's oldest political party, Mussavat⁵⁴, dates from that year.

Azerbaijan's modern history really starts with the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. Bolsheviks were strong in Baku and declared a Soviet government in November 1917 but it held little sway outside the city. In May 1918 the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic was proclaimed when the South Caucasian Federation collapsed and this government was installed in Baku when Turkish forces occupied the city as the Bolsheviks were chased out. As far as the Turks were concerned, Azerbaijan was nothing but an eastern province of Turkey, but, gradually the idea developed that there might be something called an "Azeri" as distinct from a "Turk"⁵⁵. When the Turks left after the Armistice, the British took over, and, when they left in August 1919, the new state, which had hardly been truly independent up to then, had to face the Red Army. It invaded in April 1920 and swiftly occupied the country. The importance of this period is that it established the idea of an "Azerbaijan" state which

⁵⁴ Still in existence in opposition to Aliyev, suffering some censorship and not permitted to run candidates in the 1995 parliamentary elections.

⁵⁵ Turkey itself was undergoing change to a "European" type of state of the "Turkish" people. Under the Ottomans, actual Turkic people had been relatively few and relatively powerless. The chief ministers, and the main army, were all slaves of the Padishah and, for the most part, from the Balkans or Circassia.

eventually did appear, first as the Azerbaijan SSR in 1936 and, thanks to the collapse of the USSR, as the Republic of Azerbaijan which is recognized today.

This history is, therefore, very different from that of Georgia, Armenia or Abkhazia – all these can remember a period when they ruled themselves as recognized states. All Azerbaijanis can point to, unless they want to found themselves as a latter-day Albania⁵⁶, is that short period of independence under the shadow of occupying armies.

Under Soviet rule, Azerbaijan underwent the process familiar to other “national republics” in the USSR. Ethnic Azeris were given prominence (although always under Party tutelage), national cultural structures were created, the language was taught. To a degree, therefore, the modern Azerbaijan “nationality” was created in this period out of the vague stirrings which had been before. An important ingredient in Azeri self-consciousness was the Soviet attempt to create an “Azerbaijan People's Government” in Iran after the war. Western Allied pressure forced the Soviet troops out, but this set Azeris to thinking about what they had in common with the Azeris who lived across the border in another country.

Therefore, when the Soviet Empire started to collapse, Azerbaijan differed from its two South Caucasian neighbours in having no “imperial myth”. The land was very old, but it had seldom ruled itself. Azeris were unsure whether they were Albanians or Turks, uncertain of their natural territories and, at the same time, suffering from all the leftovers of seventy years of communism. Or was Islam to be the defining characteristic of the new country?⁵⁷ These quandaries were reflected in the history of the People's Front of Azerbaijan, which split between an Islamic wing and a secular wing. The PFA was in further disarray after the Soviet Army's violent entry into Baku in January 1990 (after more massacres of Armenians) and the subsequent arrest of many of its members. When the USSR dissolved, the last communist party boss, Ayaz Mutalibov, became President of the new country. But, as Baku continued to lose the war in Karabakh, tensions mounted and he was forced to resign in March 1992. The new President was Abulfaz Elchibay, the leader of the PFA. He sought an Azerbaijan, unconnected to the Russian Federation and the CIS, close to Turkey and to the Azerbaijanis in Iran. He was overthrown in a military mutiny in the summer of 1993. Heydar Aliyev, another former Communist Party boss, was invited to Baku from his native Nakhichevan, elected President in October 1993 and has managed to retain power ever since.

Thus Azerbaijan is somewhat a country adrift. It exists today because Stalin decided that it should. Its borders are those that Stalin gave it (including Karabakh – something it would have been better off without). Its future is uncertain and its post 1991 history has not been very stable. It has lost a war that has led to the occupation

⁵⁶ Actually, we can watch that idea being put out for display. See www.scf.usc.edu/~baguirov/azeri.htm which speaks of Azerbaijan as an extremely ancient culture – perhaps the *most* ancient etc etc.

⁵⁷ Always a pull among Muslims is the international – or, better, a-national – *dar-al-islam*.

of a large part of its western territory and the creation of hundreds of thousands of refugees. It does, however, have a great deal of oil.

The uncertainties of the Azerbaijan self-identification, combined with the tensions of the losing war in Karabakh, have acted to overthrow government after government and paralyzed activity in independent Azerbaijan. Present stability seems to depend very much on President Aliyev who, although fully in charge, is 74 years old. Much hope is invested in oil revenues.

The North Caucasians – Mountaineer Republic

The dream in the North Caucasus is of freedom – an independent Mountaineer Republic. The dream is about two centuries old. The Mountaineers were free although disunited in 1800 before Russian advances made them look to their defences. And, had both the western and eastern Mountaineers been able to unite in resistance, instead of fighting the Russians, as they did, in sequence, it is possible that there would be a Mountaineer Republic today.

There have been at least three attempts since then to put the dream into reality. First were the wars in the Nineteenth Century – the Murid Wars in the east and individual wars in Circassia and Abkhazia. But the Russian Empire triumphed. Then, when it collapsed, there were proclamations of a Mountaineer Republic right across the North Caucasus. But the Soviet Empire triumphed. When the Soviet Empire broke up in 1991, there was another attempt. This effort has proved to be the most successful and today both Chechnya and Abkhazia are *de facto* independent.

In April 1991 a founding meeting of the Assembly of the Mountain People of the Caucasus was held in Sukhumi, Abkhazia. That November, delegates from the North Caucasus and Abkhazia formed the Confederation of Caucasian Mountain Peoples. And next year, in October the Congress of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus met in Grozny with delegates from Chechnya, Adygeya, Abkhazia, Ingushetia, Ossetia, Dagestan, Kabarda and Circassia and delegations from the Karachay, Akin Chechens⁵⁸ and Tatars. From the beginning, the Confederation had a military wing headed by the Chechen Shamil Basayev and fighters from the Confederation helped the Ossetians and Abkhaz in their wars against the Georgians. In December 1994, it called for volunteers to help Dudayev and Chechnya after Moscow's troops invaded.

With the beginning of the Russo-Chechen war, we approach somewhat of a mystery about the Confederation. After many threats to mobilize volunteers to fight for Chechnya, it did nothing very much. Many volunteers had gone to Abkhazia to fight the Georgian forces – the Chechen force had indeed been led by Shamil Basayev – so the Confederation was not making empty threats. In the event, Musa Shanibov resigned as President of the Confederation on 17 December. Then the Confederation

⁵⁸ The Chechens living in Dagestan.

reappeared, with a new chairman, the Chechen Yusup Soslambekov⁵⁹, and called for a federal troop pullout in March 1996. But the old Confederation seems today to be dead.

Today Chechnya is the centre of gravity of the Mountaineer Republic-in-being. Jokhar Dudayev saw an independent Chechnya as a first step towards a Mountaineer Republic and such a desire was always present in the movement for Chechen independence from Moscow. The second congress of the Chechen National Congress in June 1991 authorized him to say:

The union of all Caucasian nations on an equal basis is the only possible way for the future. As we hold a central geographic, strategic and economic position in the Caucasus and have the necessary human potential, we must be the initiators of this future union.⁶⁰

Many Chechen leaders have formed their own groups that are, at least officially, committed to a Mountaineer Republic. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Dudayev's immediate successor, convened something called the Caucasus Confederation in August 1997. Attended, it was claimed, by representatives from the North Caucasian republics, as well as Georgia and Azerbaijan, the organization seems to be entirely headed by Chechens. Similarly, Salman Raduyev heads an organization with pan-Caucasus aims. In April 1998, Basayev was elected chairman of the Congress of the Chechen and Dagestani peoples; this organization advocates strengthening the unity of the peoples of the North Caucasus and encouraging the spread of Islam throughout the Caucasus. However, the pressing questions in Chechnya today are domestic – it is a poor country, ruined by war and divided in many different ways. Seriously to push for a Mountaineer Republic would appear to require more unity than Chechnya currently has. But, it is unlikely that the dream will die.

Therefore, the dream of the Mountaineer Republic and the memory of its early death at the hands of Russian Whites and Reds and the Georgians after 1917, animated the hearts of many Mountaineers leading them to fight for the Republic in Abkhazia and Ossetia against Georgians stiffening the resistance of the Chechens against Russia. It is, as it were, “the other shoe” of Chechen independence.

DIASPORAS

A complicating factor about the Caucasus which brings Caucasian concerns home, as it were, are the communities in diaspora. About as many Armenians live outside Armenia as in it. About one million Chechens, Circassians and Abkhazians live outside of the CIS (mostly in former Ottoman territories). In some cases, these communities are influential in the countries in which they live and, like well-

⁵⁹ Soslambekov, Dudayev's cousin, had been the chairman of the Confederation's parliament. For some reason, he fell out with Dudayev, but after the Russian invasion, he resisted Moscow.

⁶⁰ Marie Bennigsen Broxup: “After the Putsch, 1991” in Marie Bennigsen Broxup (Ed): *The North Caucasus Barrier*; London; Hurst & Co; 1992, p 233.

organized single-interest groups everywhere, can have an influence on their host governments out of proportion to their numbers.

Armenians were always a far-flung people in the Middle-East but it was the massacres in the Ottoman territories which produced so large an emigration of Armenians. There are about 6,500,00 Armenians worldwide with only half of them living in Armenia itself. There are about 650,000 in the USA, 70,000 in Canada, about 120,000 in South America, 315,000 in Europe, and most of the rest in the Middle East.⁶¹ There are 532,000 in the Russian Federation. The great unifying issue for the Armenian diaspora has been to keep alive the memory of the massacres in the Ottoman territories – to get Western governments to commemorate them or make statements aimed pressuring Turkey to an admission. After 1991, of course, emphasis was placed on increasing support for independent Armenia.⁶² However, another issue might be appearing as a result of the Caspian oil question. Armenians, whether in Armenia or in Karabakh, at present are slated to receive nothing from the finds. No pipelines will pass through Armenian-inhabited territory. There is already pressure in the US to support Azerbaijan at the expense of Armenia.⁶³ Because some fear that Azerbaijan will use its income to obtain weapons to settle the Karabakh issue by war, pressure on Western governments can only increase from the Armenian diaspora.

The Russian conquest of the Mountaineers in the Nineteenth Century was accomplished with much brutality. Not surprisingly, after the Russians finally won the last of the wars, many Mountaineers preferred to emigrate to Muslim areas. Many Circassians and Abkhazians left and some Chechens. So many Abkhazians left, in fact, that very few remain in their native land. The bulk of the emigrants went to the Ottoman Empire and are today to be found in its successor states. The North Caucasian diaspora has its influence, especially in Jordan where three of the 80 seats in the lower house of parliament are reserved for Circassians and Chechens. Perhaps the greatest influence, however, comes from the fact that Chechens and Circassians form the personal bodyguard of King Hussein of Jordan. During the Russo-Chechen war, the Chechen diaspora supported the Chechen fighters with money and volunteers. Wounded fighters were often given medical treatment in Turkey or Jordan and the North Caucasian communities do what they can to advance the diplomatic cause of an independent Chechnya.

⁶¹ *Áãðãú Ðĩññèè Ýíòèèèĩãàèÿ.*

⁶² Armenia is the third-largest per capita recipient of US aid in the world (*New Europe*, 28 Dec – 3 Jan 98).

⁶³ The *ur*-source of this line (as well as blaming Russia for everything that happens) is the Washington-based Center for Security Policy (www.security-policy.org).

NORTH CAUCASIAN DIASPORA TO MIDDLE EAST⁶⁴

PEOPLE	TURKEY	SAUDI ARABIA	IRAQ	IRAN	JORDAN	SYRIA
ABAZIN	21,000					
ABKHAZ	21,000					
ADYGEY	260,000		11,000		58,000	35,000
KABARDIN	250,000	17,000				
LAZ	33,000					
JEWISH TAT				120,000		
MUSLIM TAT				140,000		
CHECHEN					3,000	

SOVIET LEGACIES

It is very easy to describe the Soviet occupation of the Caucasus as nothing but a catastrophe for the inhabitants. We have seen the bad side above – the extinction of national freedoms, the imposition of communist terror, the deportation of peoples, and everywhere we see the industrial slums, urban wastes and pollution left behind by communism. It is fruitless to try and calculate who did best or worst from communist rule. Tendentious histories produced after 1991 often try to make the point that the author’s people have suffered the most.⁶⁵ It is probably most accurate to say that all suffered from the communists and all in much the same way.⁶⁶ Some of the bad legacies left by the communists have been alluded to above. The borders, arbitrary and ever-changing, have caused wars. The Soviet nationality policy ensured the survival of exclusivist, grievance nationalism. Other problems are common to the former USSR – obsolete polluting industrial facilities, which are of no use to anyone, terrible pollution from extractive industries and a psychic legacy of the vicious attempts to stamp out personal initiative. All this is as true of the Caucasus as anywhere else in the post-communist countries.

⁶⁴ Information from the Joshua Project 2000 (<http://www.xc.org/Brigada/joshua/jp21all.html>). This is an evangelical Christian attempt to enumerate the principal Non-Christian peoples of the world. This list is neither accurate nor complete. For example, there are more Abkhazians in exile than the 21,000 in Turkey – so many left that they became a minority in their own land. The population numbers seem to be high – higher, for example than those given in the USSR 1989 Census. The table should be taken as a first order approximation of this significant diaspora.

⁶⁵“Of all the Soviet republics, only Georgia suffered losses proportionately comparable to those of Azerbaijan in terms of deportations, imprisonments, and mass killings during the purges of the 1930s”. (Tadeusz Swietochowski <http://www-scf.usc.edu/~baguirov/azeri.htm>). Possibly true as far as it goes but there was no Ukrainian-style famine in the South Caucasus (although there was in the Kuban). Neither Georgians nor Azeris were deported as a nation in the way the Chechens or Crimean Tatars were. The communist-caused losses in the small Balkan republics were proportionately very high.

⁶⁶ Including the Russians, of course.

But it has not all been bad. The communists delivered two things to their subjects – literacy and electricity. This has forever changed the life of the suspicious Svans described by Douglas Freshfield a century ago.⁶⁷ However isolated Svanetia may be today, there are roads, telecommunications, electricity and so on. More to the point, the Svans know there is a world out there and many of them have been in it. The same thing goes for everyone else in the Caucasus. These are real changes and their effects must be factored in. In the modern world, it is not easy to be isolated. Isolation may be pure, but a short life expectancy and a general backwardness will accompany it. The effect of the widening of the Caucasians’ world – especially that of the Mountaineers – is yet to be seen.

SUFISM-WAHHABISM – AN ISLAMIC FISSURE

The form of Islam predominant among the Mountaineers is under threat today. It is a dangerous threat. It is not the threat from atheistic communism – such a threat strengthens faith and their religion survived communism well. It is a threat from another form of Islam.

