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Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict

Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered

Emil Souleimanov

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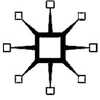

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Foreword

The 2008 Russo–Georgia war decisively showed that what happens in the Caucasus does not stay in the Caucasus. In particular it showed that conflicts originating as ethnopolitical conflicts between majorities and minorities in a state, if allowed to fester, will invariably grow in scope until they become major international issues. In fact, the ethnopolitical wars of the Caucasus, Georgia–Abkhazia, Georgia–South Ossetia, and the Azeri–Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh have all burst beyond the narrow confines of the original host states, Georgia and Azerbaijan, to become major international issues. Georgia's conflicts' evolution is already well-known as it led in 2008 to a major war with Russia, one that continues to have profound implications not just for Georgia's security but also for that of the entire Caucasus and even Europe. So, too, does the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have implications for the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Caucasus, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and therefore East–West relations. For this reason the failure in mid-2011 of the most recent Russian-inspired effort to mediate a solution to this war has left observers anxious about the possibility that the two sides may fall into a conflict that would have serious repercussions beyond their present borders.

This record reminds us that neglect of these wars or of efforts to bring about a peaceful political outcome for them is inherently malign. In regard to such conflicts there is no such thing as benign neglect. Such neglect invariably produces what amounts to a security vacuum and, as nature abhors a vacuum, an interested great power generally will entrench itself in the process of conflict resolution – and with negative results. Internationalizing these kinds of conflicts by allowing them to become entangled in major- or great-power agendas generally leads to the most negative kinds of outcomes, stalemates, or even wars like that in 2008.

For these reasons it is periodically necessary to produce serious analytical studies of the origins, nature, and trajectory of these conflicts so that international attention continues to focus upon them and tries to bring them to a political resolution. This study is a worthy example of such efforts. The author has comprehensively examined the theoretical and historical literature on these two ongoing series of conflicts in the

Caucasus (Georgia, of course, contains two unresolved conflicts, not to mention the unsettled situation with Russia) and has admirably striven to clarify what are the real causes of these conflicts and, as a result, who benefits by their continuation. Only on the basis of the kind of careful but clear thinking and sober weighing of the evidence, as we find here, will it be possible not only for scholars to get a handle, so to speak, on these conflicts. Without such efforts it will be impossible for political actors, who are striving to promote a negotiation process and bring it to a peaceful conclusion, to grasp what is real and what is self-serving in the contending sides' narratives and, thus, what can realistically be achieved by purely political means to bring about conflict resolution.

We all know – from countless examples, including these ones – that in any and all such conflicts the participants have their own necessarily partial and self-serving frames of reference or narratives. That is to be expected. But scholars working from abroad who are not subject to this kind of politicization cannot let themselves be led astray by the incomplete and one-sided claims of one or both sides. Dr. Souleimanov has produced here just that kind of objective study that the region and its well-wishers need, an impartial, critical, well-researched study that weighs both the historical evidence and the contending theoretical approaches to these conflicts, which is necessary for their proper analysis. Readers coming to these issues for the first time and experts in the field both will benefit from his careful analysis, just as was the case with his previous book on the wars in Chechnya and the North Caucasus – also areas that have been unduly neglected. One can only hope that this work, too, will inspire political actors to renew their efforts to find satisfactory political solutions to these conflicts before we have a repetition of the events of 2008, which could only carry with them even greater negative repercussions for international security.

Professor Stephen Blank
Strategic Studies Institute
U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, February 2013

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During the various stages of my research, I was able to enjoy support from a number of friends and colleagues; without their help this book would not have come to fruition. In particular, I owe an intellectual debt to Tomáš Šmíd, Petra Kohoutková-Košťálová, Georgi Derluguian, Svante Cornell, Martin Malek, Ghia Nodia, Stephen Blank, Cerwyn Moore, Sergey Markedonov, Ronald Grigor Suny, and others whose advice and/or writings have proven to be an invaluable source of information in helping me to comprehend the Caucasus region in its full complexity. Thanks are also due to Professor Stephen Blank, for writing the foreword.

Last but not least, I owe a particular debt to my beloved parents, Silva and Yunus, and to my brother Emin, whose care and devotion have accompanied me during all these years. I also would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by David Morgan with regard to the preparation of my manuscript. Any shortcomings are my own.

Note on Transliteration

I transliterate words from local languages (and Russian) that do not use Latin script – that is, all of the South Caucasian languages, with the exemption of Azerbaijani. Therefore, certain peculiarities of the local languages have been taken into consideration: for instance, while transliterating from Georgian, no capital letters are used since they are absent in that language. In case of the Azerbaijani (and Turkish) languages, I have done my best to respect the original spelling, especially so with regard to names. Nevertheless, in order to somewhat simplify local terms for an English-language readership, the Azerbaijani vowel "ə" (spelled as in the English word "man") is transliterated as "ä" (Äliyev, not Əliyev). Similarly, the undotted "ı" used in Azerbaijani (and Turkish) denoting a close back unrounded vowel sound is used interchangeably with "i." In the case of Azerbaijani toponyms, both (original and simplified) versions are used, with the transliterated version being used routinely throughout the text. Wherever possible, the widely established English-language versions of toponyms are used; for instance, Baku instead of Bakı.

1
Introduction

Caspian oil diplomacy, post-Soviet geopolitics, and ethnopolitical conflicts are the three main factors that, since the end of the 1980s, have shaped the fate of the South Caucasus,[1] a multiethnic region which lies at the strategic crossroads of Europe and Asia: a region where Turkey, Russia, and Iran have historically striven for dominance. In the post-Soviet era, a host of the region's unresolved domestic and interstate conflicts, coupled with the ambitious plans of some nations to tap the Caspian's vast oil and natural gas resources and transport them to world markets – along with some other nations' no less ambitious initiatives to hamper these plans – have condemned the South Caucasus region to the unenviable status of becoming one of the neuralgic hotspots of what Zbigniew Brzezinski has termed the "Eurasian Balkans."

With regard to the region's relationships with its surrounding areas, what has been going on in the volatile South Caucasus is far from limited to its own borders; regional developments in and around Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have had far-reaching impacts upon events in Anatolia, in the Iranian highlands, in the region to the north of the Greater Caucasus Range, and in the Central Asian area. Thus, energy security within the context of the extraction and exporting of Caspian oil and natural gas; organized crime and the smuggling of drugs and weapons along with the ever greater successes of criminal gangs of Caucasian provenience; and ceaseless politically or economically motivated emigration from the region – these have all become topics which now make systematic research on the problems of the South Caucasus relevant.

Amongst these various issues, the particular questions arising from the civil wars and ethnopolitical conflicts that have so shaped regional politics within this region have assumed particular importance with

regard to the overall security of both the South Caucasus and its adjacent areas.

The South Caucasus

This is not the first book on ethnic conflict in the South Caucasus. Yet, it is one of few that merge empirically oriented case studies of regional ethnic conflicts with broader theories of civil war and ethnic conflict. Indeed, over the past two decades, a host of books have been produced that have sought to highlight the dramatic upsurges of ethnic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. As these works have turned out to have been of varying quality, and have focused on local conflicts from different angles, this literature may be subdivided into two principal categories: purely empirical studies, on the one hand, and, on the other, theoretical studies in which South Caucasian conflicts have figured as case studies to underpin the authors' own theoretical assumptions.

With regard to the first of these two categories, books by regional authors have been numerically dominant. Written mostly in local languages or in Russian, these have mainly been attempts to trace chronologically the evolution of local conflicts; often, they have been characterized by a predetermined intention to define local conflicts either as examples of national liberation movements or as cases of dangerous ethnic separatism. Accordingly, the authors' normative conclusions are easily foreseeable, given their ethnicity. In fact, with rare exceptions (Nodia), work authored by South Caucasian specialists has often been marked by low methodological standards and by the aforementioned normativity and ideological overtones, the combination of which has significantly reduced their scholarly value. Indeed, South Caucasian authors are renowned for their tendency to perceive local conflicts and interstate politics from within specific ethnocentrist and nationalist positions (Chirikba, Nuriyev, and Svarants), a phenomenon which also generally prevails among Russian authors (Zverev and Malysheva) and post-Soviet scholars. Needless to say, the scholarly value of the overwhelming majority of these studies is debatable.[2]

Interestingly, during more recent decades, a trend has become established within the relevant scholarly literature to link the emergence of ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus region with the broader operation of great-power politics in the Caspian region – particularly as regards the extraction and transit of Caspian oil and natural gas to world markets, this particularly so in the light of broader geopolitical competition over

the region, given its position as a strategically key crossroad. However, this approach by academics has entailed a number of pitfalls when it comes to the scrutinizing of local ethnic conflicts. First, the internal dynamics of such conflicts have tended to remain largely neglected in favor of an overemphasizing of the much broader structural dimension of geopolitical competition over the Caspian region, with its vast mineral resources: viewed from this perspective, local conflicts have often been understood as mere outcomes of "The Great Game" that has been going on between Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the United States ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This point of view has ignored the fact that during the second half of the 1980s, when ethnic conflicts first broke out in Azerbaijan's and Georgia's periphery, these countries were still integral parts of the Soviet state. Even as recently as the initial years of the 1990s that saw the intensification of local ethnic conflicts, the factor of Caspian geopolitics was either absented, or its importance was still marginal. Elkhan Nuriyev's (2007) study, *The South Caucasus at the Crossroads: Conflicts, Caspian Oil and Great Power Politics*, is indicative of this kind of symbiosis. The author's heavily ethnocentrist position, coupled with his overtly anti-Armenian sentiments as well as analytical weaknesses within his text and an overemphasis on the great-power politics argument, inevitably casts doubt on the book's relevance for the study of regional ethnic conflicts. A much more successful book of a similar scope was authored by Kamiluddin Gajiyev in 2003: *Geopolitika Kavkaza* (*The Geopolitics of the Caucasus*). This book has remained one of the best and least-biased Russian-language studies on the internal and foreign policies of the South Caucasus nations, wherein attention is also paid to local ethnic conflicts. However, the author's Russo-centrist approach dominates the study, especially when it comes to explaining the causes, evolution, and outcomes of the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. Significantly, throughout his book, Gajiyev attempts to avoid consideration of the controversial topic of Moscow's involvement in regional ethnic conflicts: this inevitably reduces the overall value of his findings. More recently, an empirically plentiful book on the Caucasus conflicts, *Polygon of Satan: Ethnic Traumas and Conflicts in the Caucasus*, which is rich with numerous testimonies from the conflict zone, and which focuses primarily on local ethnonationalist narratives, was published by Anatoly Isaenko, a U.S.-based historian of Russian descent. In the field of Russian-language scholarship, the work of Sergey Markedonov stands out for its well-balanced approach to exploring regional politics, which is evidenced by his 2010 book, *Turbulentnaya Evraziya: Mezhetnicheskie, grazhdanskie konflikty,*

ksenofobiya v novykh nezavisimykh gosudarstvakh postsovetskogo prostranstva (*Turbulent Eurasia: Interethnic, Civil Conflict, Xenophobia in the Newly Independent Republics of the Post-Soviet Space*). As the title of the book suggests, Markedonov chose to address a large and diverse area from a variety of perspectives, hence the South Caucasus conflicts received only partial coverage.

Within the Western academic community, different problems and approaches have prevailed. In the first half of the 1990s, once the world came to discover the significance of this part of the former Soviet Union, it was the region's intrastate conflicts which first attracted the attention of the Western media, academics, and the policy-making communities. However, for Western specialists of the early post-Soviet period, a number of intellectual restraints existed which hampered their understanding of the region. Firstly, the former Soviet Union was initially still viewed as a monolithic geopolitical space; a relatively narrow circle of Western experts attempted to navigate through the peculiarities of particular ex-Soviet regions. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the cold war era field of Soviet studies – swiftly transformed into post-Soviet studies – remained the domain of specialists in Russian (Soviet) studies, with a newly established circle of political scientists focusing primarily on transitional or democratization studies. Caucasus-related issues, among which regional ethnic conflict and civil war occupied a significant place, were basically approached through the prism of ex-Sovietologists whose reflections on the area were characterized by the largely Russo-centrist attitudes of specialists in Russian (Soviet) studies or by the attitudes of an even-narrower circle of scarcely informed political scientists who lacked substantial empirical knowledge of the region. For the former group of scholars, notwithstanding all the peripeteia of the post-Soviet period, Russia still attracted the most attention, as Russia was heir to most of the territories and resources of the Soviet Union: the largest nation-state on the globe which possessed nuclear arms, and whose strength and unpredictability still caused international concern as far as its internal political evolution – and the international political repercussions thereof – were concerned. By contrast, the significance of the South Caucasus region with respect to global security was seen as miniscule as compared to that of Russia – let alone to that of the Middle East, the Far East, South Asia, or Europe. However, the region's seemingly marginal standing in world affairs was contradicted by the immense internal political complexity that has always characterized this multiethnic area, with its specific culture, perplexing loyalties, intricate history, and turbulent ties with its neighbors. All of this differentiated the South Caucasus – and Central

Asia, too – from the rest of the former Soviet Union, which was still largely associated with Russia, where the majority of ex-Sovietologists had received their training on. This consideration was all the more acute in the case of political scientists – specialists in comparative politics, ethnic conflict, and a range of related subdisciplines – whose attempts to conceptualize local events within this region were often marked by their lack of solid factual knowledge of the region's perplexing issues. Symptomatically, even a knowledge of Russian, let alone of local languages – so crucial to an understanding of the region – has been a perennial problem for many Western academic observers.

Nonetheless, a number of authoritative empirical accounts of ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus, authored by Western scholars, have emerged relatively recently. Michael P. Croissant's (1998) book, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications*, was one of the first to deal with the roots and evolution of a local conflict in a complex manner. In subsequent years, it was followed by a body of scholarship which sought to shed light on the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh (Cornell), Abkhazia, and South Ossetia (Coppieters) in a clear and balanced way. Focusing on the region's ethnic conflicts and civil wars from a variety of perspectives, these writers have contributed a great deal to our understanding of the causalities which have linked conflict onset and escalation, while also paying significant attention to local specifics. South Caucasian ethnic conflicts have been at the center of the scholarship of Stephen Blank, Martin Malek, Olga Oliker, and a number of other Western observers who have focused on the broader security-related implications of local conflicts. For instance, Svante Cornell's monograph, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, published in 2001, has remained an encyclopedic treatment of local ethnic conflicts, domestic politics, and the wider geopolitics that shaped the region during the 1990s. Thomas de Waal's journalistic accounts – including his *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (2004) – stand out from the list of books dealing with the Caucasus conflicts. De Waal's book largely seeks to provide deep insight into local conflicts from the perspectives of individual human fates.

Surprisingly, as mentioned above, only a small portion of the scholarship devoted to South Caucasian ethnic conflicts has sought to bring together empirical case studies with theories of ethnic conflict and civil war. As of today, Cristoph Zürcher's *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (2009) has come the closest to merging the specifics of local interethnic conflict with wider contemporary theory. Curiously, in this authoritative work, Zürcher only focuses

on attesting to the relevance of theoretical findings which emanate from *quantitative* scholarship on the causes of civil war – thereby paying no attention to what I term *process-based* or *escalation-based* theories. Hence, despite our having carried out research on a similar topic, in an identical time span, he comes to quite different conclusions: a result that is conditioned by the somewhat different focus of his work, as he concentrates on the issues of statehood *and* ethnic conflicts across the whole of the Caucasus. Stuart J. Kaufman, in his brilliant *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (2001), elaborated on three case studies of the South Caucasus conflicts: he utilized empirical material from Moldova and the former Yugoslavia in order to support his theory on the symbolic (identity) politics of ethnic wars – his findings are largely supported by this monograph.

In the meantime, a new study on the Caucasus conflicts has recently appeared, authored by Vicken Cheterian. In his *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia's Troubled Frontier* (2011), Cheterian provides an authoritative account of local ethnic wars, one which is enriched by informed insights into regional history and politics and which is framed by conceptualizations of mass trauma, mobilization, and repression as the sources of local conflicts.

Theories of ethnic conflict and civil war

During the post-World War II cold war era, little attention was paid to internal regional conflicts. In the decades preceding the 1990s, the emphasis of both academic and policy-making communities was largely on the realm of interstate war, while instances of ethnic war and civil conflict were usually interpreted through the prism of bipolar rivalry. In fact, the academic community at that time tended to comprehend such conflicts either as direct outcomes of the broader Soviet–American confrontation, or at best only insofar as regional conflicts could be viewed as being linked to the ongoing conflict between the two global superpowers. What was really seen to matter in intrastate conflicts was the possible impact which they might have upon the fragile balance of power between the Communist and Capitalist world orders. Accordingly, neither the proximate causes nor the internal dynamics of small-scale civil wars or local ethnic conflicts were of much interest to the mainstream scholarly community.

Nonetheless, as early as at the turn of the 1970s, a number of studies emerged in which attempts were made to conceptualize the peculiarities of protest and rebellion on the intrastate level. At the forefront

of multidisciplinary research emanating from within a variety of the social sciences was Ted Robert Gurr, a political scientist whose authoritative *Why Men Rebel* (1970) largely shaped the field of intrastate conflict studies in its incubatory phase. Focusing primarily on the sociopsychological causes of civil war, Gurr initially anchored his work at the crossroads of previously established relative deprivation theory, bringing in aggregate demographic and geographic data in order to operationalize his variables. From then on, the tradition of combining a microanalytical focus (individual motivations) with macroanalytical research (utilizing cross-national data) established itself – a tradition which subsequently was further elaborated upon by both quantitative and qualitative scholarship.

Initially, contextually rich narratives of ethnic conflict and civil war dominated the emerging field: these sought to explore the causal linkages between various forms of violence, illustrating in specific cases what it was that caused conflict, why and how conflict escalated, and which forms of outcomes were most likely to result. The qualitative approach was further strengthened during the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, when the fear of bipolar war entailing a destructive nuclear conflict on a global scale came to nothing, while a wave of civil wars and ethnic conflicts erupted within the remnants of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. During this period, a set of theories emerged – or re-emerged from within the previous scholarly tradition – to reflect recent experiences of intrastate conflict. Several crucial theories of ethnic conflict and civil war were (re)formulated during the 1990s – including those based on the premise of manipulative leaders (Gagnon) and those based on identity, or symbolic, politics (Kaufman).

Narrative explanations as such, however, differed from place to place when it came to generalizing on the root causes of civil war, since for many political scientists, economists, and sociologists, the capacity of qualitative studies alone to construct a complex and all-encompassing theory of civil war was disputed. Following the quantitative turn in social science research, scholars across these various fields – with economists playing a leading role among their colleagues – began utilizing cross-country statistical data in order to trace the causes of civil war, largely in an effort to purge social science research of ideological indoctrination, political preferences, and personal bias. At the turn of the century, and during the previous decade, a number of findings were made public, with two academic teams – those of Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, and James Fearon and David Laitin – heavily shaping the research. It quickly became apparent, however, that econometric studies

were flawed in that they failed, on more than a few occasions, to give an unambiguous understanding of causal mechanisms: the relationship between independent and dependent variables of civil wars provided by large-*n* quantitative studies was not sufficiently clear, allowing for a range of sometimes mutually exclusive interpretations. Additionally, such studies proved technically incapable of taking into account the time, or process, factor – that is, the evolution of intrastate conflicts which often precede eruptions of civil war; at the same time, these studies also displayed a range of other shortcomings, given the rich texture of civil and ethnic conflicts, and the traditional limitations of quantitative research. Besides this, the utilization of even slightly different concepts of civil war and other definitions pertinent to the field seemed to exercise a considerable impact upon the outcomes of research.

