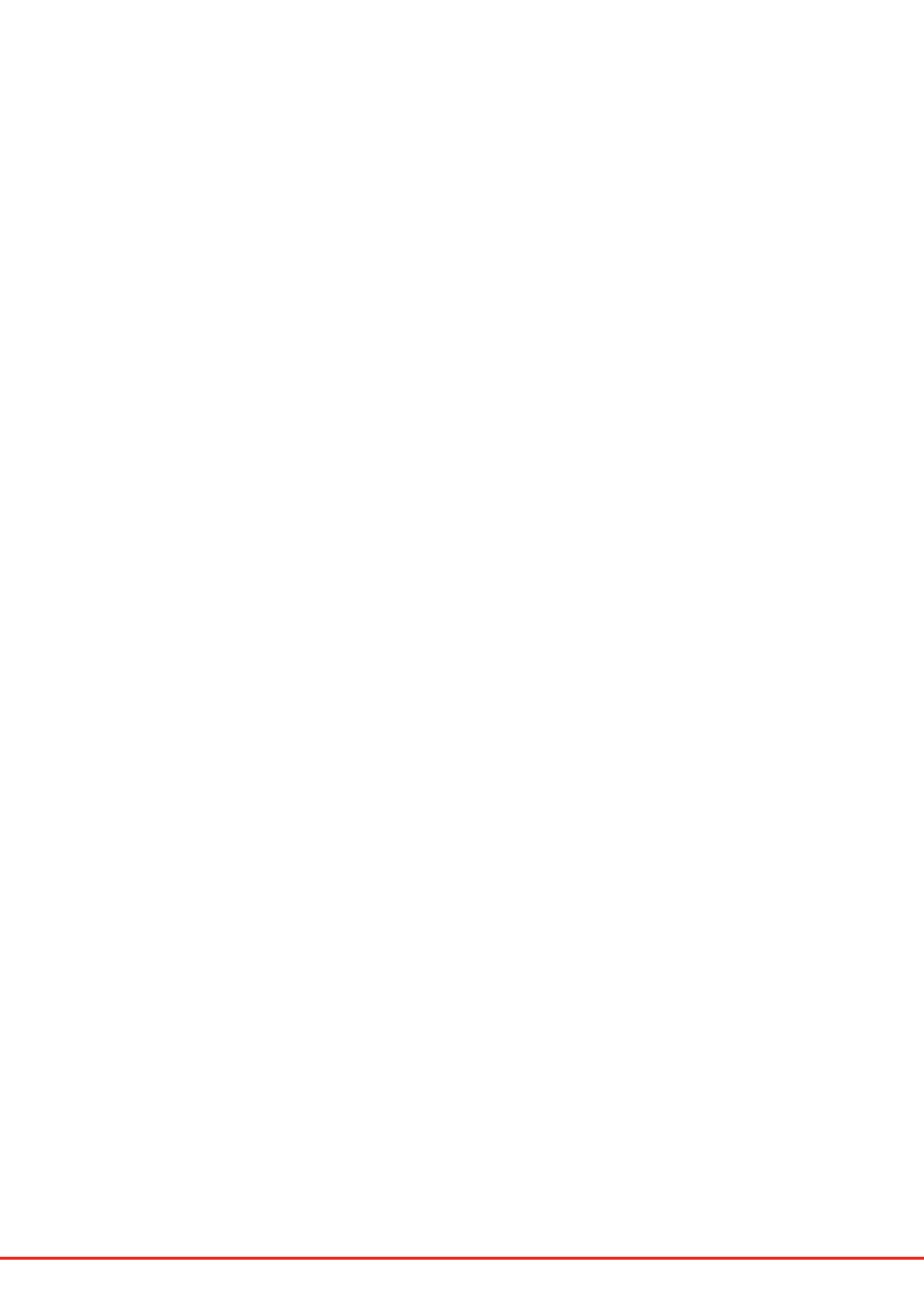


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CAUCASUS
International

Vol. 3 • No: 1-2 • Spring-Summer 2013
A New Middle East and the Frontiers
of a New Geostrategic Imagination



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A New Middle East and the Frontiers of a New Geostrategic Imagination



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Editor's Note

In this issue of *Caucasus International* (CI), we examine wide-ranging topical developments, from the Middle East in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring, to the Central Asia region, and fresh political commentary from the South Caucasus.

The title of the current issue might raise queries about the relevance of the Middle East to the South Caucasus, and its relationship to a more regional perspective. In answer, the developments following the so-called Arab Spring have demonstrated that there is growing interest in the South Caucasus region, and events across the Middle East have the potential to negatively affect security in the Caucasus.

From another perspective, the key regional powers and neighbors of three South Caucasus states- Russia, Iran and Turkey- have revealed divergent interests and policies toward the Middle East that trace new potential fault lines across the region. Interestingly, as these three players become more and more focused on Middle Eastern developments, they are placing less priority on South Caucasus issues. This is especially in the case of Turkey. Iran provides a direct link

between the South Caucasus to the Middle East, and the ongoing debate around the Iranian nuclear issue will significantly affect- positively or negatively- the security landscape of the region.

Last but certainly not least, Israel's relations with the Arab world, and the Israeli-Palestine conflict, have been closely observed by the region's countries, especially Azerbaijan. Baku, as a secular-Muslim state, is placing increasing strategic value on its relationship with Israel. At the same time, it is keen to avoid any criticism from Arab countries, and has therefore paid close attention to building strong relationships with Arab countries. This 'balancing act' – maintained by Azerbaijan between Arab countries and Israel – is important in the context of peace negotiations, should there be any concrete progress.

In this scope, we are delighted to present our feature interview with Martin Indyk, who has recently been appointed by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry as the U.S. Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations, tasked with supervising the fragile peace talks between Israel and Palestine. He talks here about the signifi-

cant role of the U.S. in maintaining peace and order in the Middle East, lamenting Washington's unwillingness to take tangible steps in getting rid of Syria's embattled President Bashar al-Assad. He urges Washington to increase U.S. involvement in Middle East affairs. This interview took place just before his appointment as a senior American envoy to the Middle East.

It is also valuable to gain a comparative perspective on the systematic problems between the Middle East and the Balkans, and to this end David B. Kanin, Adjunct Professor at Johns Hopkins University, examines the instabilities in two of the world's most complicated regions with reference to the decline of the absolute determinism of systemic factors on social, political, and economic developments.

In the context of the MENA region revolutions, the current issue offers two different national perspectives. One is from Fatima El-Issawi, a fellow at POLIS think-tank in London School of Economics, providing an overview of the developments in Jordan, reviewing the demonstrations against the monarchy in the context of the Arab Spring. Another is from Ar-

turo Varvelli, a research fellow at the ISPI (Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale) in Milan. He theorizes that Libya faces a 'trilemma' concerning the impossible coexistence of democracy, Islam and oil-based national revenues. Both articles represent valuable insights into the region's developments.

Qatar, as a small but wealthy state in the Gulf, has high stakes in Middle Eastern developments, and is the subject of a recently published book by Mehran Kamrava, "Qatar: small state, big politics". The book provides a detailed assessment about Qatari foreign policy and how it figures in the geopolitical 'dance' in the region. Following this significant publication, we sought a contribution from an observer of Qatar's foreign policy, Michael Stephens, an analyst for the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) at their Middle Eastern branch in Doha, Qatar. His paper analyzes the reasons behind Qatar's multifaceted and hyperactive foreign policy.

As I remarked, the policies of Russia and Turkey toward the Middle East are interesting to observe, and in this issue, we offer insights on Turkey's

Middle Eastern policy from Gamze Coşkun, who is a freelance journalist in Turkey. On Russia's Middle Eastern policy, we have an analysis of Moscow's 'declining power' from Stephen Blank, Research Professor of National Security Affairs at U.S. Army War College.

Beyond the Middle East, this issue also includes two articles examining Turkey's Central Asia policy, as well as an article looking at U.S. influences in Central Asia, from the perspective of its past failures and future prospects.

While this issue has focused mainly on the Middle East and Central Asia, we are also delighted to include two other important articles on regional issues, both of which represent strong contributions to future academic discussions.

One of these is the collective report by distinguished authors from Azerbaijan, providing a detailed analysis on the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh during the Soviet era. Based on careful research of the state archives, the authors present a detailed review of the level of autonomy of NKAO, focusing on the changes enacted by the USSR and Azerbaijani SSR constitutions. This report has important bearing on the resolution of the Azerbaijan-Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict. The status of Nagorno-Karabakh is one of the issues on which the two parties have not yet reached agreement.

The other contribution to academic discourses is from Rauf Garagozov's, Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Strategic Studies in Baku. He looks at Russia's so-called Eurasian Union project in terms of the historical narrative and identity. Usually, the Eurasian Union is analyzed within the "Realist" framework, and discussed in relation to its political or economic characteristic. Rarely, however, do such analyses touch on its cultural or psychological dimensions. Dr. Garagozov's paper fills this gap, arguing that the idea of Eurasian Union, well beyond any political or economic rationales, is underpinned by traditions of Russian collective memory and identity. He examines Russian historical narratives as a specific type of mnemonic device in this context, suggesting how they function as cultural tools to promote collective remembering.

Each issue of *Caucasus International* features a 'Caucasus under Review' section, which compiles a list of newly released books on the Caucasus and former Soviet territories, providing academic insights on compelling and disputed issues relating to the region, such as oil politics, regional

cooperation, social and political history, and nuclear tension. Another of our regular features is a book review. As this issue is focused on Middle East, we have taken the opportunity to look at Turkey's domestic politics as a means of better understanding Middle East policy. To this end, Jenny White's "Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks" is reviewed here.

We also have some good news for our readership: we have finalized the judging of our Essay Contest launched last year, and the winning essay is by Valeriya Gyanjumyan, who is a student at the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University in Armenia. Her essay, "How can the South Caucasus achieve regional integration and security? An Armenian Perspective", was selected by the *CI* Advisory Board.

From this issue, *Caucasus International* will include a new section - "Commentaries" - which will provide short insights on recent developments in the South Caucasus and its neighborhood. This new section is being including in response to the rapidly changing developments in the region and its neighborhood.

In the South Caucasus, Armenia's decision to join the Russian-led Customs Union remains under debate, as does the October 2013 election in Georgia. Both events represent important mile-

stones for the region. Richard Giragosian, Director of Regional Studies Center (RSC) in Yerevan, Armenia, analyzes the decision by Armenia's leadership to abandon its Association and trade agreements with the European Union. George Mchedlishvili, the Robert Bosch Fellow at Chatham House in London, analyzes Georgia's future following the Presidential election in October 2013.

In providing these new features, we have incurred a delayed in the publication of the journal, and I apologize for this. I would also like to share some developments regarding the management of the journal. First of all, we would like to welcome new members to our team: Özgür Tufekçi, is now Senior Editor; Hüsrev Tabak has been promoted to Executive Editor; and Celia Davies has been promoted to the position of Associate Editor.

We have also signed an advertisement agreement with Foreign Affairs Hellenic Edition, and more recently we happy to announce that we have signed an agreement on advertisements with *Analist* journal, the monthly publication of Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organization.

I am very grateful to all the members of the *Caucasus International* team for their work on this issue, and I take

responsibility for any errors. I would also like to mention that you can reach our Editors via email; all contacts on the journal's website, www.cijournal.org, where readers can find all the latest news about *CI*.

Finally, on behalf of the *CI* team, we hope this issue provides food for thought and for discussion!

Zaur Shiriyev,
Editor-in-Chief,
Istanbul, Turkey

Colloguy
On Syria,
the U.S. has failed
to take a leadership role | **Martin**
S. Indyk*

** Ambassador Martin Sean Indyk is U.S. special envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. He is currently on leave from his position as Vice President and Director for Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington. During the Clinton administration Indyk served as U.S. ambassador to Israel, assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, and as special assistant to the president and senior director for Near East and South Asia on the U.S. National Security Council. Indyk is the author of *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peacemaking Diplomacy in the Middle East*, and most recently, *Bending History: Barack Obama's Foreign Policy* (with Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Lieberthal).*

With Syria in ruins and no effective international diplomatic effort to halt the increasing bloodshed in the now war-torn country, criticisms of the United States for failing to live up to its leadership commitments are getting louder.

Martin Indyk was recently appointed by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry as the U.S. Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations, tasked with supervising the fragile peace talks between Israel and Palestine. He talks here about the significant role of the U.S. in maintaining peace and order in the Middle East, lamenting Washington's unwillingness to take tangible steps in getting rid of Syria's embattled President Bashar al-Assad. He urges Washington to increase U.S. involvement in Middle East affairs. This interview took place right before his appointment as a senior American envoy to the Middle East.

"The situation in Syria is heartbreaking," Indyk said. "It bothers me a great deal that the United States is not more actively involved on the ground trying to help the Syrian opposition."

Indyk's unhappiness with the situation highlights the limited role the U.S. has undertaken since the beginning of the war in Syria, which has left more than 100,000 dead and millions displaced.

Ironically, the stakes have changed in the favor of the Syrian regime since the use of chemical weapons in Da-

Indyk criticized the U.S. for failing to declare a clear objective, such as calling on Assad to leave office as Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did.

mascus suburb on August 21, and forces loyal to Assad have been gaining ground in the war that has spread across the country. Assad's government is skillfully exploiting infighting and discord within the opposition; its recent gains on the ground can also be attributed to shrinking international assistance to the rebels fighting to topple the regime in Damascus.

Western concerns over the growing numbers of Islamist extremists who have gained a considerable foothold in the conflict over the past year have fuelled fears that the U.S. and allies of the Syrian opposition will refuse to get involved in a civil war that is becoming a quagmire.

Indyk criticized the U.S. for failing to declare a clear objective, such as calling on Assad to leave office as Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did. He added that Washington has not found the "collective will" to make that happen and to achieve a clear policy directive.

Indyk noted that the conflict in Syria has become a real tragedy on multiple dimensions. On the humanitarian dimension, he said, so many people have been killed – the death toll is even higher than in Libya, where the

To Indyk, the two-year war in Syria has reinforced a perspective that the U.S. has both a strategic and a humanitarian interest in helping the opposition to achieve freedom for Syria.

international community did intervene.

In a bid to make a case for more U.S. involvement, Indyk argued that the Syrian state is now failing, and the country is starting to be torn apart. Recalling the fact that the use of chemical weapons has been independently verified, he warned against the “strategic consequences” of the intervention of Iran and Hezbollah with thousands of Lebanese Shiite militia crossing the border from Lebanon into Syria.

Syria, he said, sits at the heart in the Middle East, surrounded by allies of the U.S. – Jordan, Turkey and Israel. “We don’t have closer allies [than these countries] and all of them are affected by this descent into chaos,” Indyk emphasized.

To Indyk, the two-year war in Syria has reinforced a perspective that the U.S. has both a strategic and a humanitarian interest in helping the opposition to achieve freedom for Syria.

Recent diplomatic overtures between Russia and the U.S. have frustrated rebels fighting on the ground and the exiled Syrian opposition. Weeks after

the deployment of chemical weapons in the Damascus suburb, U.S. President Barack Obama decided to pursue a diplomatic path in the hope of disarming Syria of its chemical weapons, neither denied nor confirmed by Damascus for a lengthy period.

On August 21, according to U.S. intelligence reports, more than 1,500 people, nearly one third of them children, were killed as a result of a chemical weapons attack in a rebel-held territory. The U.S. threatened the use force to punish of Damascus, but later Washington backed down following a Russian-brokered chemical weapons deal. Assad’s chemical arsenal, in line with the agreement, should be completely eradicated by mid-2014.

The Syrian opposition hoped that the joint French-U.S. military strikes on more than 50 military targets in and around Damascus would tip the balance against Assad’s military, which enjoys air superiority and is capable of striking any point across the country. But the opposition also interpreted a diplomatic deal between the U.S. and Russia as a green light to Assad to continue killing by conventional weapons. As long as Assad does not deploy chemical weapons, the Western world will stand idly by, watching as the country is destroyed.

In addition to growing frustration with the existence of radical groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, the flow of weapons through Turkey has also dried up in recent months. Ankara

has made it clear that it is not backing radical groups in its southern neighbor, and that it is under tremendous pressure by the West to carefully vet arms deliveries into Syria, and ensure that they don't end up in the hands of al-Qaeda affiliates.

Indyk noted that the way to find an enduring solution to the crisis in Syria is "clear-cut even though it is very difficult." He believes there must be a political framework under an international umbrella of legitimacy in support of intervention by the U.S., Turkey, Jordan and other Western powers. That effort, he said, has been hindered by the Russian veto in the United Nations Security Council. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was, in Indyk's words, "absolutely right" to try to bring the Russians into the process. He urged the Obama administration to continue with the effort to get Russians on board, although it is proving very difficult to get Moscow's cooperation.

In the end, he stated, all of the available options are all bad, but things will be a little better if "the Russians [are] involved in the effort to arrange a post-Assad transition."

One risk of trying to resolve the conflict around a negotiating table is that the Syrian regime will have the upper hand due to recent gains by Damascus on the ground.

So far, the exiled Syrian opposition and the Syrian government have

Indyk noted that the way to find an enduring solution to the crisis in Syria is "clear-cut even though it is very difficult."

promised that they will attend peace talks in Geneva, as long hoped by the world community, particularly the U.S. and Russia. It is still unclear when the conference will start, and it has already been delayed several times.

The Western-backed Syrian opposition in exile is dragging its feet despite Western pressure to participate. They have little support among rebels fighting to oust Assad on the ground, mainly because of years of infighting and political bickering within the group. The Syrian opposition has set several conditions for its participation in the conference. It demands Assad's unconditional exit and rejects the idea that the Syrian president will be included in an interim government, which is expected to supervise the political transition.

Damascus, however, rejects any demand that Assad should leave.

Thanks to its superiority in the air, the Assad regime's air bombardment has gained the army important advances in Damascus suburbs and reinforced Assad's position in northern Aleppo, Syria's largest city and a financial hub.

The rebel fighters need to be provided with arms to counter the imbalance created by the fact that the Syrian regime has aircraft, helicopters and heavy artillery.

In Indyk's view, the second dimension of the solution to the Syrian crisis has to be the help on the ground for the resistance fighters affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA). He said that by now, the U.S. and Turkey know who they are, referring to the fact that weapons supplied to the rebel fighters could end up in the hands of radical groups. The rebel fighters need to be provided with arms to counter the imbalance created by the fact that the Syrian regime has aircraft, helicopters and heavy artillery. "There are ways of countering that," he said, but without elaborating.

As a third dimension, he proposed a no-fly zone to protect the areas that are liberated from Assad's grip. In his opinion, that can be achieved without great deal of difficulty, although the Pentagon says it would more difficult than in Libya.

Indyk recalled that the U.S. ran a no-fly zone in northern Iraq with a squadron of US air force operating out of the Incirli air base in southern Turkey for ten years to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein. "We never lost a pilot ... well, we didn't destroy all of Saddam Hussein's air force but

whenever we were challenged, we challenged them; we just took care of business," he said.

He said that the Patriot air defense missile systems in Jordan and Turkey could help to establish a no-fly zone in northern and southeastern Syria, but that the U.S. has to deploy air patrols and handle the challenges posed by Assad's air force.

Indyk recalled that the U.S. ran a no-fly zone in northern Iraq with a squadron of U.S. air force operating out of the Incirli air base in southern Turkey for ten years to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein.

He also dismissed the idea that the Syrian air defense system is too sophisticated for the U.S. air force to handle. He recalled several Israeli air raids in Syria; the Israeli air force seems to have no trouble in bombing Syrian targets. "Whether there is a will, there is a way. What is lacking at the moment is the will."

He said that bringing an end to the Syrian crisis is increasingly urgent. First, because of the terrible human tragedies as a result of the war, which has now been going on for nearly three years of war; and also because the situation on the ground is turning against the opposition as a result of interventions by Iran and Hezbollah.

He urged the U.S. and Turkey not to just stand by while the conflict in Syria unfolds – a conflict which has “dramatic ramifications for Turkey’s security and for the security of the U.S. allies.”

“So we have to move quickly. It is an urgent priority,” he added.

Iran’s bid for dominance

On Iran, Indyk suggests that the U.S. has done little to contain Iran, which has for some years making a bid for dominance in the region. He stressed that Tehran has made some considerable advances essentially because the U.S. has been unwilling to stand up to it in Iraq. He suggested that Washington did Iran a huge favor by removing its two most troublesome adversaries. On its eastern border, he said, the U.S. removed the Taliban and to the west, Saddam Hussein.

“So we gave the Iranians a great a boost in their bid for dominance –

On Iran, Indyk suggests that the U.S. has done little to contain Iran, which has for some years making a bid for dominance in the region.

courtesy of U.S. taxpayers. And then we pleaded no contest in Baghdad so they in effect established their influence in Baghdad and southern Iraq,” he added.

He pointed Syria as a jumping off point for Iran for their bid to control Lebanon and to become active in Palestinian arena via Hamas. On Syria, however, he said that Iran has suffered a blow as a result of the conflict. He was referring to their unconditional support of Assad while tens of thousands of people were killed in the conflict. In this regard, he said the steadfast support for Assad has seriously undermined the claim that Iran originally presented to the Arabs, i.e. that they were promoting the anti-American cause in the region. Indyk posited that Iran’s intervention on the side of the minority Alawite regime has turned the conflict into a sectarian battle, which is not to Iran’s advantage.

“They cannot dominate the Sunni Arab world by fighting the Sunni Arab world,” he said, adding that Iran will lose that battle, by getting bogged down in Syria, and will thereby suffer a real setback.

But if Tehran succeeds in preventing Assad’s downfall and reestablishing control for the Syrian regime, then it is going to be a big problem for Turkey, Jordan and Israel. “And I say that because the U.S. is in many ways moving offshore. It is redefining its interests in the region. In many ways Obama is no longer interested in playing a Great Game.”

Indyk stated that Obama is planning for an end to U.S. involvement in the Greater Middle East today and that he

But if Tehran succeeds in preventing Assad's downfall and reestablishing control for the Syrian regime, then it is going to be a big problem for Turkey, Jordan and Israel.

clearly doesn't want to get involved in another war in Syria. He said the U.S. is much more interested in Asia, referring to Obama's "Asia Pivot" policy, introduced last year.

He said the offshore balancing policy is not designed to leave a vacuum but to depend on "our local allies to protect their common interests." In Libya, he provided as an example, they called it "Leading From Behind." He said he would prefer the U.S. to take a leadership role in the region instead of putting the burden on allies as offshore balancing suggests.

Indyk thinks that Obama has a different approach in mind, which is to depend on other allies and to help them tackle challenges they face in the troubled region.

Indyk thinks that Obama has a different approach in mind, which is to depend on other allies and to help them tackle challenges they face in the troubled region. He named these allies as Turkey, Jordan and Israel, considering an apology from Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as "important," in trying to put the strategic relationship between Turkey and Israel "back on track."

From an American perspective, Indyk noted, if one follows the logic, an Israeli apology to Turkey is an essential part of the U.S. Middle East policy.

"If we are depending on Israel and Turkey as our most capable allies in the region, we need them to be working [together], at least not fighting each other. But that is easier said than done when it comes to Syria," he said, adding that Turkey has very good reasons to be reluctant to engage in the war in its southern neighbor. Speaking on the U.S. policy to arm the Syrian rebels, Indyk said the administration may be at a point where the Syrian policy changes in terms of tactics. "We may see a tactical change, the situation on the ground is deteriorating; but we may not see a change in the overall strategy."

He underlined that this overall strategy is to pivot to Asia and leave the region in the "hands of our allies."

Indyk avoided criticizing Turkey's foreign policy outright: "Let's say that they haven't succeeded yet." He reiterated that it is a very difficult region, littered with failed efforts, and that "the number one candidate for this is the U.S."

It is very easy, he pointed out, to label policies as failures when it comes to the Middle East. “What is important is to try,” Indyk said, adding that Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu deserves credit for trying.

“So I would not rush to criticism. John Kerry is now trying to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I don’t know anybody in the region who thinks he can succeed. The Israeli and Palestinian leadership can play games to avoid blame for the failure. But [Kerry] is trying and God bless him, and I hope he will succeed. Again, I wish the Palestinian problem will find resolution. And as everybody is saying, the ones who

“What is important is to try,” Indyk said, adding that Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu deserves credit for trying.

will suffer are the people who are living in the region. Starting with Turkey, in the case of Palestinians, it is Israel. Diplomacy is extraordinarily difficult as a means of resolving conflicts in the region. The region seems to prefer use of force. As Winston Churchill once said, “jaw-jaw” better than “war-war.”

Indyk remarked that he is so conscious of U.S. government’s mistakes that he hesitates to criticize others’ mistakes.

I personally invested a huge amount of effort in trying to make peace between Israel and Palestinians. We had a policy, I was a major advocate, forget about Dual Containment.

“It is simply in the nature of the game, we invested. I personally invested a huge amount of effort in trying to make peace between Israel and Palestinians. We had a policy, I was a major advocate, forget about Dual Containment. Syria first – It is policy that I advocated for. President Clinton agreed with me. Everybody was saying ‘Palestinians... Palestinians...’ but we were chasing Syria, [Hafez] Assad the father. Were we naive? I guess so, but it was better than not trying, I don’t regret the effort we made. We made super effort to try to get Assad to act in the interest of Syria.”

The Dual Containment to which Indyk was referring to is one of the most criticized Clinton-era policies. It suggested that the U.S. should check Iran and Iraq together instead of allowing Iraq to contain Iran.

“Dual containment was only one branch of the strategy not the strategy itself,” said Indyk in defence of the policy. He said that the Dual Containment policy failed because it was designed to contain Iran and Iraq while the U.S. secured peace between Israel and Palestinians.

“The failure of dual containment is more to do with the failure to achieve a comprehensive peace that it is to containing these two rogues. That was a different time.”

“The failure of dual containment is more to do with the failure to achieve a comprehensive peace that it is to containing these two rogues. That was a different time,” he added. He noted that before one can condemn a policy as having failed, there is a responsibility to offer an alternative that could have succeeded.

Indyk was critical of Russia’s resurgence and comeback in the Middle East. “What does Russia have to offer the region?” Indyk asked. “Arms, fuelling conflicts, going back to the old Soviet days,” he answered. He questioned whether Moscow has a positive constructive vision for the region; a region in conflict can always be exploited.

“Russia is a player at the moment because, essentially, the U.S. is not prepared to play a Great Game.” Indyk adding that in this age, the strategic importance of the Middle East is being redefined: the U.S. development of energy independence means that it is no longer going to depend on the Middle East oil, which is a “huge strategic shift”.

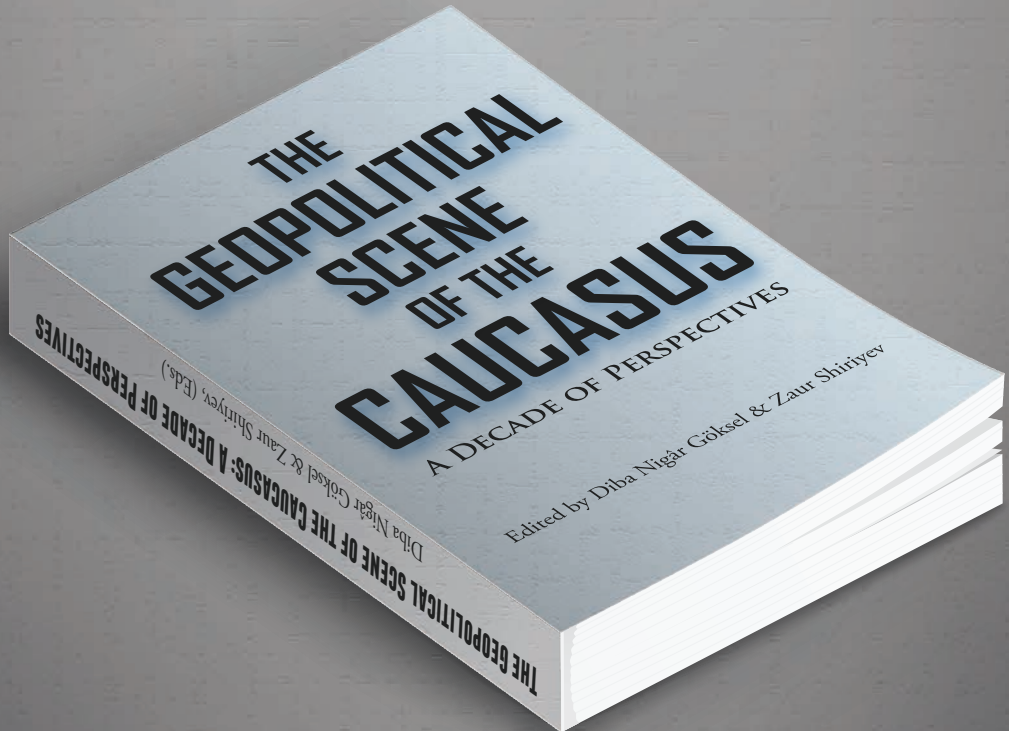
“That doesn’t mean that our allies will not depend on the Middle East

securing free flow of oil from the region. [Our allies] are not going to go to land wars in Greater Middle East. I can imagine what can happen in a decade. If Russia wants to take advantage of that, it should use models that are attractive to the people in the region. And both Turkey and U.S. have learnt that it is thankless task to try to build a position in the region,” Indyk concluded.

Colloquy conducted by Mahir Zeynalov, Managing Editor of CI, October 2013, Istanbul, Turkey

The South Caucasus has experienced a particularly eventful past decade, including wars, initiatives to solve conflicts, and development of energy and transportation infrastructure. This volume collects 28 essays from the policy community focusing on the geopolitics of the South Caucasus. Taken together, the perspectives map out the contours of the region's power politics. In bringing together these pieces thematically, we aim to create a dialogue on the region over time and space.

The trajectory of the South Caucasus is in flux. Debates over declining U.S. global power, the perception of rising pressure from Moscow, Turkey's leaning towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, uncertainty over the future regional role of the EU, and concerns over the future course of Iran are weighing on the Caucasus. Meanwhile, infighting within the region and resistance to overcoming zero-sum approaches are detracting from momentum to work towards a better future in the region. Fortunately, heightened concern about these fault-line shifts can also trigger the search for sustainable solutions. This compilation aims to encourage constructive thinking, and rethinking of the paradigms that will define the region in the era ahead.



Comparative Instability

in the Balkans and the Middle East

**David B.
Kanin***

Abstract

This article comparatively examines the instabilities in the world's two most complicated regions with reference to the decline of the systemic factors, absolute determinism on social, political, and economic developments. The author argues that actors in the Balkans and the Middle East will continue to defy U.S. and West European preferences and lectures as they work out the relationship between their parochial interests, ideological preferences, and economic exigencies. To this end, as the author holds, in both regions domestic grassroots level social and political factors will be the main driving factor of both political status quo and political change. In this way, the article concludes that since no single state or group of powers stands astride international relations, in this new era, regional patterns of trade, aid, alliance, and enmity will become difficult to read.

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There is no such thing as “the” International Community. Rather, the United States and—to the extent their diminished status permits—West European powers use their international leadership capacity to avoid accommodating shifting global tectonics. Teleological rhetoric about democracy and the rule of law obscures traditional Western reliance on inertia and force; the former in particular leads the powers to distrust and misunderstand social and political change worldwide.

This essay compares and contrasts events in two regions where the gradual decline of Western hegemony is playing out. Over the past two decades, changing security contexts, regional revolutions in thought and action, and local rivalries in both areas have precipitated unrest and social realignment. Actors in the Balkans and the Middle East will continue to defy US and West European preferences and lectures as they work out the relationship between their parochial interests, ideological preferences, and economic exigencies. For the moment, conditions in southeastern Europe are less lethal in North Africa and Western Asia; however not even the desire of the Balkan states to join the European Union will preserve what remains an fragile status quo in southeast Europe.

The Regions and the “West”

Balkan and Middle Eastern peoples have experienced serial Western interventions since Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, which is a natural point to start an analysis of regional security for both regions. In both areas, the ease with which France was able to seize a place central to Ottoman power and prestige led to premature expectations that the Ottomans would soon be finished. The precocious (in terms of being an early precursor to current explosions in Islamist activism) Wahhabi uprising predated Western predations and sent another signal regarding the weakening of Ottoman power. Uprisings in Greece and Serbia set in motion the struggle for national expression that continues to this day. One important commonality is that—more often than not—Middle Eastern and Balkan sectarian, ethnic, and family identities have overwhelmed Western efforts to force local populations to accept various Western versions of civic modernity.

Napoleon soon had to evacuate his nascent empire in Egypt, the Levant, and Syria and notional Ottoman suzerainty persisted in the Middle East and much of the Balkans. Nevertheless, from 1798 until very recently, the “West” (as we know it, this term came into general use at about this time) imposed on and attempted to institutionalize in both regions security caps, financial and legal arrangements, and

other trappings of modernity. Each of these very different adventures crested and receded—the current teleology of representative democracy and “rule of law” is the last of these and likely will prove no more durable.

The variance in Western approaches has corresponded to considerable differences in the various Powers that have stumbled their way into the Balkans and the Middle East. Since 1798 there have been seven incarnations of the West, each with its distinctive coercive utopia.

- The first, Byronic and philhellenic, helped shape a three-way tug of war among Greeks in the Balkans (Phanariot Ottoman administrators and soldiers, people attached to the externally imposed dynasty or loyal to the small post-1830 state centered on Athens, and those dreaming of a neo-Byzantine restoration of a Greek Empire with Constantinople as its capital). More important—but not part of the story here—this “West” and its idealized nod to classical philosophy influenced the development of German philosophy, archaeology, and other aspects of elite thought and bourgeois *bildung* that would inform both Western thought and the German drive for power in the 20th Century.
- The second West involved

the Bismarckian merger of crowns and nationalisms that placed German princes on various thrones in Central and Eastern Europe. This phenomenon undercut the so-called Millet system, influenced such phenomena as “Young Ottomanism,” and brought European administrators and their financial reforms to the Middle East. During the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century, Egypt’s Albanian dynasty (Mehmet Ali’s Balkan origins provided an idiosyncratic tie between the two regions, as did Mustafa Kemal’s origins in Thrace and experiences in Libya) morphed from one bent on replacing the Ottomans in Constantinople to a more Western-style monarchy focused on Egypt. Franco-Russian rivalry over which of them should “protect” Christians in the Ottoman Empire helped set in motion the formation of what would become Lebanon. Britain, meanwhile, came to control the French-built Suez Canal. This West, marked in many places by a sprinkling of German princes, had a major impact on nationalist movements in Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and eventually Albania.

- The third West emerged when

the second largely self-destructed in World War I. Woodrow Wilson brought the novelty of American Democratic ideology to a Europe disgusted by four years of slaughter and the incompetence of its leaders. However, this was an America without staying power, and neither Wilson nor anyone else prevented Britain and France, though wounded, from privileging their security concerns over other considerations regarding how to organize Eastern Europe and the Middle East. At that time, Serbia—which had per capita losses greater than any other combatant—was viewed as a heroic member of the victorious coalition. The victors awarded it domination of a new Yugoslavia, which set in motion developments that are still affecting southeastern Europe. Meanwhile, the imperial shadow of the second Europe created political conditions in North Africa and Western Asia the Middle East that only now are unraveling.

- Fascism and Communism, the fourth and fifth Wests, had rather extreme coercive utopias. The former attracted allies in Croatia and Bosnia, occupied Europe from the Atlantic almost to Moscow, influenced an “Aryan” Reza Shah

to turn Persia into Iran, and had some resonance among Arab elites concerned with growing Jewish immigration into Palestine. Its defeat by the Red Army brought Communism to a dominant position in Eastern Europe to such an extent that the “Balkans” virtually disappeared as a subject of security discussion, even in post-1948 Yugoslavia. Arab Socialism and Nasser also borrowed from this Communist West. Events since the collapse of Communism have suggested the Marxist Left has little influence on events in the absence of Soviet power.

- The United States 2.0—America with pretensions of being globally indispensable, buttressed by enormous military muscle—and the European Union are the current, and final links in this two century-old chain of empire and hegemony. The eclipse of a prostrate Europe by the US and Soviet Union made Europeans feel small as well as disoriented, spurring the ideology of a European West that fancies itself as having voluntarily replaced power and colonies with wisdom and humanity. This sublimation of the pain of global diminution into a coercive utopia of pedantry and international courts has

led this European West to test itself repeatedly and unsuccessfully in the Middle East. It also has motivated Europeans to attempt to manage the Balkans—initially saying it did not need US help—in the 1990s. Neither the pattern of failure these efforts produced nor emerging evidence of economic limitations has prevented the Europeans from continuing to seek to recover their sense of self-importance by telling peoples in both regions how to behave.

Is the Lightness of Being Unbearable, or Just a Challenge?

Waves of instability in the Balkans and Middle East periodically have led to disorientation and unrest in both former Ottoman peripheries. In both regions, family and patronage-based social and economic networks traditionally—and still—attract more trust than governments or such exogenous coercive utopias as “democracy”.

Still, the experiences of being intervention zones are similar only in part. The period of explosive conquest by Islamicized Arabs after the Prophet’s death and the spiritual high relief Arabic continues to hold as a sacred language enables a sense of identity and historical privilege in the Muslim universe unlike anything available to Balkan historians, publicists, and political elites.

Rather, the various Balkan nations, all of which were formed (as their languages were reconstructed) in the past two centuries, built their collective memories on competitive stories of victimization. Each identified its own villainous relevant others, and—unfortunately—continues too often to view neighbors as enemies. This has enabled a cultural and political fragmentation of southeastern Europe which has frustrated serial efforts by the Wests to impose various security caps (with the exception of the relatively stable Communist interlude between 1945 and 1990).

In contrast to the social glue Arabic provides in the Arab Middle East, the collapse of Yugoslavia led to the conscious dismantling of the “Serbo-Croatian” language constructed by 19th century philologists who hoped to create a larger south Slavic identity. Since 1991, the speakers of “Serbian”, “Croatian”, and “Bosnian” have gone to great efforts to use word choice and grammar to increase the linguistic space between their communities. Albanian and Slavic students learn English, German, and Chinese, but for the most part have stopped learning each other’s languages.

Therefore, nothing exists in the Balkans to match the roles of Islam and “Arab” as potential unifiers or ideological umbrellas over more granular loyalties of family, state, or sect. The specter of a Muslim or an Arab community, no matter how contested or

The specter of a Muslim or an Arab community, no matter how contested or problematic, offers a cultural common ground unknown in the Balkans.

problematic, offers a cultural common ground unknown in the Balkans. The heritage of an Orthodox Christianity subordinate to Byzantine and Ottoman authorities, and divided administratively by emerging national divisions, does not enable anything like some Muslims' constructed memory of a universal Islamic Caliphate.

This affects local minorities as well as titular *Staatsvolker*. In the Middle East, except for the Kurds (who one day could join Iran and Israel in forming a non-Arab state), the most non-Arabs and non-Muslims can hope for is a tenuous set of minority rights. That is a central meaning of Egypt-

Balkan peoples, lacking a common religious or communal context, compete over sovereignty, borders, and political legitimacy under the well-known slogan, "Why should I be a minority in your country, when you can be one in mine?"

tian President Morsi's successful, if contested, management of the constitutional drafting and referendum process that has laid the groundwork for

a resoundingly Islamic Egypt. Balkan peoples, lacking a common religious or communal context, compete over sovereignty, borders, and political legitimacy under the well-known slogan, "Why should I be a minority in your country, when you can be one in mine?"

The Otpor Problem

The place of civic mythology in each region also is different. No matter the rhetoric of student activists and leftist academics, the return of Islam to the center of political social and even economic discourse is the central meaning of the upheavals of 2011 in the Arab world. Indeed, since the Iranian revolution of 1978-9, Islam—however contested—has proven more salient than liberal or left-wing demands for various versions of Democracy, social equality, and rule of law. Western observers have forgotten their own history; those whose voices dominated in the early stages of revolutions in 1789, 1848, and 1917 soon were eclipsed either by more disciplined and better mobilized forces, or by an effective response from the forces of reaction. In the Arab world—no matter claims by secular professors and intellectuals that Islamist governments' economic management problems will help liberals and leftists reclaim a place in the political agora—decisive competitions for power and personal pride of place are more likely to take place within the Islamist universe, not between those who are religious and those who are not.

In part, the shortsighted vision of secular activists in the Middle East may have been inherited from their counterparts in the Balkans. The prevailing view among academics and others who embrace the norm of anti-ethnic cosmopolitanism is that Slobodan Milosevic and other autocratic personalities brought down the Yugoslav order in after 1990 in order to demobilize populations ready to forge a civic future. This is a feel-good story in which civic Yugoslavs organized a movement similar to those that brought down Communism elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. The message is that activism by academic and civic cosmopolitan entrepreneurs not only is virtuous, but provides a practical basis for a politics that when properly mobilized and resourced will overcome those seeking to impose regimes based on ethnicity or religion.

Further, this sort of civic politics has been touted by public academics and other intellectuals as especially conducive to Bosnia and other Balkan places that allegedly have a history of anti-ethnic social interaction. They cite the multiculturalism of Sarajevo and social mixing of cultures throughout the region as precisely the motivation that led Milosevic, Croatian strongman Franjo Tudjman, and the others to overthrow a budding civic revolution. Therefore, Yugoslavia, which under Tito's idiosyncratic Communism had nurtured its identity as independent and non-aligned,

was—and its shards remain—ripe for civic futures.

This narrative relies on anachronism, misidentifying the synchronic conditions of pre-modern politics for a diachronic commitment to pluralistic communities. For centuries, the Balkans had been dominated by various imperial outsiders; the standard politics of Empire played down 19th century-like national rivalries in favor of loyalties to dynasties or to local notables more concerned with their particular interests—and place in the imperial pecking order—then with what “nation” they belonged to. Imperial administration was typically blurry, permitting multiple lines of authority and resource distribution networks (sometimes parallel, sometimes intersecting) that enabled peoples with different languages, religions, and other markers of identity to live side by side without viewing their neighbors as daily rivals for security and material welfare. In short, contemporary observers who point to civic traditions in Bosnia (to include locals as well as outside academics) and elsewhere mistake pre-national context for non-ethnic commitment.

Tito ran Yugoslavia with this history in mind. His was an opaque administration that enabled multiple lines of authority and patronage (with his personal role as capstone, of course). He explicitly struggled to minimize the ethnic divisions he knew could threaten regional stability. Tito's sys-

Tito ran Yugoslavia with this history in mind. His was an opaque administration that enabled multiple lines of authority and patronage.

tem survived for a decade after his death, partly because everyone knew the danger nineteenth century-style nationalism presented to the opaque patronage networks on which stability depended. These critical structures, misunderstood as “informal” and regarded as “corrupt”, have remained central to a post-Yugoslav condition in which Western theories of “governance,” rule of law, transparency, and development have proven unworkable.