Islam gradually spread into the Eastern Mountaineer’s territories in the Seventeenth and early Nineteenth Centuries. But the real appearance of Islam as a unifying force for the Mountaineers was the arrival of Naqshbandi Sufism in the later Eighteenth Century. Sufism is a version of Islam that emphasizes the direct, mystical knowledge of God, unmediated by a priest. Typically, some eminent man begins a school and a “chain of transmission” from leader to leader passes that particular tradition along. Naqshbandi Sufism was brought to the Caucasus by Sheikh Ismail ash-Shirwani in the later Eighteenth Century. It provided the cement for the Mountaineers of Chechnya and Dagestan in their long fight against the Russians in which the Imam Shamil, who was both temporal and spiritual leader, led them. Naqshbandi Sufism has always been the inspiration for “nationalism” in the east Caucasus and every great leader of the wars has been identified with it and it is visible behind the scenes as an inspiration in the 1994-96 war in Chechnya.

But it is under attack from a Muslim source today. Wahhabi missionaries are seeking to spread their influence through the North Caucasus. Wahhabism is a branch of Islam that takes a very strict reading of monotheism. It was founded in the Eighteenth Century in Arabia and its founder formed an alliance with the ancestor of the ruling family of Saudi Arabia. It is the enforced version of Islam practised there. Although it has moderated somewhat, Wahhabis hold that Muslims who do not conform to Wahhabism’s practices are *infidels* and that public and private observance may legitimately be enforced by the power of the state.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ See note 30.

⁶⁸ A young Dagestan Wahhabi is quoted: “Sufism and the traditions of the Caucasus are inconsistent with Islam”. Later, he is quoted as referring to “true Muslims”. (Sanobar Shermatova: “Said will shave off his beard: Will Dagestan stay in Russia or follow Chechnya’s example?”; *Moskovskiye Novosti*; 8-15 May 1998). Said-Mukhammed Abubakarov (the head of

Therefore Wahhabism is opposed to Sufism: Sufis venerate great saints and make pilgrimages to their graves – indeed it is said that, during the Soviet times when the Haj was impossible, Mountaineers made pilgrimages to sites associated with Sufi saints. To Wahhabis, the veneration of saints violates strict monotheism and is a serious sin. There has already been some violence in Chechnya and Dagestan associated with conflicts between Naqshbandi Sufis and Wahhabis and there have been many protest meetings accompanied by strong language. These passions spring from the fact that all that the Mountaineers have in common is their faith: it has been the *only* uniting principle of the North Caucasus. To attack it is to attack all that they hold dear both in the past and in the future. Now Naqshbandi Sufism is under threat by fellow-Muslims who term it idolatry and call its practitioners infidels. This collision between well-financed outsiders and a traditional practice, sanctioned by ancestral devotion and suffering, can only become more intense. It is a factor operating in Chechnya and Dagestan whose future effects cannot be known.⁶⁹

POST 1985 WARS⁷⁰

More wars, civil wars and general conflicts have been fought in the Caucasus than in any other part of the former USSR. The reader who has stayed with this Handbook this far will not be surprised that this should be so. The following section discusses the Karabakh war in which the Karabakhians are trying to secede from Azerbaijan; the strife between Ingush and Ossetians in North Ossetia over land and the rights of the deported Ingush to their ancestral lands; the Russo-Chechen war, also about secession; the Georgian civil wars occasioned by the chauvinism of Georgia's first President and the gunmen around him; the Abkhaz-Georgian war and the Ossetian-Georgian war. None of these conflicts is fully resolved today although serious violence has been stopped – in some cases for several years. The Caspian oil must travel through this to get to its customers.

the Muslim Spiritual Administration in Makhachkala is quoted, from his point of view: "They have started their own religion and are calling it 'pure Islam'... They are destroying the basis of the culture of the nationalities of Dagestan – tradition." (FBIS-SOV-98-082 23 Mar 98).

⁶⁹ Events in 1998 in the Caucasus involving Wahhabis. On 3 January, Salman Raduyev led a protest against Wahhabism in Grozny in which he threatened violence against them. On 14 February the Azerbaijan National Security Minister accused the intelligence services of unnamed states of supporting Wahhabi activity in Azerbaijan. On 16 March it was reported that 300 Wahhabi families had left Dagestan in face of a ban on their activity and moved to Chechnya. On 14 April there was a grenade attack on a Grozny mosque used by them. In July there was fighting in Gudermes Chechnya between a detachment of Chechen National Guard and forces identified by Chechen official spokesmen as Wahhabis. This caused President Maskhadov to ban Wahhabism from the republic and to expel five foreign individuals whom he accused of creating illegal armed formations and disseminating Wahhabi ideology.

⁷⁰ The most sober, balanced and informed account of these wars which the author has yet seen is: Alexey Zverev: "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994" in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*; Bruno Coppieters (ed.); VUBPRESS, (Vrije Universiteit Brussels), Pleinlaan 2, B - 1050 Brussels; 1996 (<http://www.vub.ac.be/POLI/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0101.htm>).

This section will be the most closely argued because the backgrounds to the wars in the Caucasus are generally unknown to most commentators and analysts in the West. For the most part Westerners know nothing about these areas until another scene of violence and destruction bursts onto their television sets. Commentators, struggling to get the story out, accept whatever they are told by the first participants they spoke to. Many people believe that these wars were either fomented by Moscow or taken advantage of by Moscow for its purposes. Nowhere is this more commonly believed than in the three wars involving Georgia and nowhere are the fundamental facts less known. It is not my intention to attack Georgia or the Georgians but it is a fact that the rulers of the first phase of independent Georgia, in 1991 as in 1917, provoked these wars. No Russian interference was needed. The evidence for Russian interference, as the following will make clear, is mostly assertion. It is significant that Russian interference is assumed by all parties and *always on behalf of the other side*. The fact is that these wars were caused as much by Stalin as by anyone (although Zviad Gamsakhurdia deserves special responsibility). Likewise the Karabakh war is *sui generis* and the Ingush-Ossetian fighting is Stalin's legacy. The Russo-Chechen war was, however, due to a catastrophic misjudgement by Moscow.

Karabakh

The *casus belli* in Karabakh is, quite simply, that it, an area inhabited by Armenians from ancient times, is in Azerbaijan. Armenians have good reasons to fear Azerbaijanis (the massacres of 1905, 1988 and 1990 are not forgotten). Under the USSR, there was nothing they could do about it, but, once the Gorbachev revolution began, the issue came up again. Fighting broke out and the Karabakh fighters, eventually with help from Armenia, won. If they cannot be independent altogether, they want to trade the gains from their fighting for assured security. Azerbaijan has lost about 20 percent of its territory (not counting Karabakh) and the Azerbaijani inhabitants of these territories are now refugees in their own country. Baku wants the territory back and it wants the refugees to be allowed to go home.

Armenians have inhabited Karabakh for many years. As the history section pointed out, it was one of the areas that the Armenian and Azerbaijan states fought over in their brief period of independence after 1917, fought and it is not surprising that trouble began again after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Indeed, fighting began some time before. The sequence of events is pretty plain. The inhabitants of Karabakh never wanted to be in Azerbaijan. So, assuming the greater freedom promised by the Gorbachev reforms, in February 1988 the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (AO) legislature passed a resolution requesting the USSR Supreme Soviet to allow it to join the Armenian SSR. A few days later, and not by coincidence, – tension had been building – mobs attacked Armenians living in Sumgait (a grimy oil town just north of Baku) and murdered many of them. In June the Armenian Supreme Soviet voted to incorporate the Nagorno-Karabakh AO into Armenia, and a couple of days after that, the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet voted to retain it. Then the Karabakh legislature voted to secede from Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijan legislature annulled the decision.

The USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium decreed that Karabakh should remain part of Azerbaijan.

Fighting soon began and got steadily worse that year and the next. The USSR government felt itself bound by the USSR Constitution, which prohibited territorial changes unless all parties agreed and Azerbaijan never did agree. It tried various plans: direct rule was established, troops were sent to keep the combatants apart. Nothing worked. Indeed, all through 1988 and 1989 there were stories of the Karabakh fighters ambushing Soviet troops for their weapons.⁷¹ The fighting began, as elsewhere in the USSR, on a very small scale but there was a gradual increase and evolution of weapons. The Karabakh fighters successfully repulsed Azerbaijan attacks and, as they got more experience and more weapons, gradually took control of Karabakh and pushed the Azerbaijani inhabitants out.

The fighting here (as elsewhere in the former USSR) really took off after the collapse of the USSR. This removed the central power, which, however unsuccessful its attempts to stop it, had at least limited the scale of fighting and it made heavy weapons available to the combatants. In July 1992 the relevant CIS states agreed to divide up the Soviet Armed Forces' weaponry so as to accord with the CFE Treaty. Inevitably, heavy weapons soon found their way to the battlefield. The first big success of the Karabakhians was the establishment of a link to Armenia through Lachin ("the Lachin Corridor") in the summer of 1992.⁷² Beating off Azerbaijan counterattacks, they managed to hold the corridor open. The following year, a Karabakh offensive increased the territory held both south and west of Karabakh firmly linking itself to Armenia. The Azerbaijanis launched an offensive in October that was a failure and, finally, on 16 May 1994 yet another ceasefire was signed. This ceasefire has held so far (although there is occasional skirmishing).

It is important to understand that the Karabakh war is not a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is the view put forth by Baku and has been accepted by many in the West. It is true that Armenia has participated in the war and has supported Karabakh with weapons and "volunteers", but Karabakh has always been an actor; it is not a surrogate of Yerevan. The Karabakhians have quite legitimate reasons to be concerned about the treatment that they would receive from Baku. They have fought, and paid heavy casualties, to gain strategic space, and they are not going to give it up in return for unsecured promises whether from Baku or from international organisations. For them it is not an issue of international principle, it is one of life and death. Karabakh is *de facto* independent, although unrecognised, and prefers that status to one at which it

⁷¹ Where did the weapons come from? First, many farms in the mountainous areas had artillery (for cloud-seeding and avalanche control). There were plenty of hunting rifles and the like. But a steady progression was reported. Two farmers with shotguns hold up a Soviet soldier, this gives them an assault rifle. Now they can hold up several; this provides them with enough weapons to hold up an armoured vehicle and so on. The Soviet newspapers of the time were full of reports of this.

⁷² This was the area that had briefly been a Kurdish autonomous area in the 1920s.

would be at the mercy of Baku. A peace settlement accepted by only two of the participants will not work.

Karabakh has gained what it has because its fighters have been better than the Azerbaijan fighters have⁷³ but their power is limited – they certainly could not conquer Azerbaijan. Likewise, Azerbaijan has shown that it cannot force Karabakh to accept its terms. Thus, there is a degree of equality – a standoff. That may be about to change. Wherever the pipelines are put, Azerbaijan stands to make money from the oil boom; whatever happens, Armenia and Karabakh do not. Therefore, the correlation of forces may be about to change, as Azerbaijan becomes able to buy more and better weapons and accumulate more diplomatic support for its position. This could lead to a resumption of the war in a few years. Better, therefore, that the status and guarantees of Karabakh be resolved now; but an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan will not do, Karabakh must also be included.

Ingush-Ossetians

The Ingush-Ossetian problem is another of Stalin's legacies. When the Ingush were deported to Central Asia in 1944, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was dissolved and most of the territory was taken into Krasnodar Kray but some western portions went to North Ossetia. In the always land-hungry Caucasus, Ossetians moved into the lands vacated by the Ingush in what became the Prigorodniy Rayon of North Ossetia. When the Ingush were rehabilitated under Khrushchev, they returned and naturally wanted back the land that has been theirs for thousands of years. Perestroika allowed the question to be raised and the Ingush demanded the return of Prigorodniy Rayon to the then Chechen-Ingush ASSR. To the individual Ossetians, who had received the land in good faith, this was too much. Violence broke out in June 1992 but has been contained by Russian central forces. But the issue remains alive today with many refugees involved. The generally poor economic condition of the North Caucasus under the Soviets, intensified today by the wars, has only made matters worse.

One might say that the issue is summed up by this story from the Russian press in 1992.⁷⁴ Once there was an Ingush farmer named Kotikov. When he read

⁷³ Once again, there are accusations that the Russians are interfering – but always on the other side. There is, however, some very convincing and very circumstantial evidence that Russia (at least at the level of the General Staff) supplied significant quantities of heavy weapons to Armenia *after* the lasting ceasefire of July 1994. Smaller – but useful – amounts of ammunition and a few heavy weapons had been transferred earlier. These transfers appear to have been independent of the CFE Treaty shareout of Soviet weaponry in 1992. *This is the first convincing evidence that the author has seen of Moscow, at an official level, helping one side or the other in the Caucasian wars.* These activities appear to have violated numerous CIS agreements, Moscow's status as a member of the Minsk Group and the CFE Treaty. Ostensibly, Moscow is investigating the event.

⁷⁴ Irena Dementyeva: "A people lost" *Moscow News* No 4 1992 p 5.

about the promulgation of the USSR law repealing the Stalin deportations⁷⁵ he took it at face value: a great wrong was to be righted. So he waited all winter and then, when the ground had thawed, began to dig his kitchen-garden where his father and his grandfather had. However, the land was now farmed by an Ossetian, a man named Jotov. He ran for his gun and his relatives when he saw this stranger on his land; Kotikov ran for his gun and his relatives. Soon there was a war between Ingush and Ossetians.

The Ingush-Ossetian dispute was affected and made worse by the Georgian-Ossetian dispute. About 40,000 Ossetians fled Georgia and settled with their fellow-Ossetians in North Ossetia. About 16,000 occupied dwellings in Prigorodniy Rayon, dwellings which had been vacated by Ingush – most of whom fled to Ingushetia – after the fighting there in 1992. Most of these people are not from South Ossetia but from other areas in Georgia and are convinced that their lives would be in danger if they were to return to their former homes in Georgia; in any case, after this time, they have settled in where they are. As one analyst⁷⁶ has colourfully put it, the situation is like a Rubik's cube – no single step can be completed until all are. So, there is no quick resolution to the refugees' problems here.

Chechnya⁷⁷

The *casus belli* in Chechnya is that, after two centuries of more-or-less continuous resistance to Russia and the USSR, the Chechens still want independence and refuse to accept that they were ever *legally* part of the Russian or Soviet Empires or the Russian Federation. After the collapse of the Empire in 1917, they tried for independence and they tried again, with greater success, after 1991. But an independent Chechnya, recognized by Russia and others, is not the only question. Then will come other questions: the establishment of Greater Chechnya and Chechnya as a seed crystal for the Mountaineer Republic.