Prompted by what some have viewed as the attainment of the natural limits of quantitative research to inform or enlighten, a new trend has recently established itself within the domain of civil war and ethnic conflict research, a trend which advocates a return to qualitative studies, or at the very least a combination between quantitative and qualitative approaches with respect to the study of the interrelated phenomena of civil war and intrastate and ethnic conflict. Nowadays, the narrative tradition of conflict research appears to be on the rise (as evidenced by recent research carried out by Nicholas Sambanis, Stathis Kalyvas, and Elisabeth Wood and a range of other authors) which has been paralleled more generally by ever greater efforts to subject the realm of conflict research to techniques of multidisciplinary research. Importantly, conflict research – with intrastate conflict research featuring as an important component within it – has witnessed considerable methodological problems due to its social complexity: as a disciplinary field it stands at the crossroads between social psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, and international relations – that is to say at the epicenter of social science disciplines that often employ distinct sets of methodologies which approach the same problem from a wide variety of angles.

Notwithstanding recent concentrated efforts, no uniform methodology seems to have emerged which would provide a fully adequate framework from within which to study incidences of civil war and ethnic conflict. Similarly, attempts at establishing an all-encompassing theory (or model) of civil war and ethnic conflict appear to have foundered, which is hardly surprising, given the extremely intrinsic and case-specific nature of the social realities that characterize each particular instance of ethnic war or civil conflict. For example, whereas economists focus

primarily upon rational arguments that seek to describe civil war and ethnic conflict in terms of *economic* motives, social psychologists inevitably lean toward an emphasis on the *psychological* aspects of in-group and out-group competition, whereas students of international relations tend to focus on the external contexts of such conflicts while political scientists focus on regime types, and so forth. In certain cases of civil war or ethnic conflict, only some of these factors will apply; whereas in other instances nearly all (or sometimes none) of them will feature as relevant. Overall, it appears extremely difficult to track causal mechanisms in a precise manner, identifying (and measuring) clear links between independent and dependent variables.

Methodological remarks

The methodology of this book is akin to that of an instrumentalist comparative case study. Its primary objective is to acknowledge and assimilate the growing body of theoretical literature relating to ethnic conflict and civil war, using the empirical data deriving from three major South Caucasian conflicts and, further, to evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of the available methodological approaches. It is hoped that this analytical and comparative exercise will result in suggestions for the improvement of current theories, as well as for the identification of the directions which further theoretical research on ethnic conflict and civil war could most profitably pursue.

A comparative approach is maintained throughout the book: the theoretical part provides a synthesis of various approaches, which are classified, highlighted, and criticized in a comparative manner; meanwhile, the three empirical case studies of particular regional conflicts are utilized comparatively to illustrate the (ir)relevance of certain of the currently available theories. As with other instrumentalist case studies, the approach adopted here can best be thought of as a compromise between two methodological extremes: that of the heavily empiricist approach, on the one hand, and that of the heavily theoretical approach, on the other. As such, the book focuses strongly on the case-specific contextual richness of case studies, which in turn facilitates the creation of solid theoretical conclusions.

In particular, this book seeks to explore the relevance of major theoretical approaches which currently dominate the field of ethnic conflict and civil war and to test the efficacy of these theoretical approaches by applying them to the examples provided by the South Caucasus conflicts, namely those in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. As the

book reflects upon the ongoing methodological turn in civil war and ethnic conflict research, it distances itself in part from previous, quantitatively based, theoretical scholarship, which has treated instances of intrastate conflict worldwide as aggregated data for large-*n* cross-national studies while paying little attention to micro-level analysis. In addition, the book strives to avoid the adoption of a purely empirical focus as it merges theory with practice, apprehending the South Caucasus region as a culturally, geographically, and geopolitically homogeneous space which, in spite of some minor differences, offers common ground for theorizing.

Moreover, the study points to the necessity to distinguish between two sets of theories: the first set comprises those theories which focus upon the background causes of conflict (onset-based theories); and the second set comprises those theories which focus upon conflict escalation (process-based theories), while exploring the causes of ethnic conflict and civil war and the escalation thereof. Since it illustrates both the strengths and the shortcomings of contemporary theories of ethnic conflict and civil war, as these bear upon the case studies provided by the South Caucasian conflicts, the book further develops our understanding of specific factors (such as in-group cohesion, external support, etc.) whose relevance for the field is immense, but which as yet remain rather understudied.

Additionally, in a further effort to augment current theories on civil war and ethnic conflict, the book also points out the largely neglected link between small-scale interethnic violence (ethnic riots or sporadic violence) and large-scale interethnic violence (sustainable organized violence or civil war); therefore, a scheme of periodization in terms of ethnic conflict which reflects the process of its escalation is introduced. Indeed, it will be argued that it is the *institutionalized* use of violence which contributes to the outbreak of ethnic or civil war, once one or both of the parties to the conflict in question have sensed the opportunity to take concentrated collective action. To that end, the book proposes a three-phase scheme of conflict escalation. It further identifies the crucial importance of *opportunity* – defined as the awareness by either of the parties to a given conflict that they may make use of a relative asymmetry of power (i.e., one's own strength versus one's adversary's weakness) which, in turn, causes the escalation of small-scale ethnic disorder into full-scale civil war. Further, the book shows that even though the calculation of such opportunity by social or political elites is usually in itself a rational process, this calculation also entails a host of behavioral factors that significantly reduce the predictability of civil war.

To sum up: apart from its empirical aspects, the theoretical innovation of this book lies in the following areas. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive critique of the existing body of theoretical literature dealing with ethnopolitical conflict and civil war, using the South Caucasus conflicts of the late 1980s and early 1990s as case studies. Secondly, the existing typology of ethnopolitical conflict and civil war (with particular reference to conflict onset and conflict escalation-based theories) will be augmented. Thirdly, the (hitherto largely neglected) link between small-scale interethnic violence, and large-scale interethnic violence, will be critically analyzed – while, consequently, a tripartite scheme of periodization with respect to ethnic conflict and civil war will be postulated, consisting of: phase A, frozen or latent conflict/mobilization; phase B, ethnic riots or sporadic violence/radicalization; and phase C, sustained violence and civil war. In this way the institutionalized use of violence by agents of violence (i.e., ethnic elites and/or authorities) will come to be seen as a necessary precondition of civil war; while opportunity found in power asymmetry, as outlined above, will come to be seen as the crucial factor which transforms ethnic riots into full civil war. Other important aspects of ethnic conflict and civil war (i.e., the degree of in-group cohesion; the external support for secessionist elites, etc.) will also be analyzed.

Organization of the book

In this introductory chapter, an overview of the relevant scholarly literature is provided, subdivided into a part dealing with empirical case studies on the ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus and a subsequent part which briefly analyzes the available body of theoretical scholarship that deals with ethnic conflict and civil war. In Chapter 2, a more detailed and more critical overview of the major theoretical approaches to the study of ethnic conflict and civil war is provided. Additionally, Chapter 2 also provides some broad theorizing on the basic concepts pertinent to the field, as well as proposes a typology of escalation in ethnic conflict, pointing out the relative strengths and shortcomings of the major theories of civil wars and ethnic conflict which in recent times have come to dominate the field. Chapter 3 launches the book's empirical section: it seeks to shed light on the most significant historical milestones within the longer-term history of the South Caucasus region, placing emphasis on the genesis of sub-regional and ethnic (self-) perceptions during recent centuries, which have so shaped the interrelationships between the region's major nations and their (imperial) neighbors.

It also introduces the transitional period of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia in order to illustrate the structural impact that regime changes, economic circumstances, and ideological vacuums have had upon the region as a whole during the course of the decline of Soviet hegemony. In Chapter 4, the initial causes of ethnic conflicts and civil wars and the factors influencing their consequent escalation are detailed with respect to both the security dilemmas and the ideological discords which shaped the conflicts in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Chapter 5 provides insight into the region's various ethnic conflicts from the perspective of the interrelationships between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, considered globally, and Russia, Turkey, and Iran – the latter being key regional actors during the researched period. Importantly, the cases of conflict escalation in South Ossetia and, especially, Abkhazia, which took place in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet state are particularly closely scrutinized in this chapter due to Russia's decisive involvement in these conflicts. In Chapter 6, conclusions are drawn which critically examine the relevance of established theoretical approaches as applied to the case studies derived from the South Caucasus conflicts; additionally, efforts are made to augment contemporary theories of ethnic conflict and civil war.

2
Theorizing on the Causes of Civil War and Ethnopolitical Conflict

Recent decades have seen an increased occurrence of civil war and ethnopolitical conflict in certain areas of Europe. Whereas, in Latin America and the Middle East, incidents of ethnopolitical warfare *decreased* by 74 percent and 54 percent, respectively, between 1989 and 1999, incidents of such conflict *increased* by 43 percent in Europe, by 40 percent in Asia, and by 35 percent in Africa during the same time period.[1] In fact, the recent upsurge of ethnopolitical violence within these areas seems to be a continuation of a previously established trend which dates back to the latter half of the 1940s, as a majority of the civil wars fought during the postwar era have been fought in the name of ethnonational self-determination.[2] Indeed, remarkably, since the end of World War II such intrastate conflicts have in fact been more frequent and numerous than interstate conflicts.[3] During the period from 1945 to 1999 alone, approximately 130 intrastate civil wars have brought death to 20 million people and have caused the displacement of up to 70 million people in more than 70 countries across the globe; by contrast, during the same period, only 25 interstate wars have occurred, with a total death rate close to 3 million.[4] In absolute numbers, as of 2003 there were approximately 70 ongoing intrastate ethnopolitical conflicts still in an actively violent stage.[5]

This apparent upsurge of civil war and intra-state ethnopolitical conflict was itself paralleled by a new wave of scholarship in various academic locations across the world, which has cumulatively sought to reflect upon the growing phenomenon of intrastate conflict from within the perspectives of a number of various academic disciplines: this has had the overall consequence of reshaping the focus of conflict studies research in global terms. As mentioned above, this has proven

to be an important turning point which has marked a global shift of scholarly interest from the systemically determined field of interstate conflict, which used to characterize the superpower rivalry of the cold war era, to the intrastate realm of (hitherto largely neglected) civil war and ethnopolitical conflict.[6] Indeed, whilst the emphasis of conflict studies scholarship was previously – during the era of bi-polar Cold War conflict – primarily upon issues of nuclear deterrence, military alliances, and superpower arms races (with a subsequent focus upon economic interdependence and its repercussions in world affairs), a growing body of relatively recent scholarly literature has sought to explain the causes, the dynamics, and the outcomes of intrastate conflicts. Beginning in the 1990s, students of civil war and ethnopolitical conflict have advanced a host of theories which have focused on the impact of postmodernism, globalization, indigenization, regime change, and so forth.[7]

Nevertheless, given the complex nature of the social context which underlies each individual case of civil war or ethnopolitical conflict, as yet no all-encompassing body of explanatory theory has been established to account for such conflicts in global terms, as particular conflicts necessarily emanate from within diverse cultural, (geo)political, and historical backgrounds which allow little scope for generalization. Even though instances of ethnopolitical warfare from across the Balkans, the Caucasus, Asia, and Africa do share some important similarities, their individual particularities make it generally difficult, if not impossible, to draw far-reaching conclusions with respect to underlying causes or processes of development.

As with some other areas of social science research, global, transnational theories of civil war and ethnopolitical conflict – which tend to deal with significant numbers of cases in a quantitative way – have come to dominate the field in recent decades. However, these have lacked clarity in that they largely have tended to remain vague in approach, and in that they have been too broad in scope to be applied with sufficient accuracy to particular country-related case studies. Indeed, quantitative studies generally fail to capture the internal dynamics of civil wars, given that the level of macroanalysis employed by such studies sheds little light on the motives of the parties to the conflict. Arguing for the necessity to combine quantitative *and* qualitative studies, Sambanis observes that, "the gap between micro-level behavior and macro-level explanation is large. It is magnified when the micro-macro relationships are studied solely through cross-national statistical analyses. What is often lost in such studies is information about causal pathways that link outcomes with causes. … [D]espite large amounts of "noise" in micro-level

data about violent behavior in civil war, we can still make useful inferences about the organization, causes, and consequences of violence at the macro level, but to do so, we cannot rely on a single methodological approach."[8] Additionally, as will be further explained below, there have been fairly serious shortcomings with regard to the selection and operationalization of the data used in such cross-country research, and hence with regard to its general validity. As a rule, the breadth of interpretation intrinsic to quantitative research per se fails to elucidate the kind of clear causal mechanisms which are indispensable for the adequate comprehension of individual instances of civil war or ethnopolitical conflict, given that such conflicts are each unique in time and in space and are each shaped by quite diverse cultural backgrounds.

Conversely, *qualitatively* oriented, small-scale studies – which have tended to be based on a considerably reduced quantity of empirical case studies – have shown a tendency to be too narrow and case-determined to be applied more broadly to ranges of differing instances of civil war or ethnopolitical conflict. As Brubaker and Laitin point out, "The rhetorical weight in case studies tends to be carried by the richness and density of texture; although a major argumentative line is almost always identifiable, the argument takes the form of a seamless web rather than a distinct set of explanatory propositions."[9] However, given the complex social reality of every single case of civil war or ethnic conflict, it is debatable whether a simplified line of theorizing, based on a supposedly causal relationship between a selected number of variables, would be capable of exploring these necessarily multifaceted phenomena in an appropriate manner. In fact, qualitative scholarship does produce important conclusions, some of which have been further theorized: by comparison with quantitative research, qualitative research on civil wars and ethnic conflicts has allowed scholars to track causal relationships based on clear and chronologically determined sequences of events whilst covering conflicts in their entirety.

Nonetheless, the applicability of qualitatively based case studies to cases other than those being immediately scrutinized is essentially contingent upon random coincidence: such applicability has tended in practice to be based on a similarity of variables featuring within the conflicts in question – thus if any more general theoretical or empirical claims are advanced on the basis of such studies, their validity is usually contested. Besides that, the complexity of the social reality pertinent to each single instance of ethnopolitical conflict or civil war makes it difficult to categorize such conflicts plausibly, and even more difficult to arrive at general conclusions. As of yet, the field of conflict studies

as applied to intrastate ethnopolitical conflict is characterized by a general lack of middle-range theories such as would combine theoretical research with high levels of generalization and with research of particular case studies, which is itself grounded in the empirical singularity of particular instances of conflict. This book is an attempt to bridge that gap between empiricism and theory.

Explaining the terms

Men are said to be "social animals." Throughout human history, our ability to survive has depended largely on the ability to cohere into social groups – social groups which provide mutual support within social networks organized along the lines of family or clan. In prehistoric times, physical survival was directly commensurable to in-group cohesion, given the hostile nature of an environment made up of competing tribes, wild animals, and variable weather. This may well have contributed to the forging of the innate human sense of in-group solidarity: humans conceive of themselves not only as individuals, but even more importantly as members of a certain family, clan, territorial unit, ethnicity, religion, nationality, race, and so forth. Indeed, it is not going too far to assert that human self-consciousness itself rests upon the collective categories implied by such social groupings. Yet, to become aware of a collective in-group identity, as such, there must also be an "out-group other": perceived otherness defines the external boundaries of our collective identity as we become conscious of what constitutes "us" as distinct from "them."

Such in-group centrism is an important component of human identity, as we generally attach positive attributes to "us" – while ascribing negative characteristics to perceived otherness. Inevitably, therefore, during the course of human history otherness has been associated with threat: the relative absence of information available with respect to the nature and intentions of the social "other" increases the sense of being potentially endangered whenever we encounter out-group individuals or groups. We are generally anxious with regard to those speaking a different language or adhering to unfamiliar social values: we tend to consider their behavior bizarre, as we do not know what to expect from people with whom we are not familiar. A cognitive process such as this appears to lie at the root of much xenophobia.

In fact, according to theorists of social psychology, human collectives are innately characterized by such in-group favoritism, as we tend instinctively to give preference to and show affinity for our own

in-group, as distinct from any out-group or from anyone viewed as belonging to an out-group. Important aspects of this in-group versus out-group dichotomy were revealed a few decades ago in a series of experiments conducted by Henri Tajfel, the pioneer of social identity theory. Firstly, these experiments showed that it does not require too much effort to establish an in-group: such a group may be established on the grounds of the seemingly most marginal, occasionally trivial, patterns of distinction – such as eye color, preference for painters, and so forth. However, once established, the rules of in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination apply with considerable vigor, even overcoming motives of economic self-interest, as in-group members favor their in-group co-members, even at the expense of personal loss.[10] Significantly, in contrast to the situation regarding our own in-group collective, – in which we are able to differentiate among individual members, taking into account their particular identities – we usually tend to view the members of an out-group as constituting a monolithic entity, whereby we fail to differentiate among its individual members, since "they are alike; we are diverse."[11] This phenomenon is probably due, once again, to the relative lack of available information concerning the nature and motivations of out-group members: in the absence of such information, we tend toward the creation of negative generalizations and to the establishment of hostile stereotypes and prejudices with regard to out-groups and their members.

Although it has become an overwhelmingly significant phenomenon of social organization in the contemporary world, ethnicity used to be of far lesser importance a few centuries ago, when people primarily identified themselves with respect to their family ties, classes, religions, and their sense of territorial or dynastic belonging. The ascent to prominence of ethnicity as a principle of social organization seems to be as a consequence of the advent, firstly, of secularism (which has been gaining momentum since the end of the eighteenth century); and, secondly, of the rise of popular nationalism as a primary political force – initially in modern Europe, and subsequently elsewhere across the globe.[12]

Currently, the term ethnicity is among the most widely debated within the social sciences. Put briefly, there is a major theoretical division amongst social scientists which separates the "primordialist" approach from the "modernist" (including "constructivist" and "instrumentalist") approach, with respect to the explanation of ethnicity and its role in politics and conflict. The first approach stresses the inborn nature of ethnicity: humans are born into an ethnic group which possesses clearly defined sets of affiliations, whether these be physical appearance,

language, historical mythology, religion, culture, or a combination thereof. Membership of such an ethically structured society is reckoned by descent, and cannot be obtained.[13] Membership of an ethnic group is regarded as being akin to that of some form of extended family: this creates a primordial bond to the ethnic group as far as the individual member is concerned.[14] For primordialists, the nature of ethnic conflict is seen as obvious and simple, since such conflicts revolve around notions of ethnic or national survival and of group cohesion, and these conflicts relate to group interests that are seen as primal and universal. It is also relatively easy for the primordialists to understand why people turn to concepts and values of ethnicity when they feel endangered, and why they might sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their ethnic brethren, who are conceived of as members of a virtual extended family with whom they share powerful ties of blood kinship. In the context of this book, of particular importance is Geertz's assumption that a newly established nation-state and its specific group identity quickly becomes powerful trigger factors with regard to conflict, as this reinforces the centrality of primordial attachments along ethnic lines.[15] The "modernist" approaches toward the study of ethnicity draw a more complex picture. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, such widely prevalent factors as rapid economic development, urbanization, and the spread of literacy, led then-popular modernization theorists to claim that the multiplying frequency of the interactions between peoples of various ethnic backgrounds would have the cumulative effect of diluting age-old (primordial) identities, since increased contacts with "the other" would tend to de-mystify and familiarize "out-groups." Thus, they argued, ethnic identities would eventually come to be replaced by loyalties to civic communities and political organizations void of ethnic, confessional, or tribal self-awareness.