As Milosevic pushed Yugoslavia toward its death throes, those who touted the myth of civic politics looked towards a Western-style future. Some attempted to spur Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic to organize a movement to bring this about. Markovic, however, was slow off the mark. He created a political party months after the collapse of the old League of Communists, well after better-organized nationalist alternatives had won elections in Slovenia and Croatia. Public opinion polls proved Markovic was popular; unfortunately, the low vote totals he garnered once he did enter electoral contests demonstrated how poorly his movement was organized. It was Milosevic, nationalists of all stripes, and traditional patron-

age networks in Bosnia and elsewhere who were mobilized, not Markovic and the civic activists.

This pattern has largely persisted since then. Milosevic himself was overthrown after a string of elections starting in 1991 in which he proved himself vulnerable if an opposition could get its act together. His adversaries finally did so in October 2000, in an event that has since been misunderstood as an unalloyed triumph of democratic and civic politics.

Otpor, a movement of students and intellectuals, famously participated in the overthrow of Milosevic. This organization descended from groups of students and intellectuals who had attempted unsuccessfully to bring him down in 1991 and 1996. There is no question that civic organizers learned many lessons from those failures and by 2000 were ready to take advantage of the dictator’s overconfident decision to run for re-election.

Otpor, however, did not bring down Milosevic by itself. For the first two days after the 2000 elections—as in 1991 and 1996—Milosevic’s opponents appeared unsure what to do next aside from staging the usual demonstrations. The difference this time was that, for their own reasons, coal miners and residents of smaller towns in the heartland of Serbia joined the revolution. The climactic seizure of the Parliament building on October 5 largely was accomplished by the residents of the town of Cacak and Velimir

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Ilic, their populist mayor, not the usual blend of students and Belgrade intellectuals. (In part, what had alienated those from Cacak and other towns in the Serb heartland was the perception that Milosevic had put their sons in harm's way in disproportionate numbers during the 1999 NATO bombing campaign over Kosovo). Since 2000, Serbian politics have followed the patterns of other areas in the former Yugoslav space; traditional patronage politics and informal financial deal-making dominate, not the coercive civic utopias propagated from the West via Otpor. Constitutions get drafted and elections get held, but those who come to power spend more time arguing over which individuals or coalition parties will control public companies and other patronage piggy banks than they do about the substantive issues Westerners keep pressing on them.

Nevertheless, some Otpor figures have tended to overstate the credit they deserved for bringing down Milosevic and creating democracy in Serbia. Otpor put up candidates in Serbia's

first free elections. When these people were defeated soundly by other more traditional types of politician, some activists lamented that the country wanted them to save Serbia from the dictator, but not to rule in his stead.

After this defeat, Otpor went on the road. Serbian activists taught the lessons of agitation and organization to audiences in Africa and elsewhere, and by 2011 had made their way to Tunisia, Egypt, and other places in the restive Middle East. The Otpor activists doubtless passed on many useful tactical lessons to educated, cosmopolitan counterparts in Tunis and Cairo, who likely put to use what they learned in the revolutions that brought down Ben Ali and Mubarak.

However, if they also ingested the notion that Otpor had been the decisive

Nevertheless, some Otpor figures have tended to overstate the credit they deserved for bringing down Milosevic and creating democracy in Serbia.

actor in 2000, they made a mistake. Such a misapprehension could partly explain why—like Otpor's reconstructed memory of 2000—Middle Eastern students, intellectuals, and other educated urbanites continue to overestimate their role as the inheritors as well as progenitors of recent revolutionary events.

They may be discovering what intellectuals learned in Yugoslavia after 1990. It is possible that educated, multi-lingual elites can be out-organized and out-thought by the poorer and rural people they often look down upon. In the contemporary Balkans and Middle East, it is the educated classes that have been pushed to the sidelines. Moreover, despite repeated denials of the fact, it is those motivated by religion or ethnicity who have more often than not demonstrated an ability to dominate post-authoritarian politics.

In addition, it is Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and similar Islamic groups—not civic activists or even governments—that perform essential social services similar to those provided by patronage networks in the Balkans. In both areas, these non-civic actors enable people to depend on them for the subsistence and security the intellectuals are unable or unwilling to ensure. In this context, successful political parties in both regions are simply the official tips of patronage icebergs. To a large extent, states function more as stakes in opaque resource rivalries than as active political and social entities.

The successes of nationalists and patronage bosses in the Balkans and Islamists in the Middle East do not necessarily portend new dictatorships—no matter the expressed fears of some liberal wits and neo-Marxists. Nationalist parties in Bosnia, Serbia,

The successes of nationalists and patronage bosses in the Balkans and Islamists in the Middle East do not necessarily portend new dictatorships—no matter the expressed fears of some liberal wits and neo-Marxists.

Kosova, and—more recently—Macedonia know they can win elections with only marginal need for electoral manipulation. The same is true for Muslim Brotherhoods and other Islamists in the Middle East. They also tend, more often than not, to dominate post-election political bargaining. Bosnia's Social-Democrats are an exception that prove the rule—Zlatko Lagumdžija, their leader, has proven to be as patronage-oriented as the ethnic-based parties—Bosnjak, Serb, and Croat—with which he has struck deals.

The political bosses worry more when they lose to a rival patronage network, because then they likely will lose control over the proceeds of public companies. They might even face arrest for the “corrupt” behavior they and their successors share—the new winners might well want to put their competitors in jail to minimize the chance of their comeback. It remains to be seen how Middle Eastern Islamist parties will react as they compete with each other for power and resources.

Looking Forward in the Balkans

The dominance of religious and ethnic divisions and centrality of patronage politics will continue to determine the distribution of power and resources in both regions. The Americans and Europeans will continue to deliver lectures, of course, but the two declining West will increasingly find themselves unable to drive local developments. This is true despite continuing interest among Balkan states in joining the EU. The Union's willingness to grant Romania and Bulgaria precipitate membership and its blessing of Montenegro's candidacy prove that the locals can pursue patronage politics, opaque financial transactions and still get into a club that—for now—many still hope will magically enable them to prosper.

Unlike the Middle East, in the Balkans serious violence appears unlikely in the short run. Macedonia may be in the most immediate danger; one of the only former Yugoslav entities not formed through battlefield decisions or major internal violence is drifting toward what could become a dangerous inter-communal conflict. The country so far has held together by the 2001 Ohrid agreement signed between Macedonian and ethnic Albanian notables after a short round of inter-community fighting. The Albanians, about a quarter of the country's population, believe the government has not fulfilled promises at made at Ohrid to provide them jobs and permit them greater use of Albanian symbols

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and language. For their part, Macedonian authorities argue they have been forthcoming with the Albanians, and want to focus instead on grandiose architectural and political projects designed to assert the identity of a community denied—in different ways—by its Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian neighbors.

Serbia's rejection of the contested sovereignty of Kosova—from 1913 until 1999 a Serbian province—gets more international attention than problems in Macedonia, but for now is less likely to provoke violent conflict. The new Serbian government recognizes it cannot overcome international opposition to the re-imposition of its authority in Serbia's former province.

Belgrade can be patient. The slow-motion US failure to achieve universal recognition of its Kosovar client means the Serbs will have future opportunities to chip away at Kosova's sovereignty. In 2006, Washington

expressed confidence there would be a new UN Security Council Resolution sanctifying Kosova—and insisted Russia would not block it. After Moscow did just that, the Americans spent the next year or so preparing the diplomatic ground on which Pristina would declare its independence and achieve recognition piecemeal. Since that declaration (in February 2008), more than 90 countries have recognized the new state. Nevertheless, five EU members have not, which means that—while Serbia has a notional, if deeply rutted path toward EU membership—Kosova’s candidacy faces fundamental obstacles.

The impossible state of Bosnia-Herzegovina poses perhaps the most serious longer-term danger of serious instability. Arbitrary, improvised US and European policies pursued as their demands and declarations failed to halt or manage the 1992-1995 war culminated in a Bosnia saddled with a virtually non-existent central government and divided into two formal entities—a coherent Serb republic and a forced Federation between mutually hostile Bosnjak and Croat communities. To complicate matters further, this is the first stand-alone “Bosnia” (that is, unattached to a larger imperial or Yugoslav polity and market) since the 15th Century. It is not clear where this rump country will find legal comparative advantages or political viability.

In the 1990s, American diplomats advertised the Ottoman-era term “Bosnjak” as the marker for all citizens of the cobbled state. Not surprisingly, Serbs and Croats rejected this, leaving the word to represent only the country’s Muslim plurality. Some Bosnjaks, unhappy with a dysfunctional Bosnia that was forced on them at Dayton in 1995, increasingly are reforming themselves as a transnational ethnic and religious identity. Although Serb and other publicists exaggerate the presence of “Wahhabi” Muslims in Bosnia, an influx of Saudi and Iranian money since Yugoslavia’s collapse and the revival of Islamist discourses worldwide is feeding interest in greater religiosity.

What may be an even stronger tendency is the adoption of the “Bosnjak” label by Muslim Slavs in the Sanjak (an area once all in Serbia but divided since 2006 with the independence of Montenegro) and in Kosova. A newly minted “World Bosnjak Congress,” headed by Mustafa Cerić, former Islamic Community Reis-ul-Ulema, aims to help mobilize a religious and communal identity not confined to the borders of Bosnia.

In doing so, Bosnjaks are taking a page from a Turkish example for which they express explicit respect. The Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) skillful melding of religion, politics, and economic competence is increasing the appeal of a Turkey whose performance contrasts sharply

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with the unsuccessful regional management strategies emanating from Washington and European capitals. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu’s visits to the region and his occasional appeals to a shared Ottoman experience resonates with Bosnjaks dissatisfied with the impact on their interests of post Yugoslav fragmentation in the Balkans.

Looking Forward in the Middle East

The Turkish example also informs developments in the Middle East, but—as in the Balkans—in terms of lessons learned rather than as a rigid model. Given the important Syrian exception, Ankara’s skill in nurturing its image while not repeating the Western mistake of asserting authority and secular teleology has maximized Turkish influence. For the most part, the Turks have been sensitive to the fact that the Ottoman experience is not remembered fondly in the Arab world.

Patience is the AKP’s central lesson for Islamist politics in the Middle East. The region’s Muslim Brotherhoods have learned this lesson on their own, of course, but the skill with which the AKP leadership has moved Turkey from a secular Kemalist ethos toward the revival of religion in society is pro-

viding an example of how to do this.

In Tunisia, “patience” means altering the constitution to guarantee the rights of those citizens with a secular orientation, while in Egypt a more confident Islamist government so far has overawed its educated, pluralist opponents without making the same concessions. Whether economic problems lead to a significant increase in votes for secular parties in future elections will be an important indicator of whether in Tunisia or Egypt there will exist a robust secular alternative to the various flavors of Islamist politics. Libya, administered in its current form only since 1951, still is in a stage where it is not clear whether it will have a meaningful central government or—somewhat in the Bosnian mode—will be dominated by regional, tribal, and other patronage systems.

The figures of Iraq, Syria (and its Lebanese extension), and Jordan are linked, even though instability in the first was enabled by the US invasion of 2003, cataclysm in the second took place only during the general unrest in the Arab world of 2011, and unrest in Jordan is yet to occur. These states were created in their current form by the post-World War I settlement, and are as vulnerable in the wake of that arrangement’s unraveling as the pieces of Yugoslavia when the Cold War came to an end. Stability in all three was undermined when the US—by invading Iraq—destroyed a boundary that had functioned (sometimes

de facto, sometimes *de jure*) to separate Arab and Persian influence since Ottoman-Safavid arrangements in the 17th century. From Beirut to Baghdad, Aleppo to the Red Sea, borders, power, resource distribution networks, and the interests of tribes, religious communities, and other social forms are all now up for grabs. In Syria, like Bosnia in the 1990s, population movements along ethnic or sectarian lines—voluntary and otherwise—could well preclude the emergence of a strong central secular, civic government in the post-Assad era.

In all these cases (with the exception of Jordan, assuming the monarchy holds together), local patronage systems based on ascriptive and affiliative networks will likely be more important than the notional states set up by or recognized by international authorities.

The Middle East may come to resemble the contemporary Balkans to the extent that informal social and economic activity provides resources more reliably than notional governments or the gradually declining Wests. We are entering an era in which no single state or group of powers stands astride international relations. Therefore, regional patterns of trade, aid, alliance, and enmity will become difficult to read, especially by those in the old power centers who are looking only for evidence that they remain more important than everyone else.

Is Jordan at risk of an Arab Spring?

**Fatima el
Issawi***

Abstract

The article presents an overview of the recent developments in Jordan, reviewing the demonstrations against the monarchy in the context of the Arab Spring. In this regard, the author argues that the protests herald serious change in the country; this is the first time in the 90-year history of the royal dynasty that people have called to topple the King. However, as the author highlights, there are many factors indicating that Jordanians are still loyal to their monarch and will not go to the extent of removing him. Moreover, the strong legitimacy that the King enjoys as the symbol of national unity makes any radical change unlikely. Even so, as the author concludes, the Jordanian monarch will not be able to continue enjoying an absolute monarchy, and futile political reforms will not satisfy the public appetite for political change.

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The loud calls in support of toppling the monarchy in usually peaceful Jordan have been interpreted by many as a sign of a Jordanian Arab Spring. For the first time, demonstrations shifted their focus from reforms of the regime to demanding an end to the reign of King Abdullah II, the descendant of a Royal dynasty that ruled the country for 90 years now. The expressions of anger reached a new pitch, personally insulting the King and breaking a major taboo, a breach severely punishable by law.

Who would have predicted the collapse of Syria into such a bloody crisis?

However, many factors indicate that Jordanians remain loyal to their monarch and will not go to the extent of toppling him. The fear that the small and powerless kingdom could be dragged into the vicious circle of regional turmoil as seen in neighbouring Israel, Iraq and Syria, is still intimidating radical voices. The strong legitimacy that the King enjoys as a symbol of national unity makes any radical change improbable.

Still, no one can reassure the King that his reign will last for a long time. The unpredictability of the Arab uprisings makes everything possible. Who would have predicted the collapse of Syria into such a bloody crisis? For sure, the Jordanian

monarch will not be able to continue enjoying an absolute monarchy, nor hide behind futile political reforms. He must now take the loud voices of the street seriously. He has to bank on his significant and long established legitimacy in leading his kingdom towards real democratic change. In his controversial interview with *The Atlantic*, the Jordanian monarch expresses his anxiety that the Hashemite throne will not survive the Arab revolutions if he does not succeed in leading his country toward modernity. The harsh criticism expressed by the monarch in his assessment of the developments of the so-called Arab Spring reveal the extent of his discomfort in leading his country amid these emerging regional complexities.¹

If the uprisings that shook the Arab world in the last two years were in essence demands for dignity and better living conditions, the Jordanian unrest is an expression of the socio-economic malaise of a community sharply divided between two social classes, even two castes: those who can benefit from the modernity of the westernized but poor kingdom, manipulating a system of corruption and nepotism, and those who are living in humble conditions and have no access to this wealth.

This socio-economic divide is leading to a Jordanian society developing

¹ Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Modern King in the Arab Spring", *The Atlantic*, 18 March 2013, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/04/monarch-in-the-middle/309270/>

Jordanian unrest is an expression of the socio-economic malaise of a community sharply divided between two social classes, even two castes: those who can benefit from the modernity of the westernized but poor kingdom, manipulating a system of corruption and nepotism, and those who are living in humble conditions and have no access to this wealth.

at two speeds and in two opposing directions. This divide now plays a much more important role than the traditional split between the two main components of the Jordanian society: the Palestinian descendants who fled Israel during various episodes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and those who claim being the authentic inhabitants of the country, popularly called the East Bankers.

Traditionally conceived as a time bomb, this divide does not carry much weight in the current crisis. On the contrary, the Palestinian Jordanian community is viewed as standing a step back from the more outspoken opposition against the King than the Jordanian tribes, the traditional backbone of the regime and its main beneficiaries, whose anger was exacerbated by what they view as a growing political role of Queen Rania, a Palestinian whose family

fled to the kingdom with waves of Palestinians leaving Kuwait after Saddam Hussein's invasion in 1990. Their feeling of a new exclusion from the wealth of the political and economic elite surrounding the King is deepening the gap between the Hashemite monarchy and its traditional supporters.

The Election Law

Sparked by popular anger at the reduction in public fuel subsidies, the demonstrations in Jordan have lately reached a new pitch, calling for the ouster of King Abdullah II. But beneath the surface of these angry protests calling for basic needs are more radical demands, such as the need for the monarchy to move towards a modern democratic system where state institutions are more than a façade.

The excessive powers of the King, which allow him to dismantle Parliament and to form governments and sack them, has led to the stagnation of political life and the development of a pro-monarchy national media in which self-censorship and expressions of naïve loyalty to the Royal family are the norm.

King Abdullah II has responded to successive waves of protests by initiating low level socio-economic initiatives such as opening free housing for poor and a craftsmen's zone, as well as political reforms aiming to empower Parliament, but without

renouncing absolute prerogative over the political direction of the country. Key reforms have included changing 42 articles of the constitution, giving Parliament a say in forming cabinets - an unprecedented move - creating a constitutional court and an electoral commission to monitor the elections, new laws governing political parties and municipalities and a teachers' union for the first time in the history of the country.²

However, a radical change would necessitate the adoption of a modern election law allowing a vote based on electoral lists to replace the "one person one vote" system, which has led to a Parliament dominated by a blend of conservatives and tribal representatives. A law based on electoral lists would grant voters the opportunity to choose among diverse affiliations and to reconcile their political and their tribal/parental choices.

The one ballot vote increased the chances of tribal and family candidates to win the majority of seats in a society where tribal loyalties are primary. The new electoral law proposed by the government allows each voter a double vote, one for the district and another for a nationwide party list. This is a "formula that will have 82 percent of parliament elected according to the same old unpopular formula", according to

² Jamal Halaby, "Jordan's Islamists Rally for Elections", *The Associated Press*, 5 October 2012, at <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/jordans-islamists-rally-against-elections>

The new electoral law proposed by the government allows each voter a double vote, one for the district and another for a nationwide party list.

Marwan Muasher, the former foreign minister of Jordan and currently deputy head of studies at Carnegie international³. For Hammam Saeed, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan who called for a boycott of the elections, these reforms are simply "cosmetic and will only lead to a docile parliament".

The double vote is likely to prevent the most prominent opposition groups in Jordan from winning a large majority in Parliament on the basis of a national list, thereby stopping the Islamist party from confirming its place as a major player in the political decision making process.

The elections of January 2013 were presented by the regime as a gradual move towards greater democracy, a thesis rejected by the opposition, who boycotted the elections alleging electoral fraud.⁴ The turnout of 56.5 percent was presented as a popular endorsement of King Abdullah's reform track, hailed by the King as a "wonderful election outcome."

³ Marwan Muasher, "In Jordan, There's a Perception of Legitimacy", *The New York Times*, 28 August 2012, at <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/08/28/the-staying-power-of-arab-monarchies/in-jordan-the-monarchy-is-seen-as-legitimate>

⁴ See BBC coverage of the elections, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21158713>

The double vote is likely to prevent the most prominent opposition groups in Jordan from winning a large majority in Parliament on the basis of a national list, thereby stopping the Islamist party from confirming its place as a major player in the political decision making process.

However, the large boycott by the opposition - the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front (IAF) and the Herak movement –lead to a new Parliament largely in line with the precedent, a blend of tribal loyalists and representatives of weak political parties.⁵

The monarchy's reforms must prove that it is still able to absorb the growing popular anger and to keep this emotion channelled at the legal and constitutional levels without allowing protesting crowds to take the lead, leading to dangerous implications for the survival of the regime and the stability of the kingdom. The parliamentary elections, in failing to bring real changes in the political landscape, could not amount to a real success in that sense.

⁵ See a report by CNN on the outcome of the elections, at <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/01/29/does-jordans-election-change-anything/>

The Absolute Monarchy

The Jordanian opposition is formed of different groups, mainly the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the leading opposition force in the country and the so-called the “National Front for Reforms” led by the former prime minister and head of intelligence Ahmed Obeidat, under the banner of the so called “November (2012) Burst”.⁶ The name is inspired by a similar movement that erupted under the late King Hussein in the South of Jordan in April 1989 as a protest against the rise of bread prices, called the “April Burst”. In the latest demonstrations, which are considered as the most radical in the history of the kingdom, the opposition called for an end to what they called “the Royal favours”, alluding to the initiatives taken by the King, viewed as gifts from the monarch to calm anger rather than a real will to implement reforms. Although calls to topple the King's rule were loud and clear, the leader of the National Front for Reform insisted a slogan for reform that opposed toppling the regime, thereby confirming the reluctance to move towards a radical approach.⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood did the same, thought the decision was at odds with their strong base of youth supporters, who are more enthusiastic about radical change.

⁶ See: *Blow in relation to the wind's blow*, at <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/173415>

⁷ See: <http://alhayat.com/Details/457166>

The demonstrations calling for the ouster of the king opened a new chapter in the Jordanian crisis. In the history of the kingdom, few have been able to challenge the legitimacy of the Royal family, of which any direct criticism is punishable by one to three years of prison under the so-called crime of “language abuse (disrespect)” (Italat al Lissan). This vague expression means nothing and everything. The King, who is above questioning, enjoys absolute powers including appointing and sacking governments, drafting, approving and implementing laws, calling for elections, dissolving the Parliament, nominating high security officials and judges of the Constitutional Court, and nominating and sacking members of the House of Lords, as well as judges of civil and religious courts.⁸

The demonstrations calling for the ouster of the king opened a new chapter in the Jordanian crisis.

The late King Hussein was able to bring together the contradictions of the small kingdom and to enjoy his large powers under the patriarchal image of the father of the community, but his son lacks his charismatic authority, and is ill-prepared to manage these conflicting interests.

⁸ See: <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/173415>

According to the writer Hisham al Bustani, the old guard of King Hussein managed to keep links with the tribes while introducing their neo-liberal economic policies. The new guard of King Abdullah known for its westernized style and its eager for privatization policies led to a total rupture between the political and economic elite and the tribal base, according to the writer.

A Fragmented Opposition

However, the opposition has not established a strong position in this struggle and its ability to impose change is highly questionable. The Monarch is also playing the card of the street crowds, thousands gathering to voice their loyalty to the king side by side with angry crowds. The main opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, is divided between doves and hawks. The doves, represented by so called moderate Islamists, launched a “National Initiative for Building”, meant to be a positive move towards solving the crisis by consensus, though considered as a sign of internal dissent meant to weaken the main opposition group.⁹

The IAF, historically led by East Bankers with solid loyalty to the monarchy, has a large popular basis among Palestinians, especially from poor social classes, although this base had no real impact on the decision making processes of the front. The

⁹ See: <http://alghad.com/index.php/article/592213.html>

inability of the recent demonstrations to attract high numbers of participants strengthened the thesis of an internal divide among opposition's groups.¹⁰

The fragmentation of the opposition into diverse groups with no clear unifying agenda is weakening its ability to act as a lobbying group that is able to force the King to implement real reforms to limit his absolute power. The divide between the two groups, one for reform and the other for toppling the regime, further limits the ability of the opposition to impose real change. This situation is leading youth groups to resort to violence in their push for a radical change, a means of expressing their growing dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions. Unconfirmed information about a possible deal between Salafi Jordanians (radical Islamists) and the Jordanian secret services department, with a recent decision to free some of their prisoners in the regime's jails, was vehemently denied by the leader of the group.

The government's decision was interpreted as a move to gain the trust of the radical Islamic movement, in order to use it to counter the popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood leading the protests¹¹. Even if some slogans called for the ouster of King Abdullah, this slogan is still highly

¹⁰ See: <http://alhayat.com/Details/457852>

¹¹ See: <http://aljazeera.net/news/pages/a32583d9-184d-4ee3-810a-218db64dad97>

The fragmentation of the opposition into diverse groups with no clear unifying agenda is weakening its ability to act as a lobbying group that is able to force the King to implement real reforms to limit his absolute power.

unpopular within the opposition's traditional leadership.

The rise of nationalist trends among Jordanians across different groups and social classes in recent years, which has been conceived as a tool to protect the fragile Jordanian identity from security threats and neighbouring conflicts, has ultimately hindered the political developments beyond nationalistic discourses. The legitimacy of the monarchy is the major pillar of this nationalistic trend.

The Jordanian regime managed to safeguard its own position along with domestic stability amid fierce regional struggles, and actively marketed its success at a national level, presenting itself as the only guarantor of national cohesion against regional hazards. This is even more relevant in the context of the bloody conflict in Syria. As Marwan Muasher, the former Jordanian foreign affairs minister wrote, "Jordan could be a model for what a successful "reform from above process would be like", arguing that the monarchy "is seen as legitimate by the overwhelming sectors of the population — and

necessary as a unifying force for the different ethnic groups in the country”.¹²

Endemic Corruption

The protests are essentially calling for parliamentary reforms and an efficient government that is able to plan and implement policies, as well as reforms to limit the powers of the General Intelligence Department (GID), conceived as the main decision maker in the country. In addition there are calls for the abolition of the State Security Court, which is responsible for dealing with cases of terrorism and attempted breaches of public security. However, the main slogan for the November protests was against corruption, a major epidemic during Abdullah’s reign.

In a country with limited resources and a national debt of more than 22 billion USD, the official response of increasing taxes and abolishing utilities subsidies led to an increase in prices and popular anger, who blame the corruption rates among the elite for this debt. The King responded to this popular outrage by confirming his support for anti-corruption measures, most of which were directed against members of the elite such as the former director of the secret services Mohamed al-Dahabi, who was arrested and tried and sentenced on several charges, including money laundering.¹³

¹² Marwan Muasher, *ibid.*

¹³ See: <http://www.albawaba.com/ar/slideshow/%D9%85%>

The unprecedented decision to issue an arrest warrant for King Abdullah’s fugitive uncle, Walid al Kurdi, who stands accused of embezzling hundreds of millions from Jordan’s phosphate industry, is a strong signal from the regime, asserting its commitment to combat corruption. In launching the slogan “no one is above the law”, the King has clearly demonstrated his commitment to this process. He has created specialized entities such as the independent anti-corruption committee, which works under the remit of the prime minister,¹⁴ although this process has been labelled as politicized and inefficient. This move is meant to enhance the public image of the monarch among East Bankers, the royalty main supporters recently voicing their opposition to the monarch policies.¹⁵

Calls for anti-corruption measures even targeted Queen Rania, whose growing authority and involvement in politics enraged tribes. In a letter to the King, dated February 2011, 36 tribal personalities and leaders asked the Monarch to give back the state’s lands and to return what was given

[D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-414147](http://www.jacc.gov.jo/%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-414147)

¹⁴ See: <http://www.jacc.gov.jo/%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-414147>

¹⁵ See the report by the Washington Institute for near East policy, at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/will-jordan-be-the-first-arab-monarchy-to-fall>

The Queen's growing involvement in politics, going against the traditions of the kingdom, in addition to her Western lifestyle and international image are fuelling anger, especially within the community of the so-called original Jordanians.

to the Yassin family (the Queen's family) to the state's treasury, as the property of the Jordanian people. This unprecedented move from tribal leaders - breaching the most prominent taboo in the kingdom - was explained as the influence of the Arab Spring on Jordan's internal affairs.¹⁶

The Queen's growing involvement in politics, going against the traditions of the kingdom, in addition to her Western lifestyle and international image are fuelling anger, especially within the community of the so-called original Jordanians. The anger towards the Queen from Jordanians of Palestinian origin very much reflects the socio-economic divide between that group and those of Jordanian origins. For the latter group, the civil service is considered as the biggest employer, and who constitute the main corpus of the security forces, bound by strong loyalty to the monarchy.

¹⁶ See: <http://arabrevol.maktoobblog.com/29/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B2%D9%83%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%81-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86/>

The Jordanian Palestinians, who make up the half of the country's population of 6.5 million, are the backbone of the country's private sector strongly supported by the King. This divide is currently expressed openly in the public sphere with radical voices calling for the safeguarding the country's wealth for its original inhabitants.

Abdullah II made liberal economic reforms the major goal of his rule from the start of his reign in 1999.¹⁷ It is important to note that according to the report by Transparency International, a global NGO that works to combat public sector corruption, Jordan dropped two points in the international indicator for corruption in 2011-2012.¹⁸ According to the Jordanian Ministry of Finance, in the first nine months of 2012, the country's loan-financed deficit stood at around 3.5 billion USD. The government was forced to raise prices by reducing subsidies in order to preserve economic stability and the Jordanian dinar.¹⁹ The price increase was necessary to secure a 2 billion USD loan from the IMF. Most importantly, it means that Jordan cannot continue to be managed by a "paternal" political system whereby the population relies on state support and state institutions.

¹⁷ See: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1242561>

¹⁸ See: <http://garaanews.com/jonews/garaanews-1/41609.html>

¹⁹ Marwan Muasher; *ibid.*

Conclusion

The candid yet extremely harsh comments made by King Abdullah to the Atlantic journalist on the post Arab Spring situation reflects the monarch's discomfort with the growing risk that Jordan will be engulfed by the regional turmoil. It also reflects his deep sense of being trapped, unable to undertake real reforms in his country. As brilliantly described by a longtime friend of the palace- in reply to a question posed by a journalist from the Daily Beast - "you get the impression what [the King] really wanted to say was, 'Damn, why couldn't I have inherited Sweden?'.²⁰

In an article published in Foreign Policy in 2004, King Abdullah II wrote "Jordan has already instituted its own reforms, including elections, measures to entrench basic political and human rights such as freedom of assembly and the press, and initiatives to empower women and youth. Other programs help build an effective political party system and strengthen an independent judiciary. In economic affairs, we have learned from the dismal examples of the 20th century. Public-sector enterprise alone simply cannot provide adequate opportunities for growing populations. Nations must

also look toward the private sector for job creation, innovation, and entrepreneurship".

Obviously, the enthusiasm of the Jordanian monarch for reforms has faded. Many Jordanians are equally lacking in enthusiasm. The king's previous optimism obviously does not match realities on the ground. However, the unfolding tragedy in Syria will always serve as a solid argument in support of internal reforms. Moreover, the fall of a "middle-income country with substantial state legitimacy, large bureaucratic institutions, and a strong military apparatus" would require "a lot of waves" according to Nicholas Seely in an article published in Foreign Policy²¹. In order for the King to limit the impact of these waves that will continue to rock his kingdom in light of the dramatic developments of the Arab Spring, he must act wisely and swiftly.

As Mr. Marwan Muasher rightly points out, "if reform from above has any real chance to succeed, it would be in Jordan". However, this necessitates "a dramatic shift of priorities by a system that has been so far resilient to serious change, a shift that can be led only by the king".²²

20 Christopher Dickey, "Jordan's King Abdullah Flames Out in Atlantic Interview", *The Daily Beast*, 20 March 2013, at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/03/20/jordan-s-king-abdullah-flames-out-in-atlantic-interview.html#url=/articles/2013/03/20/jordan-s-king-abdullah-flames-out-in-atlantic-interview.html>

21 Nicholas Seeley, "Jordan is not about to collapse", *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 24 November 2012, at http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/11/14/jordan_is_not_about_to_collapse

22 Marwan Muasher, *ibid.*

The Libyan Trilemma:

*Islam, democracy
and the rentier state*

**Arturo
Varvelli***

Abstract

Besides the jihadist threat, besides the typical difficulties encountered by a nation that after 40 years of a dictatorial regime and a ruinous civil war – namely rebuilding the state - another set of challenges seems to be paralyzing the new Libya.

The purpose of implementing a democratic order in a rentier country, where Islam is the dominant religion and, at the same time, the main source of popular identity, risks remaining unfulfilled for a long time.

In this paper, the author theorizes that Libya faces a real ‘trilemma’ concerning the impossible coexistence of democracy, Islam and oil-based national revenues. However, the purpose of this essay is not to show the theoretical incompatibility of these three elements at this particular moment of Libyan history; instead, it will try to highlight what kind of connection can be established between them in the new Libya. It will also point out the difficulty of reconciling these factors, as demonstrated by the fact that nowhere in the world, today or in the past, has any country managed to balance these three factors.

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The term 'trilemma' comes from the ancient 'dilemma': a situation that requires a choice between options that are - or seem to be - equally unfavourable or mutually exclusive. A trilemma is an argument analogous to a dilemma but presenting three instead of two alternatives in the premises.¹

The current socio-political situation in Libya is characterized by three elements: Islam, the beginning of a democratization process, and the persistence of a rentier economy. By looking at these three elements on an empirical basis, reasonable doubts arise about their possible coexistence. These elements, composing a new trilemma, could appear incompatible, making it necessary to renounce to at least one of them.

Each of the three possible binomials is widely supported by a rich literature. Starting with the Islam-democracy pair, relevant studies show that even in Islamic socio-cultural contexts, it is possible to provide the country with a democratic order, or at least some of its relevant elements and principles.²

¹ One of the most cited trilemmas in social sciences is the Mundell-Fleming model, arguing that an economy cannot simultaneously maintain a fixed exchange rate, free capital movement and an independent monetary policy.

² See: M. A. Muqtedar Khan, *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives*, Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2006; John O. Voll and John L. Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996; Fareed Zakaria, *Islam, Democracy, and Constitutional Liberalism*, in *Political Science Quarterly*, 2004, 119, 1, pp. 1-20; Tariq Ramadan *The Arab awakening: Islam and the New Middle East*, Allen Lane, 2012; Gilles Kepel, *Jihad. Ascesa e declino. Storia del fondamentalismo islamico*,

At the same time, it is not possible to exclude *a priori* the possible coexistence of democracy and rentier state, i.e. a state which derives all or a substantial portion of its national revenue from the rent of indigenous resources to external clients. Rentier states are characterized by a relative absence of revenue from domestic taxation, as a significant availability of raw materials spares them the trouble of extracting money from the population. Some scholars have argued that such states fail to develop a democratic structure because, in the absence of taxes, citizens have less incentive to place pressure on the government to become responsive to their needs.³

The third pair, Islam and rentier state, is the most evidence-based. Let's look, for example, at Gulf monarchies like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates or Qatar. It is precisely this third pair which makes it empirically consistent to assume that a rentier state which is also an Islamic state cannot

Roma, Carocci, 2001. According to the most important indices of democracy, *Freedom in the World* (2012) and *Freedom House Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit*, there are few cases of Islamic countries who have a secular state and that can be defined as full democracies. Among these can be counted as Indonesia, Mali (prior to the 2012 regime change) and, with further objections, Turkey.

³ H. Beblawi, G. Luciani, *The Rentier State*, London, Croom Helm, 1987; A. Gelb, *Oil Windfalls: Blessing or Curse?*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988; P. Collier, A. Hoeffler, *On Economic Causes of Civil War*, in *Oxford Economic Articles*, 1998, 50, 4, pp. 563-73; M. L. Ross, *Does Oil Hinder Democracy?*, in *World Politics*, 2001, 53, 3, pp. 325-61; B. Smith, *Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960-1999*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, 2004, 48, 2, pp. 232-46. From the empirical point of view, at least the case of a country, Norway, would demonstrate the compatibility between being simultaneously a "rentier state" and a democracy, although in this case the rentier characterization is certainly reached when the Norway was already a full democracy.

simultaneously be a democratic one.

The purpose of this essay is not to show the theoretical incompatibility of these three elements at this particular stage of Libyan history; instead, it will try to highlight what kind of connection can be established between them in the new Libya. It will also point out the difficulty of reconciling them, as demonstrated by the fact that nowhere in the world, today or in the past, has any country succeeding in supporting the coexistence of these three elements.

In this constituent phase for the new Libyan state, the possible coexistence of these three elements will depend on the degree of democratization that the new country achieves - not only on a formal basis (competitive elections, separation of powers, etc.) but also in a wider sense (freedom and shared values) -, on the role religion plays and on how the new ruling class shapes the rentier economy and the relationship between state and society.

This article will try to analyze these three peculiarities and how the possible connections between them will affect Libya's future.

Liberal or illiberal democracy?

The long period of transition which began with the death of Muammar Qaddafi on 20th October 2011 is proving to be very complex and littered with obstacles, notwithstanding the (actually fairly humble) success of

The collapse of Qaddafi's regime has inevitably led to the destabilization of the country.

the National Congress elections held on 7th July 2011. The collapse of Qaddafi's regime has inevitably led to the destabilization of the country.

The National Transitional Council (NTC) led by Mustafa Abdel Jalil and formed a few days after the outbreak of the revolt, has established itself as the central authority in the country, firstly in the struggle against Qaddafi's regime, then in the effort to regain a national identity and restore some sort of balance between the various factions fighting for the control of Libya. These factions include regions and local communities affected by the typical clan-tribal influences of Libyan society. At the beginning of August 2012, the NTC handed power over to the newly elected Parliament, although the country's problems were far from being resolved.

Libya's pacification process is not over yet and the process of state-building is still in its initial stage. In 2012 clashes took place all over the country, especially in the South (in the cities of Sebha and Kufra) and in Qaddafi's sanctuaries (Sirte and Bani Walid). Terrorist groups are growing stronger, especially in Cyrenaica, while the number of armed militias on Libyan territory is decreasing although they are still present. In January 2012 the NTC started to inte-

grate the militias into the constituent national army, but the program did not meet with any success since the army appears now to be an incoherent gathering of various militias lacking any clear coordination with the central authority, and with dangerous double affiliations. Militia intimidation resulted on 5th May 2013 following the approval by the General National Congress (GNC) - the parliament Libyans voted for last July - of a sweeping political isolation law that will see a range of officials who worked for the late dictator's regime being disbarred from political office or from government jobs—even though they contributed to the downfall of the late dictator. The ban on them will last for ten years. Their departure from the ministries and from government is unlikely to improve bureaucratic efficiency or competence.

The elections held on 7th July marked a significant turning point in the country's history. The Libyan people voted for the General National Congress (GNC), a body enjoying full legislative authority, composed of 200 members and endowed with the power to appoint a new interim government. The elections were held in a quasi-peaceful climate, especially in the big cities. The mixed electoral system (120 members elected with a 'first-past-the-post' system, 80 elected with a proportional system) led to a variegated parliamentary composition, particularly rewarding local

communities who had voted for independent candidates, thus favoring the candidates' link with the territory rather than their political orientation.

New political parties have been created in Libya since the end of Qaddafi's regime. Back in 1970, the Colonel prohibited the establishment of political organizations in the country, and in 1972 he abolished all political organizations but those directly linked to the Libyan Arab Socialist Union or Jamahiriya popular committees. Opposition groups went underground: the Muslim Brotherhood fled to Libya, especially Cyrenaica, while other groups, almost significantly the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, went to the United States, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

The highly fragmented political landscape of today is primarily due to two factors. The first and foremost is Libyan society's historical lack of familiarity with democracy, coming from 42 years of dictatorial rule and the democratic weakness of the former Senussi regime. In order to trace some occurrence of regular democratic consultation, apart from that of 2012, we have to go back to 1952. The second factor is the total absence of legislation regulating the formation of new political parties. It was precisely under this scenario that last July's elections took place: a record number of 140 registered parties and 350 political organizations entered the political race, revealing once

again the chronic chaos of Libya's political landscape.

In other countries affected by the Arab Spring, revolution has brought to power groups related to the Muslim Brotherhood. Libya has escaped this fate, at least in part. In this political landscape, an important role has been played by the National Coalition of Mahmud Jibril, the former NTC Prime Minister. On the eve of the elections, Jibril, supported by Western countries, created the "National Forces Alliance" (NFA), a 58-party coalition. NFA established itself as a more secular and modern nationalist movement, although it still mentioned the importance of Islam in its program. Moreover, it stands for a liberal economy and territorial decentralization, arguing against federalism. In order to counterbalance Islamist parties, the United States and their Western allies have chosen to support Jibril's Alliance, which eventually was the most successful party, winning 39 seats. On the other hand, the secular National Centrist Party, led by the former Minister of Economy Ali Tarhouni, with a political program based on democracy and religious moderation, gained just two of the 80 Party-list seats.

The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood has always been internally fragmented, and in the last year profound changes have occurred at the top of the organization. In March 2012, the Brotherhood spawned the "Justice and Con-

In March 2012, the Brotherhood spawned the "Justice and Construction Party", a moderate Islamic party drawing on the Turkish and Egyptian models.

struction Party", a moderate Islamic party drawing on the Turkish and Egyptian models. This party, led by Mohamad Sowan, is the expression of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, though it does also include civil society activists. In the July 2012 elections, "Justice and Construction" had the highest number of candidates (73), but it has had to content itself with only 17 seats out of the available 80. Its influence over the Libyan political system has grown over time, especially in the last months, when the party has been able to influence many independent congressmen.

Another Islamic party is the "National Gathering for Freedom, Justice and Development", led by Ali Sallabi, one of the most influential religious figures in the country. Sallabi is enjoying profitable relations with Qatar and with Abdel Hakim Belhaj's military group in Tripolitania. Sallabi, who has spent several years in exile, is a largely popular figure. Notwithstanding his critical positions towards NTC, his declarations have showed a clear acceptance of the new political structures established by the NTC itself, as well as the alignment of his group with moderate and harmless Islam. At the same time,

Sallabi has shown a clear willingness to reform the country according to Islamic principles. His group has also formed another party: the “Union for the Homeland”, led by Ali Sallabi and Abdel Hakim Belhaj. The “Union for the Homeland” party has entered into competition with the “Justice and Construction” party, although the two have been trying to reach an agreement in the weeks before the elections.⁴ This party, however, has not reached the electoral outcome to which it aspired, and has gained only two seats in Congress. Ali Sallabi is now involved in mediation between the various political forces and Libyan militias, including Qaddafi’s former loyalists, attempting a sort of national reconciliation.

Over the last year, radical Islam groups such as the Salafists have spawned locally-based organizations, without trying to establish a national party. These groups can rely on a capillary network of mosques, as well as a strongly ideological political agenda. In any case, their political weight in July elections has been insignificant. Radical groups have been charged with murder of Abubakr Younes, which happened in July 2011. Younes, a leading figure in Qaddafi’s regime, had become the military chief of the rebels. Radical groups are also accused of perpetrating other acts of violence, such as

⁴ Omar Ashour, *Libyan Islamist Unpacked: Rise, Transformation, and Future*, Brookings Doha Center, May 2012.

Some groups of Salafists who failed to gain parliamentary representation have chosen to engage in armed struggle.

vandalizing Christian churches and cemeteries, the attacks on the U.S. and British consulates in Benghazi, the attacks on the Red Cross buildings, and most notoriously the killing of the American Ambassador in Libya, Chris Stevens. Some groups of Salafists who failed to gain parliamentary representation have chosen to engage in armed struggle.