Glasnost and the Gorbachev revolution awoke long-silent views in Chechnya as it did everywhere else in the USSR. The Chechen-Ingush Popular Front was created in the summer of 1988 initially as a result of environmental protest, and environmental protest soon became political protest.⁷⁸ In November 1990, a Chechen

⁷⁵ On 14 November 1989 but the author probably means the RSFSR one of 11 December 1990. These two laws were well-intentioned but no provision was made for compensation, resettlement or revisions of titles. Another well-intentioned but ill-considered law, the RSFSR law of 26 April 1991 "On the Rehabilitation of Peoples who have Suffered Repression" provided for the "restoration of territorial integrity" as it had existed before. But this would have violated many laws about the changing of borders.

⁷⁶ Liz Fuller: "Rubik's Cube in Ossetia", RFE/RL Report 4 May 1998.

⁷⁷ For a more detailed treatment of Chechnya see G.P. Armstrong: *The Chechen Knot*; D Strat A Research Note; January 1998.

⁷⁸ The process is easy to understand. Any consideration of the environmental disasters in the USSR, inevitably leads one to contemplate the way in which decisions were made at the centre; that leads one to meditate the rule of the Party and so on. It's a quick step to believing that our

National Congress (CNC) was convened; it passed a resolution calling for the sovereignty of the Republic and elected Jokhar Dudayev to chair its Executive Committee. Under his leadership, the CNC steadily moved towards demanding independence from the USSR and then from the Russian Federation.

The ruling partycrats in Grozny either supported the August 1991 coup attempt or were conspicuously silent. This was Dudayev's chance; through the CNC, he was able to muster enough street power to force eventually them to resign. As a result of overconfident advice from Russian Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoy and the Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov (himself a Chechen), President Yeltsin issued a decree calling for the disarming of illegal formations and the holding of elections. Dudayev, who now controlled Chechnya, defied the order. Presidential elections were held on 27 October and Dudayev won by a landslide; Yeltsin was goaded into sending troops to Grozny but Dudayev's supporters forced them out by blocking them at the airport.

Dudayev's government declared independence. Moscow tried several tacks – even though, with all Moscow's problems at the time, Chechnya seemed very far away. An attempt to negotiate generous autonomy provisions in 1993 for Chechnya within the Russian Federation came to nothing because Dudayev overruled, and later dissolved, the parliament that had negotiated it. Then Moscow waited, drifting, hoping something would turn up as opposition to Dudayev grew. In the summer of 1994 Moscow began a covert effort to provide weapons to Dudayev's opposition but this also failed. Finally, for reasons not yet clear, Moscow decided on military action. Available evidence suggests that Moscow intended a short, relatively non-violent show of force which would cow Dudayev and either prompt someone overthrow him or force him to the table to accept an agreement along the lines of the failed 1993 treaty. It was an absurdly over-confident plan which ignored the clear lesson of history – Chechens always fight and they never give up. After terrible and indiscriminate destruction of the city, the federal forces finally took the “presidential palace” in Grozny on 19 January.

The war continued. Gradually the federal forces began to get the upper hand – the introduction of Russia's small stock of first-class troops and more thoughtful operational planning started to bear fruit in the summer of 1995 when federal forces quickly and efficiently took three important rebel bases. But the Chechens riposted with a daring raid on Budyonnovsk, taking hundreds of hostages. Tense negotiations produced a ceasefire and federal troops were pulled back. The war settled down to a pattern of raids and ambushes interspersed with bold and dramatic actions by the semi-independent bands of Chechen fighters while Moscow floundered around looking for some – any – solution.

problems are caused by stupid and ignorant decisions made in Moscow by people who don't have to see the consequences. The all-USSR example, which preceded everything, was the debate over the Northern Rivers Diversion Project – a hare-brained scheme to cover over the misuse of water resources in Central Asia by diverting the great rivers that flow into the Arctic.

The war finally ended when Chechen forces attacked Grozny and seized it when the federal defence collapsed. Even so the war might have dragged on with more destruction and death had not Aleksandr Lebed, appointed Chairman of the Russian Security Council in June and Yeltsin's representative, grasped the moment. He met the Chechen commander, Aslan Maskhadov, at Khasavyurt and negotiated a ceasefire. Lebed knew the war was lost. The "Khasavyurt Agreements" of 31 August were the federal surrender documents. Federal troops were withdrawn and the Chechen fighters were left in possession of everything. It was agreed that the question of Chechen independence would be deferred for five years.

But Chechen independence is not negotiable to Grozny – indeed it believes that it already has it (but still no state has recognized independent Chechnya). At present Chechnya is on one of the pipeline routes and this means the world has an interest in its stability and in Russian-Chechen relations.

Georgian civil wars

This section of the paper requires rather more of an argument than do other parts. This is because there are many misconceptions in the West about Georgia. First, it is believed that there are such a people as "Georgians". Second that Georgia's present boundaries have some historical validity and represent a fair approximation of what they should be on historical or ethnic grounds. Third, there is a prevalent assumption that Georgia's troubles are a consequence of Russian meddling. None of these beliefs is wholly accurate, neither do they provide an adequate explanation for the Georgian catastrophe – there is some truth to all of them, but only some.

The Georgians are famous for their hospitality, their wit and charm and for an easy-going attitude to life. Georgia has had a small Jewish population for centuries and, unlike almost everywhere else in the world where Jews live, there is no record of persecution of it by the Christian majority. The Georgian self-image, and one with which most visitors would enthusiastically agree, is one of charm, of an ancient and self-confident culture and a generosity and nobility of spirit. How tragic and surprising, how uncharacteristic, it should be then that Georgia's present troubles stem from a virulent chauvinism that infected Georgian nationalism. Here is a sample of the sort of things that were being written in 1989 in Georgia:

Georgia stands on the brink of a real catastrophe – of extirpation. What devil ruled our minds, when we yielded up our land, gained inch by inch over the centuries, defended and soaked with our blood, to every homeless beggar that has come down from the fringes of the Caucasus, to tribes that have neither history nor culture? We must make every effort to raise the percentage of Georgians in the population of Georgia (currently 61%) to 95%. The remaining 5% must consist of only those who know Georgian, who have a proper respect for Georgia, who have been brought up under the influence of the Georgian national phenomenon. We must persuade other nationalities, which are multiplying

suspiciously in the land of David the Builder, that ideal conditions for the development of their personalities are to be found only in their homelands.⁷⁹

About what and whom is he talking? Like nationalist alarmists everywhere, he underestimates the proportion of Georgians in the population of Georgia – in 1989 it was actually 70.1 percent, not 61 percent. He is talking about the other 30 percent. They are, in order, Armenians (437,000), Russians (294,000), Azerbaijanis (307,000), Greeks (100,000), Ossetians (97,000), Abkhazians (96,000) and Jews (10,000). There are also Avars, Tatars, Romany and Germans (total 6,000). Which of these, in particular, are “the homeless beggar[s] that ha[ve] come down from the fringes of the Caucasus” the “tribes that have neither history nor culture”? As to “homelands”, Abkhazians have been living in Abkhazia as long as Georgians have been living in Georgia. The Greek population is of some antiquity, the Ossetians have been living there for a thousand years or more, the Jewish population has perhaps been there 1500 years, the Armenians are also probably living mostly on ancestral lands. How is the percentage of Georgians to be raised? By “ethnic cleansing”? This was the flavour in Georgia at that time. The present author has personal experience of this chauvinism: he well remembers a Georgian politician (who is still active in the opposition) describing Ossetians as being as foreign in Georgia as Cameroonians would be in England; Abkhazians as occupiers of Georgian land⁸⁰ and Ajars as Georgians (temporarily) converted to Islam. The coming storm in Georgia was visible in 1990 in his words.⁸¹

This point of view came to power in Georgia with the election of Zviad Gamsakhurdia as President in 1991. Not much of this was noticed in the West: people either were not looking or still cast events in Georgia in terms of a subject people struggling against the Soviet Empire. In any case, very few in the West knew anything about Georgia.⁸² But, for the non-Georgians who lived there, especially the Ossetians and the Abkhazians, such words demanded that they look to their defences.

⁷⁹Prof. Revaz Mishveladze, Georgian newspaper *Young Communist*, 29 July 1989.

⁸⁰In the 1940s Abkhaz schools were closed and their literature banned. Later that decade a self-taught Georgian, Pavle Ingorokva, claimed that Abkhazians only arrived in Georgia in the Seventeenth Century. But Lavrenti Beria (a Mingrelian) apparently decided against wholesale deportation of Abkhazians in favour of swamping them with Mingrelian immigrants. Ingorokva's theory made a comeback under Gamsakhurdia.

⁸¹Conference, University of New Brunswick, October 1990. The speaker hasn't learned anything either. On 11 November 1997 he was reported to be demanding 1) Georgia's withdrawal from CIS 2) the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia 3) the rejection of a confederation model for Abkhazia and Ossetia.

⁸²As an example, scientists were very interested in the very long-lived “Georgians” who lived in Western Georgia in the mountains; but they were actually Abkhazians. The famous Georgian movie of the Gorbachev period, “Repentance”, was marked in video stores as translated from the Russian. The Microsoft Encarta Virtual Globe 1998 (which is generally pretty good about getting the language right) names the Kolkhid Lowlands “*Kolkhidskaya* Lowlands” as if Russian were the proper geographical language to use in Georgia.

Another point, which should be kept in mind, is that the definition “Georgian” is Stalin’s. There are four languages in the Kartvelian Group;⁸³ Georgian is the most widely-spoken of these languages; the first to have an alphabet, it possesses a long written tradition. The three others are Svan, spoken in Svanetia in north-western Georgia, Mingrelian, spoken in the west Georgian lowlands, and Laz, spoken almost exclusively along Turkey's Black Sea littoral – there are few Laz in Georgia today. In addition, and usually included in the “Georgian” category, are Ajarians who became Muslim under Turkish rule (most live in Ajaria in south-west Georgia). But, under Soviet rules for defining national groups, all of these were included together as “Georgians”. Because of these differences, some authorities rarely speak of “Georgians”, preferring the more accurate term “Kartvelians”.

The Georgians, or Kartvelians, are a very ancient people and, like many other Caucasian peoples have been living more-or-less where they live today for as long as anyone knows. But, over the millennia, there has very rarely been a Georgian *state* (although there have been many Georgian *states*). Indeed, apart from the Twentieth Century, it appears that all today’s Georgia was under one rule for only about a century or two beginning about 975 and ending with the arrival of the Mongols in 1245. However, the unfortunate fact is that many Georgians seem to believe that today’s Georgia has borders of great antiquity and that there is a long tradition of “Georgian” unity. This is not true. The Abkhazians ruled Abkhazia and Western Georgia in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries. After the Mongols, today’s Georgia comprised as many as eight separate kingdoms or princedoms. Iosef Stalin created today’s Georgia and it is his boundaries that the world recognized. Not everyone in today’s Georgia wants to be in it, especially with outbursts about “homeless beggars”. But, Georgia’s tragedy was that many Georgians believed that there had always been a Georgian state, that all “Georgians” were Georgian, that Ossetians and Abkhazians were recent arrivals on Georgian land and had no business staying.⁸⁴ It was this chauvinism, not Russian interference, which sparked off the wars. Shevardnadze, who has said different things at different times to different audiences, after defeat in the Third Abkhaz war, had this to say⁸⁵:

did we not create a terrible phenomenon of modern times, which is provincial fascism?.. we were punished, we should have been punished and we were punished...we were robbing them [the Abkhazians]... let us also remember how we drove the Ossetians out of Tbilisi [and] how we tortured Ossetians.

As far as the so-called Russian responsibility, he said this:

⁸³ From *kartvela* – the Georgian word for a Georgian person, *Sakartvelo* is the name of the country in Georgian.

⁸⁴ And stranger things too. A Georgian friend showed the author a book written in the Gamsakhurdia period that claimed 1) that Noah’s Ark had been Georgian and was still there and 2) that Georgia was the mystical centre of the universe (the *omphalos*) 3) that Georgian literature went back thousands of years. The Georgians are a very ancient people, but not that ancient.

⁸⁵Georgian TV, Tbilisi, in Georgian, 1731 GMT 5 Jan 94 (BBC Monitoring Service SWB SU/1980 F/1).

of course there was a betrayal from Russia's reactionary forces but, despite all this, Sukhumi would not have fallen under any circumstances, had it not been for the betrayal [of the Georgian forces at the last moment by the Zviadists].

Georgia's modern troubles⁸⁶ began in April 1989 when protesters were attacked by Soviet Army forces in Tbilisi. This became the rallying point for Georgian demands for independence from Moscow. But not just from Moscow – chauvinism was already present – some of the signs carried by the protesters read “Georgia for the Georgians!” and “Get off Georgian land!”. Georgian moves toward independence marched in unison with attempts to curb Ossetian and Abkhazian independence moves. On 26 May 1991, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was elected President. He had been a long-time dissident having helped found the Georgian branch of Helsinki Watch in 1975. He had subsequently been arrested but quickly recanted. His popularity did not last very long – by September, protesters were demanding his resignation and his forces were firing on them. Violence got worse and, in January 1992, he fled the country eventually winding up in Chechnya.

Georgia was now in the hands of Jaba Ioseliani and Tingiz Kitovani, each of whom had his armed group. They had pulled off a coup d'état against the properly elected President and they needed a fig-leaf. So they invited the world's most famous Georgian, former USSR Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, to come to Tbilisi. He arrived on 7 March 1992 and three days later the junta appointed him Chairman of Georgian State Council. Gamsakhurdia had meanwhile reappeared in Mingrelia and a low-level civil war began, together with assassination attempts on the principals, continued fighting in South Ossetia and the blocking of moves by Abkhazia to regain its pre-1931 liberties which, at that time, were still legalistic and constitutional. The Georgian National Guard led by Kitovani invaded Abkhazia (where there was no support for Gamsakhurdia) and sacked Sukhumi in August 1991. This started the Abkhaz wars that the Abkhazians and their North Caucasian allies eventually won. Finally, after months of fighting in western Georgia and an almost successful rout of the Tbilisi forces by the Zviadists, Tbilisi's forces gradually gained the upper hand and, on 31 December 1993, Gamsakhurdia killed himself (or was assisted to do so) in Mingrelia⁸⁷.

No doubt to the surprise of Ioseliani and Kitovani, Shevardnadze, the lamb they had brought in to legitimate their power, wound up devouring the wolves. Their para military formations have been disarmed or incorporated into the state structures, and they themselves are in prison and involved in trials for treason.

⁸⁶ Which are not yet over – witness the Zviadist involvement in the assassination attempt on Shevardnadze in 1998 and the Mkhedrioni attempt in 1995. Shevardnadze has many enemies in Georgia.

⁸⁷ His widow has charged different things at different times – suicide, killed by Tbilisi's men and killed by his own bodyguards.