However, the events of the decades that followed showed that an opposite condition held true: it turned out that, at least in some modernizing societies, people adhered ever more closely to their respective ethnic identities, a phenomenon which in some cases gave rise to ethnoseparatist movements. The proponents of primordialism have explained this phenomenon as a form of protest mobilization which is adopted by people in order to defend what they perceive as *their* culture and established way of life. From this perspective, modernization is understood as an attack on a people's (fundamental and innate) ethnic and religious identities, these being seen as the cornerstone of their collective self-consciousness. After all, primordialists would argue, this form of identity has deep social, historical, and even genetic foundations: it comprises

a chain of deeply embedded social and psychological givens that substantially affect our mindsets.

Instrumentalists argue, on the contrary, that what matters is the perception of economic need, and the pursuit thereof: cultural identity plays a role inasmuch as it is evoked by ethnic leaders who are, in truth, driven by the desire to achieve material goals, such as power and wealth. Champions of instrumentalism regard a given ethnic group as constituting nothing more than a political coalition formed ad hoc to advance the specific economic interests of their members – or, more often, their leaders – whose motives and interests may change significantly over time. It is important to note that processes of modernization contribute to increased levels of social stratification, both along the lines of interethnic divisions, and also amongst members of the same ethnic group. Hence, modernization must itself be seen as a source of social inequality – inequality which in turn causes discontent that may be manipulated so as to rationalize ethnic conflicts whose ultimate aims may, in fact, be far removed from the interests of the ethnic groups concerned. Constructivists go further so as to point out the *constructed* essence of any ethnic identity, such that what may appear to be a cohesive group identity based on a common legacy of birth, culture, and history may, in fact, be revealed to be a social construction that is either imposed by outsiders and/or forged by fellow co-ethnic intellectuals (and politicians) in order to achieve ethnocultural homogeneity, which is the necessary foundation of the modern nation-state.[16] After all, relatively recent social identity theory has demonstrated that in-groups may be constructed quite easily, may provide for a strong sense of in-group solidarity, and out-group discrimination, and may also create the conditions for dynamic collective action.

The perennialists attempt to combine features deriving from both of the above theoretical lineages. On the one hand, they acknowledge the modernists' constructivist view of ethnicity as a social construct and also the modernists' instrumentalist view of ethnicity as a form of cultural leverage, which is used by ethnic leaders to forge in-group solidarity and to achieve specific political goals. Yet, on the other hand, perennialists acknowledge the deep historical and psychological roots of those social constructs, those roots which make these constructs so powerfully persistent. This may explain why ethnicity becomes such a crucial layer of individual and collective identity during times of ethnic conflict.[17]

In fact, under certain circumstances every approach seems to be valid to a certain degree. Ethnic groups are collective social constructs drawn from past experiences, but are considerably (re)shaped by modernity,

since what we ordinarily think of as culture, language, or historical memory is, in fact, constructed or codified by intellectuals, reshaped by historical and political circumstances, reinforced by conflicts with out-group members and, most importantly, changes and evolves over time. Yet, once these constructs have been constructed, it usually takes much time and effort to deconstruct or to reconstruct them: in practical situations reinforced by the conditions of ethnic mobilization, people do associate themselves with their ethnic identity, which is conceived of in strongly primordialist terms. The instrumentalist approach, too, plays an important role in explaining ethnopolitical conflict since, as a rule, conflict is in itself a political (public) category, and politics is shaped by elites who often act on the basis of their own understanding of ethnicity or ethnic interests.[18]

As this book demonstrates, a *combination* of these major theoretical approaches turns out to be most effective when it comes to explaining actual ethnopolitical conflict. In the pre-conflict phase, ethnicity is of lesser importance since, in times of peace, individuals tend to associate themselves with a web of other identities such as age, gender, profession, social status, family ties, and so forth, and not primarily with ethnicity, per se. Even though the consciousness of being part of a specific ethnic group and of sharing its collective symbols usually subsists latently, common historical experiences, language, skin color, culture, and the sense of belonging to some specific geographic territory, only become decisive when there is a shared perception that these associations serve to distinguish members of that one group from those who belong to other ethnic groups. Two factors which can directly foster this kind of shared perception are the collective experience of ethnic discrimination, as compared with other ethnic groups, and that of deliberate political mobilization in defense of the group's perceived interests.[19] In other words, even though the symbols of ethnic identity are themselves demonstrably a product of social and historical construction, this does not in any sense make them less important in people's daily lives when situations of ethnic conflict arise, accompanied by the subsequent politicization of ethnicity as the main marker of group identity. This is where I see the relevance of social identity theory, as described above, to the domain of ethnic conflict. Out of a host of definitions of ethnicity which have been used in the social sciences during the past few decades, I work with the one that views ethnicity as a multi-layered assemblage of collective identity – encompassing the belief in a common origin, a shared language, a collective memory, and a collective idea of ancestral land and culture.[20]

In this book, *conflict* is understood as a process in which two or more actors each attempt to advance their own – mutually exclusive – interests, so as to achieve their respective goals, albeit at the cost of their adversary's failure. Conflict is thus regarded as a condition of competition over material and ideational values – a condition which is indigenous to human communities. *Violent conflict* is here understood as a state of affairs in which two or more actors individually attempt to achieve their own particular interests with the help of organized violence – violence which usually involves physical attacks on the adversary's properties, lives, and values in order to dramatically reduce the latter's ability and willingness to pursue his or her own goals. *Ethnic conflict* is understood as a state of affairs in which various human collectives – with at least one party to the conflict organized along the lines of ethnic identity – clash over particular resources and values. In cases of *violent ethnic conflict*, this clash of competing interests acquires violent forms usually manifested in terms of direct attacks upon the members of one or more ethnic community. Another term used throughout this book is civil war, which is understood as an armed conflict within a country, "fought by organized groups that aim to take power at the center or in a region, or to change government policies."[21]

Interestingly, there is a certain degree of conceptual obscurity as regards each of the basic terms mentioned in this chapter, which also turns out to be the case with a host of other social sciences–related concepts which can be shown to be excessively vague and therefore susceptible to various interpretations. For example, a notable degree of conceptual difficulty occurs when it comes to the scrutinizing of the very essence of conflict. As stated above, conflict is understood as constituting some form of disagreement over a certain possession or commodity, which motivates actors to obtain or retain this commodity at their opponent's expense: thus, conflict is necessarily a competitive process in which two or more actors intend to achieve the same goal by means of mutual exclusion. Yet, (active) disagreement over specific commodities is so common a state of affairs in interpersonal relationships that it hardly makes sense to emphasize this form of social interaction. After all, we all compete among ourselves to obtain a better education, job, partners, and so forth and quite often do so while regarding our own achievement of specific ends as being mutually incompatible with the interests of our perceived opponents. Even though defining conflict on the interpersonal level does not seem to be too onerous a task, when it comes to situations of collective conflict in which at least one of the parties identifies itself in ethnic terms, it becomes much more difficult to ascertain

exactly when the conflict in question can be properly defined as primarily "ethnic" in nature.

Another variable factor is the question of the scope and intensity of competition (or the level of mutual incompatibility of goals and interests), which enables one to speak in terms of "conflict" as such: Does a latent conflict qualify, or must there be some form of conflict in its active phase? And, if the latter option is believed to apply, must it necessarily be of a high international profile, or could a low-key, low-profile conflict also count? Indeed, how is it possible to distinguish clearly between latent and active, or low- and high-profile conflicts? Is the use of violence to be regarded as the crucial marker of conflict, transforming it from a latent phase to an active phase? And, if so, what is the definition of violence and how can it be measured? After all, violence is in practice very much a culturally determined phenomenon which might be understood either as the actual use of physical violence or, perhaps, as the threat thereof. All these questions remain largely unanswered in any definite manner and, given the complexity and contextual determination of the above phenomena, it is very unlikely that any all-encompassing coverage can be provided by the social sciences. Yet, this conceptual vagueness does not confine itself purely to the realm of theoretical discussions, as it also affects the ways in which research on civil war and intrastate conflict is conducted and the ways in which the outcomes of such conflicts are understood; this especially holds true for concept-related, quantitatively oriented research and its findings. In practice, the particular definitions applied to the key concepts used has a powerful determining effect upon the outcomes of any given program of research; since virtually every concept in social sciences is relative, both the guiding definitions used, and the resultant research outcomes, will inevitably be contestable. Nevertheless, in practice there seems little alternative but to accept that a certain degree of conceptual vagueness and semantic intricacy is inherent to social sciences research, at least as regards some of its terminological apparatus.

For example, some contentious interpretations exist with regard to the term civil war. Andersen, Barten, and Jensen point out a range of definitions of the term civil war across various disciplines, as in legal studies civil war is widely understood as a non-international armed conflict; in anthropology, the term civil war is understood as signifying a complex concept, the definition of which depends upon the *context* within which the war occurs; meanwhile, in purely military terms, there are no civil wars as such – there are only wars or armed conflicts to that end.[22]

Notably, most quantitative research in this field, including that led by authoritative scholars such as Fearon and Laitin, as well as by Collier and Hoeffler, works with a notional numerical threshold of a thousand battle deaths per year during each year of the conflict in question as fulfilling an important part of the definition of civil war (as defined by the Correlates of War [COW] project). However, this threshold fails to take into account the notable fact that civil wars, unlike conventional wars, are characterized by the conjunction of military (combatant) and civilian (noncombatant) deaths. Given the essence of civil war, it is extremely difficult to distinguish strictly between these respective categories, as they often merge. Furthermore, over time, civil wars often undergo dramatic variations as far as their intensity is concerned, which will have an affect upon the number of annual deaths recorded. In some years, causalities may amount to more than a thousand battle deaths per annum, whilst in another year of that same conflict, they may fall well below that threshold – raising questions about whether or not to treat data from the less violent year as part of the civil war per se – when it might perhaps be seen as more appropriate to identify casualty data from that period of lower intensity as resulting from civil disorder. Accepting the formal numerical threshold of at least a thousand battle-related annual deaths disqualifies a range of instances that nevertheless do fulfill other key essentials of civil war – however, these instances tend to be defined as civil conflicts and their variables are, therefore, not operationalized in civil war research.

As mentioned above, another uncertainty occurs with regard to possible differences in terms of international legal status, because in some instances of secessionist war, a separatist entity may be formally recognized as independent by some countries, but be regarded as an integral constituent of its parent territory by one of the warring parties to the conflict. An armed conflict may also arise within the political administrative borders of one single state, and thus be initially classified as a civil war, but over time it may evolve into a fully international armed conflict, due to the interference by neighboring states in that conflict. Alternatively, a secessionist civil war may be instigated, or significantly supported, by a neighboring country whose assistance to insurgents may be crucial in maintaining the secessionist movement. In none of these cases would it be self-evidently clear whether the armed conflict in question should be considered a civil war or not; nor whether two different stages of the same armed conflict should be treated as representing different categories of conflict in overall terms. To address concerns such as these, which arise from differences in the perceived

international legal status ascribed to particular instances of conflict, some scholars have sought to define civil war as armed conflict among "geographically contiguous people concerned about possibly having to live with one another in the same political unit after the conflict."[23] Hence, again, various definitions of civil war may be applied by various scholars, and this will inevitably have an impact upon the outcomes of given programs of research: importantly, the COW project, along with some similar large-*n* projects, pay no specific attention to such modalities as these.[24]

Similarly, a lack of conceptual clarity is obvious when it comes to the detailed examination of the term "ethnic conflict." Firstly, owing to the specifics of human cognition and the complexity of the contemporary world order, virtually any interstate conflict will imply the active involvement of some degree of politicized ethnicity, as (ethnic) nationalism plays a crucial constitutive role in the processes of social mobilization during situations of crisis among nation-states (these being primary entities which still, of course, dominate the international scene). Secondly, as mentioned above, the majority of what have come to be regarded as ethnic conflicts have in practice stemmed from social, economic, and political circumstances – with ethnicity being usually involved as a coincident source of social solidarity which is, in turn, used to foster collective action mobilized along the lines of existing ethnic divisions so as to serve ends which come to be defined as "ethnic interests."

In this regard, Bruce Gilley makes the argument that, "For a start, the mere existence of ethnic markers in political conflict cannot be the basis of calling something "ethnic conflict." When the six countries that share the Mekong River fight over its use, this is not "ethnic conflict" merely because all sides are ethnically distinct. If this is the only meaning of ethnic conflict then all we have is a superficial description, not a useful concept. It becomes no more useful than saying that protests were by fishermen or involved looting. If the concept of ethnic conflict is to be useful, it must point to a distinctive causal explanation for given instances of political contention. It must somehow inform us about what is happening beyond superficial appearances. And, as it does this, we must be able to measure whether it is or is not apparent and thus to reject it in some cases, lest it become tautological every time people of distinct ethnicity are on either side of the barricades."[25]

The difficulty of defining the concept of ethnic conflict is something that theorists are well aware of. Cordell and Wolff acknowledge that there has been virtually no single conflict in the world based *solely* on ethnicity: rather, ethnicity has tended to serve as a layer of identity

which by no means serves as the sole or ultimate source of violent conflicts. Both authors emphasize the cognitive component of ethnic conflict, since "the goals of at least one party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which [conflict] the primary fault lines of confrontations is one of ethnic distinctions. Whatever the concrete issues may be over which conflict erupts, at least one of the parties will explain its dissatisfaction in ethnic terms." Both authors have claimed that, "its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members cannot realize their interests, why they do not have the same right, or why their claims are not satisfied."[26] Cordell and Wolff conclude that "ethnic conflicts are a form of group conflict in which at least one of the parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes and potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminating ethnic divide."[27] Fearon and Laitin have rationalized the concept of ethnic conflict in terms of motivation and aims, as violent attacks have been prompted by animosity towards ethnic foes, and carried out in the name of an ethnic group; while the consequent selection of targets for attack has often been made by reference to ethnic criteria.[28] Working from the assumption that many civil wars of an ethnopolitical vein have in practice sought to achieve some form of territorial secession by insurgent groups or else have been directed at the containment of such secession by state regimes – with champions of ethnic sovereignty regarding their identity as distinct from that of their adversaries in ethnic, political and civil terms – Kaufman adds a further argument, claiming that "opposing communities in ethnic civil conflicts hold irreconcilable visions of their identity, borders, and citizenship of the state. [Unlike adversaries in ideological civil wars] they do not seek to control a state whose identity all sides accept, but rather to redefine or divide the state itself."[29] And, so, "ethnic conflicts are disputes between communities which see themselves as having distinct [cultural] heritages, over the power relationship between the communities, while ideological civil wars are contests between factions within the same community over how that community should be governed."[30]

In fact, recent scholarship illustrates that most ethnic conflicts emanate from a degree of accumulation of socioeconomic or political cleavages amongst the members of two or more ethnic communities, or from the instrumental use thereof by political elites. As stated above, when cast against this backdrop, ethnicity as such plays a rather marginal role, if any, in the initial stage of conflict; yet, what makes these conflicts ethnic is the gradual *politicization* of ethnicity during the course of the conflict in question which, in turn, furthers the fragmentation

(and further radicalization) of communities involved in the conflict along ethnic lines.[31] In the course of conflict, ethnic *polarization*[32] increases dramatically, transforming every single member of the adversary's ethnic group into a public enemy. However *non*-ethnic the original cause of a given conflict may have been, the shift towards ethnic division outlined above entails the eventual creation of a fully fledged ethnic conflict in practice, since "conflicts become fundamentally altered as they rage on, and factors that were at the root cause of a conflict at its outset may no longer be the primary causes in later stages. That is, once conflicts have significantly evolved, the *prior* causes may no longer be the *primary* causes."[33]

In other words, ethnicity per se never establishes a causal relationship which leads directly to the outbreak of conflict. It is not ethnicity in itself that makes people fight each other, but rather that certain values at stake within the conflict in question come to be appropriated by the champions of at least one party to that conflict – and that those values then come to be recast by those champions in explicitly ethnic terms. Thus it is that what begins as a primarily *non*-ethnic conflict evolves in practice into a conflict which understands itself in fully ethnic terms: that is as a group conflict which revolves primarily around the notion of politicized ethnicity, and in which *ethnically* defined goals are pursued by at least one of the parties to the conflict. In practice, the process described here is, among others, inherent to the dichotomy of state versus ethnic group, which explains the frequent occurrence of ethnic conflict within states: that is, as a phenomenon of intrastate conflict which leads to civil war, when members of certain ethnic group aspire to some form of political or territorial secession.

Importantly, ethnic conflict as such has been seldom researched by means of cross-national quantitative studies: as a rule, the vast majority of cognate scholarship has tended to focus on civil wars and intrastate conflicts which have been assumed to *encompass* an adequate number of instances of ethnic conflict. In this regard, Sambanis maintains that approximately two thirds of interstate conflicts have been fought along ethnic lines.[34] Remaining instances of intrastate conflict, such as revolutions, class conflicts, military coups, and economic conflicts over control of resources, have been seen as in essence *non*-ethnic in nature. As Fearon has shown, cross-country statistical research has revealed few differences between the determinants of civil war onset in general and ethnic civil war in particular. Fearon also observes that at least since World War II, the vast majority of ethnic killing has been occasioned either by direct state oppression or by warfare between a given state

and an armed group purporting to represent a particular ethnic group (usually a minority group within the given national territory);[35] thus, the majority of ethnic wars have been seen as fitting into the internal conflict/civil war category.

At the same time, some notable distinctions exist amongst theoreticians as to the internal dynamics of ethnic civil wars, as compared to non-ethnic civil wars. Donald Horowitz argues, for example, that conflicts along ethnic lines are demonstrably more prone to extremes of violence than are the conflicts based purely on ideology or on other political cleavages: he argues that this is explained by the sense of blood (family) kinship – with all of its deep emotional overtones – which is so specifically integral to ethnic conflicts.[36] This argument is furthered by Kaufmann, who sees the key difference between non-ethnic civil conflict and ethnic conflict in terms of "the flexibility of individual loyalties, which are quite fluid in ideological conflicts, but almost completely rigid in ethnic wars."[37] Understandably, these factors have a strong impact on the dynamics of intrastate conflicts, which in turn affect conflict escalation – and its duration – in many ways. Ethnic conflicts are thus believed to be especially violent, protracted, and intractable as they are largely identity-based – unlike internal conflicts which are understood to be fought primarily for economic, private, or ideological motives. In recognition of the crucial role of the political aspects which are intrinsic to the evolution of any ethnic conflict and its resultant implications, the term *ethnopolitical conflict,* will be employed interchangeably with the term ethnic conflict throughout this book.