In autumn 2012, the process of government formation was littered with difficulties: Mustafa Abushagur, the first elected Prime Minister of modern Libya, failed to win the approval of the General National Congress (GNC) and the mandate for a new government, and thus was replaced by Ali Zeidan, who, despite the difficulties he had to face, has been able to form a cabinet which met the approval of the GNC. These difficulties are emblematic of Libya’s inner non-democratic character: the people’s vote, instead of being determined by political convictions, is guided by clan-based identities, even though these may represent some sort of pacific representation. Libya could evolve into a merely formal democracy - or an “illiberal democracy”,⁵ i.e. a form of government character-

⁵ For the definition see for example Fareed Zakaria, *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997.

ized by democratic institutions but lacking an adequate democratic culture.

The first condition for a peaceful transition is the establishment of security conditions conducive to peace and territorial integrity. In order to create these conditions, the State should be in stable possession of the exclusive use of force, a condition that Libya is far from reaching. In fact, several disruptive factors seem to be playing a part in prolonging Libya's instability phase, most notably the full integration of militias into the National Army. At the same time, notwithstanding the good results of the July 2012 elections and other positive signals, it is not possible to take for granted that the country's institutions will become more stable and more representative. A year after the elections, the political scenario remains uncertain. The decisional impasse which characterized the NTC could be also be experienced by the government, blocked by personal and local loyalties. If the laying down of the Constitution be blocked by a stalemate in the political process, the central authority will lose much of its impetus in the resolution of major domestic problems, thus paving the way for the strengthening of Islamist groups. The exclusion law, passed in May 2013, is very broad and would add to a 'leadership deficit' in Libya when it comes to running government and political administration. This leadership deficit is bound to in-

A year after the elections, the political scenario remains uncertain.

crease: many top civil servants will be forced out when the law comes into effect next month, as will approximately 40 - 60 GNC members, most of whom are moderates.

In the end, we need to ask whether Libya can actually evolve into a stable liberal democracy, irrespective of its level of economic development, the progress of the *state* and *nation-building* processes, the existence of direct threats to the survival of the polity, or, again, the degree of its domestic and regional order (from a political and institutional point of view). Over the last twenty years, the very idea of democracy has come to mean liberal democracy. As a consequence, democracy has become the place where expectations and agreed upon criteria converge, as well as the acknowledged standard for political and ideological "normality". Democracy has come to hold a powerful appeal for all those who wish to become part of the international political elite; this is particularly true of the Libyan political elite, mostly trained abroad and with a positive attitude toward the West. These figures may be crucial for the country's future. However, it is almost inevitable that this elite will be replaced by other political forces with stronger and more diverse ties across Libyan society.

Which Islam? National identity and the struggle for representation

Libyan national identity is very fragile. The country has a short history, and clan-tribal and regional identities pose a serious threat to the formation of a strong national identity.⁶ In this context, Islam is becoming a major factor in national cohesion, especially following the Arab spring revolts. In fact, Islam has always represented a platform for cohesion throughout Libya's history.⁷ Former sovereign Idris Senussi was the chief of the most important Muslim order in Cyrenaica and said to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Qaddafi, too, consistently relied on religion as a central feature of his political message, exploiting this aspect in order to gain the people's favor. This brought about a rupture the Colonel's regime with the Ulama. Qaddafi was labeled a 'heretic' by the Muslim Brothers; on his part, he branded as 'reactionaries' all those who advocated the traditional application of Islamic law. As a consequence of the strife between Qaddafi and the Ulama, the regime gave orders to the armed revolutionary committees to assault and bring down all the mosques and zawiya run by Ulama opposing the Green book and the Jamahiriya.

6 A. Baldinetti, *La formazione dello stato e la costruzione dell'identità nazionale*, in K. Mezran – A. Varvelli, *Libia. Rinascita o fine di una nazione?*, Roma, Donzelli, 2012.

7 Majid Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963

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The overthrow of Qaddafi paved the way for an Islamic comeback. Libya has a solid Sunni majority, considering religion in a conservative and private way. In October 2011, Mustafa Jalil announced the adoption of *Sharia* as the principal source of law for the new Constitution; his declarations were certainly due to political reasons – mainly to reward Islamic militias for their role in Qaddafi's overthrow – but they also mirrored a shared willingness to build new Libya on an Islamic basis.⁸ The Ulama (*hay'at 'ulama Libya*) answered with a dispatch claiming Islam as “the only source of law” - not simply “the most important” - and asking for the amendment of the provisional Constitution, which had been released on August 3rd 2011.⁹ Sheikh Sadik al-Ghariani too, Libya's grand mufti, has often referred to political Islam and *Sharia* as central in the construction of new Libya, pushing against the secularist division between state and religion.

8 Oxford University, *National survey reveals Libya would prefer one-man-rule over democracy*, February 2012.

9 Y.M. Sawani, *Post-Qadhafi Libya: an Interactive Dynamics and Political Future*, in «Contemporary Arab Affairs», January 2012.

On the secular front, we find Mohammed Magarief, former president of the Libyan National Congress (LNC) and leader of the National Front Party, who is also the founder of the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, in opposition to Qaddafi's regime. Magarief, an economist, former ambassador and widely regarded as a moderate Muslim, has declared that Libya will remain a secular state. This point is probably unclear, since while the secular forces performed better in the July 2012 elections, all the country's new political actors make explicit reference to Islam as the central element for Libya's reconstruction. The Muslim Brothers' position on the role of Sharia in the future Constitution is very ambiguous, in particular on who will be responsible to determine the conformity of Congressional laws with the Islamic Sharia.¹⁰ After the promulgation of the 'Isolation Law', LNC President Muhammad Magarief resigned on May 28, weakening the already shaky authority of 'New Libya' and the government of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan.

As far as radical Islam is concerned, some analysts consistently recall the long tradition of Jihad in Cyrenaica. However, one has to be careful not to invert the cause-effect relationship: radical Islam in Libya has been nourished mainly by the regime's oppression. For most Libyans, the only way

¹⁰ Interview of the author with Imad El Bannani, a Brotherhood leader, Tripoli, February 2012.

Radical Islam in Libya has been nourished mainly by the regime's oppression.

to distance themselves from Qaddafi was by adhering to global Jihad or al-Qaeda. For years Libyans have been the second largest group, after Saudis, among the fighters on the Iraqi and Afghan fronts. One of al-Qaeda's leading high-ranking officials was a Libyan, Abu Yahya al-Libi, killed in June 2012 in an American drone strike. Some of Abu Yahya al-Libi's followers, such as Sufian bin Qumu, are still active in Libya. Bin Qumu, who had spent six years in Guantanamo for working with Osama bin Laden, is today the head of a militia waving the black Al Qaida flag around Derna. Qumu has declared he is not going to lay down the weapons until an Islamic-Taliban government is established.¹¹ Derna and Cyrenaica are home to other Salafist groups, such as Ansar al-Sharia, that are unwilling to recognize the central authority¹². Ansar al-Sharia and other Salafist militias active in eastern Libya, such as the Abdul Rahman brigade, are thought to have led the terrorist attacks of September 2012, which caused the death of four American citizens, including the US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens.

¹¹ Giorgio Cafiero, *Beyond Libya's Election, Jadaliyya*, 19 July 2012.

¹² Frederich Werhey, *Libya's Militia Menace, Foreign Affairs*, 15 July 2012.

A number of other brigades (Rafallah al-Sahati, Shuhada' Abu Salim, Abu Ubaiday Ben Jarrah, etc.) share Ansar al-Sharia's vision. These groups are independent in terms of their leadership but they are interconnected. The fact that some of these groups (like Katiba Ahrar Libya, Shuhada' Derna) are now part of the official Libyan army does not mean that they have renounced their Islamist beliefs. On the contrary, they are using the threat of force to pressure government decision-making.

Under U.S. pressure, the Ali Zeidan government seemed to be more focused on fighting these factions. Another militia group, suspected of being involved in the terrorist attack on Benghazi, is led by Egyptian Muhammad Ahmad Abu Jamal, who belonged to the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, captured in Cairo in December 2012. Moreover, in March 2013 Libyan security forces captured Faraj Al-Chalabi in the eastern town of al-Marj in connection with the deadly Benghazi attack. Al-Chalabi was linked to the Libyan Islamist Fighting Group (LIFG) and al-Qaeda, and had been wanted in Libya since the 1994.¹³ The situation of semi-anarchy is offering al-Qaeda important opportunities to penetrate this area, increase its fi-

13 He was arrested in Tora Bora and handed over to Libyan authorities in 2004 with his Pakistani wife, who was released shortly afterwards. A prisoner who served some time with Al-Chalabi at Abu Salim prison in Tripoli said that the suspect was known as 'the Tora Bora prisoner'. He was released in 2006 due to health reasons, according to the fellow inmate. Libya Captures U.S. Mission Attack Suspect, in All Africa, 18 March 2013.

Since Qaddafi's fall, radical Islam has been gaining momentum.

nances, and recruit and train fighters, especially in Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

Since Qaddafi's fall, radical Islam has been gaining momentum. Terrorist organizations thrive in an environment characterized by criminality, illegal immigration, drugs and arms trafficking.¹⁴ This dramatic trend has been confirmed by the August 2012 attacks, when Salafist groups destroyed Sufi sanctuaries and in March 2013 when they attack Coptic Churches.

Although Islam certainly constitutes a clear reference point in Libya's renaissance, it is not yet clear which kind of Islam will prevail. The diverse success achieved by Islamic groups in different parts of Libyan territory derives in part from historical grounds. Cyrenaica was home to the Senussi order, while Tripolitania is home to traditionally more temperate interpretations of Islam. Moreover, Cyrenaica's marginality in Qaddafi's era made room for Islamic providers of social service, which rapidly gained the consent of the people. However, Salafist groups are determined to gain more influence in the country, and in order to reach this objective some of them have frequently resorted to violence.

14 Paul Salem and Amanda Kadlec, Libya's Trouble Transition, June 2012

The wide participation of Islamic forces in July 2012 elections and the acceptance of the result allows one to nourish some hope about the possible coexistence of Islam and democracy.

The wide participation of Islamic forces in July 2012 elections and the acceptance of the result allows one to nourish some hope about the possible coexistence of Islam and democracy. Constitutionalism, i.e. the principle that the authority of government derives from and is limited by a body of fundamental national law, seems to be widely-accepted in today's Libya, partly as a consequence of past positive experiences like the Tripoli republic (1918) and the Senussi monarchy.¹⁵

Since Qaddafi's fall, Libya has been undergoing a process of democratization which is part of the wider transition process underway in the Muslim world. However, the risk for Libya is that, given its peculiar cultural and political context, a "democracy without democrats" might eventually emerge. This is even truer for a rentier state, where the central authority could act as a patron. Given the combined lack of strong state institutions and a solid political culture, Libya could see the rise of new forms of authoritarianism¹⁶.

¹⁵ Karim Mezran, *Constitutionalism and Islam in Libya*, edited by Rainer Grote & Tilmann J. Roder, *Constitutionalism in Islamic Countries. Between Upheaval and Continuity*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 513-533.

¹⁶ To fill the gap has been proposed to restore the Libyan

At the moment, it is reasonable to state that the establishment of a full liberal democracy does not seem the most plausible scenario, since many important issues remain unresolved – most notably the role of religion as a source of law, the traditional religion-society-state hierarchy, the full enforcement of political power, the resolution of conflicts according to an enemy/friend logic and the idea of freedom.¹⁷

The unbearable burden of rent

2012 July's general elections contributed to the strengthening of Libyan central authority, which is further reinforced by its action of patronage, made possible by the redistribution of oil rent and the return of frozen assets. Even if some doubts remain about the actual capability of the government to efficiently use this amount of money (at least 20bdollars have already returned in Libya after the defreezing of foreign assets was ordered by the United Nations), it is widely assumed that it will represent an important source of power.

The Libyan economy is based on income and redistribution of oil rent (making up about 95% of total reve-

Constitution of 1951. See for example Duncan Pickard, The Case for an Interim Constitution in Libya, Atlantic Council, 5 October 2012.

¹⁷ Islam is a religion 'without center': no hierarchical authority, as in the Catholic Church, which is empowered to decide what is dogma. Islam, as Muslims say, is what believers want it to be. The consensus of the community is still one of the sources of law. On this issue, see for example, Renzo Guolo, *L'Islam è compatibile con la democrazia?*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2005.

In October 2011, one year after Qaddafi's fall, Libyan oil production had returned to similar pre-crisis level: 1,5 billion barrels a day.

nues). It is highly likely that whoever is in charge of the government in the future, will be in need of exporting hydrocarbons in order to guarantee the essential revenues. This is precisely what the National Transitory Council did during its rule and what the Ali Zeidan government is doing. The revitalization of Libyan economy during this phase of transition is placed on oil production and export. In October 2011, one year after Qaddafi's fall, Libyan oil production had returned to similar pre-crisis level: 1,5 billion barrels a day.

Being a *rentier state* means that a sort of silent agreement is signed between the ruler and the ruled, based on the redistribution of the rent from the former to the latter in exchange for its unaccountability to the citizens. In other words, distributive states adopt the principle 'no taxation without representation': the state doesn't ask for taxes, but it doesn't allow representation. Dirk Vandewalle, in particular, has analyzed the dynamics linking the dependence on hydrocarbons to socio-political stability with reference to specific countries. Vandewalle highlights the close connection between oil, state structure and complexity of social institutions

by means of the theoretical construct of 'distributive state'.¹⁸ Distributive states collect foreign incomes and redistribute them to their citizens, thus avoiding the task of creating a stable and efficient state apparatus.

Qaddafi's 'State of the masses' has been made possible by the rentier character of the Libyan economy, removing intermediary structures between its unique role as income distributor and the people. In early 2009 Qaddafi proposed dismantling the central government and directly distributing the oil income to the citizens, with the declared purpose of eliminating bureaucracy and corruption. The base committees, upon which Libyan 'direct democracy' was found, disliked Qaddafi's proposal, thus creating a stalemate.¹⁹ The stalemate was a direct consequence of Qaddafi's attempt to shift the blame for economic problems to the *nomenklatura*. However, the matter was much more complex than Qaddafi's simple lack of willingness to take on the responsibility for his own policies. The success of economic reforms, as well as the success of political reforms, remained tied to a deep revision of the role of the state, not to its dismantling. The purpose of giving life to a true local economy with a direct redistribution of the rent and the elimination of bureaucratic

¹⁸ D. Vandewalle, *Libya since Independence: Oil and State-building*, London, Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 7.

¹⁹ R.B. St John, *The slow pace of reform clouds the Libyan succession*, 45/2010, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid 2010.

apparatus appeared naïve and demagogic. Markets, as demonstrated by the Libyan case and as underlined by Vandewalle, cannot exist in an administrative, social and institutional vacuum.²⁰

From a long term perspective, the economic reform launched in Libya appeared compulsory; even following the fall of Qaddafi's regime it remains one of the most pressing challenges in the country. The most important objective is to free the Libyan state from the volatility of crude oil prices. The liberalization, a merely economic one, left the state structures unchanged.²¹ The success of economic reforms would have required the simultaneous reconstruction of state institutions, which Qaddafi opposed, because of the risks of social mobilization which would have brought chaos to the country, thus endangering the stability of the regime. This was the reason behind the withdrawal of the reform.

It is highly likely that in the future this particular version of the social agreement will arise again: with no need to impose taxation on its citizens, the government has returned to a policy of dispensation of money and welfare services. At the end of February 2012 the NTC, in order to celebrate the anniversary of the revolution, had passed a law granting

²⁰ D. Vandewalle, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-194.

²¹ L. Martínez, *The Libyan Paradox*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 131.

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2000 dinars (about 1250 euros) to Libyan families (with an addition of 200 dinars for any other unmarried member of the family).²² Immediately after that, another law had been passed, granting up till 4000 dinars to any revolutionary (*tuwwar*) who had taken part in the fight against Qaddafi. Finally, in October 2012, the new National Congress granted 1000 dinars to Libyan families in order to celebrate the *Eid al-Adha*.²³

The rent distribution could limit *free riding* attitudes by the stakeholders of the complicated Libyan political-military landscape. Oil and energy infrastructures have rarely been attacked by militias: this shows the widespread sensitivity about Libya's dependence on a functioning oil system, which is essential for a future of prosperity.

²² Law n. 10, 2012, National Transition Council.

²³ *Libya Herald*, 11 October 2012

From a political point of view, Libya, notwithstanding Qaddafi's fall and the electoral experiment, could remain an 'allocative or distributive' state, thus endangering the democratization process. The reference models are the Gulf monarchies. Following the request to signal some countries as reference models for Libya's future, the results of the first free survey (realized by Oxford University and Benghazi University in the spring of 2012) are United Arab Emirates (21,8%) and Qatar (8,6%). Libyan citizens seem to prefer 'strong leadership' rather than a Western-style political system, or a technocratic government. These elements do not leave much room for optimism about Libya's possible democratic future. In fact, democracy is not made only of elections; instead, a certain familiarity with democratic institutions is needed, as well as some *check and balances* aimed at creating a balance between state branches and empowering citizens to influence the government.

A large proportion of Libya's ruling class, educated in international universities and societies, is widely aware of this problem: Libya needs technology and know-how in order to move beyond a *rentier* economy. Mahmud Jibril, for example, was the head of the Committee for economic development from 2007 to 2011, thus under Qaddafi's regime, called in that role exactly by Saif al-Islam in his (failed) reformist attempt. Thus, Jibril is aware of the difficulties in

Libya needs technology and know-how in order to move beyond a rentier economy.

reducing state dependence on rents, differentiating the economy, privatizing, favoring the development of private sector, simplifying bureaucracy and cutting the number of state employees. These elements are essential in order to limit the patronage power of the central authority on the citizen and to give a new hope to the democratization process.

Since 2006, the regime has been looking for a route to economic modernization, with the help of well-known Western consultants, including Michael Porter from Harvard University and Daniel Yergin, Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and energy expert from Cambridge Energy Research, and through the launch of a National Economic Strategy supported by the International Monetary Fund. One of the greatest impediments to the development of the economic reform in those years was the shift from a 5% tax on personal income to a 20% tax: higher taxes would have entailed more rights for citizens. It is highly likely that the new Libyan ruling class, supported by international institutions, will have to face this challenge again.

Libya's alignment to rentier state typology must be evaluated in the context of the broader Middle Eastern picture, where the trend for produc-

ing countries is to have a constant increase in oil prices, enabling them to maintain a high level of public spending, in order to calm social tensions. The decisions taken by the new Libyan government on the budget seem to follow this trend: the 2012 and 2013 budgets starts from an evaluation of oil price close to 100 USD a barrel.²⁴

Conclusions

Libya is now going through a difficult phase of *nation building*, not only *state building*, which means that there is a real risk of a prolonged period of instability. In fact, the first principle of a peaceful and democratic transition is the establishment of security conditions permitting the maintaining of peace and territorial integrity, coming from the monopoly of the use of force by the state, which is a basic condition yet to be satisfied. A number of disruptive or centrifugal factors seem to represent a range of very complex challenges— terrorism, localisms, regionalisms and the role of militias which have taken part in the fight against the regime – while there seem to be no other influences able to lead the country towards stability and democracy.

At the moment, there seems to be no solution to the Libyan trilemma. Libya is probably doomed to remain a hybrid state for some years to come. The strongest characteristic among the three taken into consider-

Libya is now going through a difficult phase of nation building, not only state building, which means that there is a real risk of a prolonged period of instability.

ation above is the *rentier state* one. Moreover, this characteristic seems likely to endure for the near future, thus raising serious questions about concrete possibilities for Libya's democratization.

It is precisely the democratic elements, notwithstanding the success of July 2012 elections, which appear to be the most fragile in Libya's reconstruction process; in fact, they are endangered not only by the restrictions implicitly imposed by the rentier economy, but also by the explicit ones posed by Islamist political forces.

In this field, in Libya - as in a sizeable part of the Arab world - Islam will probably lead to a scramble for political representation, as the only solid reference point for a new power structure. Notwithstanding, it is very hard to formulate a credible hypothesis about the possible evolution of this kind of structure, or about the possible result of the competition between different forms of Islam.

Considering the latest developments in the area, there seems to be a clear juxtaposition between the 'republican', or constitutionalist, vision of Is-

²⁴ MEES (Middle East Economic Survey), vol. 55, n. 13, 26 March 2012.

lam – which is the vision of the Muslim brotherhood – and the ‘jihadist’ vision, which is held by some Salafist groups and terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda. The first vision conveys the existence of a possible mediation between the divine imperatives and the actual need to put it into practice, mainly by means of Islamic precepts such as ‘justice’ or ‘consultation’. The second vision, according to leading scholars, seems to suffer from the lack of an alternative political project. This is characteristic of many Islamist groups who have chosen the armed struggle. ‘Jihadist’ terrorism reintroduces *fitna* into Islam, by pitting Muslims against one another (i.e. Salafism vs. Sufism). At the moment, the possible medium-long term scenarios are influenced by the relationship between these two visions of Islam in the domestic Libyan landscape. The jihadist vision seems to be the minority one in Libya, but considering the weakness of the country’s institutions, it could still represent a real threat to stability.

Beyond political and social matters, the success of Islamic parties in the area has been determined by anthropological and identity factors. The missed victory of the Muslim brotherhood in Libya must not be perceived as the triumph of Western structures of thought, which are limited to a restricted elite that has been trained abroad. Rather, it must be charged on the weakness of the Brotherhood as political organization

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and on the localized fragmentation of representation.

As emphasized by some academics, it is necessary to highlight how the processes of change brought about by the Arab Spring, which brought Islamist parties to power, leave some room for revision, specification and updating of Islamic political thought, which will have to answer the challenges of managing a modern state.²⁵ Once again, the confrontation between Islam-religious state and secularism-secular state looms, in the place of a concerted effort to identify mediation or a middle way for these processes.

In conclusion, the future of the country will be shaped not only by the three factors examined above (Islam, democracy and the rentier state), but also by other factors, such as the influence of external actors, which have had a crucial role in the fall of Qaddafi’s regime. In the last year we have witnessed an attempt at planned intervention, with the objective of supporting the political agenda of the

²⁵ Cfr. Massimo Campanini, *L’alternativa islamica. Aperture e chiusure del radicalismo*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2012.

democratic elected government. Notwithstanding, there is a serious risk that the international community as well as single regional powers could act independently, trying to favor one Libyan faction over another, while pursuing their own political agendas. Such approaches could have tragic consequences for the territory, as well as create great difficulties for the Libyan government. In fact, it would strengthen, rather than weaken, the territorial and ideological divisions, thus delaying the reconciliation of the three elements presented above.



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Qatar and the Islamists:

The anomaly of Qatar

**Michael
Stephens***

Abstract

The article examines the reasons behind Qatar's multifaceted and hyperactive foreign policy. As a small, prosperous Emirate, Qatar not only funds mega construction projects, makes luxury purchases in various countries, and hosts conferences, dialogues, political refugees and activists, but also portrays itself as a secure harbor for economic investment. Accordingly, the author argues that security, in the middle of a turbulent region, has been the core reason for country's increasing trans-regional economic, diplomatic, investment, and humanitarian activism. The author further observes that, as a national strategy, Qatar strives to "be useful" to international community by which it may protect itself as a secure state, uphold its transition to a post-hydrocarbon economy, and serve as a key mediator between the Muslim world and the West.

The paper concludes that Qatar's strategy for dealing with political Islam (considering it as a publicly backed policy option and sustaining constructive ties with the Muslim world) indispensably leaves the country open to the influences of destabilization and sectarianism of the region

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The State of Qatar has risen to prominence in recent years in a number of ways. The rich and diplomatically active state has been seen in a number of different countries funding construction projects, and making mega purchases of art, football clubs and luxury stores. Simultaneously, the country has forged a pathway in the foreign policy arena that is so multifaceted and hyperactive that it is hard to see any logic to its actions. There are many theories as to why Qatar has been banging the drum so loudly, but central to the thesis lies the inescapable conception that by being an activist state, by hosting conferences, dialogues, political refugees and activists it is ensuring its long term security vis-à-vis the main strategic threats that it faces: namely Saudi Arabia and Iran.

By being the noisy neighbor and attracting international attention, Qatar is ensuring that the world is becoming invested in its prosperity and security. The case of Kuwait is particularly interesting in helping to understand what is driving that Qatari elite. A quiet but prosperous little Emirate, rich in hydrocarbons and flanked by Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait lacked the international connections to ensure its security when Saddam's army invaded. Indeed, had it not been for Saudi Arabia's fear that Saddam would advance into Riyadh via Saudi's oil fields, the likelihood that U.S. and coalition forces would have mobilized to oust Sad-

dam would have been far less. It was a lesson that the current Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, and his cousin Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al Thani, took to heart. This formed the basis for the country's increasing engagement with the United States, and by extension ushering in the removal of the old Emir Khalifa, whose goal in life seemed to be living in luxury on the French Riviera rather than attending to the security needs of his people.

The Qatar of 2012 is the brainchild of Hamad and Hamad bin Jassim in tandem with the Emir's second wife, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Missned. All three have pushed the country into increasing policy activism, modernizing Qatar on the domestic level with the country's enormous petro-dollar wealth, funding construction projects on a dizzying scale, using its financial muscle abroad to insert the country into the middle of diplomatic spats and areas of instability, as well as engaging in large investments through its sovereign wealth fund (QIA) and real estate purchasing fund (Qatari Diar). All of this is part of a national strategy, which boils down to the following objective: 'to be useful'. Often, international relations theorists seek to forge complex systemic chains of causality that explain state action, but there is no such need in the case of Qatar, for its policy is simply to interfere where it can to ensure that its overriding interests are met. Ul-

timately, the aim is to create a nation state that is secure, and has the capacity to manage the transition to a post-hydrocarbon economy in the coming decades. This is why Qatar is growing as rapidly as it is, and why it is engaging on multiple fronts in the international arena in such a hyperactive fashion.

Is Qatar an Islamist country?

There are many who are extremely worried about Qatar and its dealings with what Western nations might term 'Islamists', which remains a slippery and ill-defined term that does little to explain who Qatar actually works with, in what ways, and whether the ideology of the ruling elite bears any congruence to the ideologies of the various Islamists with whom it deals. In order to help clarify the position of Qatar towards Islamists, it is necessary to underline some of the points that are vital to understanding the nature of the Qatari state and what it represents in terms of its position as an Islamic Emirate in the Middle East. Qatar is a partial Islamic state; the holy Qur'an is used for assistance with judicial rulings, but only in respect to matters of family law and non-civic matters. All other law is kept separate from the mosque and the clerics' influence. Secondly, Qatar is not a Wahhabi country. That is not to say that a significant proportion of its citizens (particularly those of the Bedouin tribes) are not deeply conservative or lean towards Wahhabism - indeed they do - but the nation as a

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whole is not defined by this ideology. The Wazarat al-Awqaf (Ministry of Religious Affairs) in Qatar is Salafi in orientation, and holds a fairly strict outlook on what is considered appropriate with regard to Islamic principles. Certainly one does not see much in the way of Sufism promoted in Qatar's plethora of mosques (the country is considered to have the highest per capita number of mosques in the world), and Qatar's small Shia community, comprising some 10 percent of the local population, is likewise not something many religious Qataris are keen to acknowledge or discuss.

Nevertheless the country is a curious mixture of conservative ideology and progressive thinking, and this is a balance that the ruling elites have attempted to maintain, usually successfully, although there have been incidences of chafing in recent years, particularly regarding the issues of church construction, public dress standards, and alcohol sales. However, in all these incidences the ruling elite has acted as a voice of moderation, and on the odd occasion, such as the construction of a Catholic church in 2008, has enforced its will in the face of opposition from conservative

Qatar's ruling elites are generally pluralistic, and understand the need to enforce a progressive stance on religion.

Qataris. The point to note here is that on issues to do with ecumenical tolerance, Qatar's ruling elites are generally pluralistic, and understand the need to enforce a progressive stance on religion. The recent reaction to an offensive American film on the life of the Prophet is instructive in this regard. Recognizing the need for people to express their anger at the film's perceived transgressions, Qatar allowed a protest to go ahead, but insisted that clerics around the country first stress that a distinction be made between those who made the film and Americans in general. For matters of simple domestic harmony in addition to commercial interests, Qatar needs to appear as a tolerant state suitable for expatriates. Any cleric not toeing the line on an issue of such critical importance would be quickly moved to a mosque in the far corners of Qatar with only themselves and a few sand dunes for company.

It is important at this juncture to give some attention to the Muslim Brotherhood, which is often the organization with which Qatar is most associated with in the international arena. It is well known that since 1961, Qatar has played host on and off to Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Muslim Brotherhood's (Ikhwan) spiritual

leader. His influence within the movement is widespread and his longstanding connections to Qatar allow the country a certain flexibility in dealing with questions of Brotherhood politics both domestically and internationally; few other Arab nations possess this room for maneuver. There is little in the way of domestic support in Qatar, and since the mid 2000's the issue has barely registered

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concern. However to suggest that the alliance between Qaradawi and the Salafi-leaning waqf is comfortable would be untrue. The two sides tolerate each other and generally refrain from interfering in each other's affairs, but that is the best that can be said about the working relationship between Qatar's most senior cleric and the religious establishment of the country. This is a reflection of the Qatar zeitgeist, a place where not one ideology assumes precedence, where anybody can find a home, whether they are an Islamist of any strain, provided that they do not interfere with the ruling executive and its vision for the country.

Foreign Adventures

Given that neatly packaging groups of Islamists into mutually incompatible segments seems to be the modus operandi for many, it is no surprise the Qatar's interactions with Islamist groups across the region appear somewhat odd and without form. In truth, Qatar has no ideology when venturing into the realm of foreign affairs; it deals with whoever it can work with based on trust and personal connection; ideology is of secondary concern. Thus, Qatar works with Islamists across the region and from all ranges of the spectrum, and not only

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the Muslim Brotherhood as is sometimes believed to be the case. It is not only that Qatar is happy to work with movements which are not Islamist; despite the perceived slight of Qatar towards the Palestinian Authority following the Emir of Qatar's visit to Gaza in November 2012, Qatar does send aid to the Palestinian Authority, and does not seek its collapse in favor of a Hamas (read Ikhwan) led Palestine. Indeed, it has been at the forefront of nations seeking to support the PA with 100 million USD a month in

much needed aid. This is hardly the policy of a country that exclusively favors either Islamists, or the Ikhwan. The simple fact is that when it comes to regional engagement, Qatar favors pragmatism, working with people its leadership trusts and knows, or players it believes to be worthy of its attention in their respective countries. This may mean movements on the ascendancy, as was the case with the Ikhwan in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia, or, in the case of Lebanon and Palestine, long-established power centers such as the Palestinian Authority and Hezbollah.

Furthermore, Qatar does not sponsor or aid movements which could in some way return to haunt it. Unlike the UAE, which believes that the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) presents an unacceptable alternative to its rule, Qatar views the problem far differently. The Ikhwan movement is on the ascendancy in the Arab world, (though not necessarily the Gulf); as a result it makes little sense to take an Emirati viewpoint and treat the Brotherhood as inherently hostile. Instead, engagement and the use of Qatar's main asset – money - is used to ensure that the Emirate retains some say over the course of affairs in countries where Ikhwan movements are prominent. Movements that present opportunities for Qatar to maximize its regional influence will by extension be supported. The goal is not to create a Middle East in Qatar's image, far from it; it is more the case

that Qatar wishes to pursue its interests by backing winning horses. In the case of Egypt this was identified as support for the Muslim Brotherhood; in Gaza it was Hamas. Undoubtedly, both relationships were aided by the presence of Sheikh Qaradawi in Qatar and the long standing personal ties between the Emir and Hamas' leadership, enabling the country to sit at the top table of Arab politics. With that support comes the money, and lots of it. Qatar promised \$8 billion over five years to build a port in the Egyptian city of Port Said, 10 billion USD for a resort on the north coast and a 2 billion USD deposit for Egypt's central bank. In Gaza the Emir promised some 400 million USD in construction and infrastructure projects including Hamad Medical City, a gargantuan healthcare center designed to revitalize Gaza's creaking healthcare infrastructure. Elsewhere in Tunisia Qatar has moved in with big money to secure over 2 billion USD of oil production projects, in addition to a suspected 150 million USD in direct funding for Rashid Ghannouchi and his Ennahda party.

Libya was Qatar's D-Day for Islamist support, which went beyond money to the direct supply of weapons, ammunition and even Special Forces intervention on behalf of a number of groups that were clearly Islamist in orientation. Ali al-Sallabi and Abdul Hakim Belhaj are two individuals with whom Qatar has closely associated and who have received exten-

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sive patronage and support. Sallabi was one of Libya's most prominent clerics despite being exiled in Qatar for many years, and maintained close links to both the Qatari elite and the Gadaffi clan. His brother Ismail al-Sallabi ran the Islamist February 17

In truth, the policy adopted by Qatar in Libya was seemingly to hand off weapons and funding without structure or control, leading to a plurality of armed groups in Libya that destabilized rather than unified the country.

Katiba militia during the civil war, which received strong financial backing from Qatar. Abdelhakim Belhaj commanded the Tripoli Military Council, a conglomeration of various brigades that fought to liberate Tripoli, but was the former emir of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which was designated a terrorist organization in December 2004 by the U.S. State Department. But both men possess deep rooted links to the elite

in Qatar, and as such were trusted middle men with good knowledge of the situation on the ground in Libya, and who could serve as intelligence gathering sources and operators in support of Qatar's goals.

Evidence has since emerged that Qatar's reliance on men like Belhaj and Sallabi was insufficient to prevent the spread of weapons into the hands of highly questionable individuals and proto-jihadist groups. In truth, the policy adopted by Qatar in Libya was seemingly to hand off weapons and funding without structure or control, leading to a plurality of armed groups in Libya that destabilized rather than unified the country. What Qatar sought to do in Libya was colored by a naivety surrounding operations of this nature. A country of just 300,000 citizens, it lacks the capacity to adequately gather intelligence and monitor those to whom it is providing assistance. The result has been mixed, and Libyans are largely divided on whether Qatari assistance was beneficial or not. Certainly Qatari policy sped up the fall of Colonel Gadaffi, but whether it stabilized the transition phase is open to debate.

In Syria, the playing field is far more complex. In the wake of its mistakes in Libya, Qatar seems to have sought to be more structured and methodical in its support for armed resistance groups. Yet many see the growing Muslim Brotherhood influence in the Syrian National Council, the original

external body for political opposition to President Bashar al-Assad which was backed and funded by Qatar, as evidence of Qatar's open support for a Muslim Brotherhood takeover of Syria.

This is not the case. Qatar's position on Syria is more subtle than its rather unsubtle actions would suggest. Certainly, there have been worries about Qatar's distribution of weapons to rebel groups within Syria, some of whom have turned out to be less than aligned with Western interests. However, operational constraints stemming from Qatar's lack of adequate military and intelligence gathering frameworks played their part in turning the Qatari adventure in Syria into a quagmire that has left analysts with almost no coherent narrative from which to glean the country's policy objective. The complex set of relationships and shady middle men that Qatar uses to conduct its policy of supporting rebel forces in their struggle has become notable for one thing: that Qatar tends to lean towards groups that express a commitment to Islam. The form its commitment takes is variable, as of course are the number and range of groups on the ground. Not all these groups are Ikhwan; Qatar's support for the Furouq Brigades, a force of around 20,000 religious men originating from Homs and strong in the north-western border region, indicate that Qatar is happy to interact with a group that 'does not have good rela-

Pragmatism dominates the thinking of the elite in Qatar.

tions with the Muslim Brothers’.

Pragmatism dominates the thinking of the elite in Qatar. Groups which are strong are given support, and it helps if they are religious, because the Qatari elite perceives much of the Sunni hinterland of Syria as being comprised of religious people, not necessarily of any particular hue. The thinking runs that supporting religious groups results in a more accurate representation of the people, and in this sense Qatar seeks to reflect the true conditions in Syria, not impose its own will. The reasoning behind this is simple: Syria is being torn apart at the seams by various centrifugal forces, and supporting any one group in the country ensures opposition from at least ten others. Qatar is therefore trying to maximize its stakes in Syria by working under as wide a church as it realistically can in order to ensure a post-Assad Syria that contains groups that maintain some connection to Qatar, ensuring that its long term interests in the country are maintained. Currently throwing its weight behind the National Coalition, Qatar wishes to see a broad spectrum of Syrian society take a stake in a new Syria, and in private briefings with Western diplomats the Emir has indicated his concern at the prospect of sectarian bloodletting following the demise of Assad and his clan. Qatar is perceived as a sectar-

ian actor in Syria, and indeed there is some truth to the charge that its actions in Syria are designed to blunt Shia Iran and its regional influence. But again, many of the actions that have led to sectarian outcomes stem from Qatar’s inexperience in military operations and lack of organizational capacity, rather than any deliberate policy to exterminate Shia, Allawis or Christians.

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The Middle Man

So what is Qatar really doing, playing with all these Islamists? One motivation behind the policy is the desire outlined in at the beginning of the piece: to make Qatar a useful player on the world stage. According to David Roberts, a Doha-based scholar of Qatari foreign policy, ‘Qatar hopes to insert itself as the key mediator between the Muslim world and the West. Qatar sees its role as a highly specialized interlocutor between the two worlds, making -- from the West’s point of view -- unpalatable but necessary friendships and alliances with anti-Western leaders’.¹ In other words, because Qatar has the

¹ David Roberts, “Behind Qatar’s Intervention In Libya.” *Foreign Affairs*. 28 Sept. 2011. Web. 25 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68302/david-roberts/behind-qatars-intervention-in-libya?page=show>>.

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means, the connections and the ability to play the role of a global interlocutor, it does so. Part of the Emir's goal is to make his country the bridge for dialogue and conversation between Western policy elites and Islamist political actors. Doha has seen such events, conferences and meetings taking place on a weekly basis, the most salient example being the still uncompleted move to establish an office for the Taliban in Doha, the expressed aim of which was to open a space for conversation between the United States and Taliban representatives.

This strategy has only been partially successful, and the imagined bridge between civilizations has to some extent been undermined by Qatar's own actions. Weapons in both Libya and Syria ended up in the hands of questionable actors, and despite Qatar's enormous investment in Gaza it seemed unable to restrain Hamas during a recent flare up with Israel. So for all the good that the country is doing as a facilitator for a 'dialogue of civilizations', those not so interested in dialogue have nonetheless benefited from Qatari largesse and support. This becomes complex when trying to understand what Qatar is doing, because the country's quasi-schizophrenic appearance when working with Islamist parties and sub-state

actors creates an air of mistrust with regard to its intentions. Does Qatar want to see an Islamist region? What sort of regional Islamism does Qatar favor? Is Qatar's reaching out to the West genuine or devised through necessity? These are all pertinent questions to ask, and there are no clear answers to any of them. Trying to understand what Qatar wants is to read the mind of the Emir, a difficult task given the tendency of Qatar's ruling elite to conduct affairs of state in secrecy.

Qatar sees political Islam as the choice of the majority of the populations of the Levant and North Africa.

Nevertheless, we can conclude that the following assertions are true: first, Qatar sees political Islam as the choice of the majority of the populations of the Levant and North Africa. Second, the Arab Spring has allowed these choices to become manifest as populations across the region have overturned decades of elite rule and shaken the fundamental social compact to the core. To try to stop this rising tide is foolhardy, and thus the Emir has chosen to engage with political Islam in its various different guises, rather than trying to prevent its spread. As such, Qatar is not so much pushing an Islamist agenda across the region, but following the course set by regional forces and try-

Qatar is not so much pushing an Islamist agenda across the region, but following the course set by regional forces and trying to shape that course.

ing to shape that course. Nevertheless, the relationship between what Qatar wants, what is happening on the ground, and what Qatar is able to realistically change on the ground in all of the countries it is dealing with is an ever changing equation, and one that Qatar must manage with greater care and control in future if it is to prevent destabilization and sectarianism spreading from Libya to the Levant.

New Face of Turkish Foreign Policy and Its Repercussions Following the Arab Uprisings

**Gamze
Çoşkun***

Abstract

To date, and especially since the beginning of the Arab uprisings, there have been numerous discussions of Turkey's possible role in shaping the systemic transformation in the Middle Eastern countries. Many people, including various political figures, have sympathized with the idea that the Turkish experience can serve as a model, example, or point of reference. Some, pointing to deficiencies and problems in Turkey's economic, political and social systems, have argued either that Turkey cannot be considered a model at all, or it can serve as an example only in certain areas. But on the other hand, quite a few Arabs have repeatedly emphasized that they do not need a role model at all, as they are capable of establishing their own systems. Others have suggested that no one should insist on holding up an example –especially Turkey, as it is also a young country with limited democratic experience; it would be better to offer the Turkish model on a peer basis.

What put Turkey under the spotlight and brought all these discussions to the table was the convergence of Ankara's changing foreign policy course, changing international and regional contexts, and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era. Without a doubt, Turkish foreign policy became more active, independent and self-confident during this period. These policies were largely developed by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, and proved to be effective - especially in the Middle East and Turkey's near abroad. However, the unrest in Arab countries, followed by civil disturbance and uprisings, posed significant challenges to these policies. In this respect, this article will first of all explain the main principles of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government. Then, the author will discuss questions of their practical application and success during the Arab Spring, and the repercussions of these policies across the Arab world.

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Over the past few years, Turkey has become an important regional actor. It has improved its relations with other countries in the region, even those with which it previously had tense relations, such as Syria and Iran. Although this regional activism was not specific to the AKP era, for the seeds were sown in previous periods, the outcome of the policies was most apparent during the AKP period, highlighted by changing regional and international dynamics.

The “New” Face of Turkish Foreign Policy in AKP Era

During the AKP era, especially with Ahmet Davutoğlu’s as foreign minister, Turkish foreign policy acquired a new and more complex political vocabulary, which made these new foreign policy principles both better structured and more compelling. With the help of the broader changes in global structure, these policies, which were presented in Davutoğlu’s well-known book *Strategic Depth*, could also be actively realized in Turkey’s neighborhood. This new foreign policy vision has made Turkey a more active, independent, assertive and respected actor in the regional and international spheres.

According to this “new” understanding, one of the main aims of the Turkish government is to change and expand its geographical perceptions in terms of its foreign policy implementation. Under this new approach, not only the West, but also the Bal-

Turkey’s regional position in terms of geography, history, culture, politics, and economic factors aspects is assumed by the Turkish government to be of vital importance in relation to the international system and world politics

kans, Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, and beyond can come under the influence of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey’s regional position in terms of geography, history, culture, politics, and economic factors aspects is assumed by the Turkish government to be of vital importance in relation to the international system and world politics; therefore, the need to capitalize on this potential is immediate. In this regard, Turkey is posited by the ruling AKP party as a ‘center state’ within the context of international politics. This view seeks to redefine Turkey, moving away from the commonly used description of ‘bridge between East and West’ and towards a view of the country as an influential independent international actor. That is to say, Turkey is an order-establishing constructive state, rather than merely a connection point or a transit line between East and West.