Since 1994 Georgia has been fairly quiet – comparatively speaking that is. There have been two assassination attempts⁸⁸ on Shevardnadze (elected President in November 1995). There is continual skirmishing along the border with Abkhazia. There is an armed standoff in Ossetia. There are miscellaneous bomb explosions and political murders. There are trials of former Georgian leaders of all kinds. There are periodic threats of war against Abkhazia (and a flare-up in June 1998). And, because it is hard for Georgians, when they contemplate the ruin of what was once the most prosperous part of the USSR, to blame themselves, there is a great willingness to believe that this disaster was visited on them from outside.

Interestingly, on 26 February 1998, President Shevardnadze, who was “stunned” at the mess he found upon returning⁸⁹, proposed the creation of a commission of historians, lawyers, and scholars to evaluate recent political developments in Georgia and draft new principles to serve as basis for national reconciliation. This might clear away some of the myths and fix the responsibility for Georgia’s catastrophe where it belongs – at home.

Gradually Georgia is climbing out of the mess but there are still many legacies. As the assassination attempt on Shevardnadze shows, the Zviadists are not gone⁹⁰. There is still no settlement in Ossetia or Abkhazia. The economy is crawling

⁸⁸ The first in 1995 has been blamed on Ioseliani. The second, despite the usual rush to blame Moscow, was the work of Zviadists with, perhaps, some help from Chechens.

⁸⁹ “When I came back I was stunned. I did not recognize my own people. Confrontation had become a normal phenomenon. I had the impression that people hate each other and cannot discuss things like normal people.” Interview in *Moskovskiy Novosti*; 21 Feb 93 (FBIS 18 Feb 93 p 71).

⁹⁰ Their feelings are very strong; here is what they say about Shevardnadze: “It is also right to compare him with Ceausescu, but crimes of Ceausescu are nothing in comparison to the nightmare, which Shevardnadze has brought to his own people, punishing it for aspirations to freedom and independence, together with notorious Politburo, KGB and other imperialistic forces of Russia. Being a bloody dictator of Georgia in Soviet period, Shevardnadze repressed and executed thousands of man, introduced inhuman tortures in prisons, creating dreadful penitentiary system, his agents assassinated also many communist officials - enemies of Shevardnadze (see article of Peter Reddaway and William Showcross ‘The Day a Soviet Jail Torturer Revealed All’, *Sunday Times*, London, 2 November, 1975), banned Georgian language from all state institutions, has forbidden teaching of Georgian history at schools, along with total russification of the country, severely persecuted religion, infiltrating church with KGB agents, repressed all dissidents, including Zviad Gamsakhurdia, well-known scholar, writer and public figure, who was later popularly elected as a first President of Georgian state, and Merab Kostava, national hero of Georgia, who died in the suspicious ‘car accident’ in 1989, soon after massacre of 9th April, organized by Shevardnadze.... Shevardnadze and his right hand, four times convicted burglar Joseliani have created dreadful criminal army, so called ‘Mkhedrioni’, chastising whole regions of Georgia, executing peaceful mass demonstrations of protests, arrested and tortured hundreds of people, the lists of which are published in reports of Human Rights organizations. Assassination of M.Kurdadze - Attorney General of Tbilisi - mentioned by you, is committed by them, because he demanded investigation of their crimes. After this all, Shevardnadze spoke by Russian radio about the ‘great services of “Mkhedrioni” for Georgian People.’” (To Honorable

back out of a desperate hole. And politicians like the one that the author heard in 1990⁹¹ have learned absolutely nothing at all from Georgia's catastrophe.

Abkhazia

The *casus belli* in Abkhazia, as elsewhere in the Caucasus, has historical roots. The Abkhaz are an ancient people and formed an independent kingdom (after a period of vassalage to the Byzantine Empire) in the Eighth Century. A thousand years ago, a marriage between the two royal families united the Abkhaz with one of the Georgian kingdoms but this association was broken by the Mongol invasion in the Thirteenth Century and from then Abkhazia was independent of Georgia. Russia annexed Abkhazia in 1864 (a very large part of the population emigrated to the Ottoman Empire, leaving the Abkhaz a minority in their land⁹²) and the Abkhaz territory was included in the Sukhumi *guberniya* in the Empire.

After 1917, Abkhazia was part of the short-lived Mountain Republic but was invaded by independent Georgia, which claimed it. The issue had not yet been resolved when the Red Army invaded and extinguished Georgian independence. The Bolsheviks solved the problem of Abkhazia's status by proclaiming it a Soviet Socialist Republic in March 1921; in December, with a union treaty, it became associated with the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. But in 1931, it was taken into the Georgian SSR as an ASSR losing the co-equal nature of the relationship. Thus, over the several thousand-year history of the Abkhaz, they have only been *subordinate* to Georgia in the period from 1931 to 1993, although they have been *associated* with a Georgia state on several occasions. But, when the musical chairs that the communists had been playing with the internal borders of the USSR stopped in 1991, the West and the United Nations recognized Stalin's border for Georgia. It is this co-equal relationship that Abkhazia today demands from Georgia, but independence is what it really wants. So, the essence of today's issue is that Abkhazia wants, at a minimum, the *pre-1931* relationship and Georgia demands the *post-1931* relationship.

The present trouble in Abkhazia began in March 1989 when a gathering resolved that Abkhazia should regain the status of a Union republic. Thousands of people signed an appeal that was published in the newspapers. The signers included many non-Kartvelians (who, it should be clear, generally supported the Abkhaz in their drive for independence). A couple of weeks later, Georgian residents protested these demands. On 15-16 July 1989, intercommunal violence erupted in the city of Sukhumi over the establishment of a department of Tbilisi State University in the city.

Lord Bethell, Member of European Parliament [from] Merab Kiknadze, Tengiz Chachava - MP in exile June 12, 1993 – http://www.clinet.fi/~bpg/abkhaz_1.html).

⁹¹ See note 81.

⁹² A conscious effort was made to populate the now-empty (and very desirable) territory with Mingrelians. The Kartvelian/Mingrelian population climbed from about six percent in 1886 to 24 percent in ten years. (Liana Kvarchelia: "Vision from Abkhazia", 7 Nov 1996, (www.abkhazia.org/vision2.html)).

The Georgian part of Sukhumi University refused to stay as long as Abkhaz and Russian lecturers remained there. The Abkhaz then attacked a school which was expected to house the Georgian university. At this point the USSR still existed and central MVD troops gradually restored order. Then ensued a period of conflicting declarations: the Abkhaz parliament declaring “state sovereignty” and the Georgian parliament overruled it. But the real trouble began after the overthrow of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia of Georgia on 6 January 1992. As a Mingrelian, his strength was in the west of Georgia and he fled there to set up his resistance to the coup d’état that had overthrown him and was to bring in Eduard Shevardnadze to replace him. In March his supporters seized some towns in western Georgia and central troops and members of the Mkhedrioni⁹³ assembled to move there. A couple of months later, in July Abkhazia abolished the 1978 constitution and reverted to the 1925⁹⁴ one in which it was independent of Tbilisi; the Georgian State Council thereupon annulled that decision as did the Georgian members of the Abkhazian parliament. Up to that point, the Abkhazian-Georgia disagreement had been legalistic (apart from the violence of 1989) but fighting started in August after Gamsakhurdia’s forces took the Georgian Interior Minister and other Georgian officials hostage in Zugdidi (the central city of Mingrelia). Shevardnadze authorized a major military/police action in western Georgia and, on 14 August 1992, Georgian forces (led by the Defence Minister Tingiz Kitovani) entered Abkhazia and ran riot on Sukhumi⁹⁵ despite the fact that Gamsakhurdia and his revolt had nothing to do with Abkhazia. Now serious blood had been shed.

Four days later, the Parliament of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, meeting in Groznyy, demanded Georgian withdrawal from Abkhazia and then, a few days later, called for volunteers from the North Caucasus to fight in Abkhazia. In the end, several thousand volunteers from Circassia and Chechnya did go there to fight.⁹⁶ Fighting continued until the spring of 1993 when the Georgian forces suffered serious reverses. The Georgians were greatly hampered by disorganization in their own ranks (they were split between the so-called National

⁹³ A para-military organization of uncertain origins led by Jaba Ioseliani.

⁹⁴ This was in direct response to Georgia’s abolishing all Soviet legislation and declaring that the 1921 pre-Soviet constitution was back in effect. In this constitution, accepted, it should be recalled, while Georgia and Abkhazia were fighting out the issue, Abkhazia had no special status. Then as now, the Abkhaz had not accepted this status and there had been fighting then too.

⁹⁵ “The campaign of looting, rape, torture and murder mounted by the Mkhedrioni in the region did much to poison relations between Mingrelia and the rest of Georgia... Georgian forces behaved similarly upon their entry into Abkhazia in the summer of 1992.” George Khutsishvili and Neil MacFarlane: “Ethnic Conflict in Georgia”, paper presented at conference on Ethnic Conflict and European Security, Centre for International Relations, Queen’s University, Kingston, 23-24 Sep 1994. See also note 97.

⁹⁶ According to Shevardnadze, no fewer than 8000 Chechens fought in Abkhazia. The true number is probably less. The Chechen contingent was led by Shamil Basayev, today *de facto* Prime Minister of Chechnya but then commander of the Confederation’s armed forces. The President of the Confederation, Musa Shanibov, was wounded there.

Guard and the Mkhedrioni⁹⁷, each of which had its own agenda) while at the same time they were harassed by the armed supporters of Gamsakhurdia (“Zviadists”) in their rear. A Russian-mediated ceasefire was achieved on 22 July 1993.

Then the Zviadists struck – On 7 September they seized the town of Gali (just inside Abkhazia), seized weapons and gradually over the next few days extended their control through Mingrelia. Shevardnadze gained emergency powers. The Abkhazians and their supporters grasped the opportunity and attacked the Georgian forces still in Sukhumi.⁹⁸ After heavy fighting, they pushed the Georgians out on 27 September and moved down the coast forcing the Georgians out of Ochamchira three days later. The Zviadists then struck at the disorganized and retreating Georgian forces and took town after town in Western Georgia.

The Abkhaz/North Caucasian forces drove the last Georgian forces (and much of the Georgian population fled, fearing reprisals) out of Abkhazia (except for a small force in the Khodori Canyon area accessible from Svanetia). Eventually a Russian-provided peacekeeping force together with UN monitors was established in the summer of 1994. And there the situation had rested until the summer of 1998. Georgian partisan organizations had been raiding into Abkhazia attacking the Abkhaz authorities and the UN and Russian soldiers. At the end of May the Abkhaz struck back and swiftly drove the partisans out again and, in their wake, all the Kartvelians who had re-settled in Gali district.

Subsequent Georgian-Abkhaz talks have foundered on the original point. Tbilisi demands that Abkhazia be a part of a Georgian federation (in short the post-1931 status), Sukhumi demands that there be a Georgian-Abkhaz confederation (in short the pre-1931 status). Like Karabakh and Chechnya, Abkhazia is *de facto* independent and evidently prefers that status to subordination to Tbilisi. The fighting in the summer of June 1998 will not advance the settlement.

It is taken as Gospel in many circles in the West that the Abkhaz “revolt” was created, directed and funded from Moscow. This question must be addressed, because if it is believed uncritically, nothing whatever may be understood about the Abkhaz-Georgian differences. One of the earliest and strongest assertions was printed in *The Economist* on 13 November 1993.

An independent state of Georgia existed for 2 1/2 years, until Trotsky's Red Army snuffed it out in 1921. Mr Yeltsin has given its successor exactly the same amount of time. More or less secretly, Russian forces have backed rebellions by Muslims in the Abkhaz region and by Georgian followers of the former president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. In this squeeze the current president, Eduard

⁹⁷ On 15 November 1997 the Georgian Supreme Court sentenced 13 leading members of Mkhedrioni for “mass banditry” in Mingrelia in November 1993. Ioseliani himself was arrested and charged with involvement in the assassination attempt on Shevardnadze in 1995. His trial proceeds with innumerable delays. No charges have been laid for the sacking of Sukhumi that triggered the war, however.

⁹⁸ This is the point at which most people in the West first heard about Abkhazia. Shevardnadze went to Sukhumi to direct the fighting and TV cameras came with him.

Shevardnadze...despairingly appealed to Moscow for help, and got it on terms that in effect mortgage his country's independence.

Well, apart from the fact that it wasn't Trotsky, it was Orjonikidze and Stalin, and that Georgia is still independent today, not much of the rest of this is true. One of *The Economist's* chief arguments was the writers' amazement that so few Abkhazians had defeated so many Georgians – "100,000 Abkhaz took on 4 million Georgians and won". A later version of the Russian plot theory comes from Henry Kissinger in March 1997:

Even post-Communist Russia is conducting some policies redolent of traditional Russian imperialism...it maintains bases on the territory of Georgia after fomenting a civil war there...⁹⁹

A Georgian version says:

The civil war in Georgia was inspired, plotted, and provoked by forces from outside Georgia, particularly in Russia. Russian civilian and military intelligence organizations perpetuated the civil war.¹⁰⁰

A Western assessment in spring 1998:

The breakup of the Soviet Union deprived Russia of deep water harbors on the Black Sea coast. Such ports, however, existed in Georgia. In the summer of 1992, Abkhazia, the northwest corner of Georgia, was visited by Russian defense and intelligence officials. A short time later, the Abkhazians declared their independence. When Georgian troops tried to crush the revolt, they were defeated by an 'Abkhazian' army which appeared out of nowhere and whose ranks were filled with mercenaries recruited by Russian intelligence.¹⁰¹

But, before one accepts these interpretations, here is a different take on what the Russians were doing:

'Experts' constantly disparage Abkhazian prowess by asserting it was Russians who inflicted the defeat on 'hated Georgia', but such 'experts' forget that Russia was supplying weapons to Georgia gratis, whereas Abkhazians had to pay dearly for everything not gained as booty, and that Russian planes actually bombed Abkhazian lines in the final push, as an outright Abkhazian victory in no way suited the Kremlin's purpose.¹⁰²

And for yet another version of how and on what side Russia was involved, here is the perspective from Gamsakhurdia's supporters:

It must be known that Abkhazian war was necessary for Shevardnadze for following reasons. He aimed first of all on creating ethnical conflict between

⁹⁹ "Helsinki Fiasco", *The Washington Post*, 30 Mar 1997.

¹⁰⁰ Professor Zaza Gachechiladze, paper prepared with the assistance of Mr. James Morrison, Visiting Fellow, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, USA, March 1995 www.ndu.edu/ndu/inss/strforum/forum21.html.

¹⁰¹ David Satter "The Danger Of Russia's Great Power Illusions"; *Prism*; 6 Mar 98; The Jamestown Foundation. Note that he seems to know of nothing before 1992.