Typology of conflicts

Conflict vocabulary

Studies of ethnic conflict and civil war to date have revolved around the consideration of two key factors: *motivation* and *opportunity*. Whereas the first of these areas of research seeks to explain what it is that motivates those who challenge the state (as a rule these tend to be insurgents from within the ranks of an ethnic minority), and thus deals with matters which are necessarily subjective and actor-related; the second area of research – that of opportunity – is both subjective, and objective, as it deals with elements which are both structural (regime change or external support, for instance) *and* cognitive in essence (as with the perception of state weakness or of external support by ethnic insurgents during a period of regime change). Scholars have variously placed emphasis upon either motivation, or opportunity: this, in turn, has shaped the focus of

the resultant research, which has either dealt with structural (i.e., objective, non-actor related), or motivational (i.e., subjective, actor-related) processes of conflict onset. Thus, broadly speaking, research hitherto has either sought to highlight the *micro*-level of conflict (i.e., state–insurgent interactions, focus on conflict escalation, etc.), or the *macro*-level of conflict (i.e., aspects of regional, or global security, with a focus on conflict onset).

Whatever the details of the particular research approach adopted, these essential methodological components have remained the same. Moreover, most of the current research on ethnic conflict and civil war recognizes the fact that some interplay of these respective components should be present in order for a conflict to arise; where studies differ is with respect to the extent and scope of the causal mechanisms represented by motivation and opportunity. Yet, after all, both concepts seem to be interrelated in practice, as the scope of opportunity may serve to increase the motivation for those interested in changing the established status quo in their favor, while a high degree of motivation (and, hence, commitment to fight and accept sacrifice) often predetermines what can be regarded as a suitable opportunity.

The amount of research centering on motivation and opportunity which has been carried out, particularly since the early 1990s, is enormous; therefore, for the purpose of this study, attention will be devoted to the analytical models developed by three leading groups of researchers: Collier and Hoeffler, Fearon and Laitin, and Cordell and Wolff.

Collier and Hoeffler have produced the *greed versus grievance* formula, in which greed encompasses a set of arguments pertaining to both motivation and opportunity – all of which are viewed through the (economically defined) prism of a cost-benefit analysis: that is, should the potential rewards of joining an insurgency exceed the potential risks of doing so, then a civil war is likely to occur. Grievance here encompasses a variety of arguments which center on perceived injustice (and the consequent desire of ethnic dissidents to redress this), often regarded in terms of what is considered as ethnic discrimination, and drawing from the notion of *relative deprivation* as elaborated by Gurr.[38]

Fearon and Laitin are the authors of the *insurgency model*, in which emphasis is placed upon the notion of opportunity, as this prevails over motivation (particularly grievance) as the main driving force of an insurgency.[39] In this regard, Cordell and Wolff have recently developed an analytical framework which recognizes the crucial role of three interwoven sets of factors, that is: *motives*, *means*, and *opportunities*. This framework thus seems to draw on the greed versus grievance

model as developed by Collier and Hoeffler, and also upon Fearon and Laitin's insurgency model, which emphasizes the notion of opportunity. According to Cordell and Wolff, a civil war occurs in a situation marked by the presence of these three sets of factors, of which two (motives and means) are actor-related, while the remaining third factor is rather of a structural essence.[40]

On the micro level of conflict, Dessler proposes a typology with respect to the causes of conflict – a typology which is pertinent both to the conflict itself and to its practical dynamics.[41] In his terminology, *channels* are the background causes of armed conflict, mirroring the basic elements of social, political, and economic structures. In the typology I have outlined below, these background causes are addressed within the section entitled Structural Accounts. *Targets* in Dessler's typology are understood as the various mobilization strategies, encompassing both the specific objectives of the key political actors in any given conflict – that is to say, ethnic and/or regime leadership as such – and the *rationalization* of their collective actions, both in terms of perception and behavior. These factors are covered in the section which I have entitled Perceptional and Instrumentalist accounts. *Triggers*, in Dessler's terminology, are the factors which condition the timing of an armed conflict in terms of its outbreak: their relevance is not with respect to the reasons why a given conflict broke out, but rather with respect to why it broke out at a particular point in time. Triggering factors are instrumental in narrowing the choices of the actors involved by virtue of their strengthening the pattern of social polarization along ethnic lines. In my understanding, triggers cause outbreaks of violence which link the latent phase of conflict with the phase of sporadic violence (see below). The fourth factor is represented by what Dessler calls *catalysts*, which in his understanding affect the intensity and duration of armed conflicts: these would be factors such as terrain, weather, and the role of external agents or forces.[42]

Periodization in ethnopolitical conflict and civil war[43]

For the purposes of this book, I develop in general terms, three major phases of ethnic conflict – phases which are themselves based on the level, and regularity of violence used: phase A: frozen or latent conflict corresponding with the mobilization phase of ethnic conflict; phase B: sporadic or low-scale violence corresponding with the radicalization phase; phase C: large-scale violence, armed conflict, or civil war.[44] All of the three phases are marked by a certain degree of ethnic (self-) consciousness; in phase A exists ethnic fractionalization, which

becomes radicalized as the conflict undergoes escalation, phase B, and acquires the state of ethnic polarization with the advent of civil war, phase C. The state of frozen conflict is characterized by a "no peace, no war" situation: there is a general lack of violence, but a certain degree of interethnic anxiety persists, which is kept at a low profile because of the overwhelming strength of the regime and/or the dominant ethnic group, and/or the hesitation of potentially insurgent groups to turn to violence. By contrast, the phase of sporadic violence includes hit-and-run assaults that break out from time to time between the members of warring ethnic groups, or between an ethnic group campaigning for self-determination, on the one hand, and state authorities on the other. It is important to note that these instances of violence are initially episodic. It is at this stage of internal conflict that efforts at conflict resolution by either party to the conflict, or by an international mediator, may relatively easily break down the escalating cycle of violence. The phase of sustained large-scale violence that is usually regarded as civil war is the state of regular armed conflict between the members of the various warring parties to the conflict: this will, as a rule, be systematic violence undertaken by both state authorities, and by an insurgent group.

As I show in this book, the stage of frozen or latent conflict is a structural situation which may last for years without necessarily turning violent. What drives a latent conflict into the stage of sporadic or low-scale violence is usually some triggering factor which serves to strengthen ethnic polarization and to intensify the defensive posture of different warring groups towards each other. Such triggering factors will typically take the form of one or more extreme acts of violence[45] perpetrated by members of one warring group upon members of the other. While these two initial phases of conflict are, as a rule, characterized by a certain degree of spontaneity as far as interethnic violence is concerned, the shift to the third and final phase of large-scale violence, or civil war, is usually occasioned by a conscious decision taken by one of the sides of conflict, whom I term *agents of violence*. In accordance with the typology here outlined, I will propose a general scheme of periodization in ethnic conflict reflecting its escalation, the stages of which correspond with the proposed scheme: latent conflict – sporadic violence – civil war.

Reflecting the above and also what further will be explored below, a scheme of conflict escalation is here proposed, consisting of three major phases: the phase of latent conflict, the phase of sporadic violence, and the phase of civil war.

Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict

Against a backdrop of perceived discrimination, calls for linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, or political rights, or for outright self-determination, are voiced by specific dissident groups within a larger population – such groups usually comprise a specific ethnic minority. As a rule, attempts are then made at reversing the established status quo in a situation characterized by the emergence of opportunity: that is, a situation in which considerable changes take place in terms of the host country's sociopolitical conditions – changes such as those occasioned by the establishment of a new state, by regime transformation, or by the perceived weakness of that country in terms of its reduced military, socioeconomic, and/or political capabilities. Simultaneously, nationalist claims are made by the dissident ethnic community's intellectuals in order to legitimize their claims.

Emancipatory demands voiced by the ethnic minority members are then received with suspicion by the country's ethnic majority – that is the politically dominant group which controls the core of the central state apparatus. The degree of concern over the ethnic minority's demands is itself contingent upon the prevailing nature of interethnic relationships – the popular consciousness of previous or present-day grievances will play an important role in this regard. Pro-regime intellectuals will (re) construct historically related narratives so as to rationalize their claims upon the disputed territory, justifying their case, and morally discrediting that of the dissidents. Consequent protests by the members of the titular ethnicity will then obtain more expressive and vocal forms – possibly accompanied by the mobilization of radical elements. At this initial phase of conflict, anxiety is expressed verbally rather than in the form of overt violence. Phase A is paralleled by the beginning of a gradual polarization of both communities along ethnic lines, even though, at this stage, conflict is far from dominant within public discourse.

Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic or low-scale violence

Galvanized by the unfolding conflict and triggered by specific acts of cognitively significant interethnic violence, which are either grave in themselves or else popularly seen as such, the increasingly polarized, fearful, and mutually distrustful warring ethnic communities draw further apart from one another, until low-scale and sporadic violent excesses, such as riots, begin occurring, as members of the warring ethnic communities start attacking each other. Often, routine incidents

with minimal or no ethnic content in themselves, come to be regarded through the prism of ethnicity. Prompted by the perceived need to mobilize a self-defense, both ethnic dissidents, and members of the "titular ethnicity," will begin to establish ethnic militia units, which are paralleled by the establishment of alternative (secessionist) government bodies, or by the radicalization of existing ones.

This stage is crucial for the conflict's further development. In cases where the dissidents amid the ethnic minority come to the conclusion that the regime is weak, whilst they and/or their external supporters are regarded as sufficiently strong to be able to effectively confront the state, they may well opt for an intensification of their insurgent efforts. In fact, the notion of proper opportunity, stemming from a perceived power asymmetry between the center and the periphery, is crucial in this regard for the decision-making of both regime and dissident forces.

Attacks upon the state's administrative and/or military targets may then follow, with the aim of assuming control over the claimed territory. Simultaneously, members of the adversary ethnic community may be assaulted and/or expelled, which would in turn foster the phase of sporadic violence. Demands will become radicalized: it will no longer be social rights the insurgents seek, but rather some form of secession. In the meantime, attachment to ethnic symbols will increase dramatically on both sides, fostering further polarization along ethnic lines. Should the state authorities prove quick enough to employ effective large-scale repression against the dissident community, this may either right away choke the embryo of insurgency to death or, alternatively, further kindle its conflagration, depending on the strength of repressions and on the insurgents' and their sympathizers' commitment to their goals, even at increasingly high cost.

The escalating conflict in the country's periphery will brig about a radicalization which will develop along the lines of ideational clashes, and security-related concerns. Intellectuals from the majority group will increase their engagement with the "wars of historical claims," with those of the dissident group taking a more aggressive form; racist and nationalist rhetoric, along with deepening ethnic discrimination, will become a standard phenomenon. Hostile images mirroring each other will be constructed by both parties to the conflict; ethnic polarization acquires dramatic proportions, and those advocating a balanced approach toward the opponents and their demands will be marginalized and regarded with increasing suspicion and mistrust. During this and the following phase of conflict, involvement by external actors or powers may have a decisive influence upon the further developments

within the conflict zone, as this may dramatically reverse the balance of power in favor of insurgent groups or else create a perception among insurgency members that this is about to become the case they will then regard this moment as a window of opportunity and key to their ultimate success.

The country's territorial integrity now seems to be under attack: this will amplify ethnic radicalization. Attacks on ethnic kin will be reported from the periphery territories which are semi-controlled by ethnic adversaries; this will, in turn, increase attacks upon members of the adversary's community. In a situation in which channels of intercommunity communication become increasingly scarce, even small excesses, with or without ethnic pretexts, will acquire ethnic overtones. This, along with anxiety that their country is being torn apart, will increase the majority's security fears, thereby strengthening its members' commitment to take serious action in order to ensure the country's unity and stability and to defend their ethnic majority countrymen. Efforts made by the members of the ethnic minority to attract international support will further deepen concern about their being a fifth column of an outside power.

Phase C: Sustained large-scale violence – civil war

If the state authorities fail to effectively neutralize the insurgents at the stage of sporadic violence, large-scale violence may emerge, as properly organized and motivated ethnic dissidents will make full use of their military capabilities – as well as of external support – which will bring both sides to the outbreak of civil war. In both cases, massive use of force will be carried out by agents of violence, that is, by centralized insurgency leaders.

The stage of civil war is characterized by the maximum possible degree of ethnic polarization. Only self-determination is now acceptable for the insurgent groups and their ethnic kin, as they believe their very identity and physical survival is at stake, following incidents of civil war related killings and massacres on the battlefield and beyond: continued existence within the borders of the oppressive state now seems inconceivable. By contrast, a strong motivation of the forces led by the ethnic majority will be to annihilate the dissidents or else drive them out of the country at any cost, since as long as they exist within the country, they will endanger the state's unity and territorial integrity in that they would seek interference in the country's affairs by outside powers. Additionally, their secessionist aspirations would serve as a disruptive example for the rest of country's ethnic minorities.

On both sides of the barricades, the dehumanization of what is considered the ethnic enemy is widespread: members of the adversary ethnic community will be routinely physically attacked. For some, initial political demands will now cease to play a major role, since the conflict is more about the self-perpetuating spiral of violence: retaliation for killed relatives, friends, and comrades gains momentum amongst both the insurgent and government forces. Ethnic cleansing and massacres will become widespread.

The main assumption behind this periodization typology of conflict escalation is the consideration that civil wars rarely erupt out of nothing. As a rule, they are the outcomes of long-festering conflicts which eventuate due to the interplay of certain structural factors, to their use by elites, and to the self-generating spiral of violence which occurs once a certain level of conflict is achieved. Below, I propose a typology of the causes of civil war and ethnopolitical conflict: I distinguish between structural or conflict-onset based sets of conditioning factors, on the one hand, and perceptional and instrumentalist, or conflict-escalation-based and/or process-based sets of factors, on the other. Subsequent pages will show that it is necessary to draw a line between structural factors that may be present for years *without* necessarily resulting in the eruption of civil war and those factors which do lead to civil war. I regard structural factors as being of importance insofar as they entail initial *pre*conditions for civil war initiation: therefore, I term such factors conflict-onset factors. The second set of causes, whose consideration then follows, encompasses a set of major theories that to a certain degree also focus on conflict-onset – yet their relevance is particularly high when it comes to conflict escalation. Unlike structural factors, these theories have a stronger ability to illustrate causal relationships in a way that enables us to grasp the internal dynamics of conflict escalation.

Conflict-onset based theories

Until recently, quantitative studies have dominated the available research on (ethnic) civil wars, at least as far as the roots of such conflicts are concerned. According to a recent survey, less than a fifth of the qualitative studies which have been devoted to civil war have dealt with the causes of civil war in one way or another, whilst the vast majority of such studies have focused on conflict escalation and outcomes.[46] Still, as outlined above, it has become increasingly obvious over recent years that large-*n* econometric studies are *ad definitio* incapable of explaining civil wars in their full complexity for, as a rule, such conflicts are a culmination of latent processes of conflict

evolution rather than single-case events which under certain circumstances result in sustained violence. Later, I will argue that quantitative studies generally attend to what I call background factors: in my typology, they correspond with structural accounts. Indeed, the relevance of quantitative studies becomes relatively high when it comes to the explanation of the key factors which frame conflict onset. Consequently, I will point out some of the weaknesses of quantitative research and will argue for the necessity of carrying out *qualitative* research on civil wars in order to better grasp the full contextual complexity of ethnic conflicts, while also illustrating causal mechanisms. I propose that civil wars and ethnic conflicts are *processes* rather than events – and that to understand them, we need to focus on social interactions within those conflicts.[47]

Structural accounts

Level of economic development

A low level of economic development is widely believed to increase the likelihood of intrastate conflict. According to existing quantitative research, poorer societies are on average more prone to internal conflict than are wealthier ones. For instance, Fearon and Laitin show that a reduction in per capita income by 1,000 USD results in a 41 percent increase in the likelihood of civil war.[48]

This observation, however, may be explained in a variety of ways. Firstly, economically highly developed states usually have highly urbanized populations which are believed to be more dependent on the central state, both in terms of the maintenance of a stable food supply and with regard to household economic security: such factors are believed to decrease the risk of insurgency. Also, urbanized societies are believed to be more susceptible to state coercion, by contrast with (relatively more self-sufficient) rural areas, with their territorially dispersed populations.[49] Secondly, as shown by Fearon and Laitin, the governing regimes in countries with low levels of per capita income will tend to lack the means to effectively control peripheral (rural) areas which, in turn, facilitates the advent of insurgency, while simultaneously increasing its prospects for success. Richer states, by contrast, are generally better equipped to carry out more effective counterinsurgency policies, as they, *inter alia*, have access to a superior governmental and military infrastructure as compared to poorer states.[50] Thirdly, Collier and Hoeffler argue that higher national income is important because it creates greater *opportunity costs* – that is to say the economic opportunities that citizens, generally young males who form the core of any

insurgency, forgo when they join that insurgency.[51] It may also be added that the generally higher levels of growth, prosperity, and development present within wealthier societies, coupled with the prevalence of democratic institutions, has the net effect of reducing the overall likelihood of civil war. Put bluntly, rich people are usually less willing to risk their lives and their prosperity in the service of an (uncertain) insurgency cause; while the existence of democratic forms of governance do provide for an established legal framework, from within which grievances may be addressed in a peaceful way, as will be scrutinized below.

However, this general rule is not without its exceptions. Aside from the two significantly differing lines of interpretation outlined above – state capacity to police its territory versus opportunity cost – there is a data problem. For instance, data used to support this claim are based on broad nation-wide statistical analyses that fail to take into consideration the sub-state, or regional, level. In some (peripheral) areas where insurgencies erupt, the level of economic development is significantly lower than the national average; furthermore, in some other instances, which tend to be epitomized by a considerable degree of social discrimination along the lines of ethnic (religious or tribal) identity, the members of a dominant ethnic group will turn out to occupy higher socioeconomic and political positions within society, at the expense of a weaker ethnic group which has an inferior standing. Therefore, each group's actual level of economic development may vary significantly: a factor which usually escapes the focus of country-wide statistical analyses, including GDP-focused ones.[52]

Facilitating a rebellion? Natural resources, diaspora, and geography

According to Collier and Hoeffler, there is a direct correlation between increasing revenues of wealth from natural resources and the outbreak of civil war – even though once a relatively high level of wealth is achieved, natural resources begin to reduce the risk of civil war initiation. Moreover, if a country's revenues from exports of primary commodities make up around one third of its GDP, it becomes more prone to falling into the trap of civil war than does a country with no such exports.[53] However, recent scholarship has made the claim that the more broadly the term "natural resources" is defined, the less such resources can be seen to be related to the outbreak of civil war: it turns out that oil, natural gas, and mineral resources in general are *more* likely to cause internal conflict.[54] This argument is supported by Fearon and Laitin who, contrary to Collier and Hoeffler, claim that it is oil abundance,

rather than a primary reliance on commodity exports, that causes civil war.[55]

Similarly, the hypothesis that resources cause violence has been challenged by an opposite hypothesis, which posited that escalating violence causes resource exports to become a more important source of income since, within conflict-affected societies, industrial, service and manufacturing sectors of the economy suffer from inevitable setbacks, which – coupled with a flight of capital – leads to a growing dependency upon revenues from natural resources. Thus, the overall share of raw resources exports relative to GDP may in fact rise with respect to the national economies of war-torn societies.[56] Therefore, there is a certain degree of likelihood that conflict in fact causes raw resources to *increase* in overall importance.[57]

Along with support flowing from large and influential diasporas, a reliance upon natural resources in order to initiate – and maintain – a rebellion is at the core of the greed versus grievance model proposed by Collier and Hoeffler.[58] According to them, grievances arising from perceptions of social inequality amongst (potential) insurgents in fact play only a minor role, relative to greed, in stoking civil war – as insurgents are primarily motivated by rational and self-interest considerations (such as their ability to gain personal financial assets through looting, etc.). All in all, according to Collier and Hoeffler, what motivates insurgents most is their collective belief that the paramilitary actions they are about to take will pay off in economic terms.[59] Hence, according to this analysis, the primary cause of civil war is not the objective extent of deprivation (which is in any case always relative and difficult to measure), but an economically formulated premise that "rebels will conduct a civil war if the perceived benefits outweigh the costs of rebellion."[60]

Nonetheless, it is still not entirely clear whether the true factor that primarily causes civil war is a given regime's general reliance on (mineral) resource exports or whether it is the desire of ethnic insurgents to take command of the economic resources accruing from those mineral exports. If the former holds, then it may be assumed that the regime's overreliance on oil or large-scale natural gas revenues fosters the establishment of social inequality along ethnic lines, thereby widening the gap between the ever-richer centre and the poorer periphery, or that such revenues provide the regime with sufficient financial sources to be able to cope with insurgency through military means. One might also claim that an overreliance on easily attainable oil exports, for instance, might gradually reduce the state's capacity to strengthen its internal taxation infrastructure and administrative bureaucracy, thus preventing it from

developing balanced political, social, and economic leverages across the whole of the country. Alternatively, if certain mineral resources are located in a peripheral area which is claimed by members of a distinct ethnic community, who are in turn effectively denied access to the benefits accruing from the mineral exports in question, then this may force insurgents to take up arms in an attempt to secede from the center so as to ensure that they can capitalize upon that mineral wealth.