This approach also creates a new normative consciousness for Turkey, paving the way for Ankara to pursue pro-active policies during the emergence and resolution of crises instead

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of following the traditional ‘wait and see’ policy. Regarding this normative approach, Turkey should play an active role, directly intervening from the beginning, or even before the situation erupts, as well as developing preemptive policies in its near abroad. This pro-active policy also entails remaining at an equal distance and staying neutral to the parties of the conflict, instead serving as a facilitator and mediator via diplomatic platforms.

Another much-discussed concept is ‘soft power.’ This type of engagement seeks to overcome dependence on hard power in foreign policy making through greater emphasis on a new understanding of foreign policy based on diplomacy, culture, dialogue, cooperation, economic interdependence, and historical connections, in line with changing global conditions. Persuasion rather than coercion has been the focal point of the policies, and ‘rhythmic’ proactive diplomatic efforts and economic cooperation are at the forefront. Regarding ‘proactive’ and ‘rhythmic diplomacy,’ Turkey aims to play a leading role in crisis management in

its near abroad, acting in harmony with dynamic regional and international conditions. At this point, the notion of a ‘multifunctional foreign policy’ should also be taken into consideration, as it refers to synchronic compatible relations with various international actors across multiple areas. This, in turn, should create increased interdependency as well as preventing Turkey from exclusively focusing on a single region or issue. In this regard, no particular relationship should be prioritized, and a balance should be maintained. As for the economic side of soft power, bearing in mind that Turkey does not have natural resources like oil and natural gas, it must increase its focus on developing human resources. In this sense, in order not to get stuck within its national borders, increasing production capacity, expanding the market area to continental scale, and even removing visa requirements are a must. Hence, in accordance with soft power policy, all obstacles and boundaries will be abolished with the help of diplomacy, economy and cultural exchange.

Another pillar of this foreign policy approach brings a new security-freedom equation. The best way to tighten Turkey’s security is to improve freedoms at home and in the world. Therefore, security-based military policies should be substituted with freedom-based civilian, economic, soft policies; however, efforts toward improving democracy and freedoms

should not come at the expense of security concerns. In this manner, Turkey aims to support and encourage democratization in regional countries, but remains cautious due to security and national interests, as witnessed in recent examples of Libyan and Syrian uprisings.

The well-known ‘zero problems with neighbors’ concept, on the other hand, aims to abolish the defensive position whereby Turkey sees itself surrounded by enemies. Regarding this policy of concentrating primarily on neighboring countries, Turkey is using its common heritage to build bridges, in particular focusing on cultural, historical and even religious ties. This helps Turkey to pursue constructive policies towards the development of new partnerships in the Middle East, Balkans and the Caucasus. Solving problems, and normalizing and improving relations with Turkey’s immediate neighbors, creating a stable peaceful region, lie at the core of this principle. Security for all, economic integration, high level political cooperation, and tolerance are the main pillars of this policy, which is assumed to yield win-win results. Therefore, this new period hopes to bring an end to all disagreements and divergences in the near abroad.

In relation with all these basic tenets, Davutoğlu describes Turkey’s target as becoming the ‘wise country’ of the world, whose individual principles and views are respected by others.

In this context, Turkey aspires to become the voice of human conscience and stand up for its values. Thus, with its ‘wise country’ identity combining the aforementioned principles, it intends to take action in resolving regional and global crises, rather than being affected by the crisis or being a part of the crisis.

New Policies or New International Structure?

Although it has made a tremendous regional and international impression, the foreign policy activism in the AKP era should not be regarded as a unique approach in the history of Turkish foreign policy. Prime Minister Turgut Özal (1983-1989) and Foreign Minister İsmail Cem’s (1997-2002) also pursued similar activist policies. During Özal’s term, Turkey, moving away from the EU and depending more on the U.S., improved its dialogue and relations with Arab states, most of which were also part of a Green Belt designated by the U.S. as a means of containing the USSR. Therefore, the Motherland Party era witnessed an active Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East, mostly based on developing economic relations. However, given rising tensions with Syria along with many other issues, it is also possible to say that these policies were mostly based on serving the interests of the West or the U.S. rather than pursuing an independent line. İsmail Cem’s foreign policy approach, which fo-

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cused on proactive and multidimensional policies, was directed toward Western integrations at the same time as building good neighborly relations with nearby states. As seen from these two examples, Turkish foreign policy history has already encountered concepts such as 'proactive' and 'multidimensional' policies, despite their carrying different meanings in terms of differences of the governments and policy applications, as well as prevailing global dynamics. Yet, the nature of the AKP's political identity along with many structural alterations, Turkish foreign policy, the Turkish model and its regional influence are increasingly in the spotlight.

In practical terms, foreign policy is not only determined by the state itself; factors such as international structures, external pressures, regional stability and mutual perceptions provide the necessary grounds for certain policies. Therefore, not just the key actors and internal developments, but also the changing global dynamics and regional and international perceptions have enabled Turkey to diversify its foreign policy options.

In the international arena, the global financial crisis weakened Western powers and the U.S. by damaging their appeal, at least in the short term. Turkey, on the other hand, managed to ride out the crisis relatively unscathed. As a result, Turkish self-confidence increased, while trust in Turkey and Turkey's image was also boosted. This also showed the necessity of economic diversification and accelerated the search for new markets other than the West. All of this helped Turkey to engage in the Middle Eastern markets, increase its economic relations and in turn political relations, through emerging interdependency. As a result of the spill-over effect of its improving economic relations, especially with its Middle Eastern neighbors, Turkey expanded its influence and policies throughout the region and became a more credible and trusted actor.

From a more regional perspective, power distribution in the Middle East changed with the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The credibility of the U.S. rapidly decreased and a power vacuum for new regional actors and powers emerged. This change in the regional balance of power coincided with a period where Turkey enhanced capabilities and increased its assertiveness. In this period, Turkey tried not to deviate from the democratic efforts and rhetoric favoring people's demands for freedom, justice, and prosperity in its relations with the regional countries. On the road to

changing the region, with the help of cultural and historical ties, Turkey did not face great difficulties in establishing commercial, economic, political, and cultural cooperation, and easily gained popular acceptance in most of these countries. In this climate, efforts to improve relations with neighboring countries, mostly the Middle Eastern ones, was a natural and pragmatic inclination. As a result of this policy, Turkey successfully improved its relations with both governments and peoples, which probably made Turkey the only country capable of promoting relations at those two lev-

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els in the Arab world. What is more, the AKP with its Islamist roots and increasing popularity in the Muslim world, and sympathy towards Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made it easier to gain positive reactions in the Islamic world.

Added to these international and regional developments, Turkey's bumpy road toward EU integration gave rise to disappointments and tiredness. Turkey's shifting identity perceptions, naysaying by Germany and France, blocked or frozen chapters along with the unresolved Cyprus issue, all served to complicate Turkey's relations with EU. Consequently, Turkey augmented its foreign policy focuses with a particular emphasis on the Middle East, although it did not change its foreign policy stance towards the West, nor its commitment to EU membership, and the integration process continues with the ongoing domestic reform and democratization.

Moreover, increasing awareness that traditional national security-based and one-way (West) policies are not productive or sustainable have led Turkey to utilize the structural opportunities and to start following a new multidimensional foreign policy agenda. The internal improvements in economic, cultural, political spheres have also smoothed the way for Turkey to expand regional and international influence through its internal and external efforts.

All in all, Turkey's new foreign policy approach and course of action, changing international dynamics and power distribution coupled with domestic reform have enabled Turkey to challenge the status quo without destroying regional stability. Turkey

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could embrace an efficient proactive foreign policy path, and focus on the Middle East and North Africa with more active and multidimensional policies.

Turkish Stance towards the Arab Uprisings

Thanks to the developments summarized above, most Arab countries began to sympathize with Turkey. Yet since early 2011, the incidents and instability in the region seem to have the potential to undermine these efforts, as most of those countries had reached the brink of change, which blurred their future prospects. The politically advantageous atmosphere and diplomatic and economic investments generated by the new policy approach have been put at risk by the uprisings in the Middle Eastern and North African region.

Furthermore, criticisms arose due to Turkey's different responses to each case during the upheavals. As the incidents in Tunisia culminated so quickly, Ben Ali was toppled before anyone could react. Thus, Turkey could

easily welcome the newly emerging Tunisian regime. Then scene became a little bit more complicated with the Egyptian uprisings. Mubarak did not surrender as quickly as Ben Ali, creating a dilemma: whether to side with the Egyptian activists calling on him to resign, or to recommend that Mubarak initiate reforms to meet the demands of the public. In this case, if Turkey called for Mubarak to go, but he remained in power, negative repercussions would follow. After a while, when it became apparent that Mubarak was clearly doomed, the Turkish Prime Minister announced that Mubarak's time was over, even before the U.S. President said so.

In contrast to the Turkish administration's approach to these two initial instances, Turkey took a different stance toward Libya –especially at the onset of the conflict– and Syria has been highly criticized. It was expected that Turkey would immediately condemn Qaddafi and Assad as it did in the Egyptian and Tunisian cases. At the beginning of the uprisings in Libya and then Syria, Turkey was not very willing to be a part of an external operation, and nor was it supportive of the idea. Rather Turkey took a passive stance and preferred to look for ways for reconciliation and negotiation with the existing governments via reforms. Actually, this different approach was reasonable, considering Turkey's more extensive relations with both countries. At that moment, the number of Turkish

workers in Libya was around 25,000 and economic relations were at an important level; Turkey did not want to endanger the Turkish citizens residing in Libya, or the improving economic relations as also seen in the case of Syria. This risk, coupled with Turkey's tendency to act independently from Western powers, particularly in terms of regional and international conflicts, and the new-style foreign policy activism, prevented Turkey from immediately approving any kind of international intervention despite the strong emphasis on

Turkey faced a dilemma of national interests vs. ethical concerns, which forced it to take a cautious stance towards the issues, one of which ended up with a NATO intervention (Libya) while the other (Syria) remains uncertain.

Turkey's role in conflict resolution. Therefore, in these latter two cases Turkey faced a dilemma of national interests vs. ethical concerns, which forced it to take a cautious stance towards the issues, one of which ended up with a NATO intervention (Libya) while the other (Syria) remains uncertain.

The recent developments in the region have showed that Turkey tries to maintain a balance between promoting democracy and idealism, and

national interests and realism while applying its proactive foreign policy in the region, especially in times of crisis. The pragmatism of the Turkish position is based on the realism of Turkish foreign policy that seeks, as Western powers and others would do, to balance the potential gains and losses affecting its national interests before producing an interventionist policy solely based on hard power. This has revealed that it may not be so easy for Turkey to get involved in each and every conflict resolution effort at the expense of national interests.

Repercussions of Turkish Policies during and after the Upheavals

In fact, as a result of Turkey's increasing role in the region, many segments of Arab society have been talking about a 'Turkish model' as something they would like their own state systems to adopt. Turkey's improving democracy and growing economy, along with its soft power and proactive foreign policy, are behind the Arab world's growing appreciation. The increasing gap between Arab people and their governments has made the Turkish example even more compelling. What is more, following the overthrow of Ben Ali and Mubarak, the opposition parties of the two countries came to regard AKP as an example and source of inspiration. Even while the new Egyptian constitution was being debated, taking the Turkish constitution as an example was discussed, and it was translated into Arabic for this purpose.

At this point, taking a look at the perception towards Turkey and its policies in the Arab world may provide an insight into the repercussions of Turkish policies during and after the uprisings. In first place, looking at public perceptions can be enlightening. Considering the latest polls conducted at the beginning of 2012, it is possible to say that Turkey still has a positive image in the eyes of the Arab people.

Looking at the data of Pew Research Center's Public Opinion Poll of July 2012, participants from Egypt (78 percent), Tunisia (74 percent) and Jordan (70 percent) believe Turkey favors democracy in the Middle East while this percentage is relatively lower in Lebanon (49 percent favors, 43 percent opposes). The same poll also shows that Turkey (Egypt 68 percent, Tunisia 78 percent, Jordan 72 percent, and Lebanon 59 percent) and PM Erdoğan (Egypt 71 percent, Tunisia 74 percent, Jordan 76 percent, and Lebanon 58 percent) have a favorable image in regard to Turkey's regional efforts and policies. When asked whether Turkey or Saudi Arabia is a better model for the role of religion in Tunisian government, 63 percent named Turkey as the ideal whereas 15 percent survey participants answered that neither model is appropriate.

Another opinion poll conducted by YouGov in February 2012 indicates that 3 in 4 respondents across the Arab world think the Turkish politi-

Many believe that the Turkish model could be most successfully applied in Egypt and Tunisia, and is much better suited for the new Arab states than the Saudi or American models.

cal system would be a good model for the Arab states on the verge of transformation. Many believe that the Turkish model could be most successfully applied in Egypt and Tunisia, and is much better suited for the new Arab states than the Saudi or American models. Participants favoring the Turkish model agree on three main issues 1) Turkey is very close to the Arab world in terms of culture, religion and traditions, 2) the Turkish model has allowed Turkey to become a well-respected country in the eyes of the world, 3) the Turkish model involves Islam in politics, which fits into the needs of the Arab world. On the other side, those who do not believe Turkey could be a good model argue that 1) the Turkish model is irrelevant to the Arab world, 2) each country needs to have its own individual model, 3) Turkey is being closer to Europe than to the Arab world, and 4) the Turkish regime is different from most regimes in the Arab world.

The poll also shows that most respondents, regardless of whether they supported the Turkish model, believe the new Arab states should ultimately develop their own suc-

successful models rather than borrowing from other countries. Despite most participants generally favoring the Turkish model, 45 percent of them were concerned that Islamists in the Arab world may be willing to adopt the Turkish model to be able to introduce certain beliefs into government under the banner of religion.

Other than the general public perception, it is valuable to take a look at various attitudes towards Turkey from different political circles. There are divergent opinions of Turkey across political spheres. Although almost all segments of the society were united against the old regimes before they were overthrown, each had their own expectations and aims, which became more apparent after the ousting of the leaders, as they started to argue. The same fragmentation is also reflected in the support for or opposition to Turkish model. During the course of the revolutions and at the initial stages of the reestablishment, secular groups were considering the AKP model as leverage against Islamists based on the assumption that a secular Turkish example will lead to moderation of the Islamists. Islamists, on the other hand, sympathized with AKP due to its Islamic roots. Despite their divergent rationales, the Turkish model won support from the majority of both secularists and Islamists at the beginning of the transformation process. Yet, following the inaugurations of Islamist factions, especially in Tunisia and Egypt,

During the course of the revolutions and at the initial stages of the reestablishment, secular groups were considering the AKP model as leverage against Islamists based on the assumption that a secular Turkish example will lead to moderation of the Islamists.

the AKP's support for the ones who came to power has been perceived as a threat by the other political sides. This created a fear that after coming to power, Islamists could utilize the AKP example as a means to implant certain beliefs into the administration under the name of religion. With the recent developments in these countries, the ideological polarization and anti-Islamist stance has been accelerated and any support for Islamists in power is seen as a threat. As a result, almost all anti-Islamists started to take an anti-AKP or anti-Turkish attitude.

Other than the secular-Islamist discrepancy, Shia and Christian minorities' stances have also been in flux. Some Shia and Christian factions—in alliance with Shia minorities—are mostly influenced and shaped by the nature of Turkish-Iranian relations. If the course of the relations between these two countries is positive then these factions take a positive attitude towards Turkey. However, when the bilateral relations are frozen or de-

teriorating, accusations of neo-Ottomanism and Turkey as a Western tool are brought to the table. In this manner, considering the recent collapse of Turkish-Iranian relations due to the Syrian crisis, Turkey and Turkish policies are not favored by these circles.

Dilemmas and Future Prospects for Turkish Policies in the Arab World

Turkey, with its new proactive multi-dimensional foreign policy approach, has started to have a say in the international arena, and is still widely admired in the region. Despite temporary ups and downs in terms of perceptions as mentioned above, there remains a generally positive approach towards Turkey. In this sense, domestic, regional and international expectations of Turkey are rapidly rising. However, with the dilemmas and uncertainties as a result of the current regional developments, together with its political, economic and structural limitations, Turkey will inevitably need to make more efforts to sustain its credibility and effectiveness in the Middle Eastern transition process. Otherwise, without any means of putting them into action, Turkish rhetoric will seem empty in the eyes of the Arabs. Yet, this is easier said than done - not only for Turkey but also for any power in such an unpredictable, unstable atmosphere.

Recent experiences have showed that Turkey strictly adheres to the understanding that there should be no for-

Despite temporary ups and downs in terms of perceptions as mentioned above, there remains a generally positive approach towards Turkey.

eign intervention, as the faith of these countries should be determined by the people of these countries themselves. Within the framework of this understanding, diplomatic means should be exhausted between the regimes and the people; and even when it gets brutal, as Davutoğlu asserts, Turkey will still try to use diplomatic means in line with the non-interventionist approach. However, this understanding unfortunately created the misperception that Turkey is indifferent to the massacre of the Syrian people by the Assad regime.

Turkey also emphasizes its careful approach that resists drawing lines of diversion and improving relations with all Middle Eastern countries. Yet resolving issues with a country or party may cause relations with another to deteriorate. Putting all the countries of the region (e.g., Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Islamists, secularists, Shias, Sunnis) in one category may be problematic, idealistic and unrealistic.

Apart from this, when democracy promotion comes to table and Turkey somehow refers to the West or cooperation with the West in the region, this could also backfire if Turkey is seen to be a tool of the U.S. and Eu-

rope by some segments of the Arab society. The Arab bias that “Turks are Western-minded whether they are liberals, Islamists or conservatives” also strengthens this misperception.

Additionally, it has been observed that Arab stances and ideas are subject to rapid change. Hence, Turkey has no option of sitting back; there is a strong need for constant improvement and efforts to stabilize the region in line with expectations. Turkey should continue its attempts to strengthen its democracy and domestic harmony. Major domestic restructuring should be preserved in the same way. This will boost Turkey’s self-confidence, credibility and persuasiveness in regional and international realm so that the negative shift in Arab perceptions and attitudes will be minimized.

All of this clearly shows that some policies seem ideal on paper but may not provide the desired outcomes, or may not be put into realized correctly due to national interests. Al-

many serious dilemmas, notably during the uprisings: interests vs. ethical concerns; cooperating with the West –being seen as a tool of the West from time to time– vs. trying to act alone –with limited power and capacity–; its actual capacity vs. capacity needed to achieve its goals.

Turkey has quietly arrived at a historic crossroad. There is no doubt that Turkey can make an impact and play a key role in the region; however, its ability to be an influential regional power and become a source of inspiration remains under question considering all the obstacles, deficiencies and dilemmas Turkey is encountering. Turkey must analyze and work on these weaknesses as well as on its regional and international perceptions if it seriously aims to play a credible regional role as well as fulfilling domestic, regional and international expectations.

Turkey should continue its attempts to strengthen its democracy and domestic harmony.

though the new Turkish foreign policy framework seems ideal on paper and as rhetoric, it may bring different understandings and perceptions in practice, as discussed throughout the article. That is why Turkey has faced

The Turkish Key to Greater Central Asia

**Richard
Cashman***

Abstract

The countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan and Western China can more usefully be thought of as Greater Central Asia. While constituting something of a black hole on the map of globalization, they are viewed by many strategists as increasingly important in terms of diminishing global resources. Additionally, they form a geopolitical wedge between the states the West considers the greatest threats to its values of individual rights and democracy: Russia and China. The state exercising the greatest degree of what might be called 'organic power' in the region is Turkey, which is perhaps once more becoming a global power in its own right. Turkey is currently a Western ally and has spent almost a century imitating Western organizational mores. However, it also has an overwhelmingly Muslim population and seems to be increasingly torn between those Western values and Islamic ones. Aside from these geopolitical and even ideological struggles, there are sound economic reasons for greater international cooperation in Greater Central Asia. Nevertheless, Turkey will remain the geopolitical key to the region; whether that key turns itself or is turned by others is very much open to question.

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What is Greater Central Asia? The name implies that is the central part of a larger whole. However, it might more accurately be described as the remnant of a migratory corridor. From the 5th century onwards, Turkic peoples, led first by Attila, poured out of their native Mongolian steppe land in all directions to descend on the settled peoples of Europe, India and China. Their dominant route, however, was from east to west, with the Turks of present day Turkey finally settling in Anatolia and the corridor of their migration remaining intact behind them. In the modern period this led to a clash of Turkic and Slavic cultures, as the Russian Empire expanded into the corridor. Indeed, Russia and Turkey share the dubious accolade of being the two countries with the highest incidence of war between them.

Initially the Turkic peoples were thought of as barbarians by the neighboring Han Chinese. The most resonant expression of this was the building of the Great Wall, which was designed to keep them and other invasive tribes out. As successive Chinese empires waxed and waned, the central Chinese core developed its own conceit of exceptionalism, which enhanced the otherness of the Turkic peoples. Then, as China passed from fearful city builder to hungry colonizer, the Han expanded into the Turkic lands and made them tributary, forming the first concentric ring of vassal states. Chinese court

documents show that all known foreign states were divided into the categories of simple 'foreign states' and 'vassal states'. Foreign states were those over which the Chinese Emperor had no control, while vassal states were required to pay tribute to the Emperor.

However, it is not always straightforward to discover from these records exactly which groups were truly vassals and paying tribute. The Chinese character for 'tribute' is actually the same as the one for 'trading goods'. By way of example, the first English traders to arrive in China were recorded in Chinese court documents as bringing 'tribute' when, clearly, the Chinese Emperor exercised no practical authority over the English King in the 16th century. In any event, though the Chinese terminology for the area was never adopted by Europeans, the imperial connotations underlying it, in many ways, were.

S. Frederick Starr, probably the most prominent latter-day scholar in this area, has explained how, for the past century and more, the question of definition has been answered in terms of Tsarist then Soviet imperial expansion. Russians, from the mid-19th century, referred to the area as Middle (*Srednaya*) Asia. Much of the rest of the world adopted this terminology and its underlying assumptions, namely that the region was defined in terms of the territory under Russian control, rather than by its intrinsic

geographical, cultural and economic attributes, in other words: those common to the corridor.

The response of the Western academic world was to re-baptize the region as 'Central Eurasia'; a label that suffers from a lack of precision, given that 'Eurasia' itself is often hard to define. Starr, therefore, dissatisfied with both labels, preferred to base his conceptualization on those geographic, cultural and economic realities that together provide some degree of unity. It is in this way that he arrived at the idea of Greater Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but also Afghanistan and Xinjiang in China. To this the Caucasian states can be added for an even more comprehensive picture of what is known in Turkic languages as Turkistan, and in Persian as the Turan.

Greater Central Asia can also be considered an intrinsic part of Halford Mackinder's *Heartland*. In 1904, Mackinder, who was a British geographer and has come to be considered the father of modern geopolitics, published his seminal article '*The Geographical Pivot of History*'. In it, he posited the idea that the geographical area incorporating Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and what the Russians termed Middle Asia, is of such significance, that it holds the essential, or *pivotal*, place in world politics. The strategic possibilities rendered to the occupier of that area led Mackinder

to consider the ramifications of its control by a non-democratic and aggressively acquisitive power. Thus, the great worry in the minds of Western strategists has always been that this area could be consolidated under a single hostile power.

It is primarily this concern that has informed the strategic desire for not only Russian, Chinese and Turkish but also Western involvement in the region, and in particular places such as Afghanistan. This is something rarely communicated to the Western public in an age where the imperial overtones of grand strategy are unfashionable, though its relevance remains undiminished as a factor dictating foreign policy. In its place the more palatable rationale of preventing terrorism is given.

There is, however, a third way to highlight Western interest in the region: this is the genuine economic rationale for enhanced Western engagement. Greater Central Asia is, as Starr has often said, 'a black hole on the map of globalization'. Yet this no-man's land sits between two of the world's three economic engines: Europe and China (with the U.S. being the third).

Greater Central Asia is the most direct trade route between Europe and China or, in more sweeping terms, between East and West. Currently, however, its viability is extremely limited, allowing Russia to emphasize its northerly and geographically

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less hospitable option as an attractive alternative. Though the Russian route does boast the advantage of a single set of national regulations, the Greater Central Asian route would be preferable if the states there could begin to dismantle their mutually uncooperative attitudes.

In their report for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Andrew C. Kuchins, Thomas M. Sanderson and David A. Gordon detailed the economic possibilities of the region. An overland route running from Lianyungang, China, to Rotterdam via Xinjiang and Central Asia would reduce transport time between China and Europe from 20–40 days to just 11 days. Costs would also be reduced from 167 USD to 111 USD per ton. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) believes that overall trade could be increased by up to 80 percent, if rudimentary improvements are made to the transport infrastructure connecting Central Asia to Afghanistan. The ADB has simi-

larly predicted huge knock-on benefits to Afghanistan's bilateral trade with its neighbors, as well as transit trade through the country, thereby significantly boosting imports and exports. A United Nations study cited in the CSIS report estimated that if trade cooperation between its constituent states were prioritized, GDP growth would increase by 50 percent throughout Central Asia within a decade.¹

The U.S. has already declared its interest in seeing this happen. Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, robustly supported the project of a 'New Silk Road', as partially realized by the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) used to supply NATO forces in Afghanistan.

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The Northern Distribution Network represents a policy of diversification for the supply of NATO forces in Afghanistan. Developed in the first half of 2009 the NDN now sees supplies that arrive by ship in Riga being tak-

¹ 'The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities: A Report of the CSIS Transnational Threats Project and the Russia and Eurasia Program' (2010). at http://csis.org/files/publication/091229_Kuchins_NDNandAfghan_Web.pdf

en by road and rail through Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and finally from Uzbekistan via the German-controlled Termez airbase to forces in Afghanistan. The whole project is based on a series of commercial arrangements between local companies and provides an alternative route to the Karachi-Kandahar road through Pakistan into Afghanistan. Supply via the NDN also has the advantage of avoiding the clogged up Suez Canal.

The NDN properly consists of three distinct routes: NDN North, NDN South, and KKT. The NDN South route transits the Caucasus, bypassing Russia. The route originates at the Georgian port of Poti on the Black Sea and crosses Azerbaijan on the way to Baku. The goods are then loaded onto ferries for the journey across the Caspian Sea. The supplies arrive at Kazakhstan's west coast port of Aktau before being moved to Uzbekistan and finally on to Afghanistan. The KKT route takes in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. KKT is an alternative to the Uzbek border crossing at the Termez base.

The three routes of the NDN play a valuable role in the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, as was originally envisaged, and the NDN's potential as a permanent East-West transit route is much more significant as a permanent transit network than merely servicing NATO forces in Afghanistan.

However, the route faces multiple challenges, with one of the overarching difficulties being the parlous political relations between many of the Caucasian and Central Asian partners, in addition to numerous logistical inefficiencies.

Recognizing the threat from these disputes within Greater Central Asia is another essential requirement for the project's success. There are ongoing conflicts over water use, payment for natural gas and electricity, militant incursions, the status of ethnic minorities, and espionage, all of which have strained relations to the detriment of multilateral cooperation. The result is typically border closures, the *bête noire* of an ambitious transport project like the New Silk Road. Suspicion of U.S. and European intentions is also fuelled by Russian and Chinese activities. Nonetheless, the NDN has the potential to have a profound and long-lasting impact on the economic landscape of Eurasia.

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That said, following President Obama's 2011 Cairo speech, in which he committed America to interfering less in the Islamic world, and given the general tenor of the emerging 'Obama Doctrine' of al-

lowing regional balances to form and reform naturally, there are clearly policy constraints on what the U.S. can do to promote the project. And although the European Union has a robust strategy for engaging Greater Central Asia, it too faces constraints, largely due to of its relationship with Turkey.

The EU has demonstrated a schizophrenic attitude towards Turkey, with some member states supporting accession and others blocking it at every opportunity. This reluctance rests on two factors. One is the practical concern that admitting a populous but less industrially developed country will have a negative impact economically. The second is more historical, and concerns the perceived political negativity around admitting a large Muslim country to an essentially Christian bloc. The second is rarely admitted publically.

Economically, concerns about Turkey's integration are most probably overblown. Turkey is not encumbered by the legacy of a state controlled economy, as are most East European states. Its workforce is young, generally skilled and adaptable, and overall its economy is one of the most dynamic in stagnating Europe. Politically, the concerns may be more real. Turkey, along with Russia, is the Council of Europe country that is most regularly hauled before the European Court of Human Rights, and the government's record on cor-

ruption, justice and women's rights continues to be at odds with the rest of Europe - all of which have encouraged the EU's hot and cold approach to Turkey.

In frustration at this decades old snub, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan recently began making strong overtures to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) regarding Turkish membership. On paper, this seem improbable, as the two are clearly more like rivals than partners. Turkey remains a key NATO member that is perennially at odds with Russia in the Balkans, Caucasus and Turkistan. It is also worried by China's treatment of its Xinjiang region, which is home

Turkey remains a key NATO member that is perennially at odds with Russia in the Balkans, Caucasus and Turkistan. It is also worried by China's treatment of its Xinjiang region, which is home to Muslim Uighurs of Turkic origin.

to Muslim Uighurs of Turkic origin. However, the demarche is testament to how sensitive Turkey is on the issue of EU membership, and this is something Europeans will have to weigh carefully.

Weigh it carefully they must, because Turkey has the potential to play a determinative role in the West's Greater

Central Asian ambitions. After their first great migration westward, Turkic clans were divided into Oguz, Kıpçak and Cagatay groups. Today's Turks in Turkey, together with Azeris and Turkomen, are Oguz. Tatars, Bashkirts, Chuvash and Kazaks are Kıpçaks. And Uzbeks and Uighurs are Caatagay. Overlaying these three dialects and cultures are the two unifying forces of Turkic blood and Islam.

It is here that the Islamic question comes into play beyond the context of Europe: does the West really want to support Turkey in drawing the states of the Greater Central Asian away from Russia and China, thereby creating an Islamic wedge between the two autocracies? The geopolitical wedge the West desires can only be created by Turkish entreaty to a mixture of Islamic heritage and largely Western-derived modernization, which may in the end prove poor bedfellows, with Western values most likely losing out.

In other words, there is no guarantee that the secular state propounded by Ataturk and clung to by the West will be maintained if Turkish influence performs a counter-migration back eastward. And the result may be something less Western friendly than future Chinese dominance or the current Russian inertia. Especially if global economic growth prospects do not improve significantly, many in the region may repose in the comfort

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of Islamic traditions and convince themselves that Western market capitalism is more a curse than a boon.

Islam in Central Asia has generally been moderate, though Russia greatly fears the Islamic movements in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Turkey first tried to penetrate Central Asia in the 1990s. However, little progress was made when it was itself economically weak and Kurdish terrorism was at its height. Moreover, Greater Central Asia's geographic isolation made this difficult and, historically, all economic, cultural and ethnic links between Turkey and Greater Central Asia have gone via Iran, which has its own, partially religious, designs for the region.

Turkey's second penetration started in the 2000s. Since it has the closest cultural links with Azerbaijanis and Turkmen, Turkey prioritized its Greater Central Asian relations with those states. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project is representative of this, and is more political than economic, allowing Azerbaijan to be more independent of Kazakh-

stan. Turkey buys natural gas from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan via Iran. Azerbaijanis have bought the second largest petrochemical fortune in Turkey, and Turkey is also the biggest trading partner of Azerbaijan and Georgia, and in Central Asia its construction firms are the largest in terms of revenue.

Turkey has also decided on a strategy to conquer hearts and minds in the region. Its religious sects opened schools and founded cultural-religious centers. Thousands of academically able Turkomen, Kazaks and Kyrgyz from the lower and middle classes were given scholarships to Turkish universities, where they were taught that they are the descendants of a nation that governed the lands between India and Algeria, and from the Ukraine to Yemen, for 1000 years. These young people have Turkic-Islamic sentiments and little knowledge of the Russian culture that once enveloped them. In this respect, the evolving demographics of the region are also very much in Turkey's favor.

However, this is, of course, a double-edged sword and the Russian government plays effectively on Western fears of Islamism to balance its own declining influence. This is the case even though Russia has long abandoned entreaties to shared Christendom and, indeed, attempts to understand or forgive what is perceived as the West's betrayal of their common religious heritage, starting with the

Western fears of supporting the Turkish project in Greater Central Asia, which results in them acquiescing to the status quo, does not actually benefit the primary status quo power in the region – Russia – to the greatest extent.

Crimean War. For this reason, President Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan and Karimov in Uzbekistan, who both fear mosques as much as the White House and Kremlin, enjoy fairly broad if reluctant support.

Yet, Western fears of supporting the Turkish project in Greater Central Asia, which results in them acquiescing to the status quo, does not actually benefit the primary status quo power in the region – Russia – to the greatest extent. In fact, it benefits the more dynamic of the SCO partners: China, which is currently buying up resources and concessions throughout Greater Central Asia to the extent that it has almost supplanted Russia as the most influential energy and mining player in the region.

Now, on the cusp of regime change in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the West is perhaps approaching a tipping point in its relations with Turkey. If it wishes to channel its own influence through that of Turkey in the Greater Central Asian region and leverage its position against Russia and China, it will most likely have to make a con-

crete and positive statement about its willingness to accept Turkey into the Euro-Atlantic world, and in so doing hope to preserve and export the Ataturk model.

The U.S. has essentially already done this, but it is not yet a European priority and, as a result, the Europe may lose the opportunity to influence its dynamic neighbor in future. For some in Europe, this ambivalence is a principled historical position. For others, it is a strategic own goal.

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The Eurasian Union

*through Russian
Collective Memory
and the Dilemma of Identity*

**Rauf
Garagozov***

Abstract

The Eurasian Union project recently put forward by the Russian government has become the object of broad speculation among political analysts regarding Russian intentions and goals regarding the former Soviet republics, what has become known as “the near abroad.” These accounts mainly consider the project within the “Realist” approach and discuss its political or economic aspects. Rarely, however, do they touch on its cultural or psychological dimensions. The current paper argues that the idea of Eurasian Union, well beyond any political or economic rationales, is underpinned by traditions of Russian collective memory and identity. This essay analyses Russian historical narratives as a specific type of mnemonic device in this context, suggesting how they work as cultural tools to promote collective remembering.

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On October 4, 2011, the Moscow-based daily *Izvestiia* published an article by Vladimir Putin, then the Russian Prime Minister, in which he called for the creation of the Eurasian Union.¹ Putin called for CIS countries (former Soviet Republics) to join this Union in order to establish a common economic, currency and customs space. He denied that the project was an attempt to re-create the Soviet Union: “The prospective union will not be a new U.S.S.R. or a replacement for the CIS, but an effective link between Europe and the Asia Pacific region, an association with close coordination of the economic and currency policies.”² However, Russia’s attempts to bring the Eurasian Union to life have essentially sought to integrate several CIS countries as some sort of supra-state formation have evoked extensive speculation among political analysts regarding Russia’s intentions and ultimate objectives. These speculations, in accordance with the “Realism” school of thought, mainly look into the political or economic aspects of the project. It is worth noting that Putin himself has also described the proposed Union strictly in political and economic terms. However, I believe that the Eurasian project in some essential ways is based on certain cultural and psychological phenomena, including Russian collective

1 Putin V, “Novyi Integratsionnyi proekt dlia Evrazii - budushcheie, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnia”. *Izvestia*, 4 October, 2011, at <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>

2 *Ibidem*

memory and identity. In this article I will try to trace and identify the underlying cultural and psychological sources of the Eurasian Union project. Before dwelling on this issue let me start with one particular episode from several years ago, which stimulated my thoughts on this issue.

Do Russians remember Tsargrad?

On May 12, 2010 a visa-free travel agreement was signed between Russia and Turkey. The very next day, I participated in a roundtable devoted to the role of Russia in the Middle East, organized by Baku Center for Strategic Studies in collaboration with the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS).³ During the discussion I asked the assembled guests if they found the new visa agreement remarkable given the historical tensions between Russia and Turkey. After all, *twelve* Russo-Turkish wars were fought between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires during the last 200 years alone. I then asked our Russian speaker (Leonid Reshetnikov, director of the RISS): Could Russian memories of the numerous wars with the Ottoman Empire, wars that were often encouraged by slogan “Let’s liberate Tsargrad!” (referring to Constantinople, later Istanbul) undermine the growing cooperation between Russia and Turkey? I expected a formal, diplomatic answer from the speaker, who by the way had been a

3 See: <http://sam.gov.az/en/events/roundtables/20110719041218039.html>

high ranking Russian intelligence officer. To my surprise, the speaker's response was long. He was at pains to point out that the Russian-Turkish past did not create an obstacle in his view. Finally, he said, "Who remembers those wars today? The majority of Russians do not even know what Tsargrad stands for."

His answer sounded convincing, at least at first. It might well be true that new generations of Russians did not know that Tsargrad was the name given in medieval Russian chronicles to Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, later renamed Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Turkey. Indeed, who (aside professional historians) would remember events dating back to the Middle Ages? However, the more I thought about this, I realized that it was not as simple as it first appeared. From memory studies, we know that there are different types or levels of memory: *individual* memory, as well as *collective, social and cultural* memories⁴. Some scholars also talk about *deep* memory⁵. There are different interpretations of these types of memory, but the general understanding is they bear qualitatively different natures that cannot be treated as the sum of individual memo-

4 Halbwachs, M., *On Collective Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Assmann, J. (2011). *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Wertsch, J.V. (2012). *Deep Memory and Narrative Templates: Conservative Forces in Collective Memory*. In: A. Assmann and L. Shortt (Eds.), *Memory and Political Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.173-185.

5 Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994.

It might well be true that new generations of Russians did not know that Tsargrad was the name given in medieval Russian chronicles to Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, later renamed Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Turkey.

ries. Therefore, even if we imagine that we have conducted a sociological survey and obtained data demonstrating that the majority of young Russians did not know Tsargrad, how can one be sure that this knowledge is not somehow remembered in a different way or in a different context? So, taken from the perspective of collective memory studies, the Russian speaker's answer is not so obvious. In order to gain some insights on this issue, I have explored Russian collective memory in this context in greater detail.

Collective Memory and Cultural Trauma

In my research I follow a particular version of collective memory developed within the framework of a socio-cultural approach.⁶ According to this approach, historical narratives are considered to be cultural tools, promoting collective remembering. Certain properties of narratives affect the collective remember-

6 Cole, M., *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996; Wertsch, J.V., *Voices of collective remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

ing process in a very specific way. James Wertsch identified an abstract and generalized form of narratives as one such property, which underlies numerous narratives and which he describes as the “schematic narrative template” or SNT.⁷ These templates differ from one cultural setting to another, require special reflection to be identified, and are used to mold stories about key historic events, even in cases where historical events do not fit certain models. Based on these theoretical premises I have explored the Russian cultural memory via analysis of Russian historical narratives as a specific type of “mnemonic” device, as cultural tools promoting collective remembering.

Collective remembering is interconnected in some essential ways with cultural trauma. The notion of cultural trauma should be distinguished from psychological trauma in certain key ways. If psychological trauma refers to the immediate experience by an individual of a distressing or life-threatening event,⁸ cultural trauma is experienced by a group, irrespective of being an immediate witness or victim to the act of violence.⁹ More precisely, psychological trauma is experienced if there is a direct threat to the

physical existence of the individual while cultural or collective trauma may occur if community members experience a threat to their collective identity. According to Neil Smelser:

“A cultural trauma refers to an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as whole... [For example] The Protestant Reformation qualifies as a cultural trauma because of fundamental threat it posed to the integrity and dominance of the Catholic cultural worldview”.¹⁰

Unlike psychological trauma, which is diagnosed by psychiatrists or psychologists, cultural trauma is often determined or established by cultural, religious, social or political figures. As Smelser puts it:

“A claim of traumatic cultural damage (i.e., destruction of or the threat to cultural values, outlooks, norms, or, for that matter, the culture as a whole), must be established by deliberate efforts on the part of cultural carriers – cultural specialists such as priests, politicians, intellectuals, journalists, moral

⁷ Wertsch, *Ibid*, p.62

⁸ Foa, E.B., Keane, T.M., Friedman, M.J., & Cohen, J.A. *Effective treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder: Practice guidelines from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies. Second Edition.* New York: Guilford Publications, 2002.

⁹ Alexander, J.C. *Toward a Theory of Cultural trauma.* In: J.C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser, and P. Sztompka. (Eds.), *Cultural trauma and Collective Identity.* A: University of California Press, 2004, pp.1-10.

¹⁰ Smelser, N. *Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma.* In J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser, P. Sztompka (Eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, pp. 31-59 at p.38.

entrepreneurs, and leaders of social movements”¹¹.

Cultural trauma also differs from psychological trauma in terms of its mechanisms and possible effects and outcomes:

“The mechanisms associated with psychological trauma are the intrapsychic dynamics of defense, adaptation, coping, and working through; the mechanisms at the cultural level are mainly those of social agents and contending groups”¹².

To put this differently, if psychological trauma “operates” on an individual level and deals mostly with psychological processes “inside” the mental life of an individual, cultural trauma affects groups, their cultural memory, group identity and worldview or ideology. One possible way of dealing with cultural trauma could be to perform acts of collective remembering for rebuilding an appropriate identity.¹³ Another possibility is the rediscovering or emergence of new ideology in a “traumatized” community. As one scholar has written:

“Perceived and traumatic shared experiences under

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.38-39

¹³ Aarelaid-Tart, A. *Cultural Trauma as the Mnemonic Device of Collective Memory*. In: E. Koresaar, E. Lauk & K. Kuutma (Eds.), *The Burden of Remembering*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2009, pp.197-221.

certain conditions might lend themselves to divergent interpretations and conceptualizations. In such situations, it is possible that major ideologies that were dormant in the specific society would be rediscovered and even born anew.”¹⁴

In brief, cultural trauma that is perceived as a devastating threat to collective identities can play a particular role in generating new ideologies, collective memory, and identity constructions. Keeping in mind these suggestions, let us turn to a historical episode that took place in 1453 in Minor Asia, and which was greatly traumatic for the Russian psyche.

The Fall of Tsargrad as Russian Cultural Trauma

Tsargrad (Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium) was a sacred place for many Russians, from which they received their Orthodox Christianity (Curtis, 1996). When the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 it was perceived by Russians as a terrible disaster. As Russian cultural historians put it:

“For the Russian religious consciousness, accustomed to checking its ideas and acts against the authority of the true faith, the indestructible stronghold of which was the

¹⁴ Hechter, T. (2003). *Historical Traumas, Ideological Conflicts, and the Process of Mythologizing*. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol., 35, pp.439-60, at p.442

esteemed second Rome-Constantinople, the fall of this stronghold...with the capture of the city by the Turks in 1453-was equivalent to a universal catastrophe”.¹⁵

Within the cultural trauma paradigm, the fall of Constantinople can be identified as a Russian cultural trauma. To support this thesis I put forth the following arguments:

1. Among various identifications that Russians might have had at that time, one of the strongest or the most salient was their Orthodox identity. The fall of Tsargrad would definitely be perceived as a threat to this identity;
2. Soon after the fall of Tsargrad, Russian clergy responded by creating the ideologem of “Moscow – the third Rome”¹⁶. According to this notion, “Constantinople was the second Rome, and “Moscow - the third allowing for a new identity as the “God-chosen Russian people”. These activities on the part of Russian clergy fit well into what cultural trauma literature describes as a strategy of coping.
3. The fall of Tsargrad was actively remembered through the creation

¹⁵ Novikova, L.I., and I.N. Sizemskaia, *Russkaia filosofia i istorii*. Moscow: Magistr, 1997, p.36

¹⁶ There are different opinions about the authorship of this concept, but usually it is attributed to Filofei (ca. 1465–1542), a monk and the father superior of the Pskov Spaso-Eleazar Monastery (Gol'dberg, A.L., and R.P. Dmitrieva, Filofey. In *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, vol 2. St.Petersburg: Nauka, 1988).