¹⁰² "The Caucasus: An Overview" by George Hewitt (Commissioned but never published by *The New Statesman*, date not given – <http://www.channell.com/users/apsny/overview.htm#invasion>).

The fact that Tbilisi, Sukhumi and the Zviadists say that the Russians were participants but, always, on the other side, argues that Russian support was *not* a key factor and, indeed, argues to the unbiased observer that the Russians were not involved to any significant degree. It seems to be a habit in the former USSR to believe that “Moscow holds the key” to whatever dispute. But Moscow can’t even control a fractious provincial governor like Nazdratenko in Primorskiy Kray. Let alone Jokhar Dudayev. How then is it supposed to have the power to solve all the problems of the Caucasus? What everyone is really saying is this: “*Our side didn’t lose, the Russians helped the other side to win*”.

One of the best arguments against the thesis that Russia “fomented” the war is that one cannot make a fire without combustible materials – is it to be believed that nothing would have happened despite a long history of grievances and bloodshed? As soon as the Georgians started talking about an independent Georgia, the Ossetians and Abkhazians remembered what had happened to them the last time Georgia was independent. As soon as they heard the “host-guest” theory, they feared what would happen to “guests” when the “hosts” gained control. War was inevitable – a mono-ethnic state can only be built in the Caucasus by force.

Second, such theories assume that the Russian security forces – completely inept in Chechnya and everywhere else – are, somehow, only clever and successful in Georgia.¹⁰⁶ The charge that Russia fomented the Abkhaz wars in presumably otherwise peaceful Georgia is important – Satter, for example, uses it as one of the main buttresses to his argument that NATO expansion is necessary for protection against Russia.¹⁰⁷ If nothing else, it is hoped that that the above discussion will make readers question these easy assertions about Russia and the Abkhaz war.

No great Russian interference is necessary to explain the Georgian defeat in a war which it provoked by its policy of “Georgia for the Georgians” and Kitovani’s attack on Sukhumi. Georgia under Shevardnadze has been much more stable than it was under the rule of Gamsakhurdia, Kitovani or Ioseliani and their competing private armies, but these tensions are not all relieved today.

South Ossetia

The Ossetians were also made nervous by the outburst of chauvinism in Georgia in the late Gorbachev period. They are different from most of the other peoples described above because their lands are split between Russia and Georgia. 330,000 live in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania in the Russian Federation and

¹⁰⁶ The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (the successor to the Second Chief Directorate of the KGB) has been through four name changes and five heads since December 1991. It was once again re-structured in May 1997. That is not the outward sign of a successful organization.

¹⁰⁷ “The record of Russia’s actions in the former Soviet Union, however, strongly suggests that a threat to Eastern European stability does exist which could become a great deal more serious if Russia gains strength.” *Prism*, Op Cit.

160,000 in what was known, in the Soviet days, as the South Ossetian ASSR in Georgia. Initially, they wanted to unite with their fellows in Russia, then they wanted independence and now they say they will accept autonomy inside Georgia. Events in this time were no doubt accelerated by memories of the attacks on the Ossetians by independent Georgia in 1918-1921.

As soon as Georgia started its moves towards independence from the USSR, the Ossetians moved too. On 20 September 1990, the parliament proclaimed itself as the South Ossetia Soviet Democratic Republic and part of USSR. The Georgian Supreme Soviet promptly overruled this and, a couple of months later, abolished the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast altogether and ruled that the elections there had been illegal. Violence was already general and was gradually brought under control by central forces (the USSR still existed). The election of Gamsakhurdia in May 1991 exacerbated the situation and South Ossetia called for independence from Georgia and union with North Ossetia. After the collapse of the USSR in December 1991 fighting intensified around Tskhinvali, the capital. On 19 January 1992, a referendum was held and the voters overwhelmingly demanded to be incorporated into the Russian Federation. Ceasefires were announced and broken and the fighting did not stop until a Russian-Georgian-Ossetian peacekeeping force was established in the summer of 1992.

Generally speaking, it has been reasonably quiet there since but the political issue is far from being solved. On 16 May 1996, Georgia and South Ossetia signed a memorandum on security and trust building measures in Moscow where it was confirmed that Ossetia would remain part of Georgia. Even so, the issue remains open today although it is far closer to solution than the Abkhaz-Georgian situation is.

POTENTIAL BORDER DISPUTES

Lezgins

The Lezgins are a Caucasian speaking (from the Chechen-Dagestani Group) people who live partly in the Russian Federation (in Dagestan – 204,000) and partly in Azerbaijan (77,000). The first violent deaths between Lezgins and Azerbaijanis – said to be a protest against conscription – occurred in March 1993. This was followed by a demonstration on the frontier between Dagestan and Azerbaijan to demand the “unification” of the Lezgin people and to protest the deployment of frontier guards along the Russian-Azerbaijan frontier. On 4 May 1996 an Azerbaijan court sentenced two to death and nine to prison for the Baku metro explosion of 19 May 1994. All were members of Sandal, a Lezgin organization. In October 1996, a committee organizing an international conference of Lezgins appealed to the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan governments for an immediate dialogue “in order to preclude acts of violence.” There the issue rests today – a potential for serious violence but nothing large yet.

Azerbaijan-Iran

Many Azerbaijanis live in Northern Iran contiguous to Azerbaijan. After the Second World War, the USSR attempted to gain territory by capitalizing on this fact but the Western Allies were able to pressure an end to the so-called Azerbaijan secessionist movement. This issue has been quiet to date, but there is a potential there for disturbances.

Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia¹⁰⁸

One of Stalin's little ethnological jokes was creating "national homelands" which combined a Circassian people (Kabardins and Cherkess) with a Turkic people (Balkars and Karachay). Already existing tensions resulting largely from over-population, land shortages and a miserable economic situation – problems endemic to the Caucasus in general – are intensified in these republics by the struggles of repressed peoples. Stalin, during the Second World War, deported the Balkars and the Karachay; both were allowed to return under Khrushchev but neither has received any significant compensation. At the same time, their traditional lands were redistributed in their absence. So far, there has been no outburst of serious violence (like that between the Ossetians and the returned Ingush for example) but, on the other hand, not much is being done to remove the sources of tension. President Yeltsin has issued decrees supporting the restoration and compensation of the Karachay and Balkars but here, as elsewhere, such declarations in the absence of resources, only raise expectations and increase tension. At any time, there could be an outburst.

The Kabardin-Balkar Republic was created in 1922 and re-established in 1957. The Balkars, at about ten percent of the population, are outnumbered by the Kabardins (about 40 percent). This imbalance is a consequence of the sufferings of the Balkars following from their deportation. In 1991 the Balkars demanded an increased influence in the republican parliament and in December 1991 a majority voted for a separate Balkar republic. This, in turn, started a Kabardin movement for a separate Kabardin Republic. The Russian population thereupon began a movement to hold the republic together. There was a riot in which several people were killed in the capital Nalchik in September 1992. Serious trouble¹⁰⁹ has been averted thus far but on 17 November 1996 something calling itself the Balkar People's Congress demanded a sovereign republic of Balkaria.

The Karachay-Cherkess Republic was set up in 1922 but broken up in 1926. The Karachay were deported in 1943 and permitted to return in 1957. In February 1992 a referendum in Karachay-Cherkessia voted against splitting the republic. In November 1991, Karachay activists demanded the return of ancestral lands now in

¹⁰⁸ Background Brief No 16: Russia's North Caucasus; UK Defence Intelligence Staff; 22 Sep 1994 provides an excellent background summary to some of these problems. It avoids looking for Russians behind every conflict.

¹⁰⁹ Although there are periodic acts of violence, eg bombings in June 1996 and January 1997.

Stavropol Kray. This has resulted in counter moves by Cossacks. There has been no serious violence yet.

It is difficult to know how serious all this could be – or how threatening: the Chechen-Ingush Republic split reasonably peacefully into Ingushetia and Chechnya in 1992. However, in the depressed, overcrowded and always passionate North Caucasus, anything can spark off a war.

Dagestan

The Republic of Dagestan is a kind of scale model of the Caucasus. Here the full complexity of the Caucasus is found in an area of 50,000 square kilometres. Fourteen indigenous nationalities¹¹⁰, a history of fighting Russians, irredentist claims from its neighbours, long-time ethnic dislikes, poverty, over-population, depressed economies, isolated valleys; it's all here in an area a bit smaller than Lake Huron. The larger national groupings have militias, all of which are well-armed with automatic weapons. There are innumerable territorial disputes in which the “native” Caucasian peoples are often opposed to the Turkic “recent arrivals”. Dagestan is a favourite place for Chechens to raid (and there are groups in Chechnya which demand the incorporation of parts of Dagestan) and the central authorities have not had much success at keeping them out. The whole finely balanced situation, in a sort of tense stability today without large-scale violence, could collapse at any moment.

HISTORICAL HATREDS

Armenians-Turks

Armenians have many reasons to hate and fear Turks – and to them, that is what Azerbaijanis are. First, Armenia's “imperial dream” is checkmated by Turkey, the successor state of the Ottoman Empire and the Seljuk Turk Empire before that. Greater Armenia is almost all in modern Turkey. Second, there are the massacres in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century in which hundreds of thousands of Armenians perished. Closer to modern Armenia, there were massacres in Baku and Karabakh in 1905 and more recently in the perestroika period. These have not been forgotten and the memories fuel Armenian attitudes towards Azerbaijan and, although, apparently, to a lesser degree, towards Turkey. To this must be added religious opposition to the Muslim Turks and Azerbaijanis on the part of a nation that proudly boasts that it was the first in the world to become Christian and which has been sustained in its difficult national existence by this faith. Therefore, to a considerable degree, the Armenian national myth is anti-Turkic. To pan-Turanians, who boast that one can walk from the Mediterranean to the Pacific continuously

¹¹⁰ Or is it 30 or 80? It depends on how one counts. See note 18 for an indication of how many more peoples there are.

speaking a Turkic language, there is one barrier, one place that one must walk around – Armenia.

Georgians-Russians

Georgians have a love-hate relationship with Russians. On the one hand, Georgians feel a great cultural superiority. The Russians became Christian and literate seven hundred years later than the Georgians. Georgians, or more properly Kartvelians, have been known to history for at least two thousand years, while Russians are a comparatively recent mixture of Slavs, horse peoples from the steppes, forest peoples from the north with an admixture of Scandinavians. Thus, this small, proud and ancient people can easily regard Russians as *arrivistes*, and uncultured ones at that. This feeling is exacerbated and made sharper by the fact that the Georgians have, several times in their history, needed their powerful co-Christian neighbour. Threatened by Muslims all around them (and divided from the Armenians by their religion)¹¹¹ various Georgian kings appealed to Russia for help. The final appeal came from the king of Kartli-Kakhetia in 1783. This time the Russians came and stayed, and an association, which the Georgians insist was a treaty-based relationship between two independent entities, evolved into simple incorporation into the Russian Empire. The Russians also helped Georgia mightily after the defeat in Abkhazia when Zviadist forces were taking town after town in Mingrelia. But that doesn't mean that Georgians like Russians any the more. The post-1989 disaster is also commonly blamed on Russian interference.

Chechens-Russians

If the Georgians are ambivalent about Russians, the Chechens have no such uncertainty. Hatred is pretty firmly established. The horrors of the Great Caucasian War were bad enough but it is imaginable that time could have cured the feelings. But the suppression of the Chechens by General Denikin followed by the terrors of Soviet rule culminating in the deportation (all of which was blamed on “Russians” of course) kept the hate alive. The Chechen War of the post-1991 period gave the hatred further impetus. While individual Chechens may like individual Russians well enough (President Dudayev's wife was Russian) there can be few Chechens who do not agree that Chechnya must, for its own survival, get out of the Russian Federation. As one Chechen resistance fighter wrote in a letter to the Moscow leadership in 1940:

For twenty years now, the Soviet authorities have been fighting my people, aiming to destroy them group by group: first the kulaks, then the mullahs and the ‘bandits’, then the bourgeois-nationalists. I am sure now that their real object is the annihilation of our nation as a whole.

¹¹¹ The Armenians are monophysites – that is the Armenian Church believes that Christ had only one nature. This view was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon of 451, which decreed that Christ had two natures, divine and human, “without confusion, without change, without division” perfectly united in a single person. The Georgian Church came over to this view (that of both the Latin and Eastern Churches) in 607. Thus, to each, the other Church is heretical.

Today's Chechens must be convinced of this. From the Russian perspective, there is a ready agreement that Chechens are disproportionately represented in criminal organizations in Russia. And so they are, but to Chechens, this is another part of Chechnya's two hundred year struggle for freedom against Russia and the Soviet power. Moscow and St Petersburg have turned the Chechens into enemies when they didn't have to be.

KALMYKIA¹¹²

Thus far, this Handbook has focussed on the Caucasus but there is one other Republic of the Russian Federation that could be affected by Caspian oil and that is the Republic of Kalmykia (Khalmg Tangch). Kalmykia is a small and rather poor republic situated at the northwest corner of the Caspian Sea west of the Volga Delta. Kalmyks (146,000) form a plurality of the population (45 percent) with Russians next (38 percent) and the customary mixture of nationalities constituting the remainder. The Kalmyks are ethnically quite different from the peoples of the Caucasus; they are Mongols who originated in the Lake Baykal area as components of a confederation of western Mongol tribes known as the Oyrats.¹¹³ The Oyrats were members of the army of a rival of Jenghiz Khan but were defeated together with him. They continued the fight for a few years by they, no more than any of the other Turko-Mongol tribes, could resist Jenghiz Khan and the Oyrat Khan finally made submission to him in 1208. They were always subordinate to the eastern Mongols in the Great Khan's empire. However, by the middle of the Fifteenth Century, taking advantage of the collapse of the Jenghizid power, the Oyrat confederacy expanded to control a large territory to the west of Baykal. They invaded and defeated the Uzbeks in the 1450s and, taking advantage of the power vacuum in the steppes, rose to control a large empire in Central Asia – their Khan being proclaimed supreme Khan in 1434 or 1439. Their empire extended from Lakes Baykal to Balkhash and from Baykal to the Great Wall. They were unable to build on this power to form a new Mongol empire because the resistance of the Jenghizid tribes to the east was always a check on their powers and, although they managed to invest Beijing, their lack of siege machinery thwarted the capture of it. This was the high point of Oyrat power; shortly after, about 1570, attacks from the eastern Mongols began to force them westward and their empire went into decline. At this time they start to be referred to as Kalmyks or Kalmucks¹¹⁴. Sometime around the Seventeenth Century, the Oyrat confederacy (like most of the other Mongols) was converted to Tibetan (lamaistic) Buddhism. Pushed further to the west, one branch of the Oyrats arrived in the lower Volga area in the first part of the Seventeenth Century, driving the Nogay further south into the North Caucasus. By the 1650s they were well established along the lower Volga and, from the beginning, appear to have recognized the suzerainty of Moscow. In 1717, a large part of the

¹¹² Source *Íàðíäü Ðíññèè Ýíöèèëíäàèÿ* and René Grousset: *The Empire of the Steppes*; Rutgers University Press; 1970.