As for the mountainous terrain argument: some studies have demonstrably failed to establish a clear link between the occurrence of civil wars in states which happen to possess mountainous terrain, or the occurrence of insurgencies in separatist areas which likewise possess mountainous terrain. However, according to Fearon and Laitin, the presence of mountainous topography is crucial as it provides a necessary shelter for insurgent activities.[61] Importantly, defining a state as mountainous entails certain risks, as it is not clear how to measure the prevalence of terrain in relative terms.

Demographic factors: ethnic diversity, size, and proportions

Contrary to popular belief, recent scholarship has shown that states with a higher level of ethnic heterogeneity do not in fact experience civil wars any more often than less ethnically diverse states. In fact, an opposite observation holds true, provided that the dominant ethnic group makes up less than 45 percent of the entire population, since this ensures a mutual balance amongst the representatives of various ethnic groups, such that there is a lack of overwhelming ethnic dominance. Based on a large body of quantitative research, Collier and Hoeffler also illustrate that when the dominant ethnic group exceeds the threshold of 45 percent it inclines much more readily to the use of its demographic superiority in order to suppress numerically smaller ethnicities. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of ethnic insurgency as demographically weaker (minority) ethnic groups find themselves discriminated against – and so seek redress for perceived injustices.[62]

According to Fearon and Laitin, as well as Collier and Hoeffler, the presence of large-scale populations within a given state increases the risk of civil war: a proposition which is supported by a host of cross-country studies.[63] This may be explained by an assertion that demographically numerous states which happen to be poor and occupy large geographical areas are intrinsically more difficult to administer effectively: as shown by Halvard Buhaug, there is a correlation between more populous, geographically large countries and the incidence of civil war, provided these wars

are waged over issues of self-determination – that is, for control over specific territory.[64] Besides this, the likelihood of civil war immediately increases if there are large numbers of unemployed young males, who potentially may be recruited into an insurgency movement.

Nonetheless, these findings – surprisingly – contradict Tanja Ellingsen's earlier quantitative research on ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity and civil war, according to which the presence of middle-sized minorities increases the risk of civil war, whilst the presence of large-scale minorities has little or no impact on the level of occurrence of civil war.[65] Another counterargument points out the existence of many forms of diversity (ethnic, sub-ethnic, linguistic, religious, racial, etc.), and there have been ongoing debates among researchers as to how best to operationalize the measurement of such factors within statistical studies. Importantly, one might suggest that it is not only such factors as nation-wide majority-minority ratios that should be taken into consideration, but the majority-minority ratio within (potentially) secessionist areas. It might be feasible to hypothesize that once an ethnic minority within a country comes to comprise the majority within a certain territory, this may under certain circumstances increase the likelihood of rebellion and, thus, of civil war.

Regime type and regime change

Weak regimes are on average more likely to provide room for internal conflict since they are not in a position to effectively control the whole of the territory that they formally administer. This is especially so with respect to territories which are remote from the administrative center: importantly, many secessionist movements organized along the lines of ethnic identity emerge in peripheral areas which are inhabited by members of a distinct ethnic group. According to Fearon and Laitin, newly established nation-states are particularly susceptible to civil war during the two-year period following their independence, since such states lack the appropriate resources to effectively administer the whole of their territory – a situation which may be regarded as an opportunity by regime challengers, thereby leading to insurgency initiation.[66] Political instability caused by a change in the nature of a given regime, either from democracy to autocracy, or vice versa, also dramatically increases the risk of internal conflict, as transient regimes are more prone to civil war than are established regimes.[67]

A transition towards democracy is believed to be particularly dangerous as it leads to less-severe reprisals for the public expression of social discontent.[68] A similar assumption holds for mixed regimes (or

anocracies, as Fearon and Laitin term them), which are neither entirely authoritarian nor democratic and can produce opportunities for expressions of disloyalty to the ruling regime and for the organization of insurgency.[69] Conversely, wholly authoritarian or democratic regimes suffer considerably less from manifestations of civil unrest. Unlike complete democracies or autocracies, mixed regimes neither offer their citizens means of free participation in the country's public life nor do they ban any sign or manifestation of political opposition in public. At the same time, unlike authoritarian regimes, mixed regimes are not in a position to use large-scale violence to suppress internal opposition. Intriguingly, according to some recent scholarship, democratic regimes seem to be no less immune to the eruption of internal conflict than authoritarian regimes.[70]

According to Mohammed Ayoob's findings, there is a clear link between weak and inexperienced political elites and civil war, as the former lack the skills or legitimacy to effectively police the entire range of the state's territory or to effectively anticipate anti-regime insurgency. Initially applied to the newly established postcolonial nations of Africa and Asia, this doctrine seems to hold true for some post-Soviet areas as well, as it reflects the existence of controversial legacy of drawing administrative borders between particular entities defined as nation-states, as well as the general propensity by the regimes within these regions to use military force to settle internal disputes.[71]

Notwithstanding certain contradictions, such regime-instability and regime-transition factors belong to less contested theories regarding the causes of civil war. However, there is some disagreement over how to precisely define specific regimes as well as over the causal relationship between the above factors and the incidence of civil war in practice.

Social inequality accounts

Socioeconomic and cultural discrimination have been widely regarded as among the major factors leading to civil war and ethnopolitical conflict. Such situations are quite common amongst societies which are composed of two or more ethnic groups, one of which holds an exclusive position of ethnic dominance. Members of a "titular group," comprised of an ethnically dominant community which usually prevails in demographic terms, tend to consolidate under their exclusive control the most important political, social, and economic tools within their respective countries; this is done at the expense of a smaller group or groups which are either denied access to such privileges, or are effectively ousted from participation in the country's social and political life. In some instances

efforts are made to undermine the identity of the discriminated group, which may include refusal to recognize their distinct ethnolinguistic and cultural identity, a ban on education in their native tongue, or punishment for carrying and/or exhibiting ethnic symbols, such as the ethnic/national flag, anthem, costumes, and so forth.

Surprisingly, there are numerous cases worldwide where such situations of ethnic discrimination have *not* led to the outbreak of ethnic insurgency. This may be partly explained by reference to the above outlined theory of the authoritarian regime, as such regimes provide little space for public manifestation of discontent, which manifestations, in fact, become extremely risky endeavors for those involved. Similarly, in some cases it can be difficult to define what constitutes ethnic discrimination as such: in Spain's Catalan and Basque regions, for example, some form of ethnopolitical tension persists due to the willingness of a segment of the populations within those regions to aspire to full independence from Madrid – even though (unlike during the period of General Francisco Franco's rule) there is hardly any kind of active socioeconomic or cultural discrimination displayed toward Catalonians or Basques by the federal center as of today.

Importantly, quantitative research has failed to address, in a concise fashion, findings on interethnic inequality, as there is general lack of evidence with regard to differences in the level of economic wealth between the members of various ethnic communities: this kind of information usually remains out of the focus of statistical analyses which are carried out with a focus on cross-national averages.

General shortcomings of quantitative research

As illustrated above, the sort of macro-level econometric analyses which are provided by quantitative research leave too much room for interpretation as regards the actual (micro-level based) motivations of warring parties and, so, taken overall, fail to establish apparent causal relationships. Besides, Collier's and Hoeffler's standard explanation of the motivations of insurgents appears to be too rationalistic and economically orientated, as it fails to consider the importance of *psychology and ideology* in shaping loyalties, mobilizing society, and recruiting fighters into armed resistance (in cases of ethnic civil wars, ethnonationalist ideological appeals play a tremendously significant role).

However, this is not the only weakness of quantitative studies. Other factors include disputable data validity (and reliability), measurement difficulties, and an emphasis on conflict onset coupled with a general inability to track the active dynamics of conflicts as they evolve. Thus,

the very way in which key concepts are defined – concepts such as that of a given political regime, that of ethnic diversity, or even (as shown above) the question of what constitutes a war or a riot – may have a significant impact on the outcomes of statistical research because these concepts will determine the practical selection of data to be measured. Aside from this, cross-national quantitative research generally operationalizes large nation-wide data sets, whilst neglecting the *sub*-national level of analysis – whereas, in fact, as illustrated above, patterns of social inequality occurring *within* a country (patterns which remain untouched by such nation-wide analyses) may increase the risk of civil war initiation. As we see from instances of studies which have focused exclusively upon the level of overall economic development, oversimplified measurement gives rise to research results whose relevance is problematic, as such results will tend to overlook a country's internal divisions – those very divisions which are embedded within the ethnically oriented sphere of social stratification. Additionally, the available statistical data from the vast majority of countries only dates back approximately as far as 1945 – which further limits the scope, range, and efficacy of quantitative research. Moreover, data yielded by poor, weak, or war-torn states are often questionable because, on the one hand, such states do not prioritize the collection of accurate statistical data; while on the other hand, they tend to lean toward providing "filtered" (i.e., propagandized) data which give a better image of internal developments in their respective territories so as to avoid international critique, sanctions, intervention, and the like. An additional argument undermining the viability of quantitative studies is their above-mentioned inability to track the actual processes of civil war. Quantitative studies tend to focus upon the moment of the eruption of civil war as an isolated event: their focus on *conflict onset* results in a failure to explain sequences of events which persist or develop through successive conflict stages; such studies fail to work with time.

Conflict-escalation based theories

Dennis Sandole distinguishes between two critical aspects of conflict: *conflict-as-startup* (in my vocabulary, conflict onset), and *conflict-as-process* (conflict escalation).[72] In fact, as argued above, a given social situation may be characterized by the prevalence of factors which in theoretical terms equate to conflict onset, yet conflict may persist in its latent phase for years without necessarily erupting into sustained violence: thus, the causal relationship between both aspects of conflict is not axiomatic. In practice, it is the gradual development from a latent or non-violent

phase, to the stage of sporadic violence, then to the stage of large-scale violence that induces civil war – and the regularities and modalities of that development are what tend to remain out of the focus of much contemporary civil war research.

Importantly, when violent conflicts do break out, they often follow their own internal dynamics, thereby establishing a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. At some point during a given conflict, the initial causes that brought about the initiation of that conflict cease to play a crucial role, as conflict itself becomes a self-stimulating phenomenon based on the principle of social interaction; as a rule, actors, their motivations, and their social environment all change over time. In many cases, the interplay of actions and reactions begins the spiral of violence, thus increasing the warring parties' security dilemma. Under these circumstances, the dynamic processes of conflict escalation may overwhelm – or significantly reshape – the statically understood conditions of conflict onset; macro-level structural factors do serve as (potentially) necessary preconditions to conflict, yet they fail to account for the micro level of conflict, which has its own logic and rules.

In his work addressing the onset of revolutions, Charles Tilly outlines what he has termed *collective action theory*; this is the power competition – between political elements split along the lines of those who have the decision-making power and those who lack it – that is the core and motor of political action. Crucial in this context is the shift from individually defined interests to collective decisions which necessarily require a convergence of shared interests on both sides; the success of political action is contingent on the involved groups' ability to organize and mobilize those interests, and subsequently, on the ability of organized political elements to facilitate collective actions.[73]

Perceptional accounts

Ancient hatreds

Perceptional accounts have long been confined to the realm of the sort of primordialist approaches, centering on the notion of ancient hatred, that gained momentum in Western public circles during the course of the violent conflicts that broke out in Southeast Europe and the post-Soviet regions during the final years of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. According to the proponents of this approach – which two decades ago dominated the work of Western journalists and experts in (post-) Communist affairs – the outbreak of violence in those parts of the globe had to be understood as the logical outcome of the dissolution

of totalitarian states, which in turn provided for a "defrosting" effect which allowed for (previously safely contained) ethnic antagonisms to flare up anew.[74] Torn apart by the collective memories of "ancient blood," and driven by newly arisen, mutually exclusive, claims to ethnic and territorial self-determination,[75] different ethnic communities had little chance of avoiding conflict: conflict widely attributed to the heterogeneous nature of their own communities, and (an argument rarely openly expressed by Western elites) by the peculiar sociocultural nature of the ethnic groups concerned, such that the conflicts in question came to be viewed as indicative of their own innate predisposition to aggressiveness and violent behavior. The cases of the Bosnian war and the Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia conflicts were especially prone to be used in support of this thesis of the "civilizational otherness" of the peoples living on the margins of Europe. This thesis was further developed in an attempt to rationalize the general inability, or unwillingness, of the Western powers to effectively interfere in these conflicts and thereby served to sustain the newly developed rhetoric of a new (Western) international morality: promoting global peace, stability, and human rights. In this regard, Stewart Kaufman reminds us of the significant practical implications which narratives of this sort had upon policymakers during the early 1990s: American president Bill Clinton made a notorious remark, after reading Kaplan's book, to the effect that any outside intervention in the Balkans was bound to fail, as the conflict itself was driven by uncontrollable "ancient hatreds."[76] In this context, the South Caucasus conflicts attracted considerably less attention from Western policymakers, as the region was largely dismissed as the "backyard" of post-Soviet Russia, itself a newly acquired strategic partner.

Overall, the ancient hatred approach is now less widely supported within the field of contemporary ethnopolitical conflict research. In fact, even though the collective memory of what comes to be known as ancient hatreds does play a certain role when it comes to conflict escalation, such hatreds rarely in themselves create the conditions for an ethnopolitical conflict. The narratives associated with such ancient hatreds are rather (re)constructed by the elites within respective ethnic groups in an attempt to foster in-group solidarity and loyalty, thereby increasing the level of social mobilization along ethnic lines.

Security dilemma

Some researchers have emphasized the significance of previous collective experiences of grievances and wars as an additional factor which contributes to an increased likelihood of ethnopolitical conflict. This is because

the collective memory of such experiences can often increase mutual ill will and mistrust between the respective ethnic groups.[77] According to advocates of this line of explanation, ethnic groups involved in such situations of mutual mistrust are likely to view one another's ethnonationalist mobilizations as (potentially) dangerous, thereby fostering counter-mobilizations, which in turn stimulates the mutual sense of being threatened by the members of the other ethnic group. In such a situation, a spiral of mutually reinforcing mobilization occurs, as each ethnic group attempts to increase its own military capabilities, the better to face the perceived threat; under certain circumstances one of the groups involved in such a situation may opt for a preemptive attack. Put together, this matrix of mutually hostile group perceptions significantly increases the risk of armed conflict – a risk which may then be further boosted by what Posen calls the "windows of opportunities" which are created by the dissolution of central authority within multiethnic states: in such cases, the historical record of significant ethnic hostility may also play a role.[78]

Related to such security dilemma related accounts are two lines of explanation which stem from game theory. Weingast claims that when in-group members are warned by their ethnic elites that they are targets for extermination, they quite rationally mobilize in order to effectively preempt such a scenario: after all, even if the likelihood of their leaders' prognosis is low, the heightened awareness of the fact that their very physical existence might be at stake would serve to increase the level of social mobilization amongst in-group members.[79] To advance Weingast's argument, one might add that there may not necessarily be sufficient appeals of political leadership which have the potential to ameliorate prevailing ethnic tensions and mobilizations – even at the cost of a preemptive attack; whilst aggressive rhetoric voiced by the members of antagonistic ethnic groups may act so as to serve that same end.

In this regard, Fearon and Laitin elaborate on Deutsch's assumption that ethnic solidarity comes about as a result of high levels of communication, as they argue that in situations characterized by low-level, intergroup communication "an ethnic incident can more easily spiral into sustained violence, if members of each group, not being able to identify particular culprits, punish any or all members of the other group."[80] This kind of situation is likely to result in conflict, since a lack of information exchanged between respective ethnic groups as to the true nature and intent of each deepens the mutual perception of a security dilemma, thereby allowing for a range of generally negative interpretations of even episodic (violent) excesses.

Symbolic (identity) politics

Situated at the crossroads of perceptional and instrumentalist accounts is the theory of symbolic or identity politics, which combines elements of both these bodies of theory. In situations of ethnic conflict, ethnicity – regarded by members of each ethnic community concerned as being primordial, non-negotiable, and crucial for their group's existence – plays a pivotal role, one which increases over time, following the radicalizing pattern of ethnic mobilization. Conflict is therefore easily characterized as identity-based: ethnic conflicts rarely manifest as being the sort of *interest*-based conflicts which are negotiable once a mutually acceptable economic solution is figured out. Ethnicity and ethnocentrism, with all their attendant cultural ramifications, lie at the heart of symbolic politics theory.

Drawing on the findings of social psychology and of intergroup relations research (most notably the social identity theory by Henri Tajfel and John Turner partly outlined above), Kaufman posits that multiethnic societies are marked by a certain degree of interethnic competition which is embedded in the prevailing hierarchy of dominance and subordination. In these societies, ethnic identity plays a more prominent role, since it is common for people to identify themselves with their ethnic fellows and their associated ethnic symbols: hence, otherness comes to be defined in ethnic terms, while ethnicity-based primordial attachments become all the stronger. Ethnocentrism thus occurs as a natural form of in-group cohesion, while members of (potentially) alien ethnicities are regarded with suspicion and various forms of ethnically motivated discrimination become widespread. The notion of politicized ethnicity, with its relevance as a source for group conflict, is further supported by research carried out by Lieberman and Singh, according to whom the institutionalization of ethnic group boundaries can, on the basis of emotion-laden social comparisons, offer a political basis for the mobilization of recruits to join in ethnic conflict.[81]

Symbolic, or identity politics, theory contains a strong instrumentalist motive as well. In order to rally popular support, leaders can lean toward using powerful, emotionally laden symbols and mythological narratives, which have a strong appeal amongst ordinary people: thus, to achieve group cohesion and to advance collective action, leaders often make use of hate speech and will manipulate existential rhetoric which evoke such specters as the threat of national extermination. Fear and suspicion, as well as ethnic symbols and myths, all resonate powerfully

amongst already galvanized people, who will readily resort to violence when it comes to rivalry over territory or governance.