Within the cultural trauma paradigm, the fall of Constantinople can be identified as a Russian cultural trauma.

and production of different narratives —“almost simultaneously with its creation by Filofei, a whole series of legends, tales, and stories developing the idea were born”.¹⁷

Thus, shortly after this event, four historical accounts of it emerged: 1) a story with a brief factual description of the siege and fall of Tsargrad, translated from the Greek; 2) an extensive historical tale “About Tsargard, its creation and capture by Turks in 1453”, based on eyewitness accounts; 3)“On the capture of Tsargrad by the godless Turks”, translated from the Latin (16th century); and 4) a lyric lament full of bitter complaints about the fate of the destroyed world capital. This latter account was entitled “On the capture of Tsargard by the godless Makhmet, son of Amuratov, Turski”, and was included in the *Russian Chronograph of 1512*.¹⁸

Of these narratives, the most widespread was 2), the historical tale “About Tsargard, its creation and capture by Turks in 1453”. It is usually attributed to Nestor-Iskander or Iskinder. This tale was reproduced in

¹⁷ Novikova, L.I., and I.N. Sizemskaia *Op.cit.*, p.37.

¹⁸ Tvorogov, O.V. *Povesti o vzyatii Konstantinopolya turkami v 1453 godu*. Elektronnyie publikatsii Instituta russkoi literatury RAN, 2003, at <http://www.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=4515>

several historical narratives through the 16th to 18th centuries, which in turn were republished numerous times. This tale was also reproduced in the 17th century in narratives such as: *Tale of the History of Kaza*; *Tale of the book of old days*, attributed to I.M. Katyrev-Rostovskii; *Tale of the beginning of Moscow*, by Avraamii Palitsin; *Scythian history*, by A. Lyzlov (1692); and in the 18th century, *History of the Last Destruction of the*

19th century.¹⁹ Due to its popularity, it is possible to assume that the novel had a strong influence on the Russian worldview and collective memory. It therefore seems reasonable to dwell on this novel a little more. “*About Tsargard, its creation and capture by the Turks in 1453*” by Nestor-Iskander

This tale is said to have been created in the 15th century, but the only preserved copies are not older than the 16th century. The tale begins with a story about the creation of Constantinople, then goes onto a detailed description of the siege and capture of the city by the Turks, and ends with a prophecy about the fate of Constantinople. The prophecy has two parts: the first part addresses the inevitability of the destruction of Tsargrad; the second announces that Tsargrad will be liberated from Muslims by “fair-haired kin”. This prediction about the liberators of Tsargrad has been interpreted to mean that the “fair-haired kin” are the Russians, who will defeat the Turks.²⁰ Though the factual accuracy of the details given in the tale suggests that it was written based on eyewitness accounts and participants of the siege of Constantinople, the story is already a new literary elaboration whose author, undoubtedly, is a Russian from the epoch when the

However, there are two points that impose important correctives upon this seemingly perfect imperial concept: first, the idea of Moscow as a successor and heir for the legacy of Constantinople; and second, from the very beginning, this concept was framed by a specific type of “victim” or “sacrificial” narrative – “lament about the fallen world city of Tsargrad”.

Holy City of Jerusalem, by Tit, the Roman Caesar, son of Vespasian, a Second [History] about the capture of the glorious capital city of Greek Constantinople (i.e. Tsargrad), by Turski Sultan Maxomet II. This latter work was first published in Moscow in 1713, and then republished in 1716, 1723, 1745, 1765, 1769 and beyond until the beginning of the

¹⁹ Shambinago, S.K. *Istoricheskie povesti v literature Moskovskogo knyazhestva kontsa XIV i XV vv. Istoriya russkoi literatury v 10 tomov. Vol.2 (1). Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1945, pp.201-225; Tvorogov, O.V. (1981). Literatura Drevnei Rusi. M.: Prosvesheniie*

²⁰ Shambinago, Op.cit.

concept of Moscow as the successor of Tsargrad and its future liberator from Turkish power was being created.²¹ This is the concept of “Moscow—the third Rome” which was certainly an imperial concept. However, there are two points that impose important correctives upon this seemingly perfect imperial concept: first, the idea of Moscow as a successor and heir for the legacy of Constantinople; and second, from the very beginning, this concept was framed by a specific type of “victim” or “sacrificial” narrative – “lament about the fallen world city of Tsargrad”. The conjunction between the concepts of succession and “victimhood” would have resulted in *meaning transformation*. On the one hand, the idea of Moscow as a successor and heir to the legacy of Constantinople promoted a very specific understanding of the conquest. Within this concept, the conquest(s) could be interpreted and perceived as a retaking of the possessions “inherited” from Byzantium, based on the right of a “successor” to Constantinople. On the other hand, “victim” narratives, as we know from conflict psychology literature, can block empathy for and recognition of the opposite side’s sufferings, status and rights.²² The combination of these two elements would have resulted in a particular type of interpretation

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Nadler, A. *Post resolution processes: an instrumental and socio-emotional routes to reconciliation*. In G. Salamon & B. Nevo (Eds.), *Peace education worldwide: The concept, underlying principles, and research*, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2003, pp.127-143.

and/or perception of annexation and conquest by Russia.

In what follows, I give some examples of interpretations presented in Russian historical and artistic narratives devoted to Russian military campaigns from the 16th to 20th centuries which reframe annexation and conquest as “liberation”, as “triumph over alien forces, and as “Russian sacrifice”.

Conquest as liberation

The *Tale of the History of Kazan* [Kazanskaia istoriia], written in the second half of the 16th century, is a good illustration of the “Conquest as liberation” framework. The tale is a literary account of the three-century history of Russian–Tatar relations, from the formation of the Golden Horde up until 1552, the year Ivan the Terrible conquered the Kazan khanate, a branch of the Horde that dated back to the mid-15th century.²³ In fact, this was one of the first, if not the first, historical narrative dedicated to the aggressive campaigns of the new Muscovite state. In this regard, analysis of this narrative allows us to capture vividly the aspects of perception and interpretation of the events that inform many of the assumptions underlying this text. The *Tale of the History of Kazan* plays out against the backdrop of Nestor-Iskander’s story of the capture of Tsargrad, as well as a lament on the destruction of

²³ Kazanskaia istoriia, trans. T.F.Volkova, In *Za zemliu Ruskuiu! Drevneruskie voinskie povesti*, comp. M.E.Ustinov. Cheliabinsk, 1991, pp. 149-532.

The Tale of the History of Kazan [Kazanskaia istoriia], written in the second half of the 16th century, is a good illustration of the “Conquest as liberation” framework.

Tsargrad in the *Russian Chronograph of 1512*. The tale can be interpreted both as a parallel to the history of the fall of Tsargrad (and thus, grief for Kazan’s inhabitants) and, at the same time, as connected with the idea of its liberation (and thus, the glorification of the Russians, as the liberators). The destruction of Kazan is presented as the destruction of Byzantium by its enemies; the liberation of Kazan as the liberation of Byzantium from the Muslims. In this way, the text presents a type of consciousness that perceives a conquest not as “conquest” but rather as “liberation.” At this point, one might question the degree to which this perception of events was reflected in the collective mind. We have at our disposal a kind of sociological indicator, that is, the degree to which a given story was in demand among its readers. According to Pliukhanova: “Apparently, the readers of the 16th – 17th centuries did not notice any inconstancies and discrepancies in the *Tale of the History of Kazan*. The numbers of copies and the owners’ inscriptions testify to the exceptional love readers had for this work”.²⁴ This suggests that a lack of

24 Pliukhanova, M.B. “Vitiistvo I ruskaia istoricheskaia mysl’ 16-17 vekov.” In *Aktual’nye problem semiotiki kul’tury*. Trudy

close attention to historical discrepancies in the text was not a rare phenomenon.

Another example of the aforementioned reframing is the dictum, “Liberate Tsargrad!”, which for a long time was very popular in Russian society. It should be noted that since the 16th century, the idea of “liberating the world city of Tsargrad” was encountered in various different forms, presented in many Russian historical narratives. The first historical narrative of the 16th century, the 1512 *Russian Chronograph*, articulated this idea. On the one hand, it contained a lament on the destruction of Byzantium, as a kind of “sacrificial” narrative. But on the other hand, it clearly expressed hope for the liberation of the “great Tsargrad” with the glorification of Russia as the last bulwark of Christianity.

This idea was widely used in Russian politics and literature in the 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. For example, in a poem written by court poet Simeon Polotskii in 1672 in honor of the birth of Peter the First, Peter was named as a “future liberator of Tsargrad”.²⁵ The idea of the “liberating world city” was also directly connected with Russian politics. One should mention here the so-called “Greek Project”, which aimed to demolish Ottoman Turkey and to en-

po znakovym sistemam, vol.20. Tartu, 1987 pp.73-84 at p.80.

25 Vodovozov, N.V. *Istoriia drevnei ruskoj literatury*. M.:Prosvesheniie, 1972.

It is worth noting that Russian military mobilization for the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War was also conducted under the “Liberate Tsargrad!” slogan.

throne one of Russian Empress Catherine II’s grandsons, a strategy which was pursued by Catherine’s minister Grigorii Potemkin. It is worth noting that Russian military mobilization for the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War was also conducted under the “Liberate Tsargrad!” slogan. At the beginning of the 20th century, the same idea accompanied Russia’s involvement in the imperialist First World War.²⁶

Even more striking, contrary to the remarks made by our visiting Russian speaker at the beginning of this essay, is that “Liberate Tsargrad” has continued in Russian narratives of the 21st century: for example, the series of articles entitled “Tsargrad and Russia. Should Constantinople be Ours?” published in the Russian Orthodox press.²⁷

To give just one example:

“There are many reasons to say that the fate of Byzantium remains unresolved. The will of those who died on the

²⁶ Senyavskaya, E.S. *Psixologija Voiny v XX veke: Istoricheskii opyt Rossii*, M.: ROSSPEN, 1999.

²⁷ It is rather curious that the author of this article, who is also a chief editor and publisher of the Russian Orthodox newspaper, is someone by name Grigorian - ethnically Armenian. See: Grigorian, V. “Tsargrad & Russia. Should Constantinople be ours?” *Vera* (Faith), North Russian Christian Newspaper, 2004, # 472, 473, 474, at <http://rusvera.mrezha.ru/472/7.htm>

walls and streets of the King of the cities in the last battle should be fulfilled. Constantinople should be ours! But ours means, orthodox, and not necessarily Russian... Whether or not we want it to be so, history repeats itself like a bad dream.... In one of these circles once again, we will probably find ourselves involved in the battle for Tsargrad. It is hard to believe it when you can see so many Russian tourists and traders rolling through Istanbul nowadays.”²⁸

Conquest as triumph over alien forces

This type of reframing conquest can be found in abundance in Soviet history textbooks, as James Wertsch has observed. According to his analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet school history textbooks, there is a specifically Russian schematic narrative template, which he terms “triumph over alien forces”. This narrative template consists of the following components:

1. An “initial situation in which Russia is peaceful and not interfering with others;
2. Trouble, in which a foreign enemy viciously attacks Russia without provocation;
3. Russia nearly loses everything in total defeat, as it

²⁸ *Ibid.*

suffers under the enemy's attempts to destroy it as a civilization;

4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, against all odds, and acting alone, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy.²⁹

The author points to its wide dissemination as the model for plot construction of the most important events in Russian history, as well as its high degree of plasticity, that is, its ability to take on extremely diverse forms. Finally, he indicates that this schematic template is used even in cases that do not seem to fit the confines of this scheme. After all, the history of Russia, as he rightly notes, does not only include events where Russia was the victim of aggression. In many cases, Russia itself was the attacking force; otherwise it would be difficult to explain the creation of the vast Russian empire. Nevertheless, even in these cases, the schematic template described above underpins the narrative, as Wertsch shows using textual examples from Soviet and post-Soviet history textbooks.³⁰

Conquest as sacrifice

This kind of trope is particular to Russian literature devoted to the conquest of the Caucasus in the 19th century. Among the first was Pushkin's poem "The Captive of the Caucasus". Writ-

²⁹ Wertsch, J.V., *Voices of collective remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.95-96.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

ten in 1821, the poem tells a story of a Russian aristocrat who sets off to the seat of war in the Caucasus, seeking adventure. Soon he finds himself taken captive by the Circassians, only released when a young maiden sets him free. Later, other prominent Russian poets and writers such as Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, Lermontov, Tolstoy and others also made use the Caucasian captive plot in their work. In a sense, the captive plot is a perfect manifestation of the abovementioned amalgamation of the imperial idea with the Russian tradition of sacrificial or victim narratives. The ubiquity of this theme has given rise to various explanations. According to Bruce Grant (2009), the Caucasian captive plot could help reconcile Russians to the issue of their invasion.³¹ The author discussed this reiterated pattern in terms of a "gift of empire" and "sacrifice", and points out that: "Russians gave of their own [...] to legitimate imperial, colonial, and later communist interventions".³² In Susan Layton's view, these narratives serve the function of [re]constructing of Russian identity as semi-European, semi-Asian people.³³

³¹ Grant, B., *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus*. London: Cornell University Press, 2009.

³² *Ibid.*, p.xv

³³ Layton, S., *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

The Fall of the Russian Empire: Eurasianism as Response to Cultural Trauma

The collapse of the Russian empire and the civil war of 1917-1920 can also be considered within the cultural trauma paradigm. This period was marked by brutality, violence and massacres on a huge scale, taking place during the fierce civil war between “Reds” and “Whites”. From this point of view, Russians clearly experienced a threat to their collective identities. In such troubling circumstances,³⁴ a group of Russian émigré intellectuals proposed a new ideology, Eurasianism, which sought to redefine Russian identity.³⁵ The concept announced that: “Asia is a significant part of Russia and Russians are mainly Asians not Europeans.”³⁶ Under this approach to Russian identity construction, Asia was not the “exotic Other” but the “exotic Self”. Nevertheless, even if Eurasianism looked like a redefinition of Russian identity, it drew upon - with slight modifications - the old imperial idea of “Moscow – the third Rome”. Thus, Eurasianists stated that

34 *The cultural and psychological climate of Russian society that conditioned the emergence of Eurasianism is described by one research: “We cannot understand Eurasianism unless we bear in mind the disappointments and disillusionment suffered by the Russian intelligentsia during the events of 1905 and February 1917...Eurasianism was thus born in the context of a crisis, in an atmosphere of eschatological expectations: Its proponents had the feeling of standing at a turning point in human history...” (Laruelle, M. (2008). Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, pp.19-20).*

35 *Iskhod k Vostoku: Predchuvstviia i sversheniia: Utverzheniie evraziitsev, 1921, Sofia.*

36 *Vernadskii, G.V. Nachertaniie russkoi istorii. SPb.: Lan', 2000, p.34.*

The collapse of the Russian empire and the civil war of 1917-1920 can also be considered within the cultural trauma paradigm.

Mongols preserved the Byzantine Empire for Russians. The Mongol Empire gave Russia an identity that manifests itself in geography. Now along with the religious connection between Constantinople and Moscow, they suggested a territorial legacy passed on from Byzantium via the Mongols to Moscow.³⁷ However, Eurasianism failed to become a dominant ideology in Russian society at that time, as Moscow’s leadership turned instead to communism.

Eurasianists stated that Mongols preserved the Byzantine Empire for Russians. The Mongol Empire gave Russia an identity that manifests itself in geography.

The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Re-emergence of Eurasianism

Falling into oblivion during the Soviet period, Eurasianism, surprisingly, reemerged soon after 1991. The re-emergent Eurasianism, or as some may call it, neo-Eurasianism, slightly adjusted its basic postulates to the changed historical, political and other contexts. It posits that: a)

37 *Laruelle, M. Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008.*

the collapse of a specific regime like Soviet power does not entail the collapse of the country; b) any secession is destined to fail, and the new states have no choice but to revert to a unified political entity; c) Russia is inherently a superpower.³⁸ Political analysts rightly identified this movement as *restorationist*, and sought to understand why an obscure émigré ideology would be resurrected after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The explanations for this are given mainly in political terms. Some interpret it as a substitute for “empire savers”.³⁹ Others view this as an attempt to substantiate Russia as a “Natural Power”⁴⁰ or as Russia’s intention to reject the “intrusive” West.⁴¹ Without seeking to cast doubt upon these explanations, I would like to look at these phenomena within the context of cultural trauma.

Cultural Responses to a Crisis and Russian Identity

It is strange that the breakdown of the Soviet Union is rarely discussed in terms of cultural trauma. Maybe one of the reasons for neglecting this issue stems from the widespread belief that the fall of the Communist system was welcomed by the international community, including by the peoples of

the former Soviet Union. However, even if the Soviet plan to shape a new “Soviet man” failed and the majority of Soviet nationalities preserved their ethnic identities, there still were people with inculcated Soviet identities, the so-called “internationalists”.⁴² For this category of the population,⁴³ the fall of the Soviet Union was a catastrophe. They undoubtedly experienced a threat to their collective identity. This is especially true for some Russian intellectuals, people from the military, security and older Communists who felt a powerful sense of disappointment, constructing a nostalgically viewed past, and drew upon emotional language to describe how Russia had been “shamed,” “humiliated,” reduced to a “second-rate state”. It is not an accident that Russian president Putin (a former KGB officer) once called the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.⁴⁴ Individuals from these groups have taken an active part in reviving Eurasianism following the collapse of the Soviet Union. From this perspective, the re-emergence of [Neo]-Eurasianism can be considered as a cultural response to cultural trauma

38 *Ibidem*

39 Dunlop, J. *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*. Princeton University Press, 1993.

40 Laruelle *Op.cit*

41 Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. D. *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010.

42 Ignatieff, M. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994.

43 If one is to believe to the results of a referendum on the future of the Soviet Union held not long before its collapse on March 17, 1991, the number of such individuals was not few. According to this referendum at least 70% of voters in all Soviet republics except three Baltic and two Transcaucasian states voted for preservation of the renewed Soviet Union (Nohlen, D, Grotz, F & Hartmann, C, 2001, *Elections in Asia: A data handbook, Volume I.*)

44 See: <http://www.volgainform.ru/allnews/444083/>

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caused by the fall of the Soviet Union.

So far we have discussed three examples of Russian cultural responses to cultural trauma caused by different events: a) the response to the fall of Tsargrad in the 1453 by creating a new ideologem, “Moscow - the third Rome”, and the construction of new identity as “Russians –the God chosen people”; b) a response to the fall of the Russian Empire in the 1917 in the doctrine of Eurasianism portraying Russians as Asians; c) a response to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 by the [re] emergence of Neo-Eurasianism, which asserts a common identity for former Soviet peoples. As one can see, these cultural responses include a set of ideas regarding ideology and identity. It should be noted that if ideas about what it means to be Russian vary (from Orthodox to Asians, or even Turanians), ideological construction remains constant by reproducing the same imperial idea (“Moscow- the third Rome”) in dif-

ferent guises (Eurasianism, Neo-Eurasianism). This consistent ideological core, which can be regarded as sort of cultural DNA⁴⁵, helps us to understand the imperial nature of Russian identity. In connection to this, we may question why we continue to encounter this persistent [re]birth of the imperial Russia concept. The analysis of Russian narratives presented above provides us with some insights. Our analysis has shown that the Russian historical narrative tradition has preserved the imperial ideologem of “Moscow- the third Rome” through many different forms,⁴⁶ such as “conquest as liberation”, “conquest as triumph over alien forces”, or “conquest as sacrifice”. In this context, we can conclude that Russian historical narratives as mnemonic devices and cultural memory tools very much sustain the [re]construction of imperial idioms.

These considerations also provide us with insights regarding the question posited at the beginning of the essay: Do Russians remember Tsargrad? The answer would be formulated as following: So far as “imperial” constructs are preserved in a Russian nar-

45 Wertsch, J.V, *Deep Memory and Narrative Templates: Conservative Forces in Collective Memory*. In: A.Assmann and L.Shortt (Eds.), *Memory and Political Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp.173-185.

46 *Transformed form is a philosophical category introduced by Karl Marx for analysis of complex systems (Marx, K. (1962). Capital. Volume III. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House). Having no space to go into details of this complex category I only offer some examples of these transformations. For example, these are dreams which may symbolize (in transformed form) instinctive desires (Freudian concept) or capital which is derivative of exploitation of workers by capitalists (Marxist concept).*

Do Russians remember Tsar-grad? The answer would be formulated as following: So far as “imperial” constructs are preserved in a Russian narrative toolkit, Russians do remember Tsargrad on the level of a collective or cultural memory.

rative toolkit, Russians do remember Tsargrad on the level of a collective or cultural memory. This also means that even if new Russian generations do not remember the Tsargrad story specifically, and their “imperial identity” is dormant, they might be “reminded” and “awakened” one day by specific constellations of domestic and/or international political events and political/cultural/religious entrepreneurs since collective memory “devices” provided by narrative toolkit are always there.

Conclusion

Based on these lines of inquiry, let us return to the Eurasian Union project. This Russian project, which is to some extent inspired, in the view of some political analysts, by postulates of Neo-Eurasianism, evokes some concerns among post-Soviet countries.⁴⁷ For several reasons post-Soviet countries are wary of Putin’s Eurasian Union project. Their reluctance to share power with any kind of supra-state structure is usually explained by the fear that their sover-

⁴⁷ Laruelle, *Op.cit.*

eighty and access to natural resources will be weakened, along with the lack of appeal of contemporary Russia to its neighbors.⁴⁸ From the perspective of my analysis, the issue of Russian imperial identity should also be considered seriously. This type of imperial identity confounds Russians’ quest for a secure and a sustainable modern Russian consciousness. In this regard, Putin’s article, “Russia and the National Question”, published soon after he took up the presidency on 23 January 2012, hardly presented the new “Eurasian Union” in more attractive terms for neighboring peoples. The article confused terms and notions related to categories of nation and identity, not to mention history. I list just some of these aspects of this article without comment: 1. Nowhere in the article is there reference to “Empire” but rather, “historically great Russia”; 2. “The Russian people have a great mission to join, to pin together our Civilization”; 3. “We are a multinational state but a single people”; 4. Nowhere in the article does one find reference to *Rossiiane* (a term for civic identity), but rather the term “Russians” (*russkie*); 5. All people in Russia are Russians: “Russian Armenians, Russian Tatars....” 6. “Russian people made their choice to live together with other nations - self-determination”; 7. “To be Rus-

⁴⁸ Aliyev, F. *Discussing Eurasianism and Eurasian Integration within the Azerbaijani Context*. In *Central Asia Program Publications Memo 2012*. The Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (IERES). The George Washington University, 2012, at http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Publication_Memo_2012.pdf

sian means to be culturally Russian: Russian language, Russian literature, and Russian history”⁴⁹.

This discourse is simply embarrassing for peoples of post-Soviet states, and evokes two, related, questions: How do Russians address their identity problem in the 21st century? Will Russia become a multinational, democratic country or return to the old Soviet boundaries defined by the proposed Eurasian Union? The future of the Russian Federation and to some degree that of the CIS countries is dependent on how the dilemmas of Russian national identity formation (imperial, national-ethnic, or national –civic) are resolved in the coming decades.

⁴⁹ Putin, V. *Rossia: national'nyi vopros*. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 23 January, 2012. at http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html

Legal status of quasi- autonomies in USSR:

*Case of Nagorno-Karabakh's
Autonomous Oblast*

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Abstract

The article examines the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh's Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) - one of the quasi-autonomous entities in the former USSR. It begins with a brief historical background which provides the reasoning behind the establishment of autonomy in Nagorno-Karabakh when Azerbaijan became part of the USSR. Subsequently, the authors review the level of autonomy of NKAO, focusing on the changes achieved through the consecutive USSR and Azerbaijani SSR constitutions.

The research shows that the complex and entangled hierarchy of the Soviet Union governance had a formal legal structure reflecting the strictly centralized nature of the state, and a parallel political structure in the form of the communist party and all its branches and bodies that exercised the actual power and decision-making. In this context the decentralization of power in the form of autonomy was a myth, and the quasi-autonomy in Nagorno-Karabakh was subject to the same system of centralized decision-making as any other administrative unit in the Soviet Union. That said, the authors argue that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and its population received the same treatment as any other place in the USSR precisely due to the aforementioned regime. The discrimination towards autonomy by the authorities of Azerbaijani SSR was simply impossible due to the centralized decision-making and bureaucratic formality from Moscow, which precluded real legislative and administrative decentralization of power.

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“For most of the history of international affairs, territorial control was the focus of political conflict. Either national self-gratification over the acquisition of large territory or the sense of national deprivation over the loss of ‘sacred’ land has been the cause of most of the bloody wars fought since the rise of nationalism. It is no exaggeration to say that territorial imperative has been the main impulse driving the aggressive behavior of nation-states”¹

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was the first and longest-running armed conflict to break out in the territory of the former Soviet Union. Some estimates put the number of deaths on both sides at more than 30,000.

This conflict can be described as a typically irredentist, i.e. territorial, dispute. Of the many internal and external factors that caused the conflict and shaped its development, two have been crucial. Firstly, the interests of the traditional colonial power, Russia, which still considers the area to be within its sphere of influence, and tries to subordinate the conflict parties to its authority. Secondly, the very strong support that Armenia receives from its large and well-organized Diaspora in the West has been key.

Despite the continuous mediation efforts of numerous external actors including the Organization for Security

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, a political solution to this conflict has remained elusive.

Brief historical background

Karabakh (Qarabağ) (the name consists of two Azerbaijani words: “qara” (black) and “bağ” (garden), is a toponym, derived from the name of this area, located between the Lesser Caucasus and Kura and Araz rivers. It is one of the most ancient regions of Azerbaijan. In ancient times and during the early Middle Ages, Karabakh was a part of the state of Caucasian Albania (IV c. BC - VIII c. AD.), a territory of which coincides almost entirely with present-day Azerbaijan. It extended from the Caucasus Mountains in the north to the Araz River in the south. The mountainous part of Karabakh was a part of one of the Caucasian Albanian provinces, known as Artsakh (‘Orkhistene’).² Following the Arab invasion in the seventh century, the area’s inhabitants, Christian Caucasian Albanians, either converted to Islam, or - like the majority of the population - remained Christian. Through the efforts of the Arab caliphate and the Armenian Church, which retained dogmatic unity with the Albanian Apostolic Church (Monophysites), a part of Artsakh’s population gradually became Grigorianized and at the same time Armenianized.

² Movses Kaghankatvatsi, “The History of the Caucasian Albanians” (translated by C. F. J. Dowsett), London: (London Oriental Series, Vol. 8). p.26; Ф Мамедова. Политическая история и историческая география Кавказской Албании. Баку, «Эльм», 1986, pp.104-105.

¹ Z. Brzezinski, “The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives”, Basic Books, 1997, p.37.

After the fall of the independent Albanian state, Karabakh, being inseparable from Azerbaijan both geographically and politically, became part of the Azerbaijani state of Sajids. Then in the 10th century it became part of the state of Salarids, and in the 11-12th centuries was part of the state of Sheddadids. In the 15th century it existed within the states of Garagounlou and Aghghounlou, and during the 16th century and 17th centuries Karabakh, as a part of Karabakh beylerbeyyat (duchy), was within the dynasty of Safavids. Karabakhi beylerbariyyat was ruled by the representatives of the Tukic Ziyad-oglu tribe, subordinated to the Kajars from the 16th to the 18th century. After the fall of the Kajar rule in the Safavids Empire, different khanates (principalities) were created in the territory of Azerbaijan, one of which was the Karabakh khanate. Later, upon the establishment of Shusha fortress in 1750 by the Panah Ali Khan, Shusha became the capital of Karabakh khanate under the nominal Persian rule. Its rulers were Muslim Azeri Turks, as were the majority of the population during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The origin of the conflict

The Russian empire gained control over the Azerbaijani khanates following the Russian-Persian wars of 1804-1813 and 1826-1828. At the time of the incorporation of the Karabakh khanate to Russia (May 14, 1805) Armenian inhabitants of the region consisted of only one-fifth of the whole

community.³ Russia's annexation of the Karabakh khanate was formalized in the 1813 Treaty of Gulustan as a result of the Russo-Persian War (1804-1813).

The czarist authorities regarded this large, predominantly Turkish Muslim population as an unstable and disloyal element, and therefore attempted to change the ethnic and religious balance within the newly conquered territories. The authorities were also extremely well disposed towards the Armenian population as a natural ally based on their common Christian affiliation. In that context, the Russian Empire was interested in stimulating Armenian resettlement. Armenians were encouraged to emigrate from the Ottoman and Persian empires and to settle in border areas.

Thus, after the Russian-Turkish war of 1828-1829, the Treaty of Adrianople (Treaty of Edirne) was signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1829. Under the Treaty of Adrianople, a large number of Armenians who had been living in Iran and the Ottoman Empire were relocated to the South Caucasus, mainly to the areas populated by Azerbaijanis. After the Crimean War of 1853-1856 and the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1879, more groups of Armenians were relocated to the South Caucasus, specifically to Nagorno-Karabakh.

³ See: *A Record on Karabakh Province in 1823 collected by a civil servant, Mogilevsky, and a colonel, Ermolov (Tbilisi, 1866), State Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan, f.21, 24-1, N.117.*

As for the Karabakh region, the Armenian population has increased six-fold from 19 to 119 thousand people in the period from 1831 to 1916, mainly due to immigration

Thus over the course of the nineteenth century, Russian expansion in the South Caucasus brought tremendous changes to the demographic and political situation of the region.

As for the Karabakh region, the Armenian population has increased six-fold from 19 to 119 thousand people in the period from 1831 to 1916, mainly due to immigration.⁴

Thus, the migration policy enforced by the Russian empire as well as trade, economic, territorial and ethnic rivalries between the two nations laid the foundation for future hostility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The evolution of relations over more than a century shows that “massive eruptions of violence in the form of mutual inter-communal massacres began with the 1905 Russian Revolution, and would re-emerge each time the Russian state was in a condition of crisis or overhaul – during the civil war in 1918 and during the perestroika from 1988 on”.⁵

4 *Обозрение Российских владений за Кавказом, часть I, СПб, 1836; Свод статистических данных о населении Закавказского края, извлеченных из посемейных списков 1886. Тифлис, 1893; Кавказский календарь на 1917 год. Тифлис, 1916, pp. 190-197.*

5 Tadeusz Swietochowski, “Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition”, New York, Columbia University

Efforts by Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) and the Soviet leadership to settle the conflict

Territorial dispute over the mountainous part of Karabakh (Nagorno-Karabakh in Russian) continued between Armenia and Azerbaijan during the existence of the ADR (1918-1920), the first secular democracy in the Muslim world. On January 15, 1919 the ADR authorities appointed Khosrov bek Sultanov Governor-General of Karabakh (along with Zangezur) until the final solution of the dispute could be found at the Paris Peace Conference. His candidacy was also approved by General W. Thomson, Head of the British troops quartered in Baku representing the Allied Powers.

In August 1919, the Karabakh Armenians and the ADR Government signed a temporary agreement that “mountainous part of Karabakh, ... inhabited by Armenians, considers itself in the boundaries of Republic of Azerbaijan.”⁶ The resolution was based on the recognition of “cultural self-determination”⁷ of the Armenian population of Karabakh. Georgian Bolshevik newspaper *Borba* noted that “the agreement between Armenians and Muslims in Karabakh is already a fact...In the present case,

Press, 1995, p.8.

6 *Временное соглашение армян Нагорного-Карабаха с Азербайджанским правительством, 26 августа 1919 г., параг. 2 (paragraph 2) // К истории образования НКАО Азербайджанской ССР, Сборник документов и материалов, Баку, 1989, p. 25.*

7 *Ibid., Paragraph 12.*

In August 1919, the Karabakh Armenians and the ADR Government signed a temporary agreement that “mountainous part of Karabakh, ... inhabited by Armenians, considers itself in the boundaries of Republic of Azerbaijan.”

we see the first serious attempt at resolution of the Armenian-Muslim conflict not by means of violence but by means of negotiation”.⁸ Thus, “early in 1920, the Peace Conference recognized Azerbaijan’s claim to Karabakh...Perhaps Karabakh was “awarded” to Azerbaijan as a way of bolstering it against the new Russian, now Bolshevik, threat”.⁹

However on 28 April 1920 the Bolshevik 11th Red Army invaded Azerbaijan and on 29 November 1920 it entered Armenia, establishing Bolshevik control in these territories.

The territorial dispute over the mountainous part of Karabakh continued after the Sovietization of Armenia and Azerbaijan. On July 5, 1921, the Kavbureau CC RCP(b) (Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks), determined the final legal status of this territory. The most important document in this context is the July

8 “Borba Proletariata”, 1919, September 5.

9 A. Altstadt, “The Azerbaijani Turks. Power and Identity under Russian rule”, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1992, pp.102-103.

5, 1921 plenum of Kavbureau CC RCP(b) decree (Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks), in which Stalin, along with several Armenian members, such as A. Nazaretyan and A. Myasnikyan, decided on “leaving” (or “retaining” - in the original Russian, the term was *оставить* (ostavit)) NK within Azerbaijan and not “transferring” (or “ceding” it to anyone; in Russian: *отдать* (otdat)). Thus: “Nagorno-Karabakh to leave within the borders of Azerbaijan SSR”.¹⁰ Despite the fact that on July 4

The territorial dispute over the mountainous part of Karabakh continued after the Sovietization of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

the Kavbureau CC RCP(b) adopted a resolution to transfer mountainous Karabakh to Armenia, the very next day (July 5), A. Myasnikyan and Nazaretian, Armenian Communists, called for a reconsideration of the previous day’s resolutions (for which they had voted).¹¹ The resolutions were rescinded and the following resolution was passed: “Proceeding from the necessity for national peace among Muslims and Armenians and of the economic ties between upper (mountainous) and lower Karabakh,

10 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Moscow), f.64, op. 2, d.1, p.118, 121-122.

11 Архив политических движений при Управлении Делами Президента Азербайджанской Республики, АПД УДП АР. Ф. 64, он. 2, д. 1, л. 122.

of its permanent ties with Azerbaijan, mountainous Karabakh is to remain within the border of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR), receiving wide regional (oblast) autonomy with the administrative center at Shusha, becoming an autonomous region (oblast).¹²

However, this decision was not implemented on time for a number of reasons, among them the difficulty of delineating the borders of the autonomous oblast and the jurisdiction of party apparatus in establishing the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.¹³

On July 7, 1923 the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of Azerbaijan SSR issued a decree "On the Formation of the Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh"¹⁴ (AONK^{15*}).¹⁶ However "disputes over land and water rights, nomad's access, and boundaries continued for more than a year."¹⁷

In November 1924, the Autonomous Oblast' of Nagorno-Karabakh (AONK) was confirmed as a constituent part of the Azerbaijan SSR.¹⁸

12 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

13 A. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 119.

14 *Собрание Узаконений и Распоряжений Рабоче-Крестьянского Правительства АССР за 1923 г.*, Баку, 1923, с. 384-385.

15 * The name was changed to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast' (NKAO) in 1937.

16 See *Constitution of USSR of 1936*; <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons02.html#chap03>

17 A. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 126.

18 *История национально-государственного строительства в СССР, 1917-1926*, т. I, М., «Мысль», 1972, pp. 268-

In November 1924, the Autonomous Oblast' of Nagorno-Karabakh (AONK) was confirmed as a constituent part of the Azerbaijan SSR.

However it became clear very soon that the borders of this new autonomous region were drawn in such a way that allowed for the establishment of a clear Armenian majority (as they lived mainly in the mountainous part of Karabakh region). At the same time, due to forced migration of ethnic Azerbaijanis from the rural areas of the mountainous part of Karabakh and relocation of large number of Armenians (at their request) in the AONK from other districts of Azerbaijan during the 20's and 30's, the ethnic balance of this autonomous entity was significantly changed.¹⁹ Thus, according to the 1926 census, the total population of the AONK was 116,274, with a much higher proportion of Armenians - 108,482 people (93.3 percent) and only 7,188 ethnic Azerbaijanis (6.2 percent). Representation of other nationalities was 0.5 percent, i.e. 604 people.²⁰

270; *Собрание Узаконений и Распоряжений Рабоче-Крестьянского Правительства АССР за 1924 г.*, Баку, 1926, pp. 333-335.

19 Məmmədov N.R. *Azərbaycan SSR-in Dağlıq Qarabağ muxtar vilayəti (1923-1991)*. Bakı, 2008, p. 246

20 *Всесоюзная перепись населения от 1926 г., Закавказская СФСР*, т. XIV, М., 1929, с. 11-13.

The population of NKAO grew by 62.6 percent in the Soviet era (1926-1989): in 1970 it was 150,300 people, in 1979 – 162,200 and in 1989 – 189,100 people. According to census data from 1970, 1979 and 1989, the population of NKAO was, respectively, 121,100 (80.5 percent), 123,100 (75.9 percent), 145,500 (76.9 percent) ethnic Armenian; 27,200 (18 percent), 37,300 (23 percent), 40,600 (21.5 percent) ethnic Azerbaijani; and 18,100 (1.3 percent), 22,900 (1.1 percent), 21,500 (1.5 percent) Russians.²¹ However, there was a general decline in the Armenian population in comparison with the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh (in 1970 Armenians accounted for 80.5 percent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, but by 1979, only 75.9 percent), a trend which later led to Armenian politicians accusing the Azerbaijani authorities of discrimination towards the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. But in reality, this trend can be explained by demographic factors, in particular the higher birth rate in the Azerbaijani community. Azerbaijani families had an average of 3.1 children, while their Armenian counterparts had 2.3 children; for Russian families the figure was 1.6 children. In addition, the migration of the Armenian population to foreign countries exceeded all other

21 *Itogi vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya 1970 goda, tom 4. Nationalniy sostav naseleniya, Moskva, 1973; Chislennost i sostav naseleniya SSSR. Po dannym vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya 1979 goda. Moskva, 1985; Goskomitet SSSR po statistike. Itogi vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya 1989 goda. Moskva, 1989*

indicators in the USSR; Armenians made up 34.4 percent of the total population emigrating from the Soviet Union.²²

Hence, the demographic trend that had been established in nineteenth century continued throughout the Soviet period, with the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh steadily increasing from 108,500 (1926) to 145,500 people (1989). However, despite the Soviet-created autonomy, separatist movements fed by Armenian authorities in Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ArmSSR) were suppressed by the Soviet government through means of strict central administration and control, supported by internationalism and planned economy. However, this approach failed to bring any positive results, and led only to further complications.

Kin-state involvement during the Soviet rule

In Soviet times, the authorities of the ArmSSR had repeatedly raised the issue of the transfer of NKAO to Armenia with Moscow. This happened in 1945, 1964 and 1968, but met with resistance from the Azerbaijani side, which to some extent had the support of Moscow²³. Nonetheless, Armenian attempts to secure the consent of

22 İmanov R.Ə., *Azərbaycanın ərəzi bütövlüyünə qəsd - qondarma DQMV-i*. Bakı, 2005, p.170

23 АПД УП АР (Архив Политических Движений Управления Президента Азербайджанской Республики), Ф.1, оп.169, д.249, л.12; Мəтнəдov N.R. *Azərbaycan SSR-in Dağlıq Qarabağ muxtar vilayəti (1923-1991)*. Bakı, 2008, s.117; Hacıyev N. *Dağlıq Qarabağ tarixindən sənədlər*. Bakı, 2005, p.80.

Moscow on this issue continued. In the late 1980s, the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* declared by Mikhail Gorbachov created favorable conditions for a renewed campaign for unification of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

In the late 1980s, the policies of glasnost and perestroika declared by Mikhail Gorbachov created favorable conditions for a renewed campaign for unification of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

On February 20, 1988 the NKAO Council of People's Deputies passed a resolution appealing to the Supreme Soviets of the AzSSR and ArmSSR to transfer this region from the AzSSR to the ArmSSR. However, this request was denied by USSR Soviet of Ministers, which adopted the resolution "On the Measures on Intensification of the Socio-Economical Development of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast of the AzSSR in 1988-1995" on 24 March 1988.²⁴

In the following months strikes and demonstrations took place in Armenia, Azerbaijan and NKAO. On June 13, 1988 the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR passed a new resolution on this issue, reaffirming its rejection

of NKAO's application and supporting the USSR Soviet of Ministers' resolution of March 24, 1988 calling for faster socio-economical development. However, on June 15, 1988 the Supreme Soviet of the ArmSSR, in its turn, adopted a resolution insisting on the transfer of the NKAO from the AzSSR to the ArmSSR.

On July 12, 1988 the NKAO Council of People's Deputies declared its secession from AzSSR, which was considered by the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR as an illegal act. On July 18, 1988 the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet also declined the petition of the Supreme Soviet of ArmSSR on the transfer of the NKAO to the ArmSSR. At the same time, the decision was made "to establish a "special commission" from Moscow to "observe" conditions in and ostensibly "strengthen and develop the autonomy" of NKAO".²⁵ A. Volski was appointed the Head of this Commission, acting as the representative of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and the Central Committee of Communist Party. "Through the Volski Commission and martial law, the NKAO was taken de facto from direct rule by Baku, despite official statements that it remained part of Azerbaijan".²⁶

Due to the failure of the Volski Commission to achieve its objectives, the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR decided to

²⁴ Известия. Нагорный Карабах: Программа развития, корр. «И» // 1988 №85 – 25 марта 1988 г.

²⁵ A. Altstadt, *ibid*, p.198.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.198

disband the Commission on 15 September 1989. This decision was supported by Gorbachov's decree on the "normalization" of administration in the NKAO on November 28, 1989. The AzSSR was charged with responsibility for establishing an administrative committee on the equal basis with NKAO and reestablishing the Soviet of People's Deputies.

But the Supreme Soviet of ArmSSR once again demonstrated its close involvement with this conflict by passing a new resolution on "Reunification of ArmSSR and Nagorno-Karabakh" on December 1, 1989. This was a serious violation of the constitutional norms of USSR, and was deemed by a resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR passed on December 7 as inadmissible interference in the affairs of the AzSSR, and territorial encroachment. This policy was continued once Armenia became an independent state in 1991.