¹¹³ René Grousset: *The Empire of the Steppes*; Rutgers University Press, New Jersey USA; 1970.

¹¹⁴ A name given to them by the Turks.

Kalmyks determined to return to Central Asia but many perished in the journey and most of the rest were defeated and virtually exterminated by Manchu Chinese armies. Those remaining gradually lost their status as a sovereign people allied to the Russians and Kalmykia was incorporated into Astrakhan *Guberniy*.

In the Civil War that followed the Bolshevik coup d'état, the Kalmyk territory was a bastion of White resistance. The Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast was established in 1920 and, in 1935 it was raised to the status of an autonomous republic. Stalin deported the Kalmyks *en masse* to Central Asia in 1943 with the same terrible consequences suffered by the other deported peoples. They were allowed to return in 1957.¹¹⁵ They continue to practise Tibetan Buddhism and were recently granted their own Living Buddha by the Dalai Lama.

Therefore, the history of the Kalmyks is quite different from that of the other peoples discussed in the Handbook. The North Caucasians, except the Ossetians, were conquered outright by the Russians after a long and bloody resistance. The collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 was the signal for the Mountaineers to rise again but they were beaten down by the Bolsheviks and made to pay hard for their contumacy. The Georgians and the Armenians generally welcomed the Russian advance 200 years ago because it gave them protection against the Ottoman and Persian Empires but they feel the Russians cheated them because their autonomy was dissolved and they became mere provinces of the Empire. The Azerbaijanis appear to have been indifferent to whether they were ruled from Moscow, Constantinople or Teheran. But they all chafed under Soviet rule and all immediately grasped the opportunity to leave the USSR. These people have either been living where they are today for a thousand years or from great antiquity. The main history of the Kalmyks, by contrast, is set far to the east; they came to the Volga region more or less as refugees (although armed refugees in that they dispossessed the Nogay tribes there). Then, in 1717, there was another winnowing in which those Kalmyks who wanted to leave did so. Thus, one could argue that the Kalmyks living there have always accepted Moscow's rule. In Kalmykia, therefore, there are none of the historically-based myths and hero tales which have spawned so much strife in the Caucasus.

The Republic has been pretty quiet since the beginning of the Gorbachev period. President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov¹¹⁶, a young and somewhat eccentric entrepreneur, has been in control since 1993 and has had his term extended to 2002¹¹⁷. The defining law of the Republic, the Steppe Code, adopted in 1994, revokes the right of the small and rather poor republic to leave the Russian Federation. It also states the priority of federal law over republic law. Kalmykia is also a tax-free (or tax-reduced) zone in the Russian Federation.

¹¹⁵ Yeltsin signed a decree 25 December 1993 concerning rehabilitation for the Kalmyks and calling for a federal program. As usual, funding has been inadequate.

¹¹⁶ The Republic has attracted somewhat bemused world attention because Ilyumzhinov has been President of the World Chess federation since November 1995. As a result, chess is a prominent feature of the Republic.

¹¹⁷ In an election called before his first term ended in which he was the sole candidate.

Altogether, at present there appears to be little likelihood of the sort of tensions in Kalmykia that are never far from the surface in the Caucasus. There is one possible problem over a land claim against Astrakhan Oblast. In July 1993, Kalmykia claimed about 400,000 square kilometres of territory basing the claim on the 1957 decree re-establishing the republic. The issue appears to have been dropped since then. There is a lingering hostility perhaps because of the deportation.

However, there is one issue that could shake the placidity of the republic. On 8 June 1998, the body of Larisa Yudina, the editor of *Sovetskaya Kalmykiya Segodnya*, a newspaper highly critical of President Ilumzhinov, was found near the capital city. The Russian central authorities have arrested three individuals, two of whom are reported to have close ties to Ilumzhinov. There have been some protests in the capital demanding retribution while the Ilumzhinov-controlled press remained silent or laid down smoke screens about the harm being done to the reputation of Kalmyks: “The long suffering Kalmyk people, having survived the Stalinist genocide and Siberian deportation, will survive this blow as well”. The authorities had placed considerable pressure on Yudina and her newspaper that had been one of the few in Kalmykia to oppose Ilumzhinov. The whole issue might peter out – as so many scandals do in Russia today – but it might lead to damage of Ilumzhinov’s hitherto unchallenged position in Kalmykia.

Even so, generally, Kalmykia can be expected to be one of the most peaceful of Russian regions. Its expectation from the Caspian hydrocarbons is that the pipeline from the Tengiz field in Kazakhstan to Novorossiysk will pass through the republic.

TENGIZ OIL AND GAS FIELD

The other Caspian source that is producing oil and gas is the Tengiz field in Kazakhstan. Because, this Handbook is restricted to the Russian Federation and the South Caucasus part of the Caspian area, discussion of the Tengiz field is out of its remit. However, a pipeline is being built through Russia and so there is a connection that should be mentioned, however briefly.

The Tengiz field is located at the north east of the Caspian on the territory of Kazakhstan. It is presently estimated to contain 24 billion barrels of oil and 1800 billion cubic metres of gas.¹¹⁸ It is being developed by a consortium of the government of Kazakhstan, the US companies Chevron and Mobil and the Russian company LukOil. A pipeline route is planned around the top of the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea at Novorossiysk. Ownership of the pipeline consortium is Russia (24 per cent); Kazakhstan (19 per cent); Chevron (15 per cent); LukOil (12.5 per cent) and

¹¹⁸ Figures taken from Chevron (http://www.chevron.com/about/exp_prod/copi/overview/tengiz/tengiz.html).

others (including the government of Oman) the remainder. Latest reports indicate, however, that the soonest oil could be flowing would be the second quarter of 2001.¹¹⁹

Thus, Tengiz appears to be reasonably well settled, oil is flowing (by train, by which a great deal of oil is moved around the former USSR) and the pipeline is being planned. Remaining questions are whether the pipeline will be connected to routes from Baku and whether China will build the line that it is talking about from Tengiz to China.¹²⁰

The pipeline to Novorossiysk will go north of the Caucasus and therefore should have little effect on that area's economy and neither should that area's instability much affect the operation of the pipeline. The Republic of Kalmykia ought to derive some benefit from the pipeline, as it will pass through it. There is one other variation that is being studied today and that is a pipeline underneath the Caspian which could take oil from Tengiz and feed it into some other route out of Baku (eg the Georgia or Turkey routes). This variant, of course, would link Tengiz oil to Caucasian transit routes.

CASPIAN SEA BORDERS

The USSR-Iran Treaties of 1921 and 1940 regulated the possession by the littoral states – there were only two then – of the Caspian Sea. At that time the signatories were concerned with military use of the Sea by third parties and with fishing access. The 1940 treaty established a four nautical mile coastal area that was exclusive to either state and permitted free use of the other parts.¹²¹ Subsequent USSR-Iran agreements jointly regulated fish spawning, water levels and so forth. In 1940 there was no thought to underwater resources. Based on this legal regime, Russia has several times argued that the 1940 treaty established *borders* in the Caspian (a point which could be debated). This was the existing situation in 1991 and the one that all the successor states of the USSR agreed to when they generally agreed to OSCE, UN and other international agreements.

But it is not what most of them want today. The Caspian is today more than a (diminishing) fishing industry – there is a great deal of oil and gas there. There are now five littoral states (the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan). Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, arguing that the 1940 Treaty did not set up *borders*, are firmly in favour of a complete division of the entire Sea into exclusive national sectors. For a long time Russia and Iran adhered to the earlier arrangement

¹¹⁹ “Kazakhstan completes transfer of assets to pipeline alliance”, *New Europe*, 15-21 March 1998.

¹²⁰ In 1997, China signed an agreement to build a line east to China. This will be quite expensive (Chinese estimates are 3.5 billion US dollars) and so may not be built.

¹²¹ And why would the USSR apparently give up control of the greater half of the Sea? Simple – Soviet fishing technology was superior to Iranian and therefore the USSR got the lion's share of the fish.

with common areas although Moscow has abandoned this position as of the summer of 1998. Turkmenistan does not yet appear to have made up its mind.

National positions seem to be entirely the consequence of national interests and expectations. The only proven resources at the moment are in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan and, naturally, they want as much exclusive right to them as they can get. The other three, also naturally, want a public area that would give them as much as they can get. However, because there are oil and gas deposits all around the Caspian littoral, it seems probable that these fields extend underneath the Sea as well. Thus, probably every one of the states would have oil in its share of the Sea. As soon as oil or gas is found in the potential sector of a particular country, we can be confident that it will switch to the “division theory”.¹²²

Pedantic legality appears to be on the side of Russia and Iran (although their case is an argument by extension) but their case will probably be lost. In any event, while the Russian Foreign Ministry was busy defending its position, Russian oil companies were equally busy buying into agreements with Azerbaijan. The potential tensions have been mitigated because President Aliyev has been clever enough to spread the involvement so that every state gets something from every possibility.

However, the Russian Federation is steadily modifying its position and creeping ever closer to agreeing to the full division of the Caspian. In November 1996, Moscow proposed a larger “private strip” of 45 miles rather than its previous ten miles. In January 1998, it advanced the hypothesis that, while the surface waters would remain common, the bottom would be divided among the littoral states. Russia took another step on 28 March 1998 when 1st Deputy Foreign Minister Pastukhov told President Aliyev that Russia was now prepared to accept national division of the sea bed with free navigation and joint pollution responsibility for the waters. On 6 July Yeltsin and Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev signed an agreement dividing their end of the Caspian according to this scheme. Thus, Moscow is steadily moving towards the position that Baku and Almaty have held all along

The issue of division of the Sea is another complication that an already complicated issue doesn't need. However, all indications are that the Baku-Almaty position will prevail and the entire sea, and its that hydrocarbons will be divided into exclusive national sectors among the littoral states.

PIPELINE ROUTES

The next issue of contention is what routes will the oil and gas follow to get out to their customers in the West? Four possible routes are commonly mentioned (with a distant possibility of a fifth). But only one of these is actually moving oil at the moment and only one other one is being built. The third alternative exists on paper only and the fourth is blocked by American veto. The fifth one is not only completely

¹²² There are rumours as of early 1998, that oil and gas have been discovered in the Russian sector of the Sea.

unbuilt but is politically even riskier than the other four. Every route travels through politically complicated parts of the world and that is why this Handbook has been written.

Operating pipeline routes can be a force for stability but they can also be a hostage during strife. The argument that they are productive of stability is that they earn money for those who control the territories through which they pass and, generally speaking, the money is “free” because it requires little effort on the part of the recipients. In the Caucasus, where there are very few other sources of hard currency, pipelines are eagerly sought. On the other hand, in the Caucasus, where passions run deep and law and order is rather hypothetical, it is tempting to cut a pipeline that runs through or to an enemy. Pipeline explosions in the route that led from Azerbaijan, through Georgia, into Armenia were a continual feature of the Karabakh war – for example in April 1993 the line was severed for the fifth time that year. In April 1998 a group calling itself the “Sword of Islam” blew up a gas pumping station in Dagestan's Novolakskiy Rayon.¹²³ The other fate of an operating pipeline in the Caucasus is that it is illicitly tapped – for example, in February 1996 federal forces discovered 15 underground oil refineries north of Grozny. Illicit refineries and tapped pipelines and oil wells were, indeed, one of the ways in which the Chechens financed the war. Illicit tapping of the Baku-Groznyy-Novorossiysk line is happening today. So, will the pipeline contribute to stability in the Caucasus or provide hostages to a country's enemies? One can only hope that it will be the former – certainly every people, every political entity, every country can use an infusion of cash.

But, in order to maximize the possibility that pipelines can be forces for stability, it would be wise to ensure that everyone gets some of the action – and at the moment Armenia, Karabakh and Abkhazia are completely cut out from any revenues. They, therefore, might feel a temptation to strike at their enemies by attacking the pipeline that funds their enemy's armed forces. And, since they have proved themselves to be the most effective and determined fighters in the South Caucasus, this is not an empty threat.

Another complicating issue is the fact that the United States has placed Azerbaijan under a sort of embargo. Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which was passed in 1992, places sanctions on Azerbaijan because of its blockade of Armenia as a result of the Karabakh wars. However, it would appear likely that this embargo will be lifted soon.

Whether or not a particular pipeline route is built or not will depend greatly on the price of oil. The price of oil dropped from about 20 US dollars a barrel to about 14 US dollars between October 1997 and March 1998.¹²⁴ There are a number of reasons for this decline in the price of oil to levels of about 25 years ago but they amount to the increase in supply and a decrease in demand relative to that supply. The question is what

¹²³ This group demands the transfer of Novolakskiy and Aukh rayons from Dagestan to Chechnya.

¹²⁴ *The Economist* 28 March 1998.

the price will be in the future. All these calculations must be factored in to the Caspian finds.

Chechnya-Russia route.

The only route that is pumping oil at present is the Baku-Chechnya-Novorossiysk route. The principal political difficulty here, of course, is the status of Chechnya. And, to a degree, the question hinges on whether Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation, in which case Moscow is prepared to pay one fee or whether it is an independent country, in which case Moscow pays another, greater, fee. After this question is settled, comes the question of whether *any* government in Grozny can ensure the secure passage of all that liquid gold through Chechnya. At the end of 1997, Moscow and Grozny negotiated a short-term agreement but it is an open question whether they can agree in the future. An agreement for 1998 was announced in April – and one in which Chechnya received rather more per ton than it had in the 1997 agreement¹²⁵. Responding to these potential difficulties, some Russian officials have mooted building a new line that would bypass Chechnya. Chechnya, for its part, has threatened to shut off the oil unless Moscow keeps the promises it made after the war and is complaining that it is not receiving the promised revenues. But, Chechnya is not the only political difficulty – the route passes through Dagestan and the North Caucasian republics. Any one of them could turn into a smaller Chechnya at any moment.

Georgia route.

The next potential route goes from Azerbaijan, through Georgia to Supsa. This line is unbuilt as yet although preliminary work is underway and oil could be flowing in a year. There is an existing Soviet-era pipeline but it is inadequate and was severely damaged in the wars. But at least there is a route. It appears highly probable that this route will be built. Physically and technologically, there is no problem with building this line. There is, as with all other routes, some question about political stability but this is probably the route with the least of these problems even though it passes close to Abkhazia (within attacking distance that is). Work has begun as of the summer of 1998 and, although it is both slower and more expensive than planned, there seems to be little doubt that oil will be arriving in Supsa sometime in 1999.

Turkey route.