Instrumentalist accounts – manipulative leaders

Instrumentalist approaches revolve around the rationalist notion of manipulative leaders. According to this viewpoint, political leaders will sometimes deliberately provoke the sense of being ethnically threatened amongst the members of their ethnic group in order to augment their power.[82] As Michael Brown has observed, "For many politicians, tearing their countries apart and causing thousands of people to be killed are small prices to pay for staying in or getting power."[83] In fact, recent history has witnessed a number of instances of political elites making use of ethnonationalist arguments so as to rally popular support: consciously forging, at times of existential threat arising from ethnic conflict, a sense of ethnic solidarity – and of devotion to themselves as the sole representatives of their respective ethnic communities. This attitude has been shown to be instrumental in the pursuit of communal homogeneity, thereby also suppressing internal political opposition: personal adversaries and ideological dissent being perceived as detrimental to the unity of the ethnic group concerned, and as posing threats to its prospects for physical survival. Efforts to consolidate power within a given ethnic community are usually paralleled by the (re)establishment of hostile images of the adversary ethnic group as being culturally or racially inferior and innately dangerous. Ethnonationalist (mis)use of competing historical narratives is also common in this sort of situation, as ethnic leaders seek to trace the roots of the prevailing conflict with ethnic adversaries back into the historical past, thereby re-stimulating enduring ethnic prejudices. Consequently, emotion-laden ethnic polarization increases considerably at such times, adding to the strengthening of already hostile ethnic images; "combined, these forces create a devastating brew of ethnic rivalry and violence."[84]

Overall, there is a consensus among the academic community that, in one way or another, the role of manipulative ethnic leaders is instrumental in stirring up ethnopolitical violence. Yet, it remains doubtful, case-bound, and hard to determine, whether political elites directly initiate conflicts or merely contribute to their escalation; or, indeed, whether such elites may in fact find themselves in a social environment which forces them into acting in an ethnically incendiary way – that is, in a way dictated by the particular emotional and cultural circumstances created by the expectations and prejudices of their own ethnic

kin. Besides, there have been instances of ethnopolitical conflict in which the political elites concerned have largely *refrained* from playing an active role in stirring up hostilities.[85]

Opportunity in power asymmetry: a missing causal link between ethnic riots and civil war?

As explained above, in my understanding the crucial question in ethnic conflict and civil war studies remains the matter of the evolution from episodes of sporadic violence to the outbreak of large-scale hostilities, which usually precedes civil war per se: yet, the precise mechanism of that transformation is marked by a general lack of regularity. In fact, as summarized by Davenport, Armstrong and Lichbach, there are three main theoretical approaches which deal with that mechanism, and each is anchored in mutually exclusive sets of theoretical assumptions. According to the first of these – *the inflammation hypothesis* – civil war is caused by increased state repression, which prompts insurgents to increase their efforts to secure their rights, defend their lives and/or achieve their political goals. Reprisals by state authorities often tend to become less selective as regards the actual targets of violence (this because, while carrying out repression, it proves difficult for state authorities to clearly distinguish between insurgents and their [uninvolved] ethnic kin).[86] These reprisals are believed to outrage local populations *without* effectively eliminating secessionist movements among them: indeed such state violence may actually serve to increase the level of popular support for insurgency, which eventually leads to civil war. This hypothesis corresponds with what Collier and Hoeffler have termed the grievance hypothesis.

According to another theory – the *incapacity hypothesis* – which shares certain similarities with the above-mentioned inflammation hypothesis, large-scale hostilities occur when state authorities prove incapable of applying sufficient levels of repression. Within this line of explanation, the governing regime's weakness toward (potential) insurgents results in an inadequate level of state repression, which then empowers insurgents to increase their dissident activities because they see an opportunity to achieve their political goals, until those activities attain the level of full-scale civil war. Clearly, this hypothesis is itself founded on the opportunity argument, since the insurgents' decision to take action is determined by the perceived incapacity of the central state authorities to effectively hamper their efforts.

The *ineffectiveness hypothesis* proposes that large-scale conflict is a result of a situation in which governments apply coercion, but fail to achieve their ends because of the insurgents' military and political superiority. According to this proposition, both repressive behavior and dissident activities are undertaken at a high level of intensity; however, and most importantly, despite the high costs of their collective action, the insurgents nevertheless choose to increase their subversive efforts until full-scale civil war results.[87]

Each of the three mechanisms outlined above is – almost proportionally – evidenced by reference to case studies from different parts of the world, a fact that is preconditioned by virtue of the extremely rich and diverse social contexts which attend each civil war onset and escalation. Common to all of these apparently mutually exclusive theoretical propositions, I argue, is the adversaries' perception of a relative *power asymmetry* that favors them over their adversaries; this is what prompts them to take collective action in a situation that is considered an opportunity. Hence, in this book, I utilize the notion of opportunity in relative power asymmetry to address these situations.

Moreover, given the existence of free will in humans, it appears doubtful if conflict theory can ever anticipate the outbreak of actual civil wars or ethnopolitical conflicts – or indeed shape the pathway of escalation leading from less violent forms of contention to more violent ones. After all – as I claim in this book – the chief factor that transforms sporadic forms of conflict into full-scale civil war is the *conscious commitment* of the parties to taking concentrated collective action when they come to the collective conclusion that such a course of action is necessary to achieve specific political ends.

In civil wars of an ethnic makeup, it is the role of political elites to organize, mobilize and lead masses into violent conflict: political elites – whether of an insurgent group or of a state – serve as active agents of violence. Leaders are instrumental in transforming spontaneous waves of violence into sustainable campaigns of organized violence: as stated, the commonly accepted threshold of civil war violent intrastate conflict entailing a thousand battlefield deaths per annum. This threshold is hardly attainable unless sporadic violence is institutionalized by political elites – agents of violence. In other words, in contrast to the sporadic and rather disorganized incidents of intercommunal violence which usually precede civil war, established large-scale violence is a direct product of a conscious decision of an actor or actors to turn to conflict – whether these be state authorities or insurgents or both. A decision – which is

itself shaped by human cognition that may emanate from a wide range of cultural predispositions, preferences, prejudices, interpretations of the situation, and so forth, – is taken by elites, that is, particular individuals, or by narrow groups of individuals: a decision which social sciences fail to predict. When viewed against this background, civil war appears to be but one potential outcome of a variety of possible outcomes of contentious interrelations between state and dissent – but it is far from being the only possible outcome.

In other words, civil war is an outcome of a conscious use of large-scale violence by the political elites of either party to the conflict in order to achieve political victory by inflicting military defeat upon the opponent. In this regard, the perception of proper opportunity is of decisive importance, as it prompts either regime or secessionist forces to take concentrated collective action which aims to exploit that opportunity. I designate "opportunity" as constituting a rational calculation on the part of an actor or actors of the existence of a *relative power asymmetry*: such an asymmetry comprises a recognition of one's opponent's weakness relative to one's own strength, along with the recognition of a seemingly favorable political constellation. Nonetheless, what a given actor of violence considers to be a rational calculation may in effect stem from a *miscalculation* as well as individual bias, based upon a range of cognitive shortcomings; this considerably reduces the predictability of civil war initiation in practice.

3
The South Caucasus: A History of Identities, an Identity of Histories

For Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians, as well as for their neighbors within the post-Soviet area, their gaining of independence in 1991 was an unexpected gift, even if many of them had long been dreaming of it. For the leading politicians of the day within the Communist republics, accustomed as they were to managing a fairly modest domestic agenda – as well as for the dilettantes in the ranks of the newly formed national (post-Communist) elites – there emerged a problem with which neither they nor their predecessors had any experience: that of building a new, fully functional nation-state from the ground up. At the time, however, few of the politicians concerned were fully aware of the magnitude of the task which confronted them. Given the euphoric expectations which abounded during the first few months of independence, there arose an oversimplified perception of the complicated local and international context within which that independence had been gained, and this misperception came fully reflected in the definition of both internal and foreign policy goals. Emotions and desires, rediscovered feelings of "historical hatred" and "blood relations" – these were the factors which came to be decisive for not only domestic politics, but also for relations with international neighbors, even if the old guard continued to take Moscow's wishes into account. Policy priorities, therefore, emerged in parallel with the ways in which, after 70 years of existence within the framework of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan, Armenians and Armenia, Georgians and Georgia, went about trying to (re)build a nation-state and to (re)discover their place within the world's family of nations.

Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis

The peculiarity of the politics of post-Soviet Azerbaijan was that for this nation of 7 million, the 1990s brought about the start of the final stage of nation building – a difficult process which had been dragging along for centuries, full of revolutions, wars, and an unending succession of regimes and ideologies. The twentieth century can thus be described as the most dramatic period in the complicated history of this politically young nation.

The beginnings of the process of attaining nationhood stretch back to the eleventh century, when vast areas of Persia, the South Caucasus, and Anatolia were occupied by Seljuq (Oghuz) raiders from the steppes of Central Asia. In later centuries, the erstwhile conquerors blended in with the social and cultural environment in which they had settled. They were assimilated in cultural terms, albeit not entirely: they retained their original Turkic language, although it was recognizably influenced by local languages such as Persian and, as a consequence of Islamization, also by Arabic. As a result of several successive waves of mass Turkic migration, two main ethnic groups emerged, which have been preserved to this day. Those migrants who arrived and settled in the peninsula of Asia Minor were subjected to the strong influences of Greek (Byzantine) and Arab/Islamic culture, and also to a certain extent to the influence of the cultures of the Southern Slavic nations: today, they are designated as (Anatolian) Turks. While Oghuz nomads, mixing with the local Caucasian (Caucasian Albanian)[1] and North Iranian populations, gave rise during the course of the past millennium to the ethnic group known today as the Azerbaijanis.

It should be noted that the question of the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijanis, particularly as it has been influenced during recent decades by (pseudo) scientific disputes over history related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, has been heavily politicized and has still not been answered satisfactorily.[2] Several (mainly Azerbaijani) historians have dated the arrival of the first Turkic tribes (Khazars, not Oghuz) to the territory of present-day Azerbaijan[3] to around the sixth century – this in an effort to make the origin of the Azerbaijani population appear older. Others – generally twentieth-century Iranian authors – have claimed that the Azerbaijanis are of Indo-European origin and that they are Iranian "Aryans," who adopted the language and certain elements of the Oghuz culture during the centuries following the Seljuq invasion. Such authors also draw attention to the Azari (Adhari, Adari) language, which can be shown from documentary evidence to have

existed within the territory of proto-Turkic Azerbaijan, and which was similar to Persian.[4]

Over the centuries, Azerbaijan, like its neighbors, has been a bone of contention between regional powers struggling for influence in the area connecting Anatolia, Persia, and the vast steppes of Eurasia. Apart from relatively short periods, Azerbaijan has never been a unified state worthy of the name. It was divided into nearly two dozen tiny, mutually competing states – khanates or sultanates. While the Turkic inhabitants of Azerbaijan did give rise to a number of important ruling dynasties and acted as a storehouse for the Persian military, with whom they formed a single unit for centuries, the degree of sovereignty of the various Azerbaijani states varied from full independence (with an effort to achieve regional hegemony) to the status of a vassal territory – or even to complete integration with larger, more powerful neighbors: most frequently Persia, and, to a lesser degree, Turkey.

The legacy of such historical developments as these has been a patchwork of relatively strong local material, cultural, and lingual differences which to some extent persist in Azerbaijan to this day. Differences exist in particular among the Western Azerbaijanis (who, until recently, inhabited the territory of present-day Armenia, and among whom Turkish influence is apparent), Northern Azerbaijanis (historically associated with Dagestani highlanders), Eastern and Central Azerbaijanis (from the Baku area, the lowlands at the confluence of the Kura and Arax rivers), and Southern Azerbaijanis (amongst whom the strong influence of Persia is manifested). Equally varied is the ethnolinguistic palette of Azerbaijan, home as it is to dozens of autochthonous nations. If we discount the Armenians (who today only inhabit the Karabakh area, which is de jure a part of Azerbaijan, but de facto outside its sovereign control since the early 1990s) then this ethnolinguistic heterogeneity primarily involves the ethnic groups of the Lezgin branch of the Nakh-Dagestani language group, in the northern areas of today's Azerbaijan, and the Avars in the same area. Another important ethnolinguistic group is the Iranian-speaking population, namely: the Talysh in the southeast of the country, in the Länkäran region (Lenkoran); the Tats in the northeast; and the remnants of the formerly numerous Kurdish population of western Karabakh.

This being the case, it was difficult to choose the correct ethnonym for Azerbaijan's inhabitants as a whole. As was the case with other Turkic nationalities in the erstwhile Russian Empire, the designations "Tatar," "Transcaucasian Tatar," or "Aderbaijani/Azerbaijani Tatar" were used interchangeably to describe Azerbaijanis; until the 1940s the Azerbaijanis

not infrequently referred to themselves simply as "Muslims," or even as "Shiites." Moreover, as late as the nineteenth century, many Azerbaijanis identified themselves primarily according to their membership in large clans (families or tribes). The actual ethnonym "Azerbaijani" (the phrase "Azerbaijani Turk" was sometimes also used) is relatively new: it first appeared during the late nineteenth century as a result of attempts by local intellectuals to introduce a modern ethnolinguistic/regional identity in opposition to the pervasive supranational or religious identities (such as Turk, or more correctly, *Türk*), which were perceived as being too broad and territorially unfixed to serve as an ethnolinguistic identity.[5] The ethnonym Azerbaijani (Azärbaycanlı) began to be used officially during the existence of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–20) but did not become commonly engrained until the period of Soviet hegemony, from the 1930s onwards.[6]

Given the inevitable ballast of accumulated popular memory and prejudice bequeathed by the turbulent history of the South Caucasus, self-perceptions have necessarily been reflected in the way in which neighbors have been viewed: the past – or rather a (re)discovered perception of the past shaped by actual political needs – has been integral in the creation of the present, while the past has also, by extension, been integral to the shaping of policies with respect to neighboring nations and states.

The national policy direction of Azerbaijan, especially during the first third of the 1990s, was to a large extent a continuation of the country's ongoing process of "identity building" – that is to say it was a "policy of identity." This is why ethnic issues have come to play such a prominent part in the formation of both Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policies – a far greater part than has been the case in other European countries that have an established tradition of statehood and which already possess clearly defined nationalism. In spite of several regime changes in Baku – since 1993 the politics there have been far more pragmatic – these ethnic sentiments have lost none of their relevance or immediacy. This being the case, as far as Azerbaijani citizens are concerned, relations with immediate neighbors are effectively equated with their relation toward the neighboring individual *nationalities* concerned – a factor which draws the observer into ever deeper historical contexts. State-building, as well as nation-building processes in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, have been further complicated by the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh coming to a head; by problematic relations with powerful neighbors (Iran and Russia); and by the expectation of (instant) riches thanks to the large oil deposits which have been discovered in the Caspian Sea.

With respect to Armenia, the collective national identity can be perceived from an international perspective as comprising a relatively simple equation of two stereotypes that are in polar opposition to each other: the notion of an “elder brother,” or “great protector” (Russia and the Russians), on the one hand, and an image of Turkey and the Turks (or Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijanis) as the “historical enemy,” on the other. The symbolic world of Armenian nationalism, which became solidified in the 1920s and 1930s, is not a phenomenon isolated from the surrounding world. To this day it has broadly maintained the form described above, and the resultant paranoia of the Armenian public continues to influence the thinking of statesmen, their perception of possible security threats, and the formation of their policy priorities. These continuing nationalist sentiments have been further fuelled by the actual experience of the woeful realities of the late Soviet and post-Soviet period, when the phantoms of past threats, upon which Armenian nationalism has historically rested, have seemingly come back to life. As with the case of Azerbaijan, Armenian policy is also based on deep historical and psychological roots: here too, the relations between neighboring countries in the present have been conditioned to a significant extent by historical experiences of conflict with neighboring ethnic groups. Without an understanding of the specific historical and cultural circumstances, it is not possible to adequately comprehend the apparent paradoxes of Armenian domestic and foreign policy during the period under scrutiny here. The central issue in this regard is the question of the Armenian perception of *Turkey*: a brief analysis of which is given below.

The Georgian national identity, unlike that of its neighboring nationalities, is less burdened by a sense of historical wrongs; hence, the Georgian popular perception of its neighbors (especially of its powerful neighbors) is – or at least was, until the first half of the 1990s – less black and white. This is owing to the absence of the sort of experience with massacres and deportations which the Armenians have suffered, and also to the absence of any notion of a “thousand-year struggle,” such as that which characterizes the engraved Armenian view of the Turkish–Armenian or Azerbaijani–Armenian conflicts. The threat to Georgia from Persia, to the south, ended during the first third of the nineteenth century, when Tehran was obliged to surrender its Caucasian territories to the empire of the Romanovs. Fifty years later, the threat to Georgia from Turkey also nearly vanished when, in 1878, the remaining territory of historical Georgia still inhabited by a Kartvel element (Ajaria),[7] was annexed to Russia as a consequence of the Russo–Turkish War (1877–78).

Thus, the Turkish and Persian (Iranian) dimensions of Georgian national security have become a thing of the past during the last two centuries,[8] but the Russian dimension is still relevant. In the light of this fact, the image which Georgians hold of Russia and the Russians has undergone significant changes since the nineteenth century: this has been an era marked by a popular desire for the unification of Georgian lands under the dominion of the empire of the "white tsar" – a factor which, albeit modified by the most recent developments, still influences the mindset of Tbilisi politicians today. All of the problems that have been so far described will be discussed in the following parts of this chapter.

Azerbaijan[9]

Relations with Persians and Persia, or Turks and Turkey, in historical perspective

Since the eleventh century, when Oghuz nomads made their definitive entrance onto the local political stage (sometimes referred to as the Greater Middle East), the history of Iran can be regarded as a kind of Persian–Turkic symbiosis, in which there was a mutually complementary intermingling of cultural influences from both of these (originally sedentary and nomadic) civilizations: principally sedentary, ancient Iranians and Turkish nomads from the Great Steppes, and their descendants.

Tribes of predominantly *Turkic* origin ruled over the Persian lands (as well as over Azerbaijan and its surrounding areas[10]) from the eleventh century[11] until the coup d'état in 1925, when the Pahlaví Dynasty was founded (the first purely ethnic Persian dynasty in Persia whose ruling power was not limited to the borders of historical Persia). For nearly ten centuries, Iran comprised a distinctive conglomeration of Iranian and Turkic peoples: indeed until relatively recently, the actual toponym "Iran" carried a much greater semantic weight than it does today.