Hence, the kin-state involvement of Armenia played an instrumental role in further occupation of Azerbaijani territory in pursuit of irredentist claims and ethnic solidarity.

Taking advantage of the upheaval within the Azerbaijani leadership, Karabakh separatists declared the creation of the "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic", within the boundaries of NKAO and the Shaumyan region of the Azerbaijan SSR on September 2, 1991. In response, Azerbaijan repealed the autonomous status of

Nagorno-Karabakh on November 23, 1991.²⁷ Thus, originally having sought unification with Armenia, the Karabakh Armenians started to demand the right to self-determination and secession from Azerbaijan after Azerbaijan and Armenia gained independence in 1991.

As a result of the escalation of this armed conflict and undeclared war, which lasted from 1992 to 1994, Armenian forces seized almost one-fifth of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory including Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts (Lachin, Kelbajar, Agdam, Jabrayil, Fizuly, Gubadly and Zangilan), which are outside the territory of former NKAO. Approximately one million people became refugees or IDPs.

Since 1994, when a cease-fire was reached, many attempts have been made to find a political solution to this conflict.

Analysis of the legal status of the NKAO within the USSR

This part of the study is dedicated to a review of the legal status and level of autonomy of NKAO during various legislative regimes. The issue of autonomy is generally regulated through legal acts which constitute the main part of the legal hierarchy – in constitutions. Thus NKAO was regulated by both the USSR and Azerbaijani Constitutions, though mainly the latter.

²⁷ See: <http://en.president.az/azerbaijan/karabakh>

Introduction to USSR system of administration

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established in 1922 by four republics – the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federation. The first Constitution of USSR was promulgated and finally adopted on 31 January 1924.

The USSR was a federal state with only formal separation of powers. All administration was highly centralized, and the administrative structure and the laws of USSR and the Soviet republics were very similar. In theory, USSR had a conventional system of government where the supreme organ of power, according to the Article 8 of the 1924 USSR Constitution²⁸, was the Congress of Soviets²⁹, and in the recesses of the Congress of Soviets the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, which consisted of two chambers - the Council of the Union (*Soyuzniy Soviet*) and the Council of Nationalities (*Soviet Nasionalnostey*).³⁰ The Council of the Union of the USSR was elected by Congress of Soviets from del-

egates of republics, proportional to their respective populations.³¹ According to Article 15, representatives of the member Republics and associated autonomous Republics of the RSFSR composed the Council of Nationalities of the USSR on the basis of five representatives for each member Republic, and one representative for each associated autonomous Republic. The autonomous Republics of Adjara, and Abkhazia and autonomous regions of Osetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan each sent a representative to the Council of Nationalities. The composition of the Council of Nationalities in its entirety was approved by the Congress of the USSR.³²

According to Article 17 of the 1924 USSR Constitution, the CEC published the codes, decrees, acts, and ordinances, ordered the process of legislation and administration of the USSR and defined the sphere of activity of the Presidium of the CEC and of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR.³³ The CEC convened three times a year by the decision of Presidium of the CEC.

The Presidium of CEC was elected in a joint session of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities. According to Article 29 of the

28 The 1924 USSR Constitution. <http://mailstar.net/ussr1924.html>

29 Due to Soviet and Bolshevik ideology, the state power in USSR was held by different levels of "Soviets" which translates to "Council". Thus ultimate power in USSR was held by Congress of Soviets or "Syezd Sovetov". In fact, Congress of Soviets did not function as legislative body but mostly as an organ establishing general policies within communist ideology.

30 Central Executive Committee was a state body analogous to the parliament with two separate chambers.

31 Article 14 of the 1924 USSR Constitution, see at <http://mailstar.net/ussr1924.html>

32 Article 15 of the 1924 USSR Constitution. <http://mailstar.net/ussr1924.html>

33 The 1924 USSR Constitution. <http://mailstar.net/ussr1924.html>

1924 USSR Constitution the Presidium of the CEC of the USSR was the supreme organ of legislative, executive, and administrative power of the USSR between sessions of the CEC of USSR".³⁴ The Council of People's Commissars of the USSR was also the executive and administrative organ of the CEC of the USSR (Article 37).³⁵ However as an executive body, the Presidium of the CEC of the USSR was higher up in the hierarchy; it could suspend and abrogate the orders of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR (Article 31).

According to Article 37 of the 1924 USSR Constitution, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR was formed by the CEC as follows: (a) The President of the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R., (b) The Vice-Presidents, (c) The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, (d) The People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, (e) The People's Commissar for Foreign Commerce, (f) The People's Commissar for Ways and Communication, (g) The People's Commissar for Postal and Telegraph Service, (h) The People's Commissar for the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, (i) The President of the Supreme Council of National Economy, (j) The People's Commissar for Labor, (k) The People's Commissar for Finances, (l) The

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Council of Commissars of the People of the USSR (Sovnarkom) was a body analogous to Cabinet of Ministers.*

People's Commissar for Supplies³⁶.

The judicial system of the USSR on the federal level, according to Article 43 of the 1924 USSR Constitution, was represented by a Supreme Court under the jurisdiction of the CEC of the USSR.

The sovereign rights of the member Republics were described in the Chapter 2 of the 1924 USSR Constitution. The sovereignty of the member Republics was limited only in the matters indicated in the 1924 USSR Constitution as coming within the competence of the Union. Outside of those limits, each member Republic exerted its public powers independently; the USSR protected the rights of the member Republics (Article 3).³⁷ At the same time, each of the member Republics retained the right to freely withdraw from the Union (Article 4); however it was underlined in the Article 6 that any amendment or removal of the Article 4 needed the approval of all the member Republics of the Union.³⁸ The same Article 6 of the 1924 USSR Constitution also declared that the territory of the member Republics could not be modified without their consent.

The legislative and executive bodies of member Republics were regulated by Articles 64-68 of the 1924 USSR Constitution. According to Article 64

³⁶ *The 1924 USSR Constitution. <http://mailstar.net/ussr1924.html>*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The sovereignty of the member Republics was limited only in the matters indicated in the 1924 USSR Constitution as coming within the competence of the Union. Outside of those limits, each member Republic exerted its public powers independently

the supreme organ of power within the limits of the territory of each member republic was the Congress of Soviets of the Republic, and in Congressional recesses, its Central Executive Committee (CEC). The CEC of the member Republics formed their executive organs, the Council of People's Commissars.

Formally the competences of Republics covered all matters that were not covered by the competence of the Union (USSR) regulated by the Article 1 of the USSR Constitution. However, important matters such as employment, land and property status, economy and budget, military issues, administration of justice, etc. were managed directly by the Union. Thus, the Soviet Republics were seriously limited in their competences, as Stalin's and consecutive governments ruled in a very centralized and coercive manner. Furthermore, in these matters, the central initiative was enforced through communist party activities.

Initial autonomy arrangements for Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh (1923-1936)

The legal regulation of autonomous oblasts and particularly of the NKAO was mostly covered by republican legislation, namely the Constitution of AzSSR of March 26, 1927 and the specific "Regulation on Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh", which was developed by the special commission in July 1923.³⁹

According to the Article 55 of the 1927 Constitution of AzSSR, AONK was recognized as an integral part of the AzSSR.⁴⁰ More detailed norms were provided by the "Regulations on Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh", which had to be adopted by the AONK Congress of Soviets and approved by the CEC of Azerbaijan.⁴¹

Legislative power: The 1927 Constitution of AzSSR proclaimed that the supreme organ of power in the AONK was the Congress of Soviets and in the recesses of the AONK Congress of Soviets, the AONK Central Executive Committee (CEC).⁴² The AONK Congress of Soviets was required to

39 Протокол заседания комиссии по выработке Положения автономной области Нагорного Карабаха, установлению границ между Низменным и Нагорным Карабахом, а также между Нагорным Карабахом и Курдистаном и определению форм административного управления Низменного Карабаха и Курдистана. П.А.А.Ф. ИМ.Л. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Д. 132. Л. 169

40 Constitution of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic of 1927; http://files.prestlib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

41 Ibid. Article 56.

42 Ibid. Article 57.

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meet at least once a year. At the same time the CEC had the power to appoint the executive body – Council of the People’s Commissars.⁴³

Executive power: According to the “Regulation on Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh”, the following seven departments (ministries) were created as part of the AONK Council of People’s Commissars: Department of the Interior, Justice, Education, Health, Agriculture, Register and Economy.⁴⁴ Almost all Commissars (ministers), including the Interior and Justice, were appointed by AONK CEC and were directly accountable to this organ.⁴⁵ Only the Military Commissars and the Commissars for Labor and Finance were appointed by the CEC of AzSSR with the consent

⁴³ *Собрание узаконений и распоряжений Рабоче-Крестьянского правительства АССР за 1924 г. Баку, 1926 г. С. 334.*

⁴⁴ *АПД УдПАР, Фонд 1, Опись 74, Дело 137, Протоколы Заседаний Президиума Центрального Комитета КП (б) Азербайджана, лист 99.*

⁴⁵ *Decision of NK Oblast Executive Committee on 2 March 1937. ЦТАСР, Фонд 379, Опись 3, ед.хр 5613, лист 50.*

of AONK Council of the People’s Commissars.

It must be noted, however, that issues of state security came under the competence of CH-K (ministry of security) of AzSSR.⁴⁶ But in fact, the Commissars were also accountable to the AONK Communist Party’s Committee (AONK CPC). AONK CPC was in charge of supervision of all activities of Commissars.

Administration of justice: Until 1925, AONK did not have its own court of appeals and Supreme Court of Azerbaijan was a court of appeals for AONK courts.⁴⁷ The Oblast Court of AONK (as an appeal court for NK district courts) was not created until 1 October 1925.⁴⁸

Local authorities: As for the whole of the USSR, local authorities consisted of Councils of Workers, Farmers and Red Army Deputies. These councils convened in “sessions” which in turn elected their CECs and Presidiums. There was no clear division of powers between local and central AONK authorities in the Regulation on Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh, so this issue was regulated on a general basis according to the Constitution of AzSSR.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *A. Karakozov (appointed as Extraordinary Commissioner for Zangazur and Karabakh in February 1921) appealed to S. Kirov for establishment of Supreme Court for AONK as it has been for Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic.*

⁴⁸ *Собрание узаконений и распоряжений Рабоче-Крестьянского правительства АССР за 1924 г. Баку, 1926 г. С. 334*

The local authorities in AONK were represented mostly by Armenians, as reflected by the percentage of Armenians in the party organization of AONK – 94.2 percent. Just 4 percent were Azerbaijani.⁴⁹ The situation evidently continued, as by 1926, the total percentage of the Armenian population in AONK was 93.3 percent, compared with 6.2 percent Azerbaijanis.⁵⁰

Economy: Officially, the Oblast had control over the economy of AONK through the Council of People's Economy. But the Regulation provided that AONK Council of People's Economy had to work according to development plans, which had to be in compliance with the general state plan of USSR (GosPlan). However, it was AONK CEC that determined the annual level of production for kolkhozes⁵¹ and other industries, distributed pastures, and prepared the draft of the budget.⁵² The budget of AONK had to be approved by the CEC of AzSSR, because the expenditures of AONK had to be covered by AzSSR. The 1927 AzSSR Constitution provided that the budget of AONK and all its profits and expenditures was to be unified with the budget of the AzSSR.⁵³

49 Нифталиев И., «Азербайджанская ССР в экспансионистских планах армян», Баку, 2009, с. 220

50 Всесоюзная перепись населения от 1926 г., Закавказская СФСР. т. XIV, М., 1929, с. 11-13.

51 The word is a contraction of *kollektivnoye khozyaystvo* meaning collective farm or collective economy.

52 Decision of NK Oblast Executive Committee on 30 October 1937.

53 Constitution of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic of

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According to the documents of the CEC of AzSSR, the AONK, like other Azerbaijani districts, received financial aid and technical assistance. For instance, in correspondence with the “Commission on Upper and Lower Karabakh” addressed to the CEC of AzSSR, 21.456 rubles of AONK’s public debts were annulled, 200 barrels of cement were released, and additional funds for construction of ten governmental buildings were added to the NK budget.⁵⁴ As demonstrated by the Decision of AONK CEC, the reconstruction of the Stepanakert Hospital was completed with funds allocated from AzSSR’s budget.⁵⁵

Midterm autonomy arrangements for Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (1936-1978)

The 1936 USSR Constitution introduced new provisions on autonomous entities, establishing a list of

1927; article 88 http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

54 АПД УДПАР, Фонд 1, Опись 74, Дело 136, Протоколы Заседаний Президиума Центрального Комитета КП (б) Азербайджана, лист 50.

55 Decision of NK Oblast Executive Committee on 2 March 1937. ЦГАСР, Фонд 379, Опись 3, ed.хр 5613, лист 53.

all autonomous oblasts and republics within the USSR.⁵⁶ Article 24 of the 1936 USSR Constitution reaffirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was an integral part of AzSSR. The representation of member and autonomous Republics as well as autonomous oblasts and national areas in the Council of Nationalities of the USSR was addressed by the Article 35. According to this Article each member Republic could send twenty-five deputies to the Council of Nationalities; autonomous Republics – eleven; autonomous oblasts – five, and each national area - one⁵⁷. Thus, the NKAO was represented at the Council of Nationalities of the USSR by five deputies, which marked an improvement compared with the previous constitutional arrangements.

A number of developments followed the adoption of the new Constitution of AzSSR Republic on March 14, 1937. In particular, the 1937 Constitution of AzSSR introduced the detailed administrative division of AzSSR, including the NKAO (Article 14).⁵⁸ Moreover, the 1937 Constitution includes a whole Chapter VII dedicated to the governing bodies of the NKAO. On the other hand provisions concerning the local authorities remained unchanged, as indicated in Chapter VIII of the 1937 Constitution of AzSSR.

56 *The 1936 Constitution of USSR of 1936*; <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons02.html#chap03>, Articles 22-27

57 *Ibid.* Articles 24, 35.

58 *The 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR*; http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

Article 24 of the 1936 USSR Constitution reaffirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was an integral part of AzSSR.

At the same time, the powers of the AzSSR itself concerning its territory were significantly extended. For example, the AzSSR could now submit proposals to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the creation of new autonomous republics or oblasts.⁵⁹ The AzSSR, through its supreme bodies of state authority, was now able to decide on the borders and regions of the NKAO.⁶⁰ For instance, there was a Decree of Presidium of Supreme Soviet of AzSSR on February 1939, “On direct subordination of Stepanakert City Council to the NKAO Executive Committee”.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the 1937 Constitution of AzSSR introduced a new norm allowing for one of the representatives of NKAO to be assigned as a Deputy to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR.⁶²

The 1937 Constitution of AzSSR provided more detailed norms on the authority of the Azerbaijani state and supervisory powers over the NKAO as well as other autonomous entities. For example, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR was able to

59 *Ibid.*, Article 19.

60 *Ibid.*

61 ЦГАСР, Фонд 2941, Опись 7, лист 147.

62 *The 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR*, Article 31.

veto the decisions of NKAO Council of People's Deputies if it was not consistent with the law,⁶³ while the Council of Ministers of AzSSR were charged with oversight of the work of the executive committees (oblast, district, city, village) of NKAO.⁶⁴ The Council of Ministers of AzSSR was able to completely annul the decision of any executive committee in NKAO and suspend the decision of the NKAO Council of People's Deputies. Similar rules also applied to Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic.⁶⁵

The laws of AzSSR were in force on the territory of NKAO as well as in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic. Elections in NKAO were held according to the laws of the republic. Election day was the same for the whole territory of AzSSR.⁶⁶

To demonstrate the extent of the relativity of true executive power, it has to be taken into account that sometimes even member republics were not able to enjoy their federative republic (state) status. As an example, we can look at the November 26, 1939 Decree of the Council of People's Commissars and Central Committee of Communist Party of USSR on improvement of the function of the departments of agriculture in Soviet republics. According to

⁶³ *Ibid.* Article 33.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Article 46.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Article 47

⁶⁶ *Постановление Президиума ВС АССР от 23 Октября 1939 года, ЦГАСР, Фонд 2941, Опись 7, ед.хр 7, лист 110.*

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that Decree, the AzSSR's Council of People's Commissars issued a subsequent Decree on December 5, 1939. The Decree provides detailed regulation for departments of agriculture, their structure and personnel.⁶⁷ This Decree and a number of decisions of the Central Committee of Communist Party of the AzSSR were sent to Moscow for approval.⁶⁸ Given the high level of scrutiny from Moscow and the Communist Party, it is clear that the "self-governance" of the NKAO

Elections in NKAO were held according to the laws of the republic. Election day was the same for the whole territory of AzSSR

was illusory. In the political environment wherein the appointment of the Head of Azerbaijani Railroad (decision of 31 March 1959) was approved by Central Committee of Communist

⁶⁷ АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 74, Дело 596, лист 23-25.

⁶⁸ АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 74, Дело 596, лист 47.

Party of USSR,⁶⁹ all state affairs were under the scrutiny of the Communist Party, which held an exhaustive function in society and state. Another example of the dominant role of the Communist Party, as enshrined in the 1937 Constitution, is a 31 March 1959 ruling by the Central Committee of Communist Party of the AzSSR on the decision to change the name of “Karyagin” District to “Fizuli”, proposed by the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of AzSSR,⁷⁰ even though according to the Constitution that power belonged to the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR. That was the case for NKAO as well. The First Secretaries of Nakhichevan and NKAO’s Communist Parties were approved from the center (Moscow).⁷¹ The centralization of government within the “federal” state of the USSR can be demonstrated by the simple fact that the Head of the NKAO Executive Committee was appointed by Moscow. For instance, under a September 13, 1939 proposal by the Central Committee of Communist Party of AzSSR sent to Stalin, G. Petrosyan was nominated as a candidate for this official position.⁷² Taking into account that in the USSR many state organs were merged with party offices (e. g. chairmanship of executive branch with a secretary of the Communist Party at that level), the scrutiny of the executive branch was

69 АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 46, Дело 70, лист 1.

70 АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 46, Дело 70, лист 295.

71 АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 46, Дело 70, лист 149.

72 АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 74, Дело 581, лист 7.

performed by party control. Even such issues as permission for annual vacation had to be decided by the Central Committee of Communist Party of AzSSR, as in the case of the 1st Secretary of the NKAO Communist Party Committee Manukyans on October 25, 1938.⁷³ Another example is the appointment of Grigoriy Kalantarov as Head of the Finance Department of the NKAO Executive Committee by the proposal of the NKAO Communist Party Committee and decision of the Central Committee of Communist Party of AzSSR from 31.03.1959.⁷⁴

Legislative power: NKAO Council of People’s Deputies was a legislative body elected by the citizens of the Oblast every two years.⁷⁵ It was able to exercise its powers only within the limits of the legislation of both USSR and AzSSR.⁷⁶ It had some powers and responsibilities including the cultural, political and economical development, law enforcement, control over subjected bodies, etc.⁷⁷ Usually, the NKAO Council of People’s Deputies used its legislative power by issuing by-laws.

The decisions of the NKAO Council of People’s Deputies should have been published in both Armenian and Azerbaijani.⁷⁸

73 АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 74, Дело 531, лист 267.

74 АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 46, Дело 70, лист 154.

75 *The 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR, Articles 75-76; http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf*

76 *Ibid.*, Article 78.

77 *Ibid.*, Article 77.

78 *Ibid.*, Article 78.

Executive power: As for the executive branch of NKAO, Council of People's Deputies elected its Executive Committee (IspolKom), which in turn had its own departments and offices.⁷⁹ According to Articles 46 and 81 of the 1937 AzSSR Constitution, the Executive Committee of NKAO Council of People's Deputies was in fact under the strict supervision of the relevant Ministries of AzSSR. The Executive Committee was charged with summoning the sessions of the NKAO Council of People's Deputies no less than four times a year.⁸⁰

Administration of justice: One of the more interesting developments of the 1937 Constitution was the provision concerning justice in NKAO. Articles 110, 115 of the 1937 Constitution of AzSSR provided that justice in NKAO was carried out by the regional court elected by NKAO Council of People's Deputies for a five-year period. However, at the same time, the regional court of NKAO was subject to monitoring and control by the Supreme Court of AzSSR.⁸¹

Administration of justice is strongly connected to "Prosecutor's control" in the USSR. In many cases judicial scrutiny was performed more by Prosecutors than courts. For instance,

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 79-80. *IspolKom of NKAO had a 13 members. The number, areas and functions of departments of Ispolkom had to be approved by the Council of Ministers of AzSSR. These departments had a double subordination – both to NK upper bodies and relevant Azerbaijani central departments.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Article 82.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Article 112

Article 120 of the AzSSR Constitution shows that the Prosecutor had supreme powers of control over the function of both state organs and citizens; Chief Prosecutors of member Republics were appointed by the Prosecutor-General of the USSR; in their turn Chief Prosecutors appointed district (oblast) Prosecutors. Thus the Prosecutor's Office in NKAO was appointed by the Prosecutor-General of the USSR for a five-year term.⁸²

Interestingly, in accordance with the 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR, justice in NKAO was generally carried out in Armenian.⁸³ The use of the Armenian language for court affairs reflected the minority policy of the Soviet state. According to the AzSSR Constitution, not only in NKAO but also in other districts where Russians or Armenians prevailed, their language could be used for court proceedings. However, the obligation to publish the decisions (laws) adopted by the NKAO Council of People's Deputies in both Armenian and Azerbaijani suggested that there were considerations of the strong legislative and administrative ties between NKAO and the AzSSR.

Economy: The budget of the NKAO was separated from the total budget of AzSSR, but the control for the implementation of the budget remained the responsibility of the supreme powers of AzSSR. Article 109 of the 1937

⁸² *Ibid.*, Article 122.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Article 117 of the 1937 Constitution of AzSSR

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Constitution provided details of the budget formation of NKAO. According to that article, the budgets of local authorities were based on incomes of local economy (like kolkhozes), allocations from the central state budget and local taxes and fees, as established under USSR and AzSSR legislation.⁸⁴ However, the area was also subject to Moscow's scrutiny. For instance, in the case of kolkhozes, any change in their reorganization and functioning had to be agreed with Moscow.⁸⁵ Though the centers (Moscow and Baku) had specific allocations for NKAO which constituted a certain part of the budget, the other aspects of budget formation were done by the NKAO Executive Committee. Usually requests for funds were sustained by the Baku government. For example, between 1946-1960, NKAO received 68 million rubles, three times more than for the Agdam, Terter and Fizuli districts together, and 10 million more than the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *The 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR, Articles 46, 109.*

⁸⁵ *From correspondence between Bagirov and Stalin АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Опись 74, Дело 596, лист 84.*

⁸⁶ *Nadirov A.A., Nuriyev Ə.X., Muradov Ə.S., Naxçıvan İqtisadiyyatı XX əsrdə, Bakı 2000, s.32.*

Final autonomy arrangements for Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (1978-1988)

The new 1977 USSR Constitution did not introduce further regulations for the autonomous units of the USSR. In this Constitution, NKAO was once again mentioned as an autonomous oblast of AzSSR. According to the Article 110 of the 1977 USSR Constitution the Council of Nationalities had to be elected on the basis of the following representation: 32 deputies from each member Republic, 11 deputies from each autonomous Republic,

The budget of the NKAO was separated from the total budget of AzSSR, but the control for the implementation of the budget remained the responsibility of the supreme powers of AzSSR.

five deputies from each autonomous region, and one deputy from each autonomous area.⁸⁷ Thus, NKAO also retained its representation in the Council of Nationalities and was allowed to have five representatives. In the last gathering of Council of Nationalities, of five representatives of NKAO, three were ethnically Armenian and two were Azerbaijani.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *The 1977 USSR Constitution. Article 110. <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons05.html#chap15>*

⁸⁸ *Депутаты Верховного Совета СССР. Одинадцатый созыв, М., «Известия», 1984 г., 507-543.*

At the same time, Article 86 of the 1977 USSR Constitution provided that the local legislatures (Councils of People's Deputies) of autonomous units (such as NKAO and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic) would have a right to draft the law for the status of the unit and submit it to Supreme Soviet of concerned republic for approval.

The later adopted Constitution of AzSSR of April 21, 1978 reaffirmed most of the provisions of the previous 1937 Constitution concerning NKAO. Provisions of the 1978 Constitution once again confirmed the integrity of NKAO into AzSSR, providing detailed administrative division.⁸⁹

The law of the AzSSR "On Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast"⁹⁰ was adopted by Supreme Soviet of AzSSR on June 16, 1981. But in fact, NKAO bodies did not prepare a draft, because this Law was simply a shorter, amended version of the model law of USSR on autonomous oblasts, called "USSR Law on the Main Competences of the Soviets of People's Deputies of Krays, Oblasts and Autonomous Oblasts". This law introduced detailed regulation on NKAO, its bodies, competencies and functioning. In fact, the competences of ordinary oblasts and autonomous oblast were very similar.

⁸⁹ The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR, Article 78, http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf.

⁹⁰ Закон Азербайджанкой Советской Социалистической Республики о Нагорно-Карабахской Автономной Области. Издание Верховного Совета Азербайджанской ССР. Азербайджанское Государственное Издательство, Баку, 1981.

The new 1977 USSR Constitution did not introduce further regulations for the autonomous units of the USSR. In this Constitution, NKAO was once again mentioned as an autonomous oblast of AzSSR.

Legislative power: the NKAO Council of People's Deputies was the supreme body that was competent to make decisions on all matters concerning the Oblast. The Law provided the NKAO Council of People's Deputies *inter alia* with competences to forecast, estimate, calculate and manage the budget (art.17), to regulate prices (art.18), industry (art.19), architecture, agriculture, natural resources, housing, trade, education, social security, health and interior affairs (art.20-34)⁹¹. Importantly, according to the Article 63 of this Law the regional court was elected by the NKAO Council of People's Deputies for five years and the Chairman of NKAO Oblast Court was included into the Supreme Court of AzSSR.⁹²

Furthermore, NKAO was still able to have its representative as one of the three Deputies to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR,⁹³ enabling its direct

⁹¹ Закон Азербайджанкой Советской Социалистической Республики о Нагорно-Карабахской Автономной Области. Издание Верховного Совета Азербайджанской ССР. Азербайджанское Государственное Издательство, Баку, 1981, cc.12-35

⁹² *Ibid*, p.49

⁹³ The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR, <http://files.preslib.az/>

participation in the decision making of the supreme body of the AzSSR of that time. This was important as the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR was the main legislative body and was granted powers of changing regional (administrative) division of NKAO or even changing its borders.⁹⁴ The Supreme Soviet was also able to abolish any type of decision of the NKAO's Council of People's Deputies it deemed contradictory to the laws of the Republic or the USSR.⁹⁵

Executive power: The Executive Committee of the NKAO Council of People's Deputies was an executive body of the Oblast. Between the sessions of the NKAO Council of People's Deputies, the Executive Committee undertook most of the competences of the Council. It formally created departments and commissions and also appointed the heads of these structures. These appointments had to be approved by the NKAO Council of People's Deputies, but not by the central authorities in Baku.

According to Article 46 of the Law on NKAO, taking into consideration that all spheres of industry and services were under state property, the appointment and dismissal of the heads of industrial and agricultural facilities like kolkhozes were subject to approval by the NKAO Council of People's Deputies. But the Commu-

nist Party had more (informal) powers in regard to the appointment of any official. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of AzSSR held powers to control and order all Executive Committees in AzSSR. According to the October 23 1981 Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of AzSSR, all Executive Committees in Azerbaijan had to increase their efforts in the fight against corruption and plundering of state property.

The NKAO executive branch did not participate in the Council of Ministers of AzSSR. Once again the Council of Ministers of AzSSR was able to control and monitor the work of the local Executive Committees in NKAO and in some cases, even suspend or overturn their decisions,⁹⁶ thus directly affecting the law enforcement in the region.

Administration of justice: Under the 1978 Constitution of AzSSR, the judicial system of NKAO remained unchanged. NKAO had district courts and supervisory regional court as the main judicial body.⁹⁷ That regional court in turn was under the direct supervision of the Supreme Court of AzSSR and the NKAO was enabled to participate in its issuing of court's rulings. The Chairman of NKAO regional court was an *ex officio* mem-

[projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf](#), Article 113.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 114 (8).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 114 (10).

⁹⁶ The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR, Article 125 (7), 128, http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Article 163.

ber of the Supreme Court of AzSSR.⁹⁸ NKAO was also able to retain its Prosecutor's Office, appointed by the Prosecutor-General of USSR.⁹⁹

According to the Article of 159 of the 1977 USSR Constitution, judicial proceedings had to be conducted in the language of the member Republic, autonomous Republic, autonomous region, or autonomous area, or in the language spoken by the majority of the people in the locality. Persons participating in court proceedings, who do not know the language in which the proceedings are being conducted, have the right to become fully acquainted with the materials in the case; the services of an interpreter during the proceedings; and the right to address the court in their own language. The similar provisions were reflected in the 1978 AzSSR Constitution.¹⁰⁰ This guaranteed that the judicial proceedings in the NKAO would be conducted in the language used by the majority of the population in the region, thus once more guaranteeing NKAO the use of Armenian in its jurisprudence. However, at the same time it provided for wider guarantees for non-speakers of Armenian to use their native language in the judicial process, guaranteeing those people the right to become fully acquainted with the materials in the case, pro-

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 165.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 177.

¹⁰⁰ The 1977 USSR Constitution. Article 159. <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons05.html#chap15>; The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR, Article 171, http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

viding the services of an interpreter during the proceedings and the right to address the court in their own language.

Local authorities: as was the case across the whole territory of the USSR, local authorities were the local Councils of People's Deputies. However, their competences were increased in comparison with the 1937-1978 constitutional regime. Article 138 of the 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR expanded the functions of the local Councils of People's Deputies in comparison with Article 88 of the 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR. New regulations provided that "... Soviets are in charge for all matters in their area, this competence will be realized considering general state interests and interests of the people living in that area"¹⁰¹.

Local Councils of People's Deputies elected Executive Committees. These Executive Committees had competences very similar to those held by their respective local Councils of People's Deputies, excluding matters that had to be solved exclusively by meetings of local Councils.

Economy: One of the ways in which autonomy was strengthened was that NKAO now had a separate state plan for economic and social development,¹⁰² which was supposed

¹⁰¹ The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR. Article 138. http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Article 153; Закон Азербайджанской Советской Социалистической Республики о Назорно-Карабахской

edly there to account for the specifics of the autonomy and differences from the rest of AzSSR, thus strengthening the socio-economic situation in NKAO. Under the new 1978 Constitution, NKAO was also able to retain its budget. However, it was considered still a part of the unified state budget of AzSSR.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the Law on NKAO in Article 9¹⁰⁴ provided that the budget of NKAO should be listed separately in state budget of AzSSR. The budget consisted of allocations from state budget and industries located in NKAO.¹⁰⁵ Article 72 (8) of the 1978 Constitution of AzSSR still allowed for control of the implementation of the budget of NKAO by the higher authorities of AzSSR.

However, as mentioned above, the economy of the USSR was centralized. NKAO had to prepare its economic plan within the context of the state development plan and commitments imposed by the central authorities. The chain of commitments actually started in Moscow. The Communist Party of the USSR prescribed commitments for republics and they in turn issued requirements for lower

units. For every five years there was a new state plan (“GosPlan”) and all units within USSR had commitments to meet (according to this state plan) with regard to the production of products and services, including agriculture products.¹⁰⁶ The NKAO Executive Committee also took part in drafting its commitments for GosPlan.¹⁰⁷ For example, the Central Committee of Communist Party of USSR issued a decision “On measures of developments grape and wine industry in AzSSR” dated February 22, 1979; then the Central Committee of Communist Party of AzSSR made a subsequent ruling on July 3, 1982, requiring NKAO Executive Committee to fulfill a set of obligations between 1982-1986.¹⁰⁸ Another example is the creation by the Central Committee of Communist Party of AzSSR of NKAO Agriculture Corporation (*oblastnoe agropromishlennoye obyedineniye*) on the improvement of the agriculture performance in NKAO;¹⁰⁹ in fact this was the implementation of the decision of the Central Committee of Communist Party of USSR and the Council of Ministers of USSR on May 24, 1982. A further example is the joint decision by the Central

Автономной Области. Статья 8. Издание Верховного Совета Азербайджанской ССР. Азербайджанское Государственное Издательство, Баку, 1981, с.5.

103 The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR. Article 138. Articles 159-160 http://files.prestlib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf.

104 Закон Азербайджанкой Советской Социалистической Республики о Нагорно-Карабахской Автономной Области. Статья 9. Издание Верховного Совета Азербайджанской ССР. Азербайджанское Государственное Издательство, Баку, 1981, сс.5-6.

105 As a difference with former Constitution there is no mention about local taxes and fees.

106 АПД УДПАР, Фонд 1, Опись 70, Дело 148, лист 40. For NKAO as for 1983 the state plane required to prepare 500 tons of agriculture products, and for 1985 as 1000 tons.

107 Decision of the Council of Ministers of AzSSR on July 16 1981 on “Draft of State Planning of Economic and Social Development of AzSSR for 1982”. The draft had to be reviewed by Central Committee of Communist Party of AzSSR and then submitted to GosPlan Agency of USSR for final approval.

108 АПД УДПАР, Фонд 1, Опись 70, Дело 100, лист 41.

109 АПД УДПАР, Фонд 1, Опись 70, Дело 80, лист 20-23.

Committee of Communist Party and Council of Ministers of AzSSR dated June 24, 1982, granting powers to kolkhozes (including NKAO) to adjust the salaries of workers who performed their duties in an exemplary fashion.¹¹⁰

Property entitlement: there was no private property in USSR. Only personal property was considered as legitimate under “socialist property” idea; personal property was limited to things for personal and indoor usage (notably, houses were not supposed to be of excessive value and enterprises were not allowed to generate income as a specific function). Only small enterprises, like haircutters or shoes-repair shops could function. The property regime was regulated by Articles 11-13 of the 1978 Constitution of AzSSR.¹¹¹ Those living in NKAO had the same property rights as other citizens in the USSR.

Security issues: The police force of NKAO was under the control of the NKAO Executive Committee, though military issues were controlled by the central Soviet authorities in Moscow. As a republic, Azerbaijan did not have its own military units.

Azerbaijan and Armenia: relations with NKAO: Given that politically and economically NKAO was linked with Azerbaijan, the majority of political and trade relations were with Azer-

baijan. There was only one highway, through Lachin, that linked NKAO with Armenia, whereas with Azerbaijan there were six. There were no administrative relations with Armenia. However, Armenia provided some books in Armenian for schools and universities. Ethnic Armenians from NKAO were frequently educated in Armenia. Taking into account that Karabakh Armenians knew the Russian language better than those who lived in Armenia, they also traveled to Russia for education.

In general, the 1978 Constitution provided for stronger autonomy in NKAO. It was able to establish mechanisms whereby the population could directly participate in the administration of AzSSR, in legislation, and in matters concerning the NKAO itself. However, the 1978 Constitution left a lot of matters for separate legislation, such as USSR laws, leaving the NKAO with only the general decisions of the NKAO Councils of People’s Deputies to make.

NKAO was represented in the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR. Based on the results of the last elections to the Supreme Soviet of AzSSR, 30 ethnic Armenians were elected as deputies, ten of whom were elected from NKAO.¹¹²

The status of NKAO continued to evolve from the day of creation and until the 1980s. But the autonomy

¹¹⁰ АПД УДПАР, Фонд 1, Опись 70, Дело 80, лист 38.

¹¹¹ The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR. Article 11-13 http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

¹¹² Азербайджанская ССР. Верховный Совет. Одиннадцатый созыв, Б., Азернеур, 1985, с. 6.

Given that politically and economically NKAO was linked with Azerbaijan, the majority of political and trade relations were with Azerbaijan. There was only one highway, through Lachin, that linked NKAO with Armenia, whereas with Azerbaijan there were six.

of the NKAO mostly functioned not through legislative and administrative ways but through party proceedings. It is noteworthy that the Decision of the Central Committee of Communist Party of AzSSR on July 28, 1981 - to strengthen public order and legality in all spheres – required local and NKAO Executive Committees to discuss the Decision and then implement it.¹¹³ At the same time, the level of autonomy of the Oblasts in the Soviet Union like NKAO were lower than those enjoyed by autonomies in several European states at the time. These disparities were also underscored by the direct command system in the Soviet Union.

Protection of minority rights in NKAO

It is clear that the status of autonomy was granted for Nagorno-Karabakh based on its ethnic Armenian majority. The aim of autonomy was not economic independence but rather to preserve and respect the ethnic differences, language and culture of Armenian population of this region. At

113 АПД УПДАР, Фонд 1, Отись 86, Дело 106, лист 96-106.

the same time there were no essential differences between an autonomous republic and autonomous oblast or kray. The differences were mainly in the names of the regulatory bodies. All autonomous units were obliged to obey the laws of USSR and the respective republic; neither autonomous republic nor oblast was able to issue its own laws on education, healthcare or employment or social security system. Autonomy was about decision-making in some areas and provided cultural self-governance, appointment of public officers, correspondence, and media and education in minority language. The common policy in the USSR on the status for territorial units was to set out common rules without taking into consideration any specific circumstances.

That is why the regulation of NKAO was very similar to those for other autonomous oblasts in USSR. Here we will review whether legal regulation of the status of the NKAO provided protection for minority rights.

The Soviet regime did not aim to remove or erase the national identities of the people of the USSR, but tried to create a “soviet people” with common ideology. At the same time the communist ideology, public administration and mentality were essential to the functioning of the USSR. Although the legislative regulations provided very broad rights and privileges for national minorities, the totalitarian communist intervention to social and

personal life greatly diffused those rights.

Thus if we are going to compare the rights provided for ethnic Armenians of NKAO with the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities¹¹⁴, we can say that from the very inception of the NKAO, certain rights such as non-discrimination (Article 4 of the Framework Convention), right to identity, namely religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage (Article 5), right to use their language, etc. were protected by Azerbaijani and Soviet laws. For example, let us briefly analyze the language rights in the case of NKAO.

As mentioned above, according to the 1970, 1979 and 1989 census data, the population of NKAO was, respectively, 80.5 percent, 75.9 percent, and 76.9 percent ethnically Armenian; 18 percent, 23 percent, and 21.5 percent ethnically Azerbaijani, and 1.3 percent, 1.1 percent, and 1.5 percent other. The percentage of Armenians in this region who considered Armenian their native tongue remained almost unchanged from 1970 to 1989: 98.25 percent (1970), 96.33 percent (1979) and 98.44 percent (1989).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. Strasbourg, 1.II.1995. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/157.htm>; Thomas Buergenthal, Dinah Shelton, David Stewart: *International Human Rights*, West Group Publication, MN 2004, 2nd Edition, page 194.

¹¹⁵ *Itogi vsesoyuznoj perepisi naseleniya 1970 goda, tom 4. Nacionalniy sostav naseleniya*, Moskva, 1973; *Chislennost i sostav naseleniya SSSR. Po danym vsesoyuznoj perepisi naseleniya 1979 goda*. Moskva, 1985; Goskomitet SSSR po statistike. *Itogi vsesoyuznoj perepisi naseleniya 1989 goda*.

However, thanks to the Russification policy that spread across all republics of the USSR, the percentage of persons who considered Russian their native tongue steadily increased. Those who did not speak Russian were de facto second-class citizens, because the cultural and linguistic situation throughout the Soviet Union made it impossible for non-Russian speakers to get good jobs in state and party institutions. This tendency can also be observed among the inhabitants of NKAO.

According to Ministry of Education data for the ten-year period between 1978 and 1988, the number of Armenian language schools in NKAO increased: they made up 62 percent of the total in 1978-1979, and 69 percent in 1988-1989. By contrast, Azerbaijani language schools made up 19 percent of the total in 1978-1979, and 23% in 1988-1989. Pupils of the Armenian language schools made up 64 percent of the total number of pupils in NKAO in 1978-1979, 60 percent in 1988-1989 (compare with data on the number of pupils of the Azerbaijani language schools: 24.6 percent of the total in 1978-1979, 24.3 percent in 1988-1989). Only the number of pupils of the Russian schools increased: they made up 11 percent of the total in 1978-1979, and then 15.5 percent in 1988-1989.¹¹⁶

Moskva, 1989.

¹¹⁶ G.Pashayeva, *From Soviet to European language policy standards: the Case of Azerbaijan*. In: *Azerbaijan Focus*, Center for Strategic Studies, 2010, 2(2), p. 140

However, as noted by Luchterhandt, "...the educational system in the Autonomous region managed to present a relatively favorable picture. The compact Armenian settlement (200 out of 215 settlements in the region were Armenian), or rather the actual separation from the residential areas of the Azerbaijanis led to the segregation of the educational system. This contributed to the situation in 1979, where 96.3 percent of the Armenian ethnic group in Nagorno-Karabakh spoke Armenian as their native language".¹¹⁷

Language rights are only one part of the minority rights package. Minority rights should be viewed among other important civil and political rights, such as right to a private life, and freedoms of religion, expression and assembly. Freedom to use their language in media, schools and correspondence, worship their religion and perform customs and cultural affairs are the most important issues for ethnic minorities.

On the subject of freedom of religion in the USSR, we should remember that based on its communist ideology, the USSR had an anti-religious policy. Muslims, Christians and Jews were limited in their freedom of religion, and atheism was promoted by the state at all levels. For example, the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of AzSSR

¹¹⁷ O.Luchterhandt. *Nagorny Karabakh's right to state independence according to international law*. Boston, 1993, pp.62-63

"On strengthening of atheistic education" (October 23, 1981)¹¹⁸ districts and oblast executive committees were tasked with various measures to stamp out religious customs, preachers, mullahs, etc.¹¹⁹

The very concept of human rights in the Soviet Union was relegated by official propaganda to the category of institutions of bourgeois law that are incompatible with socialist law. The argument was that these rights were capitalist in nature, serving as a veil for imperialistic exploitation of workers.¹²⁰ Thus, key first generation rights such as right to property, freedom of religion, freedom of expression and assembly, were limited by law due to their incompatibility with communist ideology. Notwithstanding that the basic rights and freedoms of citizens have been laid down in all the Soviet Constitutions, the communist ideology excluded other ones, including the human rights concept.

Human rights education is one of the cornerstones of a liberal society, but alien to a socialist one. Though the rights were determined in Soviet legislation, it was not possible to appeal to any judicial or other agency in order to defend one's rights by referring only to the Constitution. In order to submit such a lawsuit, complaint, or appeal accepted (even for review)

¹¹⁸ Source?

¹¹⁹ АПД УПЦАР, Фонд 1, Опусь 68, Дело 137, лист 13-21.

¹²⁰ Ayferi Göze: *Siyasal Düşünceler ve Yönetimler*, Beta Basım, İstanbul 1995, page 286.