A third candidate runs from Azerbaijan, through Georgia, into Anatolia and to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. This route has the advantage of bypassing the Bosphorus, which is already crowded with shipping to the point of concern in Ankara.¹²⁶ Its defects are that it must be built through mountainous Anatolia with all

¹²⁵ According to the Chechen oil minister, US\$3.58/tonne rather than US\$0.43/tonne

¹²⁶ Both the Georgian and Russia/Chechnya routes have this problem to face. By-pass pipelines are one suggestion; another is to connect into a European system in Bulgaria.

its earthquakes. Politically, it would pass through Turkish Kurdistan. A recent meeting among the foreign ministers of Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan discussed the route. The participants approved it (without making any commitments) while stressing that they favour multiple pipelines. To construct this route will take more than statements, some consortium must commit to the money which is likely to be about three billion US dollars. This route has a good deal of support from the United States but, even so, whatever the US government may think of it, it is not very likely that it will pay for it. After all, oil is not just a geostrategic resource, it is supposed to be a moneymaking proposition too. Thus, some oil consortium has to be found to put up the money for Baku-Ceyhan and that may be the problem on which it founders. The decline in oil prices in 1998 presumably makes this route than much less likely.

Iran route.

A fourth route would take the oil south from Azerbaijan into Iran where it could be connected easily and cheaply to the existing pipeline networks. The difficulty here is that the United States is very much opposed to Iran's receiving any of the transit monies.¹²⁷ Another difficulty is that the oil and gas would wind up in the Persian Gulf making that volatile area even more important.

Eastern routes.

China and the countries of the Far East are also potential customers for the hydrocarbons of the Caspian area – especially those from the Tengiz Field. Two routes are under discussion for this eastward direction although neither is much past the discussion stage.

The Afghanistan route heads across the Sea from Baku or down from Tengiz, through Turkmenistan, to western Afghanistan and thence to Pakistan. This route has many disadvantages – the ecological problems of an underwater route, very difficult terrain and extreme – nay, terminal – political instability in Afghanistan. It is expensive (two to four billion US dollars) and therefore rather improbable.

A second route heads east from Tengiz to China. An agreement was signed in 1977 between the governments of Kazakhstan and China but this line is also quite expensive (Chinese estimates are 3.5 billion US dollars). It must go through some formidable territory and, in what seems to be the norm for Caspian pipeline routes, through some politically troubled territory. This line would not be operating for six or seven years.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ There are some indications that Washington's position may be softening. If the Novorossiysk, Supsa and Iran routes were all functioning, there would seem to be little financial reason to build the Turkish route as well.

¹²⁸ "Kazakhoil details plans to export through China", *New Europe*, 15-21 March 1998.

For the near future, two things are so likely as to be virtually certain: the Russian/Chechen and Georgian routes are the only ones that will be carrying oil and all concerned will agree on many routes rather than few. Here, once again, President Aliyev has involved all players in all possibilities. If there really is as much oil and gas in the Caspian as some think other routes will become attractive. The Turkey route may be built (although it is expensive) and, if US-Iran relations improve, an Iranian route could easily be added.

However, one other thing is also certain. There is no route out of Azerbaijan for oil or gas that is not attached to political difficulties. All routes either pass through or near to contested territories. Thus, the decision to build this or that route carries with it a heavy freight of political and strategic choices.

NATIONAL INTERESTS

The Caucasus is poor, damaged by years of communist mis-management and by the nationalist-inspired wars after 1985. Money is not the answer to all problems there, but it can help. One reason why so much of the Chechen economy today, for example, is based on kidnapping foreigners is that there is little else for people to do to earn a living. There are too many unemployed men with guns in the Caucasus and there are plenty of issues to excite their passions. The income from oil and gas could be the basis for creating a prosperous and stable Caucasus. Governments there see the income as their salvation, as a means to jump-start their collapsed economies.

As well as exciting the interests of the inhabitants and their governments, the oil and gas finds have drawn the interests of the rest of the world into the Caucasus. The struggle is played out in three fields – oil extraction, pipeline routes and influence. In essence, every player wants to maximize its gains. However, some feel that, in order to maximize their gains, they must minimize the other players' gains. It appears, however, that this “zero-sum” approach, which seems to have been common a few years ago, is losing support as the players realize that there is plenty for everybody and that the best and most stable solution is one in which all players have a stake in every outcome.

For an example of the “zero-sum” approach circa 1997:

...Caspar Weinberger issued a powerful warning that American policy makers, in their preoccupation with NATO's expansion, may be missing the fact that Russia has a truly ominous enlargement initiative of its own – ‘dominance of the energy resources in the Caspian Sea region.’ As he observes in the attached op.ed. article which appeared on 9 May in the *New York Times*... ‘If Moscow succeeds, its victory could prove much more significant than the West's success in enlarging NATO.’¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Center for Security Policy, Washington, 12 May 1997. The “zero-sum” view can lead the authors into rather improbable statements as when the piece quoted here goes on to talk about “Western-oriented, secular Azerbaijan”.

In particular, the naïve geostrategic view that the Russian Federation must be kept out of the picture lest it increase its “sphere of interest” is waning. Much credit must go to President Aliyev of Azerbaijan for his skill in attaching every player to every option. For example, the consortium of September 1994 for the exploitation of several off-shore fields involves 11 companies from seven countries: Amoco (17 percent), British Petroleum (17 percent), Unocal (11 percent), Azerbaijan's SOCAR (10 percent), the Russian LukOil (10 percent), Pennzoil (9.8 percent), Statoil of Norway (8.5 percent), the Turkish Tpa0 (6.75 percent), Exxon (5 percent), McDermott (2.45 percent), British Ramco (2 percent), and Saudi Delta (0.5 percent).

If it ever was US policy to exclude the Russian Federation as a pipeline route, it is not now. A US spokesman, on the eve of the “Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission” meeting in March 1998, stated that:

We do not view this (Baku-Ceyhan) route as exclusive of routes through Russia...Our position is that we favor multiple pipelines...There is clearly sufficient oil resources in the eastern Caspian to justify both the (Baku-Ceyhan) route as well as other pipeline routes that could come out from the region.¹³⁰

It is already possible to make up a partial list of “winners” and “losers” in the contest. Azerbaijan (and Kazakhstan) are winners of course because they have oil and gas and, whatever happens, they will make money out of it. The Russian Federation is a winner because some pipeline routes inevitably will pass through its territory and its companies are involved in the extraction. Georgia – but not Abkhazia – is a winner because one of the routes will pass through its territory. The major Western oil companies and suppliers are also winners because they are involved in the extraction and in constructing any pipeline.

There are two certain losers at present and they are Armenia and Karabakh. They are losers because no proposed pipeline route passes through their territory, they have no oil companies or pipeline companies and no oil has been discovered there. Added to which, as long as the Karabakh problem is unsolved, it is unlikely that Baku will allow Armenia to make anything from the oil and gas. If, the Karabakh problem were solved, things might be different. Armenia and Karabakh are not completely helpless in bargaining, however, inasmuch as the Karabakhians do control a bargaining chip in the Azerbaijan territory they hold. But, as we have already seen with the downfall of President Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia does not control Karabakh. Nonetheless, careful diplomatic activity could produce a way out; for example, Azerbaijan territory could be traded for Karabakh security and some Armenian and Karabakh involvement in the oil bonanza.

At the moment, it is not clear to what degree Turkey and Iran will be winners or losers in the competition to make money and gain influence from Caspian oil and gas. Turkey has invested a lot of hope on the Baku-Ceyhan route both for the income and the influence. But, as was said above, the route may not be economically viable and nor may it be necessary. Turkey has two cards to play – to persuade others that a

¹³⁰ Tom Doggett: “US to reassure Russia about trans-Caspian pipeline”, Reuters 9 Mar 1998.

Russian “sphere of influence” must be stopped and the problem of transit through the Bosphorus. The Bosphorus is an international waterway and, legally, Turkey cannot stop peaceful passage. But the waterway is very narrow and Turkey has reason to be concerned about more tanker traffic passing through the centre of its principal city. There are legitimate ecological concerns as well. Iran, which in many respects has the cheapest and easiest route to offer, is currently blocked by the USA, which does not want the oil going that way. So far, no oil or gas has been discovered in what would be the Iranian sector of the Caspian Sea.

However, these are solvable problems and there is no reason why every player can't have something. Certainly, that appears to be President Aliyev's policy (and the USA's) and, as more interests become entangled together, the dangerous “zero-sum” thinking will decrease. But all the players must make an effort to leave some gain for everyone. Because of the military prowess of the Karabakhians and Abkhazians, an effort should be made to include them as well as Armenia in the profits. One does not want there to be any spoilers in the area – especially if they are those who have demonstrated that they are the most effective fighters.

Russia's Involvement

As has been observed above, there is, or was, a wide-spread conviction, at least among some commentators, that the Russian Federation interfered in the course of developments in the South Caucasus in order to bind the countries into its “sphere of influence”. The arguments presented earlier will not be repeated here¹³¹. Suffice it to say that the claims that Russia started the wars in the area are gross oversimplifications, depend upon a deep ignorance of what the causes actually were and presuppose a number of assumptions that are, simply, wrong. Russia did not start these troubles, there is little evidence that it shaped their development and there have been few benefits for Russia in the chaos in the South Caucasus.

Another common charge is that, in the attempt of all concerned countries to get as much as they can out of the Caspian hydrocarbons, there is something sinister or threatening about Russia's (or Iran's) attempts.

But Russia, which is determined to maintain a predominant influence in the region, has responded to what it perceives as Western intrusion in its backyard with its own version of the Monroe Doctrine... Moscow's strategy of reasserting its economic and military-political influence in the region includes the goal of dominating the production and transportation of Caspian oil to world markets... A pattern of Russian-Iranian cooperation is emerging, which must be very disturbing to policy-makers in Washington... In the game for economic and political leverage in the region, the problem for the West is that Russia, as the

¹³¹ See section on Post 1985 wars p 33 for argument that official Russia did not set up the wars and that Russian interference was not, by any means, the decisive factor.

regional hegemon, holds all the cards that it needs to regain dominance over Caspian oil.¹³²

Other pipeline routes are, of course, a good thing:

The Turkish government has proposed to finance the extension of an existing Georgian pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea, thus securing an oil route to the West that is safe from terrorist threats and Russian subversion. But when Georgian president Shevardnadze backed the Turkish proposal, he was nearly killed in a bombing, in which Russian involvement was suspected.¹³³

But, enough. It should have been clear from the beginning that Russia's argument was founded on simple geography. The two easiest pipeline routes to the Black Sea are north and south of the Great Caucasus Range and of these, the only one that could be brought into operation in time was the Russian route. The Georgian route should be operating by the end of 1998. All the other routes exist only on paper. Therefore, given the facts of geography, there was no way that Russia could be kept out of involvement.

People who argue for a sinister Russian intention in the area like to point to the 13,000 Russian soldiers stationed there. They are in two separately-controlled groups – an airborne regiment in Abkhazia and units of the Group of Russian Forces in the South Caucasus (GRFTC).

The first elements of the airborne regiment was placed in Abkhazia in mid-1991 (when both Abkhazia and Georgia were part of the USSR). The Abkhaz leader saw trouble coming after the 17 March 1991 referendum in which, in defiance of a Georgia-wide ban on its holding, Abkhazia had voted to remain in the Union.¹³⁴ Georgian President Gamsakhurdia's response was to threaten to disband the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet and abolish the autonomy of Abkhazia. The Abkhaz leader, Vladislav Ardzinba, thereupon arranged for a Soviet airborne battalion to be transferred to

¹³² Rossen Vassilev: "The Politics of Caspian Oil", *Prism*, 12 January 1996, The Jamestown Foundation. This piece is altogether somewhat of a classic: Russia's evil intention is based on history: "Russia had maintained tight control over the energy resources of the region since the 19th century." (Isn't that like saying that the USA had maintained tight control over Texas's energy resources?). Then there is the fairly incredible statement "Russia's bid to control both the pipeline routes and a larger share of the Caspian oil projects has already been strengthened by its troop presence in Chechnya."

¹³³ Vassilev Op Cit. Calling the Turkish route "secure" ignores the fact that it will pass through Turkish Kurdistan. As to the assassination attempt on Shevardnadze (the 1995 attempt), suspicion of Russian involvement is apparently enough. As it happens, the Georgian authorities have charged Jabba Ioseliani, not Moscow (see note 97).

¹³⁴ This referendum was a real pointer to the future – in several cases, national subunits of the SSRs, voted to remain in the USSR. Their populations evidently felt they had less to fear from Moscow than from the local capital. The Chechens, however, voted against the new union.

Sukhumi.¹³⁵ This military presence forced Gamsakhurdia to back down until the collapse of the USSR at the end of that year. The force was later strengthened to regiment size in order to protect some sensitive nuclear weapons related installations in and around Sukhumi¹³⁶. It would seem probable that this force would have been, at a minimum, hostile to Tbilisi's attempts to crush Abkhazia – it should not be forgotten, in any case, that the Georgian National Guard, when it attacked Abkhazia and Sukhumi in August 1992, would not have respected Russian troops or their families; in any case, it had earlier been attacked in June (at that point it was a “CIS” unit). Kitovani and his gang therefore gave the Russian troops an interest in seeing them stay as far away as possible. Today, under command of Airborne HQ in Moscow, the 345th Airborne Regiment is stationed in Gudauta, Abkhazia. It possesses 1708 troops, 141 armoured combat vehicles and 18 pieces of artillery.¹³⁷ It presently supplies a battalion to the CIS (but actually all-Russian) peacekeeping force along the Abkhazia-Georgia border. In March 1998, it was announced that this unit would be disbanded and it is not yet clear whether any more Russian troops will be garrisoned in Gudauta.

The other Russian Ministry of Defence forces in the South Caucasus are part of the GRFTC. These were regularized after the Georgian defeat in the Abkhaz war and the Zviadist revolt¹³⁸. The Georgian forces, having been expelled from Abkhazia were on the verge of being chased out of Mingrelia by the Zviadists when Russian troops intervened, after Shevardnadze's appeal, to protect the Poti-Tbilisi railway. Almost immediately, the Zviadist tide began to turn. In February 1994, Yeltsin and Shevardnadze signed a treaty and, eventually, an agreement for Russian troops to be based in Georgia. The troops in Armenia had been there earlier. Russian troops in Azerbaijan were all withdrawn in May 1993.

One should not exaggerate the number or capability of the troops of the GRFTC. According to CFE Treaty data as of 1 January 1998, there were 11,520 troops in the GRFTC¹³⁹. They were equipped with 215 tanks, 517 armoured combat vehicles, 239 pieces of artillery, five attack helicopters and five combat support helicopters. These deployments have not changed since the figures of 1997. On paper, the manoeuvre units appeared substantial: eight motorized rifle regiments and one independent tank battalion. However, all of these units were under strength – only

¹³⁵ Alexey Zverev: “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994” in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*; Bruno Coppieters (ed.); VUBPRESS, (Vrije Universiteit Brussels), Pleinlaan 2, B - 1050 Brussels; 1996 (<http://www.vub.ac.be/POLI/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0101.htm>).