At the start of the sixteenth century, the Safavid ruler Shah Ismail I granted Shiite Islam the status of being the official state religion. The extent and strength of this shah's hold on the region rested on the military power of the elite of the Qizilbash[12] tribal union, which had brought together the Turkic tribes of Persia, eastern Anatolia, and the South Caucasus; the majority of Azerbaijanis and Persians adopted Shiite Islam at this time. This process strengthened the devotion of the Turkic tribes to the idea of Iranian statehood, and in particular intensified the Persianization of the tribal elite. The new religion was also a powerful impulse toward territorial expansion. There followed decades

of so-called Persian–Turkish or Shiite–Sunni conflict, in which the fortunes of war fluctuated, alternately favoring one side then the other. From the sixteenth century through the first third of the nineteenth century, the khanates of northern and southern Azerbaijan existed as either an integral part of Persia itself, or had the status of vassal territories under the suzerainty of Tabriz/Isfahan/Tehran (although successful attempts to gain emancipation from this domination were not uncommon).[13]

A definitive change to this situation did not occur until the two Russo–Persian wars, in which St. Petersburg was victorious. According to the peace treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828), the territory encompassed by the northern Azerbaijani khanates (north of the border at the river Araxes) was handed over to the Romanovs. Azerbaijan thus came to be divided into distinct northern and southern parts, each inhabited by one nationality that spoke one language. From the turn of the nineteenth century onwards, the idea of a divided homeland (*severance*: *ayriliq* in Azerbaijani) came to be reflected in the ideological and political solidification of a distinctive *Azerbaijani* national consciousness – which, in turn, influenced the beginnings of Azerbaijani nationalism per se.[14]

At first, the formation of this Azerbaijani identity played out as a contest between two ideological and political currents: one of which stressed the primacy of culture and religion (effectively linking Azerbaijanis to the Persian high culture: *société persane*); while the other current emphasized the notion of a collective Azerbaijani origin derived from their predominantly Turkic language. Countering this process of the creation of a unified Azerbaijani identity was not only the continuing existence of traditional clan/territorial differentiations, but also the existence of the two widespread (Shiite/Sunni) denominations within Islam itself. While the majority of Azerbaijanis were adherents of Shiite Islam and inclined towards the Persians, the strong Sunni minority, who mainly inhabited the west and north of Azerbaijani territory, identified themselves more with their Turkish and Dagestani fellow (Sunni) believers.[15] As Tadeusz Swietochowski points out, "the depth of the sectarian split was reflected in the nineteenth-century wars waged by Russia, when the Tsardom was able to use Shiite volunteers against Turkey in 1828 and 1853–1856 as well as against Shamil's *ghazavat* (holy war) in Dagestan. By contrast, the Sunnis tended to support Shamil, sometimes taking up arms, and showed restiveness at times of Russo-Ottoman conflicts."[16] In the 1830s alone there were three local uprisings in the northern areas of contemporary Azerbaijan,

bordering on Dagestan, which were in one way or another connected with Shamil's movement.

In the end, the decisive factor within this complex of cultural, religious, and ideological disputes was *language*: by the early twentieth century, the broadly pro-Turkish or pro-Turkic orientation of the collective Azerbaijani identity was clearly established; while within this emerging (secular, pro-Western, and modernistic) nationalism the role of religion had been reduced to a minimum. One result of this ideological shift was a growing orientation on the part of the local elite towards the Ottoman Empire: this came to be regarded as the flagship of the (Pan-) Turkic movement as a whole, whilst at the same time being revered as a leading Muslim power bloc; It was to the Ottoman Empire that the Pan-Turanist revivalists from the Crimea to the Altai tied their hopes. No less intensely felt was the rediscovery of "Turkic brotherhood" in various parts of the Russian Empire: in the Volga–Ural region, the North and South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Crimea.[17] Thanks to these developments during the first decades of the twentieth century, the political forces behind the emergence of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–20), could declare: "The Muslims of the Transcaucasus [i.e., Azerbaijanis] together with the Turks constitute one nationality."[18] Although, from the start of the twentieth century onwards, bourgeois circles in particular laid claim ever more vocally to their Turkic identity, an historically based orientation towards Iranian statehood was not at all uncommon among the aristocracy, while the (more apolitical) countryside still identified itself strongly on the basis of religion (as Muslims), or in accordance with local family, clan, or territorial ties. Nevertheless, the foundations had been laid for the establishment of a collective Azerbaijani identity as a lingual and territorial phenomenon.

This change of collective identity was sealed during the last months of World War I, when, in the autumn of 1918, after the withdrawal of the Bolshevik army and of Armenian revolutionary forces, Ottoman troops, and the (mostly Azerbaijani) Army of Islam briefly occupied Baku. The Ottoman Turks were welcomed in Azerbaijan as rescuers and liberators who, together with Azerbaijani militia units, had rid the local populace of the bloody rampages of the Armenian militias – although at the cost of the murder of thousands of Armenian civilians in the capital. Until their eventual withdrawal in the autumn of 1918, when they were replaced by British occupation forces, Turkish troops were largely responsible for the creation of an independent Azerbaijan. They also provided significant aid in the fight against Armenian rebels in Karabakh.[19]

Relations with Russians and Russia in historical perspective

The relationship with Russia in the Muslim Caucasus has never been unambiguous. Russians were regarded as "infidels" by most of the local population – infidels who, by contrast to the Christian Armenians and, especially, Georgians – had exhibited almost no sympathy towards Azerbaijanis, especially during the initial period of colonization. For St. Petersburg, on the other hand, the Muslim Azerbaijanis represented a potentially treacherous populace: at the time of the nineteenth-century wars against Russia in the North Caucasus, there had been a threat on several occasions that the conflict might spill over into territory inhabited by Azerbaijanis – potentially a very unpleasant scenario for the Russian Empire in view of the strong ties of the local population to Persia and Turkey.[20]

According to the *Caucasian Calendar for 1853*, Transcaucasian Tatars (i.e., Azerbaijanis) are "fiery, impatient, predisposed to brutality, preferring an itinerant way of life; when the government weakens they cross over to a different government or to anarchy; they do not forgive wrongs, but are vengeful, tenacious...."[21] About ten years earlier, a Russian officer had reported from Karabakh that the Tatars' way of life, and their morals, were inconsistent: "[A]ccording to their customs and beliefs, lying, banditry and plundering are worthy of praise"; while to abduct a girl, and in so doing to kill "at least a man or even her very own parents and then to marry her is praiseworthy, youthful heroism." As a consequence, "they cannot be real supporters of the Russian government, and in case of any political upheaval, they will be prepared to rise up against us."[22] Even sources which attributed mostly positive qualities to Azerbaijanis ("hard-working, manly, full of determination, not inclined towards changes and novelties") did not fail to emphasize that "one cannot at all rely on their peacefulness and loyalty."[23] Despite this, the number and extent of actual anti-colonial uprisings in Azerbaijani lands was small, especially by comparison with other areas of the Muslim (North) Caucasus. Amongst other things, this was a by-product of the fact that St. Petersburg relied, in its regional policy, on the loyalty of the established Azerbaijani aristocracy, who were therefore granted a certain degree of autonomy. At least at first, this approach provided the appearance of a continuity of power and legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary farmers and herdsmen, in whose lives the arrival of the Russians changed almost nothing. Those local disturbances which did occasionally arise were generally suppressed by the armed forces of the local feudal lords, khans or beks – only relatively rarely by mounted Cossacks.

That said, one can acknowledge that existence within the framework of the Russian state provided the inhabitants of the South Caucasus with decades of stable socioeconomic growth, although it was primarily Russian, Armenian, Jewish, and foreign investment that profited from the oil wealth of Baku. Another important factor was the long-term influence of Russian culture and learning upon Azerbaijani life – especially upon the formation of the Azerbaijani intellectual elite, for whom the Russian language and culture served as a bridge to Western culture in general and to the various modernizing tendencies which Western Europe was then undergoing. This is another reason why Azerbaijani revivalists of the nineteenth century, with their anticlerical tendencies, maintained generally positive relations with Russia and took a broadly benign view with respect to Russian domination.

Although the Azerbaijanis, as Muslim nationals, were exempt from serving in the Russian army, some of the older feudal elite nevertheless still regarded military service as being an honorable privilege. Nonetheless, there was noticeably less participation by the Azerbaijani nobility in the officer corps of the Russian army than that of the nobilities of Georgia and Armenia: this ratio corresponded to the degree of the involvement of these respective ethnic groups in the social life of tsarist Russia.[24] The period after the Russian Revolution of 1917 was marked by relatively weak anti-Russian attitudes on the part of the Azerbaijanis. This can be at least partially explained by the fact that the withdrawal of the rule of St. Petersburg from the Azerbaijani region left behind a power vacuum that both the Armenians and Azerbaijanis tried to fill – each striving for control over the several areas which they jointly populated. Armenians, and not Russians, thus came to be perceived as the chief threat to the brief existence of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–20). Even after the South Caucasian republic had been occupied in April 1920 by divisions of the Eleventh Red Army, anti-Russian attitudes within the territory still did not strengthen, although in certain areas of the country armed resistance to the occupation was not definitively suppressed until 1924.

The period of Soviet domination was characterized by a strengthening degree of autonomy for Azerbaijan (where, especially after World War II, the newly established local elite played an ever greater role), and by generally placid Russian–Azerbaijani coexistence. In fact, it was during the Soviet period that the very term "Azerbaijani nationality" was coined; while many of the clannish, territorial, and religious divides which had fractured Azerbaijani society for centuries were largely overcome. Instead, cultural and linguistic homogenization began to assume

significant proportions. Following the politics of *korenizatsiya*,[25] highly Russified local Azerbaijani elites emerged whose influence in the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic increased dramatically throughout the twentieth century. Notwithstanding the considerable oil wealth of its Caspian coastline, Azerbaijan still remained a relatively backward area economically when compared to its regional neighbors; Azerbaijan largely subsidized both Armenia and Georgia in terms of oil supplies, and belonged to a small group of Caucasus regions that obtained no subsidies from the Soviet center but, on the contrary, provided them.

Nonetheless, the ultimate outcome of the Soviet–Azerbaijani relationship proved to be tragic. On January 20, 1990, Soviet Army units invaded Baku, officially with the goal of preventing the pogroms of Armenian civilians (Baku's inhabitants), which was asserted as being instigated by fanatical crowds. The Soviet troops deployed in the capital city and its environs had been passively following events within the region for more than a week. The Azerbaijanis, however, clearly interpreted this brutal attack, which led to the deaths of dozens of Azerbaijani civilians and the injury of hundreds more, as a punishment from Moscow for the increasingly emphatic demands for independence, which had been heard in Baku at ongoing demonstrations by many tens of thousands of followers of the nationalist opposition. The original mission of these army units had been to prevent the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh under the administration of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia.

Armenia and Armenians

For Armenia, with its population of three and a half million – and for the Armenian diaspora spread around the world – the gaining of independence was perceived as the veritable apotheosis of national history, comparable in its emotional depth perhaps with the Jewish reestablishment of Israel.[26] Apart from the two-year period of national independence (1918–20/21) – which had in any case failed to engrave itself on the Armenian national consciousness because of its brevity and the thoroughness of the subsequent Soviet occupation – this was the first time since 1375 that Armenian statehood had formally been in existence (although something of an exception in this respect was the existence of the [semi-] independent principality of the upper part of Karabakh, which had been controlled by Armenians until the mid-eighteenth century).[27] Throughout almost the entire period of its history, Armenia has existed as a buffer zone between powerful neighbors – whether that be the Roman Empire, various Persian states, Arab caliphates, Byzantium,

or Turkey – each of whom had successively striven for control over this strategic crossroads.

Although the greater part of Armenian history has been characterized by the absence of any form of statehood which might imprint upon ethnic communities a feeling of political solidarity, an Armenian identity centered largely upon language, religion, and their unique alphabet has been one of the most firmly grounded in the world. This is another reason why a preoccupation with the ancient world and with the early Middle Ages has been an abiding feature of the Armenian written tradition. In these accounts of the heroic deeds of ancient kings, in which truth readily mingles with epicized fiction, room has always been found for the evocation of longed-for national greatness and – especially in the romanticized works of the revivalists of the late nineteenth century – proto-nationalist inspiration (and aspiration) for the future. The "golden age" of national history is most often viewed as having been during the rule of the "King of Kings," Tigranes the Great (Tigranes II, 95–55 BC), who managed for a brief time to extend his rule over the Caucasus and Anatolia, even extending his reach as far as Syria and Palestine. Bygone glory was also seen in the rule of the Orontid, Artaxiad, and Arsacid dynasties, and in the so-called Macedonian dynasty in Byzantium.

The unity of the Armenian collective identity has been further reinforced by the tragic events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Anatolia and the Caucasus, much of which was commonly experienced by all persons of Armenian nationality, regardless of their social status or place of origin.[28] This traumatic period witnessed the genocide of 1915–16, the consequent mass exile and other hardships, and the subsequent rebuilding of the Armenian homeland, but now within the borders of the Soviet state. Although a significant number of the people who claim Armenian nationality have, in fact, been living outside the territory of the historical Armenia for more than 90 years (there are said to be as many as 4 million such people), a strong consciousness of a common homeland and an equally strong sense of ethnocultural or ethnoreligious solidarity, have so far effectively prevented the assimilation of Armenians within foreign environments.

This populous and influential diaspora remains an important part of Armenian public life and identity. Although the beginnings of the Armenian diaspora – one of the world's oldest – reaches back to the period before the end of the first millennium,[29] the tragic events of 1915–16 in the Ottoman Empire, during which hundreds of thousands of Armenians lost their lives, were the cause for tens of thousands of Armenian survivors migrating across the Middle East, Europe, and

America, and thereby laying the foundations for the so-called "New Diaspora." Some of these refugees found their way to Russian (eastern or Caucasian) Armenia, where they became mixed with the local population during the subsequent decades.

The church, which acted, de facto, as the standard-bearer of not only religion, but also of the language, learning, and "Armenianness" of the Armenian people, has traditionally interpreted the historical peripeteia of the Armenians over the centuries as God "putting the nation to the test," so that it would bear in itself the cross of Jesus's suffering. The Armenian nation's history has, thus, been understood as a series of sufferings and God-ordained trials, and this consciousness has served to provide the nation with a powerful emotional (and religious) bond; within the Armenian historical self-conception we find several analogies to the Jews and, from a certain viewpoint, to contemporary Greeks as well.[30] This collective sense of Armenian national identity was thus codified and solidified much earlier than was the case with many other nations: however, the distinctive *political* phenomenon of Armenian nationalism did not assume its current profile until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during a period of dramatic events which shook the region and the whole world.

Relations with Turks and Turkey in historical perspective

From the time of the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451),[31] Armenian thinkers began to view the West (together with Persia in the south) as sources of constant threat. From that time onwards, the geostrategic interests of Constantinople, continually striving as it was for the conquest of this important territory in its own regional struggles (first with the Persians and later with the Arabs), coincided with ideological interests which were dictated by an effort to bring the Armenian "heretics" into the light of the "true faith": Orthodox Christianity. Although the Armenians did give Byzantium a number of important statesmen and military commanders, in earlier times the Greek–Armenian antagonism was so strong that many Byzantine Armenians came to regard the victorious breakthrough of Seljuq Turks into Anatolia, a thousand years ago, as a salutary episode. This antagonism seems to have strengthened during the Ottoman era as Greek and Armenian (and Jewish) communities became fierce competitors in the empire's vibrant economic life.[32]

The strengthening of the Turkish element in Asia Minor at first actually brought Armenian communities in Anatolia more religious freedom, since the incoming Muslim rulers were willing to provide relative freedoms to the adherents of other faiths in exchange for loyalty:

this relative benevolence towards vassal faith communities included allowing them the possibility of maintaining their own faith, identity, and (to a certain extent) legal codes. The Armenians within the Ottoman Empire, in common with other "People of the Book" (i.e., Christians and Jews), enjoyed the status of *dhimmi* or wards of the Muslim community or state, and as such were regarded as an independent *millet*, that is, a political–religious community. While that status formally determined their lower social status,[33] they still enjoyed the guaranteed possibility of relatively stable social development within the overarching framework of communities under autonomous administration.[34] Armenian loyalty during the Balkan uprisings of the first half of the nineteenth century, when the Armenian community, as one of the Ottoman *millets*, refused to question the sultan's authority, earned the Armenians the distinction of being called *millet-i sadika* or a faithful nation. Within nineteenth-century Turkish society the standing of the Armenian urban community – in particular its bourgeois and intellectual elite – grew enormously, reaching its apex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Armenians were at the heart of the economic, artistic and, in a certain sense, political life of that empire of multiple nationalities. During this period, however, the Armenians of eastern Anatolia became the targets of ever more intensive attacks by the Ottoman army and by Muslim (mainly Kurdish and Turkish) militias: in 1894–96 there were massacres of the Armenian population which, according to various estimates, cost the lives of between 80,000 and 300,000 people.[35] This sharp turnaround in the attitude of the Ottoman state towards Armenians was caused by a series of factors.

Foremost among these was a new, European-styled, tax system which was introduced in Turkey during the second half of the nineteenth century. The higher taxes which were charged under this new system were levied without the factual abolition of the apparatus of the previous taxation system (which continued to exist in areas of Anatolia in parallel to the new one): this situation served to accommodate the traditionally high revenue demands made by local feudal lords – landowners, the Kurds generally, and Armenians as well – and left ample scope for (already ubiquitous) corruption, cronyism, and anarchy to worsen. The situation further deteriorated after thousands of so-called Muhajirs – immigrants from the ranks of the rebellious Circassians, Abkhazians, and Abazins, or Balkan Muslims, who had been forced by St. Petersburg to emigrate from the northern Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire – were settled in the none-too-fertile regions inhabited by Armenians: this process of settlement was usually conducted to the detriment of the existing Armenian

and Syriac Christian populations. If that were not enough, at the same time Istanbul gave approval for ever larger numbers of nomadic Kurdish tribes to migrate farther to the north and northeast – that is, directly into territories which had traditionally been populated by Armenians: "The Kurds, nomads and semi-nomads, would winter in the regions of Mush and Van, and around Ararat, occupying upkeep and tribute from the Armenian peasants, forcing them to purchase their protection (*hafir*), pillaging with impunity, and carrying off women and flocks. The usual reactions of the Armenian peasant and artisans were flight and emigration toward Constantinople, Smyrna, and Transcaucasia."[36]

In response to these developments, armed units began to appear spontaneously during the mid-nineteenth century in some areas of Anatolian Armenia, with the main goal of resisting Kurdish raiders: thus, the first Armenian rebellions (in 1862 in Zeitun and in 1863 in Van and Erzerum) became predominantly anti-Kurdish in character. Just as with the earlier Balkan uprisings, in these instances Christian farmers were, initially, asking for the sultan's protection, but "Local Turkish officials ran the towns with little regard to central authority, and Kurdish beys held much of the countryside under their sway. Often the only way Istanbul could make its will felt was by sending in the army."[37]

These processes taking place in the Anatolian countryside coincided with the rise of an emancipation movement which was beginning to gain strength within the circles of Armenian intellectuals in Russia and Europe, as well as in the biggest Ottoman cities. Once the "Armenian question" had entered upon the stage of grand European diplomacy at the 1878 Congress of Berlin, it became politicized once and for all. The initial efforts of a handful of Armenian revivalists to agitate for the improvement of the situation of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire were soon appropriated by St. Petersburg as an excellent tool for its foreign policy agenda – as a convenient means of meddling in the internal affairs of the "sick man of the Bosporus." The publicly declared goal, proclaimed by St. Petersburg, of protecting the interests of Ottoman Christians, was in fact a convenient excuse for the expansion of Russian influence into the interior of Anatolia.[38]

The disconsolate state of the Armenian peasantry in Anatolia next came to the attention of several Armenian revivalist organizations, and especially of the three oldest and largest Armenian socialist revolutionary parties – the members of which did not hesitate to use terrorist, or diversionary-terrorist, means of armed resistance during certain periods. The organizations in question were: the revolutionary group Protectors of the Homeland (founded in 1882); the three aforementioned socialist

revolutionary parties – *Armenakan* (in the Armenian language, the name means "Armenian"), founded in 1885; *Hnchak* (Armenian for "bell"), founded two years later; and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Haykakan heghaphokhakan dashnaktsutiun*), also known by the shorter name *Dashnaktsutiun*, founded in 1890. The programs espoused by these respective organizations varied (depending on the respective periods of their existence) from the formal founding of an independent Armenian state, to the incorporation of eastern areas of Anatolia, regarded as an integral part of western Armenia,[39] into the empire of the Romanovs. Before long, violent clashes occurred with Kurds in several eastern Turkish vilayets, and attacks were also launched against Ottoman military units and police – while sometimes the targets of the attacks were even Muslim (Kurdish and Turkish) civilians: it was generally believed that St. Petersburg was supporting these activities. These revivalist organizations thus helped to quite significantly mobilize the originally apolitical Armenian rural population, leading to the formation of an armed resistance movement. In a relatively short time, Ottoman Muslims began to view the Armenians as a homogenous ethnic–religious community – a "fifth column" – which was trying to undermine the state's integrity with the support of foreign powers. In any case, after a series of uprisings and wars which cost the humiliated Ottoman sultanate extensive territory in the Black Sea region and the Balkans, while also precipitating the arrival of waves of hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees into an already economically devastated country, the seeds of distrust of the Ottomans towards their Christian fellow citizens had now been sown.