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one needed *mandamus* provided by law. In the absence of such norms, the rights and liberties laid down in the Constitution frequently served merely as decorations.¹²¹

A comparative analysis of international legal instruments and domestic Soviet legislation shows that there is a very large discrepancy between the two. For example, such a thing as the statute on the system of *propiska* or residence permits (a product of the Stalin era in itself) had nothing in common with the norms laid down in international agreements signed by the Soviet Union and violated both the guarantees of international agreements and the Soviet constitutional guarantees on freedom of movement. Unfortunately, all contemporary efforts to curb this system failed due to the obstacles created by the security agencies of former USSR. While international legal instruments had guarantees of complete access to information and the freedom of each citizen to express his or her thoughts

121 Arkady I. Vaxberg. *Civil Rights in the Soviet Union. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 506, Human Rights around the World (Nov., 1989), pp. 111-112*

publicly, there were no authentic guarantees of freedom of speech in Soviet legislation or practice at that time.

Soviet courts had little experience of applying international human rights law, whether derived from treaties or otherwise. The idea of international law as part of the national law was not accepted in Soviet jurisprudence. To be sure, the 1977 Constitution of USSR declared that “the USSR’s relations with other states are based on . . . fulfillment in good faith of obligations arising from the generally recognized principles and rules of international law, and from the international treaties signed by the USSR”.¹²² However, under the scrutiny of the Communist Party, the Soviet courts did not have explicit authority to apply international law as a direct source of law. Rather, the 1977 USSR Constitution conferred the function of implementing international law upon the Council of Ministers of the USSR, i.e. the Government of the USSR, which was the highest executive and administrative body of state authority of the USSR¹²³ and upon the respective subsidiary organs that have competence over the subject matter in question.¹²⁴

122 *The 1977 USSR Constitution. Article 29.* <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons05.html#chap15>

123 *Ibid.*, Articles 128.

124 *See, Law on the Procedure for the Conclusion, Execution, and Denunciation of International Treaties of the USSR, art. 21, translated in W. Butler, Basic documents on the soviet legal system 290 (2d ed. 1988)*

The reluctance of Soviet Union to apply international human rights law in national tribunals may be connected to several factors. One of the reasons was that the Soviet system was hardly open to the idea of the rule of law as a control mechanism over official action; one can say that law was viewed instrumentally – as a tool for building and maintaining a socialist order.¹²⁵ Just as there was no tradition of constitutional control in the Soviet Union, the idea of applying international law to change what elites or bureaucrats would otherwise do was an alien notion. Another reason was that there was no legal culture of an independent judiciary to give effect to rules that would constrain government action. On the contrary, Soviet courts and judges typically served as adjuncts of the party apparatus. Moreover, in contrast to non-socialist countries, where direct judicial application of customary international law was already well established, Soviet courts had never applied custom as a source of law. In addition there was no overarching principle in Soviet law to resolve conflicts between international and domestic law.¹²⁶

Nonetheless, NKAO as part of AzSSR and the Soviet Union was under the same guarantees that were provided to the citizens of USSR through the appropriate constitutions. As the reg-

¹²⁵ Berman, *The Comparison of Soviet and American Law*, 34 *IND. L.J.* 559, 567 (1959).

¹²⁶ Ametistov, *Problems of Relations Between International and National Law, The Moscow Conference on Law and Economic Cooperation: Faculty Presentations* 55, 57 (1990).

ulations concerning the rights of individuals existed in the law concerning the NKAO, it is worth looking at the norms for human rights guarantees to the people in NKAO. The development of such norms can be traced through the same three Constitutions of AzSSR that have been covered above.

The constitutional law of USSR included human rights as one of its pillars. Though, as mentioned before, the rights provided to the citizens of Soviet Union were not proclaimed as such and rather called “individual” or “citizen” rights, their essence lies in the doctrine of international human rights law.

The 1927 Constitution of AzSSR regulated minority rights for the people of AzSSR. In Article 15 of this constitution norm are laid down that state: “... regardless of racial or national identity.... it is absolutely incompatible with the laws of the Republic... to create or allow any (directly or indirectly) privileges of particular nationalities... or national minorities or abuse their rights to equality...”.¹²⁷ Such a clause in the 1927 Constitution of the AzSSR at the time was progressive even compared to other states in the world. Moreover, that same Article extended the rights of the minorities to include linguistic rights, providing minorities with the right to use their language in Congresses, courts,

¹²⁷ The 1927 Constitution of the AzSSR, Article 15 http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdfhttp://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

public administration and social life as well as to be educated in their native language.¹²⁸

Some improvements came with the adoption of the 1937 Constitution of AzSSR. The rights of all citizens were reiterated in detail in Chapter XI of the aforementioned Constitution. The first were labor rights, in particular the right to work. The exercise of this right was understood as the right to the guaranteed paid job for all the citizens,¹²⁹ thus including national minorities. With it came a right to leisure and rest that have provided for the 7-hour working days, yearly paid vacations and usage of recreational infrastructure.¹³⁰ Then a right to social security came that included pensions and other social advantages, and the right to education that included compulsory 8th-grade education with forms of higher education guaranteed to all people without discrimination.¹³¹

The 1937 Constitution provided stricter non-discrimination norms. Discrimination based on nationality or race was prohibited with legal responsibility guaranteed to the perpetrators. The simple privileges on the grounds of nationality were considered punishable by law.¹³² Thus Ar-

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *The 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR; Article 125.* http://files.prestlib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, Article 126.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Articles 127, 128.

¹³² *Ibid.*, Article 130.

menians of NKAO as a national minority have retained their protection constitutionally.

The 1937 Constitution of AzSSR reaffirmed the religious freedoms and the secularity of the state;¹³³ at the same time it provided wider guarantees of freedom of speech and expression, freedom of press, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of street demonstrations and rallies, etc. These freedoms were to be guaranteed by equal access to resources.¹³⁴ Moreover, this constitution touched upon guarantees towards the person. It provided for the right to individual integrity, prohibiting arbitrary arrest or any arrest other than by the decision of the court or sanctions from prosecutor. The same applied to the inviolability of the domestic dwellings of the persons and their correspondence.¹³⁵

The 1978 Constitution of AzSSR made even more considerable progress as a human rights instrument. It must be noted that at that point Soviet Union was party to the 1975 Helsinki Act, which included significant human rights commitments, thus necessitating the changes in the constitutional law of USSR.

This particular constitution broadened the subject of non-discrimination from merely the grounds of race and nationality to sex, education, lan-

¹³³ *The 1937 Constitution of the AzSSR. Article 131.* http://files.prestlib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 132, 133.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 134, 135.

guage, religion, activities and even place of residency.¹³⁶ Thus it applied the non-discrimination clause to linguistic and religious minorities. It reaffirmed the equal rights of men and women¹³⁷ and of all nationalities in the Union, specifically addressing national minorities.¹³⁸ In addition it guaranteed all people (including foreigners) to the defense of their rights in a court of justice.¹³⁹

The 1978 Constitution provided wider human rights guarantees than any of the former constitutions, though many of the political rights were avoided, focusing instead on social, economic, civil and cultural rights. The 1978 Constitution, like the previous ones, prohibited discrimination towards any nationality or group; the basic law contained norms prohibiting discrimination and encouraging subjects to disregard grounds of nationality and race in any part of social and political life.

As we can see, the same laws applied to the NKAO and the national minority of Armenians came under their scope.

¹³⁶ The 1978 Constitution of the AzSSR. Article 32. http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_ru/atr_kons.pdf

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Article 33.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 34.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 35.

The 1937 Constitution provided stricter non-discrimination norms. Discrimination based on nationality or race was prohibited with legal responsibility guaranteed to the perpetrators.

Conclusion

Soviet autonomy in Nagorno-Karabakh was a myth by contemporary standards. It is obvious from the declared rights that were not actually implemented in practical terms, from the illusionary separation of powers that never worked due to the party control, etc. However one thing is certain: Armenians and Azerbaijanis were able to live and develop peacefully for several decades of Soviet

The 1978 Constitution of AzSSR made even more considerable progress as a human rights instrument. It must be noted that at that point Soviet Union was party to the 1975 Helsinki Act, which included significant human rights commitments, thus necessitating the changes in the constitutional law of USSR.

rule, without many of the domestic problems that affected the whole of the Soviet Union.

In all three periods of the development of autonomy we can see that it was managed by the same system of governmental bodies; their names were changed but the essence of their function was not. From the Congress of Soviets up until the NKAO Soviet of People's Deputies, the legislative power was mostly illusory, and decisions and legislation were adopted on the basis of the party arrangements, as in the rest of the USSR.

At the same time, the executive bodies were the actual bearers of state power. Until 1936, departments and their Commissars dealt with all administrative matters, and then until 1988 the same role was carried out by the Council of Ministers and Executive Committees. These bodies exercised the actual effective functions of governance at the domestic level.

When it came to the judiciary, NKAO had its own system of district courts and acquired its own court of appeals at a relatively early stage (in 1925). However, it must be said that throughout this whole period of autonomy, the supreme body of justice was the Supreme Court of AzSSR and the final appeals could only be made there. At the same time, the Chairman of the local "Oblast Court" was a member of the Supreme Court of AzSSR and the judiciary in the autonomy was usually carried out in Armenian.

Throughout the stages of its development, the NKAO was partly in charge of economic matters. In the 1923-1936

period, the Department of Economy was in charge of the implementation of the development plans and used the allocation from the unified budget of AzSSR. After 1936, the budget of the NKAO was separated from the total budget of AzSSR, although its spending was still under strict control, from both Baku and Moscow. After 1978, NKAO was given its own plans of economic and social developments, increasing its economic independence, at least relatively speaking. Generally when it comes to the economic developments during the later stages of development, NKAO

However one thing is certain: Armenians and Azerbaijanis were able to live and develop peacefully for several decades of Soviet rule, without many of the domestic problems that affected the whole of the Soviet Union.

was doing even better than the rest of AzSSR and many other places in the Soviet Union.

Nor was the NKAO denied access to political participation. Since its establishment, it was allowed to send one representative to the Council of Nationalities, and after 1936, this was extended to five. In the final stages of the development of NKAO one of its representatives was one the three Deputy of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of

AzSSR, who had a right to participate in all decisions that concerned autonomy.

At the same time, the administrative division and the borders of autonomy remained within the competence of the central government. Essentially all the bodies of the central government concerning legislative, executive and judicial authorities possessed the rights to overrule illegal decisions of the corresponding branch of bodies of NKAO.

Moreover, both the decision-making process as well as the implementation and enforcement procedures were monitored and controlled by the Communist Party. The decisions of legislative and executive bodies were legal outputs of the behind-the-scenes decision-making process. That process consisted of correspondence between the local and central authorities on the Party levels that then were transformed into actual decisions.

However, while the system failed to truly recognize the importance of self-governance for minorities, the same level of party scrutiny applied to all the republics of the Soviet Union as well as to the smaller entities. The denial of effective self-governance was due to the general framework and policy of USSR, and not based on any kind of ethnic discrimination.

Though in terms of infrastructure NKAO was not closely linked to Armenia, due to the fact that Soviet

Union was considered a single state, in cultural terms there were no barriers in regard to NKAO's interaction with the Armenian SSR.

At the same time, in the final stages of its development, NKAO was economically stronger than the AzSSR. The demographic situation was mostly stable and the vast majority of population of NKAO was Armenian. There is no evidence of a policy that sought to change the demographic situation.

Thus, it can be concluded that the reasons for the failure of autonomy was not discrimination on the part of the central Azerbaijani government, nor the lack of access to minority rights, but rather the Soviet system of administration and Armenia's separatist goals.

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U.S. influence in Central Asia:

*Causes of its decline, and tools
through which to understand it*

**Graham
Lee***

Abstract

The following paper assesses the United States' diminishing influence in Central Asia, contrasted with the recent history of successful Russian and Chinese engagement in the region. It argues that one of the United States' key failings is its use of overly-ideological foreign policy, designed primarily to win favor with the domestic American public, rather than for its chances of success 'on the ground' in Central Asia.

The paper examines the dismal prospects for the United States' "New Silk Road" initiative, and the causes of underperformance in past U.S. projects in the region. It also examines case studies of Russia's effective use of hard power, and effective commercial engagement with regional actors by China. In conclusion, it suggests that Western observers should employ better analogues when analyzing corrupt, patronage-based and centralized Central Asian power structures, in order to more effectively gauge a policy's chances of success prior to implementation. It discusses the merits of comparison between Central Asian elites and the 20th century Italian-American mafia for this purpose.

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Many commentators have suggested that the United States' influence in Central Asia is waning from its peak in the 1990s. "U.S. engagement in Central Asia is no longer a given. It's not something we can take for granted, nor is it something that is necessarily desired by the states of Central Asia – specifically, by the leadership of these countries," according to a recent address by Roger Kangas, Professor of Central Asian Studies at the U.S. National Defense University. Kangas went on to argue that the United States' "freedom agenda" in Central Asia has contributed to its diminished standing with the region's leaders, and the American diplomats "should no longer assume that Central Asian leaders see U.S.-style market/democracy as a development model worth emulating."¹

The United States' "freedom agenda" in Central Asia is most aptly demonstrated by the New Silk Road initiative. The policy, formally adopted by the State Department in mid-2011, envisions regional transformation achieved by opening up closed Central Asian states to liberalized trade regimes and free market economics, and providing broad-based benefits to ordinary Central Asian citizens in the process. According to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, this means "removing the bureaucratic barriers and other impediments

to the free flow of goods and people. It means casting aside the outdated trade policies that we all still are living with and adopting new rules for the 21st century."²

However, many analysts have argued that the New Silk Road policy rests on flawed assumptions about the incentive mechanisms that drive political elites in Central Asia. Specifically, the assumption that elites will be motivated to support the initiative because of the benefits that it could offer to their citizenry.

This author recently produced a research paper for the Open Society Initiative, looking at the ways in which the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) of U.S. military supplies to Afghanistan has affected ordinary Central Asian citizens. The NDN, stretching from Europe through the Caucasus and Russia to Central Asia, is often seen as a precursor to the New Silk Road. According to theory, it lays the foundations for the latter by improving regional transport processes, and by acting as a 'proof of concept' for large-scale regional transshipment. The author's research, however, indicated that the NDN, over the three years of its operation, has brought almost no benefit to Central Asian citizens, and that the vast majority of its economic benefits flow straight to regional state coffers, and the wallets of government officials and members

¹ *Central Asia: Washington Must Adapt to Diminished Role in Central Asia – Expert, Eurasia Net, 4th December 2012, at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66253>*

² *Transcript available at http://blogs.state.gov/index.php/site/entry/travel_diary_india_us_vision*

NDN, over the three years of its operation, has brought almost no benefit to Central Asian citizens, and that the vast majority of its economic benefits flow straight to regional state coffers, and the wallets of government officials and members of the elite

of the elite (by fair means or foul).³

The concept of trade liberalization for its own sake, whilst closely aligned with American ideology, seems to have little purchase with Central Asian policymakers. Moreover, there appears to be a gap between the New Silk Road rhetoric that US diplomats use in public, and what they say in private. “None of them really believe in the New Silk Road,” a senior civil society Central Asia analyst recently told the author. “When you get them alone, off the record, they tell you a very different story. They just promote the New Silk Road because they have to – it’s official U.S. policy.”

Referring to the United States’ woes in Afghanistan, Myles Smith, an independent analyst, summed up U.S. enthusiasm for regional trade integration in a different way: “‘New Silk Road’ sounds a whole lot better than ‘Retreat’.”

³ *The New Silk Road and the Northern Distribution Network: A Golden Road to Central Asian Trade Reform?* Open Society Foundations, October 2012. <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/new-silk-road-and-northern-distribution-network-golden-road-central-asian-trade-reform>

Russian and Chinese Influence in Central Asia

In contrast to U.S. policy in Central Asia, modern Russian and Chinese engagement is largely bereft of the desire to steer the region’s ideology.

In the Russian case, Central Asia policy seems to focus on maintaining physical security, through the presence of military bases and cooperation between regional security services, on keeping transport corridors and energy supplies open to Russian interests, and on promoting the rights of Russian citizens in Central Asia. These aims are pursued with local leaders through realpolitik incentives and counter-incentives.

The states of Central Asia, financially supported by Moscow for much of the Soviet period, still receive significant trade and budgetary subsidies by Russia, but these subsidies have been temporarily withdrawn in the past, to great effect. The ouster of Kyrgyz President Bakiev in 2010 was preceded by a sharp deterioration in relations between Bakiev’s regime and Moscow, due to the Kyrgyz government’s perceived misuse of Russian budgetary subsidies and broken promises over the closure of the U.S. Manas Airbase. In response, Russia withdrew its fuel subsidies for Kyrgyzstan, causing prices to spike at the pumps, and launched a fiercely negative media campaign against Bakiev. Within a few weeks, he was forced to flee the country on a wave of public anger.

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To take another example of Russian hard power at work, economic pressure was brought to bear on Tajikistan in 2011, when Dushanbe jailed a Russian and an Estonian airline pilot for eight-and-a-half years each, accusing them of smuggling equipment and illegally entering the country. After the verdict, Russian authorities began to deport Tajik migrant workers in Moscow. Tajikistan, the poorest of the ex-Soviet countries, is reliant on foreign labor remittances for nearly half of its GDP, and the economic pressure applied caused the Tajik government to reduce the pilots' sentence to time served. Within a month of being jailed, the pilots returned home as free men.

Compared to Russia, China prefers to tread a far less political path in Central Asia, but one which is no less pragmatic. In a leaked diplomatic cable from February 2009, the U.S. Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan relays a conversation with the Chinese Ambassador, Zhang Yannian, which gives much insight into Chinese attitudes towards the region:

Asked if he had any concerns about the Kyrgyz Republic falling ever deeper into the Russian sphere of influence and whether China had any interest in countering this, [the Chinese Ambassador] answered that Kyrgyzstan was already in that sphere, and China had no interest in balancing that influence. "Kyrgyzstan is Russia's neighbor," he intoned (somewhat expansively, since Kyrgyzstan does not share a border with the Russian Federation -- though it does share a border with China). ... As for China's interests in the Kyrgyz Republic, he stated flatly: "We have only commercial interests here. We want to increase investment and trade. We have no interest in politics."⁴

China is Kyrgyzstan's biggest trading partner, and Chinese actions in Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere in Central Asia, bear out the ambassador's claim that his country's interest in the region is first and foremost a commercial one. Amongst the most visible signs of Chinese commercial influence are the profusion of Chinese goods in Central Asia's bazaars, and the ubiquity of Chinese road contractors repairing regional highways. On Central Asian politics, conversely, China is often conspicuously silent.

⁴ The cable can be downloaded here: <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/02/09BISHKEK135.html>

The need for accurate analogues to appraise Central Asia policy

As discussed above, Russia and China are both pragmatic in their dealings with Central Asia, and of course are geographically proximate to the region. The West, and in particular the United States, are geographically and culturally far more removed. It is perhaps paradoxical, therefore, that Western attitudes toward Central Asia are much more ideological than those of the region's neighbors, whose inherent understanding of Central Asian power dynamics is presumably greater.

For any policy to succeed, the society onto which it is projected must be capable of absorbing the ideals contained within it. The society's structure must be conducive to the change. Whether the trade liberalization espoused in the New Silk Road policy can be adopted by Central Asia remains to be seen, but widespread skepticism by analysts, and early empirical data, suggest that it cannot.

Considering the significant resources which are invested into such policies, there is a clear need for reliable analytical tools through which to appraise their chances of success prior to implementation. In the case of the Western world, it would be desirable to have a simple and familiar analogue that people who are not experts in post-Soviet power hierarchies could apply to their government's Central Asia policies. Given diplo-

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mats' private doubts over the New Silk Road's viability on the ground, it seems likely that the American voting public are the initiative's real intended audience, and hence they are the group who most need to scrutinize it.

Each of the Central Asian states is characterized by secretive, patronage-based elites which dominate the ruling tiers of society and operate largely outside the law. In the case of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, these elites are highly centralized, focused on the office of the President. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the structure is more fractious, with many different clan-based elites occupying the ruling tiers alongside each other (and continuously jockeying for position).

The United States may not have to look beyond its own recent history for an analogue to such power structures. The Italian-American mafia of 20th century New York, for example, displayed all of the characteristics listed above. Moreover, the analogue is easily accessible, given the profusion of mafia studies in American popular culture – for example, Mario

Puzo's famous novel *The Godfather*, and subsequent films.

The similarities between the Italian-American mafia and the ruling elites of Central Asia have not gone unnoticed by other regional commentators. The former husband of the President of Kazakhstan's daughter played on the link for the title of his exposé novel, *The Godfather-in-Law*.

Lest the author of this piece be accused of flippancy, one should bear in mind the value of simple analogy in shaping popular opinion, and the power of popular opinion to shape Western foreign policy. Moreover, lest the author be accused of academic sloppiness, the following three examples are offered to test the analogue.

Firstly, there is the case of capacity-building programs for Central Asian officials. The U.S. has been engaged for many years in professionalization initiatives, anti-corruption programs and human rights training in the region, but with little in the way of tangible results to show for it.

Whilst Western reformers often characterize Central Asian corruption as a matter of low level officials extracting petty bribes, and hence in need of on-the-job training to mend their ways, many analysts paint a very different picture, of mutually-supporting corruption at all levels of the state hierarchy, highly analogous to a mafia family. After painstaking research, Dr. Johan Engvall concluded that in

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Kyrgyzstan "corruption is not an external problem [for the state] but the very method of governance."⁵

To take a concrete example of the phenomenon, one can study the USAID-funded Regional Trade Liberalization and Customs project, which ran from 2007 until 2011. Myles Smith, who worked extensively on the project, relayed to the author that "The program was a failure. In part, this was because it assumed local governments had an incentive to curb corruption. In fact, in most cases, the very opposite was true."

Returning to the Italian-American mafia analogy, if one were to imagine neat-suited consultants explaining to low-level henchmen the benefits of renouncing corruption and patronage, the absurdity of the program outlined above becomes immediately obvious. Moreover, it is demonstrably absurd even for someone without specialist

⁵ In Kyrgyzstan, corruption is not a problem for the state, it IS the state. Turkish Weekly, 31st December 2011, at <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/129152/-in-kyrgyzstan-corruption-is-not-a-problem-for-the-state-it-is-the-state-.html>

knowledge of Central Asia.

Secondly, there is the case of regional integration and trade liberalization, as espoused in the New Silk Road policy. Anyone trying to encourage the archetypal mafia family into greater integration between their ‘turf’ and that of adjacent mafias would undoubtedly meet with failure, since mafia groups’ power bases come not from integration, but from isolating and harnessing the resources under their control. It is yet to be seen whether the New Silk Road will be a success or a failure, but early indications are not hopeful. If the initiative fails, then the mafia analogue will have held true in this case as well.

Lastly, one can examine a case where an outside actor has succeeded in achieving their aims in Central Asia: Russia securing the release of two airline pilots from jail in Tajikistan in 2011. The release was brought about when Russia began to deport Tajik migrant workers, inflicting severe economic harm on ordinary Tajik citizens. Here too the mafia analogue holds. The archetypal Don, or Khan (or ‘head of a patronage network’, as modern parlance has it), is not divorced from the concerns of his people. Rather, he may be motivated by the esteem he gains from helping them against an external oppressor, provided that it does not damage his own interests to do so. For President Rahmon of Tajikistan, the release of the two pilots did exactly that: it al-

layed the hardship which ordinary citizens experienced, and did not harm his interests – his power base or his finances – to do so. Were the mafia analogue to have been used to test the Russian plan before it was implemented, it would have correctly predicted success.

Of course the analogue described above is not perfect, but neither is it a meaningless flight of fancy. Rather, it seems to be a reasonably accurate, and easy to apply, rule of thumb for foreign

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policy in Central Asia. Its main limitation is that it only predicts what may and may not work for outside actors hoping to further their own ends in the region. Were we to ask instead what policies might bring real and lasting improvements to the lives of ordinary citizens in Central Asia, the answer would be infinitely harder to determine.

The Decline of Russian Power in the Middle East

**Stephen
Blank***

Abstract

This article provides a critical analysis of Russia's political involvements in the Middle East, and examines the successes and failures of Russia's policies in the region. The article argues that Russia has recently shown, particularly through its Syrian policy, that it is still a diplomatically skilled and politically powerful state in international politics, and that it continues to define the Middle East along Soviet lines, namely as an area of the world close to Russia's borders. This has led Russia to develop bilateral relations with the countries in the region, and as such, Moscow feels that it must get involved in the problems of individual states. By the same token, Russia maintains a rivalry with the U.S. in building relations with or conducting interventions in regional countries, indicating a continuum of the traditional strategy. The paper then provides an assessment of Russia's failures in its bilateral relations with Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Iran respectively. The article concludes that Russia is failing to convince Middle Eastern states to listen to its advice.

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Observers of Syria's seemingly endless ordeal may be impressed by the single-minded obstinacy of Russian diplomatic activity that has frustrated a UN or other foreign intervention in the civil war. Certainly some Russian commentators are impressed by this obstinacy, and deem it a highly successful, even masterful, display of diplomatic ability and of Russia's power in world politics.¹ Indeed, superficially it would appear that Moscow has successfully tied the international community in knots regarding Syria, and demonstrated a commitment to its ally and to its principles that others might envy. But a deeper look might suggest that the absence of foreign intervention in Syria may stem as much from external vacillation, caution about intervention in a murky civil war, the incoherence of the opposition to the Assad regime, and indecisiveness among potential actors as Moscow's intransigence. Furthermore, in Syria's nightmare one may also discern the larger theme of the ongoing retreat of Russian power in the Middle East. In other words, the absence of foreign intervention may owe little to Russia's tenacious opposition.

It bears noting that Russia has consistently claimed not only that it opposes externally induced regime change and insists on a negotiated settlement between Syrian President Bashar al-

Assad and the rebels -which it is willing to mediate, but that it also wants and has advised Assad repeatedly to make concessions and reforms that the opposition had been demanding.² In a recent interview, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev stated his belief that Assad's obstinacy on this point represented a grave mistake.³ More recently, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov angrily denounced the insurgents' "obsession" with dethroning Assad which, allegedly has become the major obstacle to a negotiated peace.⁴ Yet Lavrov and the Russian government have also repeatedly made clear that they not only want Assad to stay but that even if they suggested otherwise he would not heed their advice. Therefore they will not press the issue.⁵ In other words, for all its talk of principle, Moscow has all along insisted on Assad's continuation in power and sold arms to one side in a civil war, a position that precludes its ability a mediating role despite statements of its readiness to

² Ellen Barry and Kareem Fahim, "Russia Calls for Meeting With Syrian Opposition," *New York Times*, December 28, 2012, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/29/world/europe/russia-urges-assad-to-negotiate-with-his-opponents.html>; Contributor, "Russia's Intransigence," *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 5, 2013, at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russias-intransigence.aspx?pageID=449&nID=38378&NewsCatID=396>

³ "Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's Interview With CNN," www.government.ru, January 28, 2013

⁴ Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov's Introductory Speech and Answers to Questions From the Media During a Press Conference on the Results of the Activity of Russian Diplomacy in 2012, January 23, 2013", at www.mid.ru

⁵ Trenin, p. 22.

¹ Dmitri Trenin, *The Mythical Alliance: Russia's Syria Policy*, Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, www.carnegie.ru, 2013, p. 16

play such a role.⁶ Equally, Moscow's insistence on Assad retaining power indicates that despite its invocations of principle, the real issue for Russia is power, not principle.

Thus, despite its vaunted diplomatic success at the UN in preventing intervention, neither of the Syrian sides has heeded any of Russia's proposals or demands. Certainly Moscow has failed to persuade Assad to act in this direction, despite providing his regime with arms, money, and according to unconfirmed rebel charges, even tactical direction of some Syrian government operations.⁷ Indeed, even though Moscow will continue to provide Assad with weapons - despite its professed irritation at other states supplying weapons to the rebels—Assad has simply refused to heed Russian calls for reforms and concessions the insurgents. Instead he still considers them criminals.⁸

Neither is this failure of Russian diplomacy confined to Syria. Despite repeated calls upon the Palestinians to unite and upon Israel to stop build-

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁷ Simon Shuster, "Is Russia Running a Secret Supply Route to Arm Syria's Assad?" *Time Magazine*, November 29, 2012, *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* <http://world.time.com/2012/11/29/is-russia-running-a-secret-supply-route-to-arm-syrias-assad/#ixzz2H9L3F9Pl>; "Flight Records Say Russia Sent Syria Tons of Cash," *Pro Publica*, November 25, 2012, <http://www.propublica.org/article/flight-records-list-russia-sending-tons-of-cash-to-syria>; Julian Borger, "Russian Military Presence in Syria Poses Challenge to US-Led Intervention," *The Guardian*, December 23, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/23/syria-crisis-russian-military-presence>

⁸ "In Rare Speech, Assad Rejects Dialogue With Syria 'Puppet' Opposition," *www.haaretz.com*, January 6, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/in-rare-speech-assad-rejects-dialogue-with-syria-puppet-opposition.premium-1.492226>

Certainly Moscow has failed to persuade Assad to act in this direction, despite providing his regime with arms, money, and according to unconfirmed rebel charges, even tactical direction of some Syrian government operations.

ing new settlements and negotiate with the Palestinians, neither side has paid Moscow the slightest attention. Certainly the Quartet of powers of which it is a member is distinguished primarily by its inability to get anyone to take it seriously.⁹ Yet Moscow continues to support both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) while also building expanding commercial and political ties with Israel. While everyone benefits economically from these Russo-Israeli ties, none of the parties has heeded Russia regarding security issues. Furthermore, despite its valuable trade relations with Israel, the Israeli government openly views Russia's support for Hamas and Hezbollah - to whom Russian arms are going (surely with Moscow's knowledge and complicity) - as a classic example of a double standard whereby Moscow denounces terrorism but supports its proxies as being some-

⁹ Nathalie Tocci, *The EU, the Middle East Quartet and (In) effective Multilateralism*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2009, www.iai.it/pdf/Mercury/Mercury-epaper_09.pdf; Nathalie Tocci, "The Middle East Quartet and (In) effective Multilateralism," *Middle East Journal*, LXVII, NO. 1, Winter, 2013, pp. 29-44

thing other than terrorists.¹⁰

For example, Russia has consistently maintained that the Palestinians should unite and that therefore Hamas should take part in the discussions leading to the conference and ultimately as a member of the unified Palestinian delegation. As Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov said in 2007, “National unity in Palestine is the main determining condition for an independent Palestinian state.”¹¹ Consequently Moscow has regularly expressed its desire for this unification and its dismay whenever the perennial internecine strife between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas undermines this unity. Accordingly, Russia is constantly urging Hamas to support the PA, but it deals openly with Hamas while advocating Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with the PA and Hamas’ participation in negotiations with Israel.¹²

However, in pursuing this goal Russia has also had to maintain, in open defiance of the facts, that Hamas is not a terrorist organization. Since 2006 when President Putin invited Hamas’ leadership to Moscow after their elec-

¹⁰ Stephen Blank, “Putin Embraces Double Standard, in Middle East Crisis, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 20, 2006

¹¹ Marianna Belenkaya, “Russia Hopes Palestinian Unity Will be Restored,” *Moscow, 1 RIA Novosti, in English*, August 1, 2007, *FBIS SOV*, August 1, 2007

¹² Vladimir Radyuhin, “Russia Backs Abbas, Talks to Hamas,” *The Hindu*, August 1, 2007; Avi Isacharoff, “Hamas official: Russia invited us to Moscow in coming days,” *Ha’Aretz.com*, August 3, 2007; *Moscow, Interfax, in English*, January 21, 2008, *FBIS SOV*, January 21, 2008; *Moscow, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Internet Version, in English*, January 23, 2008, *FBIS SOV*, January 23, 2008

Russia has consistently maintained that the Palestinians should unite and that therefore Hamas should take part in the discussions leading to the conference and ultimately as a member of the unified Palestinian delegation.

tion victory, Russian authorities have allegedly tried to convince Hamas to renounce terrorism, recognize Israel, and abide by all previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Yet they imposed no conditions on the visit and seem unfazed by the fact that Hamas’ leadership continues to express its determination to destroy Israel.¹³ Putin even stated earlier that Russia did not recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization on its list of such groups. This emphasis on getting Hamas and the PA to unite continues to be a key point in Russian diplomacy.¹⁴ Yet nothing has changed Hamas’ outlook or *modus operandi*.

There are also other less obvious reasons for Russia’s steadfast pursuit of engagement with Hamas and Hezbollah. According to the influential Senator and Chairman of the Federation Council’s Foreign Affairs Committee, Mikhail Margelov, the idea that Rus-

¹³ “Moscow Hopes Hamas Will Sign Up To Previous Agreements,” *Interfax*, March 3, 2006; “No Pressure Exerted While Discussing ‘Road Map-Hamas Delegation Member,’” *Interfax*, March 3, 2006

¹⁴ “Turkey, Russia Call for Talks With Hamas,” *China Daily*, May 13, 2010, www.englihs.cri.cn/6966/2010/05/13/189s/569393

sia has good relations with Hamas is merely an illusion. The real reason for opening those ties is that Moscow cannot afford to forego contacts with any potentially important player lest it be deprived of leverage over them, and find itself reacting to other players' initiatives. This posture highlights Russia's regional weakness, not its strength. Margelov stated that,

We are in communication, which is mostly of an informational nature for us. When there is a player on the political arena, it would be just too fantastic for those backing this player if we allowed them a monopoly in using it. Therefore, it is better to speak with HAMAS directly than to depend on the Iranians or Syrians, who will dictate to us their conditions for talking with HAMAS. But we are under no illusion about the fact that HAMAS is heterogeneous: in Gaza, in a more subdued state in the West Bank, and in Syria.¹⁵

But it is also clear that there are factions in Russia who would, if they could, go further in supporting Hamas. In 2006-7 Chief of Staff General Yuri Baluevsky even intimated that Russia might sell weapons to Hamas, only to be corrected by Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, who

¹⁵ Shimon Briman, "Interview with Senator Mikhail Magelov," *www.Izrus.com in Russian*, January 27, 2010, FBIS SOV, January 27, 2010

When there is a player on the political arena, it would be just too fantastic for those backing this player if we allowed them a monopoly in using it. Therefore, it is better to speak with HAMAS directly than to depend on the Iranians or Syrians, who will dictate to us their conditions for talking with HAMAS.

stated that Russia would only do so with Israel's approval.¹⁶ Indeed Israel's intelligence community reported in 2010 that despite the 2008-9 war with Israel, Hamas had amassed 5000 rockets and extended some of these rockets that it acquired from Iran. Its report concluded that Hamas has not only rearmed but is looking to extend the range of its missiles and fire multiple tubes from vehicles. Hamas has also acquired Russian SA-7 and SA-14 anti-air missiles and AT-3 and AT-5 anti-tank weapons, either from Iran or Syria. As a result the military assessment was that another war with Hamas in 2010 was likely, but it came instead in 2012.¹⁷ Of course, it is inconceivable that Moscow did not know about these transfers to Hamas or similar ones to Hezbollah.

¹⁶ "Hard Talk Awaits Lavrov in DC", at www.kommersant.com/page.asp?id=654562, March 3, 2006

¹⁷ "Israel Intel: Hamas Has Amasses 5,000 Rockets Since 2009 War", at www.worldtribune.com, January 28, 2010

Meanwhile Hamas has continued to conduct terrorist operations and rocket attacks against Israel despite Russia's urging to desist.¹⁸ But none of this has changed Russia's outlook on Palestinian unity and the need for Hamas to play a role in the talks. After all, its sponsorship of Hamas helps ensure that it has cards to play in the peace process and that its voice will be heard there. The Hamas-Russia relationship within Moscow's overall framework of relations here is quite revealing. Russia regards its contacts with Hamas as its "contribution" to the Peace Process and will continue pursuing these contacts regardless of Hamas' inflexibility on Israel.¹⁹ When President Medvedev met with Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal in Damascus, he urged not just reconciliation with the PA but also Israeli engagement with Hamas.

Russia regards its contacts with Hamas as its "contribution" to the Peace Process and will continue pursuing these contacts regardless of Hamas' inflexibility on Israel.

While this may have surprised Israel, it is a consistent point in Russian poli-

18 "Hamas Chief: 'No 'Prospect' of Israeli-Arab Peace Deals", at www.einnews.com, February 9, 2010

19 Moscow, *Interfax-AVN Online*, in English, December 9, 2009, *FBIS SOV*, December 9, 2009

cy.²⁰ And Israeli commentators know it. Thus Zvi Magen observed that what disturbs Russia about Hamas is not its attacks on Israel but its refusal to unite with the PA. Magen observed that Moscow clearly distinguishes between internal terrorism, which it regards as an exclusively internal matter, and groups like Hamas that it wishes to cultivate and with whom it aims to maintain contacts. Therefore, and in order to safeguard its ability to maintain contacts with everyone, Moscow wants to prevent further Hamas rocket attacks on Israel. But this is essentially irrelevant to the issue of terrorism in its eyes.²¹

Russia has advanced numerous reasons for inviting Hamas to Moscow and for, since then, conducting an annual round of meetings with Foreign Minister Lavrov and its representatives. In 2006, after Hamas' election victory, Putin said that Hamas had won a democratic election that Moscow was bound to respect, that it had never recognized Hamas as a terrorist movement, and that Russia tries to work with all sides.²² It is more accurate, of course, to say that Putin saw in Hamas' election win in 2005 an American defeat and opportunity for Russia to make gains at Wash-

20 "Israel Slams Medvedev's Hamas Call," www.aljazeera.net, www.einnews.com, May 13, 2010

21 Zvi Magen, "Russia Between Terrorism and Foreign Policy," Tel Aviv, *Institute for National Security Studies*, in English, April 18, 2010, *FBIS SOV*, April 21, 2010

22 Moscow, *Rossiya TV*, in Russian, February 9, 2006, *FBIS SOV*, February 9, 2006; Pavel K. Baev, "Moscow's Initiative: Your Terrorist is Our Dear Guest," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, February 13, 2006

Hamis is also perfectly willing to call the Chechen insurgency a purely domestic Russian affair.

ington's expense.²³ So today, while Foreign Minister Lavrov has consistently urged Hamas to reconcile with the PA, to adopt a more flexible tone with Israel, and to cease overtly radical acts, he has failed to achieve any of those objectives.²⁴

Meanwhile Hamas understands Russia's game and flatters Moscow's desire to be seen as an important player in the Middle East. Hamas' leaders invariably argue that Russia can play an important role in the Middle East settlement, that Moscow's invitation to talk exposes the bankruptcy of the U.S. position in the Middle East, and most importantly that there is a need for a power like Russia to balance out the U.S. in the Middle East.²⁵ Hamas is also perfectly willing to call the Chechen insurgency a purely domestic Russian affair.²⁶ All this is music to

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Russia to Urge Hamas to Abandon Radicalism-Russian ME Envoy, www.kuna.net.kw, February 10, 2006; "Lavrov Asks Mish'al To Sign Reconciliation Agreement Quickly. PA Rejects Arab Pressure Before HAMA Sings Egyptian Document," *Gaza, Qudsnet in Arabic*, February 9, 2010, *FBIS SOV*, February 9, 2010; *Moscow, ITAR-TASS*, in *English* February 8, 2010, *FBIS SOV*, February 8, 2010;

²⁵ *Gaza*. *Al-Aqsa Satellite Channel Television*, in *Arabic*, February 13, 2010, *FBIS SOV*, February 13, 2010; *Moscow, ITAR-TASS*, in *English*, February 8, 2010, *FBIS SOV*, February 8, 2010; *Moscow, ITAR-TASS*, in *English*, November 7, 2008, *FBIS SOV*, February 7, 2008

²⁶ "Hamas Leader Says Chechnya Is Russia's 'Internal Problem,' Chechen Rebels Protest," *Associated Press*, March 5, 2006

Moscow's ears. Nonetheless, as Russian journalist Vitaly Portnikov wrote, all Moscow achieved is to show that Hamas can come to Moscow and utter its anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli screed with impunity.²⁷

Russia apparently believes that it has the Hamas card to play in the negotiations around the Peace Process, and that this confers upon it the role and status of a key player. Moreover, its position as a sponsor of Palestinian unity, and a player that can talk to everyone increases its credibility across the larger Arab world. Thus King Abdullah of Jordan has remarked that Russia has an important role to play in creating a Palestinian state.²⁸ But Russia's justifications for this position are incredibly hypocritical and can only make sense in the Realpolitik mentality that it has developed. Thus in 2007, the Russian ambassador to Israel, Andrei Demidov, stated that Israel must talk with Hamas no matter what it does. But when asked about Russia's refusal to talk with Chechen terrorists he stated that this is because the Chechen problem is an internal: "We decide how to settle the problem." Moreover, in complete defiance of the facts, he claimed that Moscow has settled Chechnya by peaceful means and created a government, parliament, and judicial system there. He even recommended that Is-

²⁷ Vitaly Portnikov, "Promises to Palestine," *Moscow*, www.polikom.ru, in *Russian*, January 11, 2008, *FBIS SOV*, January 11, 20-08

²⁸ *Moscow, Interfax*, in *English*, March 10, 2010, *FBIS SOV*, March 10, 2010

rael learn from Russia's success.²⁹

This breathtakingly hypocritical statement reveals the true Realpolitik calculations behind Russian policy along with its implicit belief that Israel is not truly a sovereign state while Russia is. Thus while Russia's sovereignty is inviolable, it can tell Israel to negotiate with terrorists who seek its destruction. Not surprisingly, Israel has replied that Hamas is no different than the Chechen terrorists and just as it supported Russia against them it demands Russian support against Hamas.³⁰ But this line falls on deaf ears in Moscow.