¹³⁶ Sukhumi was one of the centres of Soviet research on nuclear weapons after the war. There is an installation in Tkvarcheli which monitors nuclear explosions.

¹³⁷ CFE Treaty Data 1 January 1998. It is very possible, even probable, given the severe personnel shortages in the Russian Federation Armed Forces, that the actual number is significantly below these figures both for this formation and the GRFTC generally.

¹³⁸ See Georgian civil wars p 39.

¹³⁹ 7691 from the GRFTC in Georgia and the 1708 paratroops of the 345th Airborne Regiment in Abkhazia for a total of 9399 in Georgia. The remaining 3829 are in Armenia. There are no Russian troops in Azerbaijan.

five of the motorized rifle regiments had more than one thousand troops (the largest at 1373). By contrast, in the North Caucasus Military District, where Moscow is seriously concerned about Chechnya, motorized rifle regiments typically have over 2000 troops. The 205th Motorized Rifle Brigade at Budyonnovsk¹⁴⁰, with 4076 troops has nearly as many soldiers in it the six smallest regiments south of the Caucasus. Even so, these forces are substantial, given the context, especially in Georgia, where the state has little in the way of disciplined armed forces.

Why are these troops there? Again, a common answer would be that they are there to overawe the local governments and ensure that they do not stray too far from Moscow's interests. But this theory does not seem to accord very well with where they are deployed. With the exception of the headquarters in Tbilisi, a motorized rifle regiment nearby¹⁴¹ and a motorized rifle regiment in Yerevan,¹⁴² the troops are based along the frontiers at Batumi, Akhalkalaki and Gjumri – covering the historical invasion routes to and from Turkey. Thus, for the most part, their deployments do not seem to be consistent with an intention to dominate Armenia and Georgia. It appears, therefore, that the principal purpose of the troops would fall under a “geostrategic” rubric. Russia has long-held “interests” in the area, it is a “vital sphere of interest” etc etc. Certainly, these kinds of things were commonly said by then Minister of Defence Grachev and then Foreign Minister Kozyrev. The question today is whether anyone cares about such matters.

The two countries have different ideas about the Russian troops. The Georgians officially say they are welcome but unofficially feel that they were forced on them after the disaster of the Abkhaz war and the Zviadist revolt in the West.¹⁴³ Armenians are probably not unhappy to see them there as they would provide a deterrent to any attack by Azerbaijan (however unlikely such an attack would be and despite the fact that the troops are deployed about as far away from Azerbaijan as they could be). As to the Russians themselves, it is not easy to see tangible benefits. Troops stationed abroad are always more expensive than troops stationed at home. They do not serve any real useful purpose – if the intent was to put Georgia into the Russian “sphere of influence” for example, that has not exactly happened. If they were placed there to ensure that Russia got all the Caspian pipelines, they have not done that either. There is no need either to threaten or defend against Turkey. Indeed, they have had little effect in geostrategic matters. Whatever the then defence minister Grachev may have had in mind, his successor appears to be less committed to

¹⁴⁰ This is one of the very few Russian units which appears to be fully manned and equipped. Most of the others never seem to have the troops that they are said to have. The brigade in Maykop appears to be in a similar condition. It is even possible that the Russian Federation Armed Forces are in better condition around Chechnya today than they were before the war started.

¹⁴¹ 405th MRR with 1373 troops and 31 tanks.

¹⁴² 123rd MRR with 1256 troops and 13 tanks.

¹⁴³ Tbilisi also has an expectation that Russia would somehow settle the Abkhazia situation in Tbilisi's favour – many Georgians are convinced that Russia fomented the war; therefore, they believe that Moscow can deliver Sukhumi whenever it wants.

stationing troops there: on 2 March 1988, he hinted that troops might be withdrawn from Georgia.

The Russian troops in the South Caucasus do not seem to be much use for Russia – they cost a lot and the geostrategic benefits are slight. Therefore, it is probable that Moscow will withdraw its troops from the South Caucasus reasonably soon.

Another reason to expect Moscow to withdraw or greatly reduce these troops – and reduction will make them even less useful – is the fact that it is moving away from *geopolitics* towards *geoeconomics*. The Russian Federation Concept of National Security, which was published in December 1997, clearly states that the greatest “threat” to Russia’s security is the state of its economy.

While military power factors retain their significance in international relations, economic, political, scientific and technical, ecological and informational factors are playing an increasing role...The critical state of the economy is the main cause of the emergence of a threat to the Russian Federation’s national security.

Military forces (“The existing military organization is burdensome to the state”) have a comparatively small role to play in this (other than nuclear forces “The most important task of the Russian Federation Armed Forces is to maintain a guarantee of nuclear deterrence”). This document is supposed to be a sort of master “white paper” and guide all government departments and agencies. 12,000 not very well equipped or capable troops in two foreign countries facing a state that is not going to attack¹⁴⁴ do not fit well with this new concept.

The other Russian armed forces in the area total about 15,000 border guards whose job is to control South Caucasian borders. Generally, throughout the 12 members of the CIS, Russian border guards guard the borders of the old USSR. This situation is another post-USSR reality, however undesirable it may be in the longer term. Russians constituted about half of the USSR’s population and most things were directed from Moscow. When the USSR broke up, there was no re-distribution of nationalities in which, say, all the Georgians in the old USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs packed up and moved to Tbilisi to set up the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many of them stayed in Moscow for readily understandable personal reasons.¹⁴⁵ The same is true for institutions – the USSR was a very centralized state, most headquarters were in Moscow and the Russian Federation inevitably inherited the structure and expertise. In short, upon gaining the independence, which not all of the twelve had sought, the newly-independent countries found that they had very few

¹⁴⁴ Despite Turkey’s oft-stated concerns about Russian deployments in the Caucasus, it is instructive that Turkish construction firms (which do a great deal of the building in Russia) actually worked on the barracks and structures at Budyonnovsk.

¹⁴⁵ For example, the author knows three Georgians in the Russian Federation MFA.

resources with which to exercise their new status.¹⁴⁶ In particular, they had no border guards (and no properly surveyed borders between them).

It is very easy to declare that the CIS *should* have done something about the problem or that there was no problem and that Russian border guards are yet one more sign of Russia leaning on its neighbours. It's not so simple: the cost of creating the border alone puts it out of the question. Here is an illustration of how expensive it is: in April 1995 it was announced that the European Union had granted Lithuania 5.2 million ECU (\$USD6.9 million) to implement a three-year program aimed at resolving border crossing problems.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, for the little border of Lithuania with Belarus and Kaliningrad, one with few physical difficulties, not in dispute at any point and only about 500 kilometres long, the EU was granting about \$1.5 million per 100 kms and expected the operation to take at least three years. The border of the Russian Federation, which marches with the CIS countries and the Baltic states, extends about 10,000 kms. Thus, at this rate of cost, we are looking at something like \$15 billion and some of it is over much more difficult (and therefore more expensive) terrain. Such a task would take time measured in years. Thus, for the Russian Federation to survey, mark, built access roads, communications links and customs posts along its CIS/Baltic borders would not be a minor task. And, in 1991, at least Russia had the staff and equipment to do so and might have believed it had the money. For Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, wracked by war, border surveying and guarding was out of the question.

But, the borders could not be left unguarded altogether. Therefore the CIS was forced, willy-nilly, to treat the old USSR border as a kind of common border. They were all afraid of what would happen if these borders were left unmanned while the newly independent countries created border control forces (along with all the other forces they had to create). Thus, they agreed that Russia, which retained the bulk of the old Soviet structure, would supply the border controls. However, this situation is gradually changing – each country is gradually developing its borders with its CIS neighbours. Thus, it would be a gross oversimplification to see the presence of Russian¹⁴⁸ border guards in the South Caucasus and elsewhere as Russian imperialistic activity. Nonetheless, the presence of these forces and the others, however under strength, do constitute a force far greater than those of the Georgian or Armenian governments can muster. It is, therefore, desirable, that the CIS countries all acquire the ability to patrol their own borders as soon as possible. It is probable

¹⁴⁶ The author was told by the Belarusan Embassy in Moscow that upon independence Belarus (which had had a seat in the UN General Assembly) had *twenty* people in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Georgia or Azerbaijan would have had even fewer. (All the SSRs maintained quasi-Embassies in Moscow as part of the fiction that they were independent *in posse* and therefore they all had vestigial foreign ministries. This at least meant that they all owned buildings in Moscow – some of which are very large and elaborate).

¹⁴⁷ OMRI Daily Digest, No. 66, Part II, 3 April 1995

¹⁴⁸ Indeed, one wonders how “Russian” they are anyway – the overwhelming personnel majority of the so-called Russian border guard force in Tajikistan, for example, is locally recruited/conscripted.

here too, that, as the Russian government – now under a 35 year old Prime Minister – looks more closely at the books, these forces will also be reduced or withdrawn. Indeed, a report in a Russian newspaper recently spoke of how the cost of maintaining these border guards – 100,000 outside the Russian Federation according to the author – was becoming prohibitively high and that at least a partial withdrawal may be coming.¹⁴⁹ Georgia, in fact, announced in July 1998 that it had start patrolling a significant part of its borders with its own border guards.

Russia's other principal interest in the Caucasus is that it should be *quiet*. Whatever it may have thought in 1992, after the defeat in Chechnya, Moscow's ambitions in the Caucasus can only be defensive and containing. Chechnya, should it ever emerge from its present chaos, is problem enough for Moscow.¹⁵⁰

Nonetheless, Moscow is determined to get something out of the Caspian boom and its position is affected by the fact that, so far, no oil or gas has been found in its own part of the Caspian (although there are rumours). But its desire for pipelines is a product mostly of the geographic reality of the area and that is something that nothing much can be done about. The area would not have become more stable, nor the oil and gas more economically viable, if all pipelines had carefully avoided Russian territory.

FEDERALISM

As all the above has shown, mono-ethnic states, or states in which one nationality is seen as the “host” and the others as “guests”, cannot survive in the Caucasus – civil war will be the inevitable result of any such policy. It is not a coincidence that most of the post-USSR wars have taken place in the Caucasus. Only federal states have any chance of success. The Abkhaz, Ossetians and Karabakhians could probably be persuaded to accept a genuine federal relationship in which they have some powers to ensure their own physical security – but these powers must be real for too many people have been killed and tormented to expect them to just trust the majority. Best of all would be a South Caucasian Confederation. At present, this is a fantasy. But the three independent states have produced such a record of political instability, wars, overthrown governments and suffering that the people might, once they give up their obsolete mono-ethnic desires, be prepared to countenance the idea. A confederation in which all are minorities – Georgians and Azerbaijanis as well as Karabakh Armenians, Christians as well as Muslims – would lead to much more understanding and mutual benefit. The oil and gas money could be a lubricant. This is a fantasy today but, it is interesting that, whenever the author asked South Caucasian

¹⁴⁹ RFE/RL 10 April 1998 quoting *Russkiy Telegraf*.

¹⁵⁰ See G.P. Armstrong: *The Chechen Knot*; D Strat A Research Note; January 1998.

diplomats whether they could imagine a future Confederation, they answered that they could. It is a possibility to be considered.¹⁵¹

For the North Caucasus, this possibility already exists. Moscow has signed more than 40 power delimitation treaties with the constituent Subjects of the Federation¹⁵² since the first with Tatarstan in February 1994 and the most recent with Moscow City in June 1998. In the North Caucasus treaties have been signed with the Republics of Kabardino-Balkaria (July 1994), North Ossetia-Alania (March 1995) and Krasnodar Krai (January 1996).¹⁵³ Moscow has shown that it permits, even encourages, a good deal of real autonomy in its 89 Subjects of the Federation. Therefore, in Russia the mechanism exists and has had some reality in the North Caucasus. However, the problem of Chechnya remains – it is *de facto* independent, it is not likely to accept membership in the Russian Federation under any terms but no federal official has yet publicly acquiesced in its secession.¹⁵⁴

The post-USSR experience in the South Caucasus has been pretty devastating for its members and the principal blame must be laid at the feet of the form of nationalism which, frozen by the communist nationality policy, thawed out after glasnost and perestroika. This *exclusive, grievance* or *tribal* nationalism – there are many words – ignited the tensions and desires that had been kept alive in a stultified form by the communists. It is not a coincidence that the former CPSU First Secretaries came to power in Georgia and Azerbaijan and that their countries have been much less unstable since.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ But the Caucasians he now speaks to see little chance of it. Perhaps whatever possibility there might have been four years ago, has now evaporated.

¹⁵² This term is used in the Russian Federation because there are so many different entities that make up the federation – republics, Krays, Oblasts and two cities.

¹⁵³ On 6 March 1998, President Aushev of Ingushetia refused to sign a power-sharing agreement scheduled for that day. There are several theories why he refused but the treaty will probably be signed eventually in this or another version.

¹⁵⁴ Although Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, who is a credible presidential candidate for 2000, did say in 1998 that it was time to let Chechnya go.

¹⁵⁵ The final Abkhaz-Georgian war happened in Shevardnadze's watch but he can hardly be blamed for it – Gamsakhurdia, Ioseliani and Kitovani had already lighted the fuse.

APPENDIX I. ETHNO-LINGUISTIC MAP OF THE CAUCASUS

Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region



Source: The map (in colour) is at [www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/commonwealth/ethno Caucasus.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/commonwealth/ethno%20Caucasus.jpg). The source doesn't give the origin but it is based on findings certainly from the 1979 USSR Census and possibly the 1989 Census. However, the fact that Ingushetia is separate from Chechnya argues that the information is reasonably current.

SOURCES USED

1. **FBIS.** Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Transcripts of radio and television broadcasts.
2. **Interfax.** Russian news agency. (URL <http://www.interfax-news.com/TodaysFSUNews>)
3. **Johnson Russia List.** An address on the Internet with news items and discussion by the community. (Subscribe at davidjohnson@erols.com)
4. **OMRI.** Open Media Research Institute. Daily news reports and commentary on the FUSSR. Now replaced by RFE/RL. (Back issues available at <http://www.omri.cz/>)
5. **Presidential Administration press releases** (in Russian) (URL http://www.maindir.gov.ru/Administration/Press_Release/Main.html)
6. **RFE/RL.** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty daily reports on the FUSSR. The successor to OMRI. (URL <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/search/>)
7. **RIA/Novosti.** Russian news agency (URL <http://www.ria-novosti.com/products/hotline/index.htm>) (Requires free registration)
8. **Russia Today.** Electronic newspaper, published five days a week. (URL www.russiatoday.com).