Similarly Moscow's efforts to win friends and influence in Iraq at Washington's expense through large-scale arms sales has seriously misfired. Iraq cancelled the deal it had only just negotiated on the grounds of corruption.³¹ Finally Iran has ignored Russia's calls for Tehran to shut down its nuclear project. Yet Russia continues to act as Iran's defense lawyer in the 5+1 negotiating process and has even announced its willingness to renegotiate energy and arms deals with Iran.³² Meanwhile its government also de-

nies that Iran has a military nuclear program.³³ Iran, for its part, has again indicated its desire for energy, space, and other deals with Russia upon whom it clearly counts to block further international sanctions.³⁴ Meanwhile, Russian relations with Turkey have declined, not least over differences concerning Syria.³⁵

This perspective shows that Russia is subsidizing or rewarding many Middle Eastern governments and movements, yet none of them pay attention to its wishes or advice. This does not mean that Russian power is or has become irrelevant to security outcomes here, far from it. But the appearance of this trend in different milieus and across different agendas suggests a continuation of a long-term and deep structural decline that began over a generation ago. While Russia will still strive toward - and achieve - occasional gains and attempt to enhance its overall capabilities, an examination of trends affecting Russian policy in Syria and the Middle East suggests that it will become increasingly difficult and costly for Moscow to make

29 Herb Keiron, "Interview With Andrei Demidov," *Jerusalem, Jerusalem Post*, in English, February 16, 2007, FBIS SOV, February 16, 2007

30 Barak Ravid and News Agencies, "Israel to Russia: Hamas is Like the Chechen Terrorists," www.Haaretz.com, May 13, 2010

31 "Iraq Cancels \$4.2bn Russian Arms Deal Over 'Corruption'," *BBC News Middle East*, November 10, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20278774>

32 Moscow, *Interfax-AVN Online*, in English, February 8, 2012, Open Source Center, foreign broadcast Information Service, Central Eurasia, (FBIS SOV), February 8, 2012

33 Moscow, *Interfax-AVN Online*, in English, April 28, 2012, FBIS SOV, April 28, 2012

34 Bill Gertz, "The Moscow-Tehran Axis," *Washington Free Beacon*, July 19, 2012, Moscow, *RIA Novosti*, in Russian, September 3, 2012, FBIS SOV, September 3, 2012; Moscow, *Interfax*, in English, February 12, 2013, FBIS SOV, February 12, 2013; Tehran, *IRNA*, in Persian, February 11, 2013, FBIS SOV, February 11, 2013; "Iran Wants to Develop Space ties With Russia," *RIA Novosti*, February 12, 2013

35 Stephen Blank and Younkyoo Kim, "Russo-Turkish Divergence (Part I): The Security Dimension," *MERIA*, XVI, No. 1, March, 2012, www.gloria-center.org April 27, 2012; Idems., "Russo-Turkish Divergence (Part II): The Energy Dimension," *MERIA Middle East Review of International Affairs*, XVI, NOP, 3, September, 2012

these moves, achieve those gains, or, perhaps more importantly, sustain them, or gain genuine local support. Moreover, in several instances it has already begun to fall discernibly short of its objectives.

Even before Syria's civil war it was clear that, as observed by British historian Niall Ferguson, "Russia, thanks to its own extensive energy reserves, is the only power that has no vested interest in stability in the Middle East."³⁶ As one 2004 commentary at the meeting of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) noted,

When you consider that a large proportion of the OIC member countries are actually situated in the territory that George Bush described as the Greater Middle East, rivalry between Russia and the United States for influence in the region is patently obvious. It is a striking fact that both the United States and Russia (as successor to the USSR), in building relations with the Islamic world, generally stick to the old strategy. The United States is seeking new ways of exporting cheap democracy, while Russia is still talking about the principles of equality and cooperation. So it was that Sergei Lavrov (Russia's Foreign Minister) assured the

OIC foreign ministers in Istanbul that Russia is prepared to "create an order that is truly collective and is built not on the basis of demonstration of the supremacy of a particular religion or system of particular world views, but on the basis of mutual understanding and a joint quest for ways of combating new threats and challenges."³⁷

This observation also highlights the second fundamental driver of Russian policy, namely the *a priori* presupposition of virtually global conflict or rivalry with the United States. Since Russian analysts still define the Middle East along Soviet lines, namely as an area of the world that is close to Russia's borders (as if nothing happened since 1989 to change those borders), any achievement of the U.S. in helping to provide a legitimate order here is defined as being an intrinsic threat to Russia's interests and status. Thus participation in the Quartet along with the U.S. and European foreign ministers gives Moscow the pretext or foothold it seeks to claim equality with the U.S. and legitimate rights to intervene on behalf of its own interests. Indeed, beginning in 2004 when the U.S. proposed a Greater Middle East approach to bring democracy to the region, but was also visibly in disarray due to the war in Iraq, Russia decided to step up

³⁶ Quoted in Gordon G. Chang, "How China and Russia Threaten the World," *Commentary*, June 2007, p. 29

³⁷ Dmitriy Bagiro, "New World Order: Russian Alternative," Moscow, *Politkom.ru* in Russian, June 17, 2004, , *FBI SOV*, June 17, 2004

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its game and occupy at least some of the power vacuum.³⁸

What then does Russia want? What is Russian foreign policy supposed to achieve other than warding off threats? In line with the obsession with *being* a great power, Russia wants to be recognized as such throughout the world, and have a voice in all major international issues, now including the organization of global financial institutions.³⁹ And it wants to compel the U.S. to take its views into account and thus surrender its power in world affairs. To this end it insists upon the concept of multipolarity in world politics. The Syrian crisis embodies Moscow's demands and arguments.

38 Moscow, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, in Russian, March 3, 2006, FBIS SOV, 2006

39 President Dmitri A. Medvedev, *Vystuplenie na XII Petersburgskom Mezhdunarodnom Ekonomicheskom Forum*, June 7, 2008, www.kremlin.ru (Henceforth Medvedev, *Vystuplenie*)

The Syrian Debacle

Moscow has articulated a sophisticated argument to defend its support for Assad's regime. It consists of the following precepts.

- Since this is a civil war, Syrians should resolve it without foreign intervention. Moscow believes that intervention is responsible for the civil war, following an effort to depose Assad and strike at Iran if not Russia.⁴⁰ Therefore while Russian arms sales are a matter of legal interstate agreements, it is outrageous that Arab states and the US are supporting arms flows to the rebels.
- It is even more outrageous to Russia that the West wants to flout international law (which Moscow pretends it is nobly defending) and use the Right to Protect (R2P) to intervene in Syria and remove the government. This builds on the Libya precedent that the West used to attack and unseat Qaddafi and conforms to a general Western policy of imposing "democracies" at gunpoint, especially in areas that threaten Russia's vital interests close to its borders.⁴¹

40 These statements also reflect Moscow's paranoia and habit of projecting onto others what it thinks it would do or what they might do to it. Since it denies that legitimacy or reality of an indigenous opposition movement based on its own experience in stage-managing uprisings and its fear of a domestic one, it attributes all such phenomena to "outside agitators" and powers.

41 Trenin, pp. 1-20

- Putin and Lavrov have repeatedly stated that the only alternative to Assad is Islamic terrorism. Therefore there must be a negotiated settlement that preserves Assad's rule. Moreover, Russia is willing to host and act as the mediator for a conference to this end, i.e. to preserve its influence at all costs. It blames the recent violence in Mali and Algeria on the Western intervention in Libya and weapons transfers to the new Libyan regime (without much proof or regard for the nature of Mali's and Algeria's own Al-Qaida factions), stating that the support for the rebels will only foment civil war and Islamist terrorist regimes as in Egypt and Libya.⁴²

Ostensibly these are principled arguments based on international law. But nobody is listening. In fact they are utterly self-serving, even hypocritical. Putin's admission that the war with Georgia in 2008 had been planned for two years with the conscious use of separatists to foment it should also serve as a reminder that security in Eurasia cannot be taken for granted.⁴³ That Moscow justified its war on the grounds of the R2P and Article 51 on self-defense in the UN charter, while it simply bypassed UN approval for its attack, undermines Russia's declared attachment to the UN Charter.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ "Putin Admits Russia Trained S Ossetians Before 2008 Georgia war - Transcript President of Russia, www.kremlin.ru, August 10, 2012

Putin's admission also should remind us that Russia still refuses to accept the finality of the territorial settlement that occurred in the wake of the Soviet disintegration and perhaps even more importantly, there is abundant evidence that Russia does not really believe in the genuine and full sovereignty of the post-Soviet states. Neither do its strictures against Islamic revolution cut much ice since Russian officials have threatened recalcitrant CIS governments with the forcible incitement of just such a revolution.

On November 15, 2011 Valery Yazev, Vice-Speaker of the Russian Duma and head of the Russian Gas Society, openly threatened to incite an "Arab Spring" in Turkmenistan if Turkmenistan did not renounce its "neutrality" and independent sovereign foreign policy, including its desire to align with the Nabucco pipeline. Yazev said that,

Given the instructive experience with UN resolutions on Libya and the political consequences of their being 'shielded from the air' by NATO forces, Turkmenistan will soon understand that only the principled positions of Russia and China in the UN Security Council and its involvement in regional international organizations — such as the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Orga-

nization), Eurasian Economic Union – can protect it from similar resolutions.⁴⁴

In other words, Turkmenistan should surrender its neutrality and independent foreign policy and refrain from exporting gas to Europe; otherwise Moscow will incite a revolution on its territory. Other Russian analysts and officials threatened that if Turkmenistan adheres to the EU's planned Southern Corridor for energy transshipments to Europe that bypass Russia, Moscow will have no choice but to do to Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan what it did to Georgia in 2008.⁴⁵ Mikhail Aleksandrov, a department chief of the state-sponsored Institute on the CIS also opined that NATO's Libya operation gave Moscow the right to use force in the Caspian Basin.⁴⁶

What Russia's arguments really reveal is its anger that the West disregards its interests: keeping Assad in power; displaying Russia as a great power capable of playing its old role of thwarting U.S. policies (long desired by Assad and similarly minded factions⁴⁷); and its clear anxiety about

both democratic revolution by a mobilized citizenry, and the prospect of Islamic rule, which could influence trends in Central Asia and the North Caucasus.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Moscow has also failed because despite the superficial sophistication of its arguments about defending principles of international law, in practice it has ended up with no leverage over Assad, despite sending him arms and, according to the rebels, even support in directing Assad's strategy and sending tanks through South Africa.⁴⁹ Indeed, some Russian analysts privately complain that by refusing to listen to Moscow, Assad has held Russian policy hostage and deprived Moscow of the political leverage it has "earned".⁵⁰ Given Moscow's increasing anxiety about the fate of its own regime and US policy, the only way Moscow can show itself as a great power is by obstruction in the UN and displays of force. Thus it has thrice sent its navy into the Mediterranean near Syria, ostensibly for naval exercises, but in reality to pretend to deter a nonexistent Western attack. At the same time, this pattern of gunboat diplomacy ap-

44 "Senior MP Advises Turkmenistan to Stick with Russia to Avoid Libya Fate," Moscow, Interfax, November 15, 2011, also available from BBC Monitoring

45 Vladimir Socor, "Moscow Issues Trans-Caspian Project Warning," Asia Times Online, December 2, 2011, www.atimes.com

46 Vladimir Socor, "Bluff in Substance: Brutal in Form: Moscow Warns Against Trans-Caspian Project," Eurasia Daily Monitor, November 30, 2011

47 For example: "Interview With Dr. Gassan Raslan, Ambassador of Syria to the Russian Federation," Moscow, Pravda Pyat, in Russian, March 5, 21997, FBIS SOV, March

5, 1997

48 Stephen Blank and Carol R. Saivetz, "Playing to Lose? Russia and the Arab Spring," *Problems of Post-Communism*, LIX, No. 1, January-February, 2012, pp. 3-14

49 Trenin, pp. 19-20; and communications with US experts in Washington February 2013

50 Trenin, p. 20

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pears to have become something of a standard policy response in Moscow to any challenges in the Near East, including Cyprus and Turkey’s threats against Cyprus.⁵¹

But none of these moves has had the slightest impact upon its targets in terms of getting them to change their policies or to take Russia seriously. Similarly, in the case of Iran, it is clear that Iran only appeals to Russia when it needs something, but ignores its advice. Increasingly it appears that in the Middle East Moscow may shout and brandish its naval stick, but the fact is, as Russia knows, it is a weak stick. And meanwhile, despite this noise, Russia is addressing an increasingly empty auditorium while the actors in today’s Middle Eastern narratives are writing their own scripts. Is it any wonder that Moscow’s frustrations are increasingly evident?

⁵¹ Stephen Blank, “Putin’s Agenda: Gunboat Diplomacy,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, December 12, 2011



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AZERBAIJAN AS A REGIONAL HUB IN CENTRAL EURASIA

Taleh Ziyadov



*Caucasus Under Review: Recently Published Books**

The recently published books on the Caucasus and former Soviet territories listed here offer new and exciting scholarly insights on a range of regional issues, including self-determination, counter secession, contested territories, political interventions, geopolitics, and national historiography.

* Prepared by Hüsrev Tabak, Executive Editor of Caucasus International.

The breakup of the USSR gave rise to a plethora of problems, many of which have their origins in pre-Soviet history. Among them, self-determination has been one of the most hotly debated topics, creating a political climate in which sovereign states have tightened their authority and control over territories and people; as a consequence of this, tragic and violent conflicts have taken place. Some conflicts have been resolved, while others remain 'frozen', awaiting either peaceful resolution, or renewed fighting. To this end, Bahruz Balayev's book, *"The Right to Self-Determination in the South Caucasus: Nagorno Karabakh in Context"*, offers up-to-date and carefully compiled insights on Nagorno-Karabakh, and how this frozen conflict fits in with the recent debates in international law on the right to self-determination. In his analysis, Balayev considers the international perspective on the subject as well as the local experiences and expectations. In order to understand the international law approach Balayev seeks to offer political alternatives for the resolution of the frozen conflicts before they re-erupt. Michael Kambeck and Sargis Ghazaryan focus on the latter issue. In *"Europe's Next Avoidable War: Nagorno-Karabakh"*, the authors bring together voices from a diverse range of interdisciplinary and practical perspectives. This collection of around twenty scholars and practitioners, offers multiple scenarios for resolution. However, despite

their academic originality, neither of these books equally reflects the Azerbaijan and Armenian experiences and approaches to the resolution of the conflict.

Another recently published book, *The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession Preventing the Recognition of Contested States*, outlines national approaches to the resolution (or not) of frozen conflicts. Dr. James Ker-Lindsay attempts to answer the question of *how states prevent the recognition of territories that have unilaterally declared independence*. This question is genuinely formulated, and Ker-Lindsay's response is an invaluable contribution to the field of foreign policy. Secession is often predicted and witnessed as an outcome of intra-state conflicts, and the post-Cold War world order has been marked by the failure of sovereign states to subdue rebellions. States' international efforts to prevent recognition of the secessionists' struggle remains a fascinating topic, and Ker-Lindsay's book is a candidate for serious accolades. The book analyzes the efforts by the governments of Serbia, Georgia, and Cyprus to prevent the international recognition of Kosovo, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and northern Cyprus respectively.

In addition to secessionist movements and national policies of suppression, regional developments have also been shaped by external forces. Sometimes, the role of international

powers becomes decisive, as with the 1953 military coup in Iran. Ervand Abrahamian, a well-known Iranian scholar and the author of *A History of Modern Iran*, has just released a new book, *The Coup: 1953, The CIA, and The Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. This recent publication delves into the genesis and aftermath of the CIA-backed military coup against the democratically elected president of the country in 1953. Abrahamian, with the extensive use of recently declassified diplomatic cables and the archives of multinational oil companies, pieces together the complexity of the relationships among the military and great powers and provides a sound argument that the control of oil resources was the dominating issue behind the coup.

Abrahamian's assessment of external interests in the region is complemented by another recently published study, this time from a historical perspective. *The Archaeology of Power and Politics in Eurasia: Regimes and Revolution*, an edited collection produced by Charles Hartley, Bike Yazicioglu, and Adam Smith, examines a wide-range of archaeological studies in order to better understand the role of power politics in the history and prehistory of the region. A similar study is conducted by another recent release, *Clash of Histories in the South Caucasus: Redrawing the Map of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iran*, by Rouben Galichian. Galichian examines Azerbaijani historiography and

political geography, and examines the efforts by Azerbaijani scholars to create a historically rooted nation in the Caucasus based on geo-history and geo-political perspectives.

***The Right to Self-Determination
in the South Caucasus:
Nagorno-Karabakh in Context***

By Bahruz Balayev
Lexington Books,
February 2013, 262 pp.

The Right to Self-Determination in the South Caucasus: Nagorno Karabakh in Context, by Bahruz Balayev, explores the relationship in international law between the concept of self-determination and territorial integrity in the context of the Caucasus region. This study brings together the various self-determination movements of the Caucasus (Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia, Adjara, Abkhazia, and Chechnya) and provides a comparative analysis. The August 2008 war in Georgia and the proclamation of independence of Kosovo renewed the discussion over the right to self-determination in international law: Has the right to self-determination evolved since the solutions to the conflicts over self-determination are now determined in a new manner, or should it? Will the question of self-determination in different regions of the world be a spark for a new cold war? Unilateral declarations and the recognition of independence of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Kosovo could be the first spark. These are the pressing questions because there are many self-determination and secession movements all over the world. *The Right to Self-Determination in the South Caucasus* is a unique tool for scholars, researchers, and the public in understanding South Caucasus regional conflicts from the New Haven School perspective.

***Europe's Next Avoidable War:
Nagorno-Karabakh***

By Michael Kambeck,
Sargis Ghazaryan (Eds)
Palgrave Macmillan,
March 2013, 296 pp.

Nagorno-Karabakh is the most perilous of the so-called frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe. In an area almost free of observers, the implications of a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh are largely underestimated. The editors, capitalizing on their experience within the NGO European Friends of Armenia, bring together voices from a diverse range of interdisciplinary perspectives within the social sciences and from practitioners working in the field. They shed light on the current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, how it evolved, and likely scenarios, taking into account the changed landscape including the EU's new foreign policy instruments. The book includes concrete policy proposals in order to make war a less likely outcome.

***The Foreign Policy of Counter
Secession Preventing the
Recognition of Contested States***

By James Ker-Lindsay
*Oxford University Press,
October 2012, 240 pp.*

How do states prevent the recognition of territories that have unilaterally declared independence? At a time when the issue of secession is becoming increasingly significant on the world stage, this is the first book to consider this crucial question. Analyzing the efforts of the governments of Serbia, Georgia, and Cyprus to prevent the international recognition of Kosovo, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and northern Cyprus the work draws on in depth interviews with a number of leading policy makers to explain how each of the countries has designed, developed, and implemented its counter secession strategies. After explaining how the principle of the territorial integrity of states has tended to take precedence over the right of self-determination, it examines the range of ways countries facing a separatist threat can prevent recognition by other states and considers the increasingly important role played by international and regional organizations, especially the United Nations, in the recognition process. Additionally, it shows how forms of legitimization or acknowledgement are also central elements of any counter-recognition process, and why steps to prevent secessionist entities from participating in major sporting and cultural bodies are given so much at-

ention. Finally, it questions the effects of these counter recognition efforts on attempts to solve these territorial conflicts. Drawing on history, politics, and international law this book is the first and only comprehensive account of this increasingly important field of foreign policy.

***The Coup: 1953, The CIA,
and The Roots of Modern U.S.-
Iranian Relations***

By Ervand Abrahamian
New Press,
February 2013, 304 pp.

In August 1953, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency orchestrated the swift overthrow of Iran's democratically elected leader and installed Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in his place. Over the next twenty-six years, the United States backed the unpopular, authoritarian shah and his secret police; in exchange, it reaped a share of Iran's oil wealth and became a key player in this volatile region. In this authoritative new history of the coup and its aftermath, noted Iran scholar Ervand Abrahamian uncovers little-known documents that challenge conventional interpretations and also sheds new light on how the American role in the coup influenced U.S.-Iranian relations, both past and present. Drawing from the hitherto closed archives of British Petroleum, the Foreign Office, and the U.S. State Department, as well as from Iranian memoirs and published interviews, Abrahamian's riveting account of this key historical event will change America's understanding of a crucial turning point in modern U.S.-Iranian relations.

***The Archaeology of Power and
Politics in Eurasia: Regimes and
Revolutions***

By Charles Hartley, Biko
Yazicioglu, Adam Smith (Eds)
Cambridge University Press,
November 2012, 486 pp.

For thousands of years, the geography of Eurasia has facilitated travel, conquest and colonization by various groups, from the Huns in ancient times to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the past century. This book brings together archaeological investigations of Eurasian regimes and revolutions ranging from the Bronze Age to the modern day, from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in the west to the Mongolian steppe and the Korean Peninsula in the east. The authors examine a wide-ranging series of archaeological studies in order to better understand the role of politics in the history and prehistory of the region. This book re-evaluates the significance of power, authority and ideology in the emergence and transformation of ancient and modern societies in this vast continent.

***Clash of Histories in the South
Caucasus: Redrawing the Map
of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iran***

By Rouben Galichian
Bennett & Bloom,
November 2012, 232 pp.

As the only former Soviet republic not to be created from an established ethnic group, ever since its formation in 1918 Azerbaijan has used strategies adapted especially from the USSR and Pan-Turkism movement to create a nationalistic ethnos/mythos at odds with the historical and geographical reality. This new study examines the motives and methodology employed by Azerbaijani historians and geographers over the past century in officially recreating the history, boundaries and even ethnicity of this historically volatile region. Particular focus is given to Azerbaijan's campaign for the geo-historical appropriation of neighboring Armenia and the three provinces of Iranian Azerbaijan, a selective campaign that ignores the neighboring territories of Georgia and Russia's North Caucasus. The evidence of the ancient and later cartographers, presented in more than 50 colour maps, along with the Greco-Roman historians and the accounts of Islamic and European travellers confirm the international position that runs counter to Azerbaijan's claims.

Book Review:

*Muslim Nationalism
and the New Turks*

**Hüsrev
Tabak***

* *Hüsrev Tabak, Executive Editor of Caucasus International.*

Changes in the self-definition of the Turkish people have long been observed by political scientists, sociologists, and social anthropologists. The self-identification of the Turkish state and people historically shaped by the Kemalism of the Republican era governments, which comprehended Turkishness and Turkish citizenry on ethnic and racial lines, was reconstructed by the governments that came to power after the 1980 military coup. Notwithstanding this evolutionary process, the self-redefinition of state and people in Turkey found its current form under the ruling Justice and Development Party. In this present era, Islam and Muslimhood have become more concrete and salient components of Turkey's state identity and Turkish national identity, while the formerly prevalent racial component has lost its significance.

This latest incarnation of Turkish self-identification is conceptualized as the "new Turk" by Jenny White in her book *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, selected as one of the Best Books of 2012 on the Middle East by *Foreign Policy* journal.

White first of all explores the evolution of "what it means to be Turk in Turkey", and the new form it took under the rule of the pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party. In relation to this, White later on examines the battle between the secularist and Muslim sectors of the population that

ended up with cataclysmic divisions between the political discourses of the secular Kemalist intelligentsia and the Muslim elites in regards to democracy, Western orientation, globalism, and internationalism (p. 19). As she notes, "to an outside observer who assumes Islam is anti-West, it would appear counterintuitive that [in the Third Republic as conceptualized by White] it is the Islam-rooted AKP, the Muslim bourgeoisie, and other Muslim publics, such as Gülenists, that are the enthusiastic developers of a globalized economy and that support political liberalization, international political alliances, and in many cases EU membership. Hard-line secularists, however, including some in the military, oppose these same things in favor of an isolationist, globally unplugged 'Turkey for the Turks'" (p. 10). To this end, the new Turks (new rightists or modern rightists according to a new political classification that has emerged among AKP supporters) "are motivated not by Islam but by post-imperial political and economic ambitions that extend far beyond the Muslim Middle East" (p. 11).

In this regard, with the handover of power to a civilian government after the 1980 military coup, new self-conscious Muslim elite has mounted political and economic challenges to traditional Kemalist principles in general. Together, massive public support, the powerful influence of religious networks, a newly emerging

Muslim bourgeoisie in Anatolia, and the civilian government's upper-hand over the military have increased the momentum behind this challenge. The real impact of this was seen in the development of a novel and non-orthodox definition of the national-self in Turkey. To this end, the republican model of the national-self was replaced by a post-Ottoman (as opposed to neo-Ottoman) form of self-attribution: the new Turk.

In accordance with the above-mentioned post-imperial and post-Ottoman perspectives, this new Turk is a cultural Turkist, rather than an ethnic or racial one. S/he believes that "to be Turkish means to be Muslim", "share[s] a belief that Turkish Islam is the better form of Islam", desires to be modern and shows intimacy towards the West, "imagines the nation as having more flexible Ottoman imperial boundaries", and pursues "economic interests without concern for the ethnic identity of its interlocutors" (p. 19). These sentiments run counter to the Kemalist-era vision of economic nationalism against the Arab world. This conception of the new Turk, therefore, entails both Islamic and, to a certain extent, secular features and characteristics. However, this does not mean the historical contention between the secularists and Islamists has been resolved via the construction of this non-orthodox form of a new Turkish identity. On the contrary, as White's careful analysis demonstrates, both parties

continue to condemn one another for "heavy-handed imposition of its own values and practices on Turkish society as a whole" (p. 181).

In order to explicate the evolution of the new Turk, White conducted an ethnographic study in Turkey. In building her narrative, she looks initially at the course of events that set up the relation between Islam and nationalism (or Muslim nationalism) in Turkish historical and contemporary contexts (chapter 2). She later moves on to an analysis of the rival form of nationalism: secular nationalism, which was based on distrust of historical enemies, thus on fear and animosity (chapter 3). Through these two chapters, she demonstrates that both the religiously motivated nationalism and secular nationalism are in flux, and hence took new forms during the Third Republic era (post-1980). The next chapter (chapter 4) is devoted to the elaboration of two issues that have generated the merging and diverging arguments of religious and secular nationalisms in Turkey: missionary movements and the headscarf. Since both nationalisms consider the Turk as Muslim, the missionary activities pose a robust threat for secular-nationalist national identity and for religious-nationalist religious identity. However, despite the relevance and importance of Muslimhood of the Turk for both parties, the headscarf was encoded by secular nationalism -particularly by the Kemalists- as a threat to the very exist-

tence of the Turkish state. The fears of religious dominion, therefore, facilitate boundary making in the formulation of the national identity. The ethnic or religious boundary maintenance and its relationship with *fear* are further explored in the following section (chapter 5). The last two sections (chapter 6 and 7) are devoted to the analysis of the woman in national identity discourse. As they reveal in these two sections, both secular and religious nationalisms describe the nationhood primarily as a male experience.

In conclusion, Jenny White offers a meticulous ethnographic analysis of contemporary Turkey, clearly demonstrating the new forms that nationalisms in Turkey have taken. To this end, I personally agree with her views on the issues relating to the ruptures that occurred in regard to the historical positions and characters of political blocs. However, there are two points in her study that raise questions. My first contention is that the gendered approach to the new Turk, which is based on Muslim nationalism and Turkish Islam, may not contain enough currency. When we consider the Gülen movement and the high ratio of female participation in grassroots activities, claiming that the new Muslim nationalism is a male experience fails to acknowledge female involvement in this process. In this way, she appears to be mixed up with the traditional articulation of nationalism in Turkey, such

as in the discourses of the *ülküçüs*. Thus, I would argue that the female members of the Gülen movement hold a favorable approach to Turkish Islam and Turkish exceptionalism, as Şerif Mardin has argued. Hence, the role of women in the dissemination of the new Muslim nationalism among ethnic Turks and Kurds requires further scrutiny. The second issue is that White's conception of Muslim nationalism is not clear. She does not show how the contention between Islam and nationalism in regards to Muslim nationalism is resolved by the new Muslim nationalists. Moreover, the formation of the Muslim nationalism is underdeveloped. It might have been better if she had linked Turkish exceptionalism to an argument for Muslim nationalism, because the new Muslim nationalists have sought to use Turkish exceptionalism as a means of resolving the contention between Islam and nationalism.

*How can the South
Caucasus achieve regional
integration and security?
An Armenian Perspective*

**Valeriya
Gyanjumyan***

Abstract

This essay investigates the possibility of and conditions for lasting stability and peace in the South Caucasus. Following an initial definition of the existing destabilizing factors, the essay offers possible routes to overcoming the political discord and lack of harmony in the region. To the author, if the regional states want to achieve peace and stability, they must focus on strengthening human rights and democracy in their respective countries, develop mutually beneficial economic policy, create a regional organization involving all South Caucasian states, and settle the region's ethnic and territorial conflicts.

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Today, the world has undergone a new integration system, and this process implies the creation of a globalized world. In tandem with global integrative formations, new subsystems are also being formed. The need for new subsystems that will bring cohesion and harmony in delimited territories is nowhere more evident than in the South Caucasus; and nowhere is the formation of such systems harder than in the South Caucasus. This is because the region is at the crossroads of interests, not only of the three South Caucasian republics but also Russia, Turkey, Iran and the U.S.

In a subsystem, the occurrence of an event or a development in one country definitely has positive or negative effects in other countries. For instance, an economic crisis in Russia today unavoidably has repercussive effects on the South Caucasus. Similarly, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has had serious impacts not only on Azerbaijan and Armenia but also on Turkey, Georgia, Russia and even Iran.

Search for stability

Systems can be either stable or unstable. Caucasian subsystem has no balance of power or consensus on common interests; stabilizing mechanisms do not exist. There are several reasons for this, all of which are in some way related to the absence of an overarching regional organization, where common issues can be

examined, common solutions can be found, and common interests can be built. The destabilizing factors are numerous. In my opinion, they can be divided into four categories.

The first category consists of internal political factors. Unfortunately, state structures have not yet evolved sufficiently to contribute to a state's domestic stability. Armenia may remove these destabilizing factors through, for instance, taking a leading role in the building of human rights and democratic institutions. This why our state must first 'put its own house in order'. In this regard, the human rights environment in Armenia must be improved. A mature democratic society must be created so that it can credibly advocate the spread of human rights and democracy in the region. Only then we will be able to resolve our economic, ethnic and political problems. Protecting human rights can become the top priority in the national strategy for pacifying political opposition and conflicts.

The next stabilization category is political. Our region lacks a congruence of interests. Political interests are different and it seems that each state has its own direction. Additionally, the continued use of the East-West division leads to serious polarization, which is not conducive to stability. So, it will be wiser to conduct a policy of "positive equilibrium" by providing equal opportunities to

all states wishing to engage with the region, and by creating a network of security arrangements that are mutually complementary.

The third is the economic category. The uneven distribution of natural resources in the South Caucasus is a further destabilizing factor. Regionally, the issue of pipeline routes and division of the Caspian energy resources is a bone of contention among numerous states. Even more dangerous is the competition surrounding the passage of pipelines through the various countries. Therefore, it is important for our region to create a unified and equal economic system. In particular, each country must be active in all regional economic initiatives and oil matters.

Finally, the fourth category of destabilizing factors is regional conflicts and the failure to develop good neighborly relations.

Armenia and regional stability

Armenia's foreign policy is contingent on objective factors of both a regional and global nature. Among the imperatives that shape the country's foreign policy, the leading ones are Armenia's historic past and traditions, along with its geographical location. Armenia also prioritizes relations with its immediate neighbors, because regional conflicts are the toughest security concerns for the whole region. Indeed, the establishment of normal relations with neighbors is one of the major tasks

for Armenia, for both political and economic reasons. Of course, it is necessary to mention that there are many psychological barriers in communication among the nations of the South Caucasus, which derive from long-running controversies. Unfortunately, due to a number of reasons, at present Armenia has established relations with only two of its neighbors, Iran and Georgia, which will continue to develop. The implementation of the objective of the normalization of relations with all neighboring countries depends on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although a cease-fire has held since 1994, the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not been resolved. Now the consequent blockade along both the Azerbaijani and Turkish borders is a great impediment to Armenia's economic development. Land routes through Azerbaijan and Turkey are closed; routes through Georgia and Iran are inadequate or unreliable. Armenia has developed a varied and flexible economy, due to the transportation limitations and to the economic blockade imposed by two of its neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan. So, relations with neighbors, particularly with Turkey, must be based on bilateral rather than unilateral principles. Today, our new policy requires that the actions and reactions be commensurate with Turkey's actions and attitudes. The intention of the Republic of Armenia is not to confront Turkey, but to engage with it. In my view

the Armenia-Turkey rapprochement and the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are important for the social and economic growth of the South Caucasus, in the reinforcement of mutual confidence and goals, in promoting neighborly relations in our region, in assuring stability and security, and for integration with European organizations.

Pathway to a stable peace in the South Caucasus

Negotiations and dialogue are the only paths towards the establishment of a stable peace and mutual trust in the region and towards the resolution of regional problems. Without resolution in this manner, we will not be able to reach lasting peace or stability in the South Caucasus or achieve regional integration and security. With good will and reciprocal steps forward we can yield results. It is vital to realize that the future of our region is in our hands, and each South Caucasus country cannot develop separately without taking into consideration the issues and interests of all regional states. Of course, it is not easy and only through hard work and perseverance can success be guaranteed. If we want to live in a stable region, we must agree to a compromise.

Distrust prevents the adjustment of the political dialogue, economic cooperation and good neighborly relations, which are needed by all states to ensure their own welfare. Creating a favorable atmosphere for coopera-

tion, harmony, confidence and mutual understanding is possible only once the disputes and conflicts in the South Caucasus have been addressed peacefully and definitively. As H. G. Wells said, "If we don't end war, war will end us". Thus, it is high time to brush aside perceptions of the South Caucasus as the crossroads of never-ending conflicts.

There is no other place on the map where such a small transfer of land would have such a global impact. This clearly demonstrates the unique situation in which the South Caucasian states find themselves in. Thus, they must correctly define their foreign policy concerns and find the right solutions. They must strive to contribute to stability and peace in this region.

To sum up, our future is in our hands and this future depends on what we do today. If we want to achieve stability in the South Caucasus, we must focus on strengthening human rights and democracy in the region, develop a unified and equal economic policy, create a regional organization involving all the South Caucasian states, and achieve the peaceful settlement of the region's ethnic conflicts.

Commentaries

*Georgia after
the Election:
Where to now,
and how?*

*Armenia's
Strategic Setback*

Georgia after the Election:

Where to now, and how?

George Mchedlishvili*

The October 27th presidential election was a defining moment in Georgia's recent history in more than one way. First of all, it marked the end of the almost 10-year presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, an important and contradictory period. Saakashvili's rule saw the building of the genuine foundations of a new state, but was marred by the increasingly authoritarian style of governance in the final years, as well as the irreparably damaged relations with Russia – a mixed legacy, to put it in a nutshell. Secondly, on the day of inauguration, November 17, Georgia ceased to be a presidential republic and became a parliamentary one, with greater responsibilities vested in the office of the prime minister.

Thirdly, setting a precedent in the post-Soviet space, and in a historically very rare move, reclusive billionaire-turned-politician Bidzina Ivanishvili - who defeated Saakashvili's "United National Movement" in the October 2012 parliamentary election with his broad-based "Georgian Dream" - voluntarily relinquished his political power and prime ministerial responsibilities. According to him, this is for the good of democracy and civil society in Georgia. His critics, however, say that the move has allowed him to shirk responsibility for future mistakes and

setbacks, thereby remaining a "savior".

These criticisms are probably at least partially valid. Both the newly elected president and the newly appointed Prime Minister, 31-year old Irakly Garibashvili, owe their posts entirely to Bidzina Ivanishvili. With no political experience (or very limited, in Margvelashvili's case), they are easy targets for speculation that Ivanishvili will remain the de facto puppet master of Georgian politics, leaving the politically unskilled president and Prime Minister as just rubber-stamps. If this does indeed come to pass, it will be extremely undesirable for this fledgling democracy, and will most likely put a dampener on Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration quest. Thus, in order to maintain or strengthen the country's image as a well-performing aspiring state, Georgian leaders will have to need become genuinely independent political personalities.

At least in one regard, the new leadership is lucky, as they have begun on a high note, by initialing the Association Agreement at the Vilnius Summit in late November. Now, the ball is in Georgia's court in terms of capitalizing on this momentum. Sustained and dedicated efforts will have to be undertaken after the Summit in order to convert the hopes into a reality. Here the issue of dedicated and strong personal and institutional leadership will be key, especially as the road ahead looks like an uphill battle with many complications, both domestic and international. Look-

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ing to the historical experiences of countries that have found themselves in a similar position in terms of political goals, breakthroughs have been accomplished by strong leadership.

The most obvious and powerful impediment to Georgia's foreign policy orientation is the increasingly aggressive Russia, hell-bent on derailing the European aspirations of post-Soviet states. The limited dialogue with Russia over the last year could only go so far, given the decidedly divergent interests of the two states.

Predictably, Russia has shown its teeth on a number of occasions with countries like Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Armenia made a sharp U-turn in September - submitting to Russian pressure - and abandoned its European aspirations in favor of the Customs Union. A few days ago, Ukraine caved in the face of Russian trade sanctions and suspended its negotiations with the European Union, which means Kyiv will not sign an association agreement. Moldova has so far shown its determination not to succumb to Russian economic pressure and Moscow's policy towards break-away Transnistria, but Russian pressure is continuing to mount.

As far as Georgia is concerned, economic and energy dependency on Russia is still there, though it has been significantly reduced over the last few years, following significant assistance from Azerbaijan. Now, the country is better prepared to withstand Moscow's economic bullying. Thus the only av-

enue for Moscow is to play its security and military cards. The past year has seen intensified fence building around the Administrative Border of the occupied South Ossetia; Russia has also provocatively moved the barbed wire deeper into the uncontested territory of Georgia proper, which might represents one direction of further aggression on Russia's part. Another potential area of vulnerability could be the province of Samegrelo, adjacent to Abkhazia. The myth underpinning the potential aggression is already in place, as some Abkhaz "historians" and members of the puppet government claim that about 800 km² of Samegrelo is "historically Abkhaz". There is also the Javakheti region, predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians. So far they have not raised their complaints beyond greater cultural autonomy, so it will not be so easy for Russia to sow seeds of serious discord. Besides the escalating tensions, this would obviously run counter to Armenian state interests. However, recent developments indicate that Moscow is in virtual command of Yerevan and the Armenian leadership is too dependent on Russia to pursue their state interests first.

The latter challenges are all the more pressing as is it widely perceived - and oftentimes perceptions are at least as important as the real state of affairs - that the US is pursuing a neo-isolationist course. Washington is looking for a pretext to disengage, rather than engage, in major international and regional affairs, particularly the ones that

require tougher approaches. Defending Georgia from very likely Russian would certainly require confronting Russia, both politically and economically.

But the difficulties ahead of Georgia are not limited to the potential foreign policy threats. European integration and DCFTA do provide a tried and tested blueprint for thorough reforms, but these are reforms that imply government transparency and regulatory modifications. Such reforms may be painful, and go against the interests many businessmen, as well as proving more costly in social terms. This could create a backlash and significantly erode the currently strong support for EU in Georgia, thus jeopardizing the Association Agreement. On the other hand, the Customs Union offers more immediate short-term benefits and might prove more tempting for an economically weak country. In connection with this, the EU's current economic woes and lack of unified foreign policy and strategy toward Eastern Partners hardly provide an auspicious backdrop ahead of the rigors of reforms. But if the strategy of the European Union becomes more judicious and flexible, these difficulties might be overcome.

Armenia's Strategic Setback

Richard Giragosian*

In a largely unexpected development, on September 3, 2013, Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian announced a dramatic U-turn in Armenian policy. While in Moscow, after being summoned to a meeting with his Russian counterpart, the Armenian president promised Russian officials that Armenia would join the Russian-led Customs Union, and would support Moscow's efforts to "integrate" the former Soviet space. That decision effectively ended Armenia's plans to initial an Association Agreement, and the related Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the European Union, set for the Vilnius Summit in late November 2013.

Moscow's success in forcing Yerevan to backtrack on its intentions to finalize pending agreements with the EU poses several significant challenges for Armenia. In the short-term, once Armenia was forced to renege on its promise to the EU, it will be hard pressed to recover confidence and credibility. This move has not only imperiled several years of difficult negotiations and reform, but has also tested European patience. The decision to join the Customs Union also offers Armenia few alternative benefits, and may lock Yerevan even more firmly into the Russian orbit,

limiting its future to little more than a captive to Moscow's grand project for a rival Customs Union, as the first step toward its so-called "Eurasian Union." Furthermore, Armenia has clearly missed a strategic opportunity in terms of opening to the West. And the longer term impact may be significant, undermining the Armenian government's meager legitimacy by endangering the overall reform program, and significantly weakening the position pro-Western reformers within the government.

Thus, from a broader perspective, the Armenian retreat also reveals several deeper deficiencies within the Armenian government in terms of closed public policy, inadequate strategic planning and the informal decision-making process.

Although the sudden decision by the Armenian president to commit the country to joining the Russian-dominated Customs Union effectively ends any chance for Armenia to initial the Association Agreement with the EU, the Armenian government has recently reaffirmed its intention and desire to go ahead with reaching at least some sort of agreement on relations with the EU. But, as is now clear, the loss of the Association Agreement and the DCFTA suggests that by opting for the Russian-led Customs Union, the Armenian president has committed a strategic blunder, and this move represents a missed opportunity for Armenia.

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Moreover, as Moscow seems to have succeeded in forcing Yerevan to backtrack on its intentions to finalize pending agreements with the EU, Armenia will face several significant challenges. In the short-term, if Armenia implements this decision to choose the Customs Union over the DCFTA, it will be hard pressed to recover confidence and credibility. Such a move would not only imperil several years of difficult negotiations and reform, but would also reduce European interest in Armenia. Thus, the danger for Armenia is greater isolation, enhanced insignificance, and, most distressing, the threat of becoming little more than a “small, subservient Russian garrison state.”

This single move also imperils the overall reform program, by weakening the pro-Western reformers within the government, and by reverting to an inherently problematic policy of remaining dangerously overly-dependent on Russia.

There is an additional obstacle to Armenian entry into the Customs Union: specifically, the absence of common borders with Russia, or with Belarus and Kazakhstan, the two other members of the Customs Union. This poses a logical impediment to Armenia’s membership. Second, even the Armenian prime minister has noted that “the structure of the Armenian economy is very different from that of the economies of the Customs Union’s countries that have substantial depos-

its of energy resources and pursue a policy of supporting domestic manufacturers through quite high customs duties.” He further noted that “on the whole, the level of such duties in the Customs Union is twice as high as those levied in Armenia,” adding that as “Armenia was one of the first CIS countries to join the World Trade Organization” (WTO), the a switch to the Russian-dominated Customs Union would be very complicated, if not impossible.

What Next?

In the aftermath of this decision, the EU is now exploring alternative ways to engage with Armenia. One such move may be a new Legal Framework, consisting of a six-point agenda: (1) mobility, and people-to-people contact and exchange, as a carrot for Armenia; (2) good governance, with a new stress on local and regional governance and greater accountability; (3) the rule of law, with a focus on judicial reform and more attention to law enforcement and enhanced standards for police conduct and performance; (4) democratization, with a broader approach to political parties, party and campaign finance and measures to promote greater civic and civil society engagement in the public policy process; (5) anti-corruption measures, including a new targeting of commodity-based cartels, or so called “oligarchic structures” and anti-trust mechanisms; and (6) sectoral cooperation, for more sweeping and broader capacity-building.

The challenge now stems from how to salvage and redefine a relationship between the EU and Armenia in the wake of this surprise retreat by Armenia, and how to avoid any attempt by Russia to coerce Armenia to surrendering to the Russian-sponsored Customs Union.

Notes for Contributors

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Issue 2/2014

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- Turkey's support for military modernization in the South Caucasus countries and the impact of NATO integration
- Euro-Atlantic Partnership after 2014 in the post-Soviet space
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