The Sublime Porte proved entirely deaf to the desires of its Anatolian vassals, and wherever possible it dealt with attempts at separatism in the standard manner: military intervention, as was also the case with the earlier suppression by army units of several local rebellions of Kurdish tribes in Anatolia, which had already occurred prior to the 1860s. Sultan Abdul Hamid II (in power from 1876 to 1909), nicknamed "The Butcher" (by no means only by Ottoman Christians), ruled during a period of deep Ottoman fear with respect to the (supposed) destructive intent of European powers who were alleged to be trying to destroy the empire: thus, any efforts towards the emancipation of the Armenian community were a priori interpreted in the light of this "global Christian conspiracy" against the caliphate.

At the same time, Istanbul had increasing concerns about the growing cooperation between certain Kurdish tribal chiefs, who had ideas of autonomy, and the Russians – and these fears were partly confirmed during the Russo–Turkish War (1877–78). In 1891, soon after Turkey's

defeat, Abdul Hamid II authorized the formation of Kurdish militia units (*hamidiye*) to which he lent his name. They were to be organized on the basis of an analogy with the mobile Cossack regiments whose deployment in the previous war had proven extraordinarily successful; besides, "it was important to stiffen the resolve of Kurds as part of the empire."[40] The Kurdish tribes from which members of the *hamidiye* were recruited were made exempt from taxes: the only duty of these paramilitary units was military service to the sultan, for which they received regular pay. Nonetheless, "when the government could not afford to pay *hamidiye* officers, it offered them tax-collecting rights on local Armenian villages, causing further hardship for the latter."[41] Before long, the armed Kurdish tribes, who had been given broad responsibility for protection of the border with Russia in the eastern provinces, began engaging in fights over the region's limited resources – clashes amongst both individual *hamidiye* forces, and between those forces and the local population, whether Kurdish, Turkish, or Christian: "local commanders did not differentiate between enemies of their tribe qua tribe, and enemies of the *hamidiye* cavalry."[42] Eastern Anatolia thus became the arena of regular armed conflicts of a local character, in which the Christian population suffered the most.[43] The regular calls of Armenians to Istanbul to intervene in the name of protecting its Christian subjects, and the general stabilization of the remote East-Anatolian vilayets, proved to be in vain. At the end of the nineteenth century, Istanbul generally avoided armed intervention in the area concerned, partly in order not to incur the wrath of the populous and powerful Kurdish tribes, and partly because the general state of Kurdish–Armenian antagonism seems to have suited Istanbul's own interests. Given this situation, the aforementioned massacres of 1894–96 in fact took place with the active participation of local police forces – especially of *hamidiye* units – and with the connivance of ordinary local Muslims.[44]

The tragic climax of the deepening crisis was the so-called Armenian Genocide of 1915, a complicated phenomenon, the precise circumstances of which have still not been satisfactorily brought to light to this day. The Young Turk regime appears to have decided in part upon the liquidation of the Armenian population, and in part upon its expulsion, in order to pre-empt the feared penetration by the Russians into the interior of Anatolia.[45] The result was the outright murder of hundreds of thousands of people, comprising the greater part of the Armenian population of Anatolia, by Ottoman forces and *hamidiya* units; or else the subjection of the surviving Armenian populations to fatal conditions during their subsequent deportation.[46] The remaining Armenian

survivors were then "Kurdified" or "Turkified"; while tens of thousands of others managed to escape to the then-disintegrating Russian Empire, or to the West (particularly France or the United States), to Syria or Lebanon or to other Arab areas of the sultanate (which before long came under the mandate of France or the United Kingdom). Massacres also recurred during the assault of the Turkish army upon the newly created Armenian Democratic Republic in 1918, as well as during the brief Turkish–Armenian War of 1920. As a response to these struggles – and based upon the pretext that Turkic farmers and herdsmen had largely taken the side of the Turks – there were extensive ethnic cleansing and murders of thousands of people belonging to the Turkish and Azerbaijani population, who constituted approximately one third of the population of independent Armenia.

It was during the period of these tragic events, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, that the image of the Turks as a "nation of murderers and ruffians" became definitively sealed in the Armenian national consciousness – a collective image further consolidated by the experience of subsequent conflicts with the Azerbaijanis of the South Caucasus.[47] Subsequently, the collective Armenian interpretation of the catastrophic year of 1915 came quickly to dovetail thematically with the, already religiously imbued, self-image of Armenians as a "nation of martyrs" – hence the readiness with which these events became an integral part of the Armenian national myth. Already before 1915, literary and musical works had been created which glorified the suffering of Armenian women and children at the hands of the brutal Turks, works which praised the courage of Armenian partisans and condemned the boundless cruelty of the Turks – thus effectively superimposing the feeling of deep national tradition upon the Armenian–Turkish (in reality more Armenian–Kurdish or Armenian–Ottoman) rivalry of the last decades of the Ottoman Empire's existence. Also contributing to the process of collective national myth-building was the later retrospective epicizing of these narrative constructions, with the notion of some sort of "millennial" Armenian–Turkish grudge being taken as axiomatic.[48]

Relations with Russians and Russia in historical perspective

Russia's eventual penetration of the Caucasus region was welcomed by the Armenian intellectual, and especially clerical, elite, as well as by ordinary people, with religion playing a significant role in this acceptance. Units of Armenian volunteers had existed since the time of the two Russo–Persian Wars (1804–13 and 1826–28), during which period

the territory of Eastern Armenia had become part of the empire of the Romanovs; while such volunteer units had also served in nearly all of St Petersburg's Turkish campaigns in the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia (1806–12, 1828–29, 1877–78, 1914–17).

The Russians came to be perceived by the Armenian revivalists – whose ideas had a significant cultural/religious component – as "liberators" from the thousand-year yoke of the "heathen." In the first half of the nineteenth century, some Armenians even believed that St. Petersburg would permit the restoration of some form of quasi-autonomous Armenian tsardom as a distinct entity and a protectorate in the Romanov empire. Although, for various reasons, such optimistic hopes were never fulfilled, Armenian migration to the Caucasus from the Ottoman Empire and Persia was supported by the Russian authorities in every possible way. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees founded numerous prosperous communities all over the Caucasus, as well as in the southern regions of Russia itself.[49]

As far as the Russian view of Armenians is concerned, those attitudes underwent certain changes during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Until 1917, hatred towards the "Jews of the Caucasus," as Armenians were often called for their business talent, was not uncommon among "Great Russian" chauvinists. With the exception of the Azerbaijanis – and especially the North Caucasian highlanders, who were generally distrusted by the Russian authorities, and who were sometimes seen as having the character of noble savages[50] – Armenians as a whole were regarded more favorably as a religiously and politically kindred people. According to Russian opinions of the day, Armenians "without any doubt take first place among the inhabitants of the Transcaucasus for their ability, industriousness and effort to educate themselves" and "have always been regarded as the most industrious workers of the Orient."[51] Russian authorities accounted them as "peaceable, gentle, cautious, calculating, diligent, tied to their families, industrious, delicate, quiet, obedient, trying to act [in compliance with] the law. ..."[52] Besides their talent at business, many documents underscored the unquestionable loyalty of the Armenians, who are "devoted to the Russian government and could not betray us."[53]

Since the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the attitude of Russians toward Armenians gradually changed to such an extent that Armenians came to be regarded as a potentially dangerous "nation of revolutionaries and conspirators." This was especially so in the wake of the so-called first Russian revolution of 1905, which ended

in failure and caused a vigorous strengthening of the police state and a concomitant repression of opponents of the regime: this development unfortunately coincided with a growing mood of revolution among more educated Armenian circles; this in turn sowed the seeds of a deep mistrust of Armenian national intent on the part of the Russian authorities, such that the Russian daily *Russkoe slovo* could assert that "any Armenian in the Caucasus is regarded as a revolutionary just for being Armenian."[54] Another cause for the suspicions of the colonial authorities towards the Armenians was the inescapable fact that, as the most politically conscious inhabitants of the Transcaucasus at the time, who also possessed active political institutions of their own, Armenians were offering the stiffest resistance to the attempts at *Russification* that St. Petersburg had begun to enforce against the ethnic peripheries from the 1880s onwards, after the coronation of Alexander III. Nonetheless, Russian relations toward the Christian Armenians during this period can be best characterized as comprising an attitude of condescending accommodation.

In spite of occasional disappointment with the policies of St. Petersburg toward the affairs of eastern Anatolia, or with regard to the none-too-pro-Armenian approach of the colonial authorities with respect to the so-called Armenian–Tatar War of 1905 (which will be the subject of analysis below), the level of sympathy of Armenians towards Russians always remained high. The crucial point for an understanding of this virtually unchanging attachment was the deepening fear of the Armenians for their own safety: they saw themselves as "an island of Christendom in a hostile (i.e., Turkic–Muslim) environment." In broad terms, the orientation of the Armenian elite towards Russia strengthened in direct proportion to the degree to which, over time, the relations of Armenians with their immediate neighbors (the Turks and Azerbaijanis) deteriorated – Russia being seen as the only power willing and able to provide the small and vulnerable population of Armenians with the guarantee of existence in a situation of geopolitical stalemate.[55] The position of the Armenians, thus, has features similar to the situation of the Lebanese Christians – the Maronites – who have long felt alienated within a potentially hostile Muslim encirclement and who, since the days of the Crusades, have sought protective alliances with European Christians and have supported Christian interests in the eastern Mediterranean.

Even in spite of the occupation of the fledgling Armenian state by the Eleventh Red Army in 1920.[56] and the consequent end of Armenian independence, this burgeoning national consciousness served, during the

ensuing decades, to augment the consolidation of Armenian nationalism, both in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic itself, and amongst nationalistically oriented Armenians throughout the diaspora. However, alongside this, the experience of the 70 years of existence as a province within the U.S.S.R. further served to strengthen Armenia's orientation towards Russia, while also contributing to this was the significant role played by Armenians within Soviet society. These factors help explain why in Armenia – unlike with neighboring countries – the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union was accompanied by almost no anti-Russian sentiment.

Georgia and Georgians

For Armenia – given its collective national experience of centuries of foreign domination, viewed as virtuous suffering in the name of faith and of the nation – the recent regaining of statehood has been received with a virtually metaphysical euphoria; whereas, on the contrary, for Azerbaijan the idea of a unified nation-state has never really taken root; however, in Georgia, the announcement of independence was rather heralded as the restoration – long desired – of historical justice. For Georgians, the year 1991 was regarded as an important milestone: signifying the triumphant reestablishment of the long historical continuity of Georgian statehood, which had been fundamentally disrupted twice in modern history – in 1801 and again over a century later in 1921.

The (proto-) Georgian state has been documented in various forms since the early Middle Ages; while some local sources give it an even much earlier date of origin, placing the emergence of a unified Georgian kingdom as far back as the 4th century BCE.[57] Georgian historiography lacks a uniform view of the ethnogenesis of the Georgians: traditionally there has been a conflict of opinion between an archaistic approach and an autochthonous approach, but there are ever more frequent attempts to synthesize the two viewpoints.[58]

The Georgian state has gone through periods of traumatic development and decline. It flourished, for example, during the rule of King David IV (David the Builder, 1089–1125), and during that of Queen Tamar (1184–1213), when the united Georgian kingdom included vast areas of the South Caucasus and eastern Anatolia. During periods of decline and political disintegration, Georgia[59] has been subject to the power of Rome, to the Persian empires, Byzantium, the Arabs, the Mongols, and of first the Seljuq, then the Ottoman Turks – for whom the territory represented a strategically crucial juncture between the endless Eurasian steppes to the north and the Anatolian–Iranian plains to the south.[60]

Georgian kingdoms and principalities thus very often existed under the domination of powerful neighbors; however, the fundamental elements of Georgian statehood (if by that we mean the control of a distinct geopolitical entity by rulers of local origin) were seldom erased entirely. The legacy of this territorial and political continuity of Georgian statehood – whether in the form of the ancient unified kingdoms or that of (semi-) vassal principalities – has played an important role in recent years in efforts to consolidate Georgian national consciousness.

On the other hand, strong differences of regional culture and religion, which have been only partially a consequence of the historical ascendancy of one power or another, have tended to hinder the consolidation of a single collective Georgian ethnic identity within the framework of a unified political nation: hence, the overall process of Georgian nation building has taken long centuries to complete.[61] The problem of the cultural and political fragmentation of the Georgian nation was finally resolved successfully only during the twentieth century, the period of the effective "social engineering of nationalities." With the development of Georgian nationalism, however, there was also a concomitant strengthening of national self-awareness amongst the various *non*-Georgian nationalities inhabiting the border areas of the Georgian state – nationalities such as the former Meskheti Turks, Javakheti Armenians, Borchali (Kvemo Kartli) Azerbaijanis to the south, and (most especially) the South Ossetians in the north and the Abkhazians in the northwest. During the most recent period of Georgia's national history, the mosaic-like (sub) ethnic map of the Georgian region – with all of the consequent manifold and conflicting (sub)ethnic and political loyalties both within the country and beyond, which that implies – has proven to be an effective tool for intervention by outsiders: and this factor has indeed become the central nightmare of Georgian intellectuals and statesmen striving for the territorial and ideological-political cohesion of the country. Thus, Georgian statesmen have become especially sensitive to the efforts – if sometimes only perceived – of foreign powers to take advantage of Georgia's ethnic and territorial fragmentation.

Relations with Russians and Russia in historical perspective

By the fifteenth century, when the remnants of the Byzantine Empire were being swallowed up by the expanding Ottoman Empire, Georgia had ceased to have direct contact with the Christian world. Georgian high culture had, by this period, come to be marked by both a strong Greek influence, which extended beyond the sphere of their shared Orthodox religion,[62] together with a no less strong (old-) Persian

influence: this broad cultural synthesis was especially true of the (early) Middle Ages, during which period Georgian statehood came to be solidified and strengthened. Indeed, the geographical territory of historical Georgia was united for the first time in its history during the eleventh century, as a result of the efforts of rulers from the Georgian branch of the ancient Bagratid Dynasty, who subsequently ruled the Eastern Georgian states almost without interruption until 1783 (and notionally until 1801). Hence, the concept, strong by local standards, of an ethnically and territorially grounded statehood, based on Orthodoxy, ensured during the ensuing centuries that the collective consciousness of Georgia's elite was permanently ingrained with a gravitation towards the West and towards Christian Europe, and also with a self-image of being a part of the West, in spite of the massive cultural and political influence of Turkey and Persia.

The orientation of Georgian kings towards the increasingly powerful Muscovite or Russian state, regarding itself as the "third Rome" and as a bastion of Orthodoxy, can also be viewed as a continuation of the religiously grounded orientation of Georgia towards the West and Europe. The orientation of the Georgian elite towards the West began to manifest itself most emphatically in the eighteenth century, during the rule of King Erekle (Heraclius) II Bagrationi of Kartli-Kakheti, eastern Georgia. This orientation was rooted in both ideological and strategic factors: indeed, attempts to create close contacts with the remote Russian state to the north had already been undertaken several centuries earlier. Beginning in the sixteenth century, successive Georgian kings and princes had hoped for the aid of the Orthodox rulers of Russia to consolidate their rule at home; but above all they wanted to secure an ally in their unceasing wars with their Muslim neighbors, Turkey and Persia, whose expansionist plans caused the inhabitants of Georgia continual anxiety.[63] Despite many overtures from Georgian kings, the first Georgia–Russia alliance is not documented until 1783, when the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed, sealing the status of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti as a vassal state of the Russian Empire, in exchange for the provision of guarantees of security on the part of St. Petersburg. However, in 1795, when the army of the Persian ruler Agha Mohammed-Khan Qajar directly threatened Tiflis (Tbilisi), the Russian garrison in Georgia remained neutral: their failure to fulfill their duty as allies cost the lives of tens of thousands of inhabitants of the ravaged city and kingdom. Another controversial event, often brought up by post-Soviet Georgian nationalists, was the unilateral decree in 1801 by Tsar Alexander I (who had just ascended to the Russian imperial throne), which dissolved the

Kingdom of Kartli-Kacheti, in contradiction of the terms of the Treaty of Georgievsk: thereafter, *guberniyas* were set up on Georgian territory, following the Russian model.

By 1866, St. Petersburg had virtually occupied all western Georgian territory. Soon after the formal annexation of the principality of western Georgia, the insensitive policies of Russia with respect to that region caused several local uprisings and disturbances (1812–13, 1819–29, 1841), some of which actively aspired to return the Georgian throne to the *Bagratid dynastie*: however, they were all bloodily suppressed. Further, in 1832 there was an attempted coup – the only one in the country's history while under Russian rule – by Georgian aristocrats who strove for the independence of the Georgian state under the restored rule of the Bagrationi.

Despite these geopolitical reverses, Georgian culture flourished during the nineteenth century (as did the Armenian and Azerbaijani cultures). For the first time in many centuries, long-term stability and relative prosperity were secured, albeit brought about by Russian rule: as a consequence the country experienced a population explosion. Economic growth also intensified, especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century. As the seat of the Russian governor of the Caucasus, Tiflis became the cultural and, in a sense, the economic metropolis of the region as a whole.[64] While the culturally "alien" neighboring Muslim powers, Turkey and Persia, came to be associated in the Georgian national consciousness with centuries of backwardness combined with unending wars and suffering, there was a growing sense of religious, cultural, and historical kinship with Russia.[65] To use the words of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, a well-known Soviet-era author and the father of Georgia's first president:

> Russia was called upon to carry out a great cultural and historical mission in the East. The semi-European monarchy fought against tyrannical Persia and Turkey. Russia started the offensive against the Muslim states that Byzantium had turned over in the name of Western civilization to the Austrian Habsburgs and the Russian Romanovs.[66]

Georgian nobility had the same privileges and duties as their Russian counterparts: as a consequence, they could be incorporated into imperial institutions, such as the civil administration and, last but not least, the army. In this way the Romanov crown soon secured the loyalty of the local elite. Throughout the nineteenth century, liberal Russian circles were enthralled with Georgia, the beautiful country below the peaks of

the Greater Caucasus Range, where one found a rare mingling of the explosiveness of the highlanders with oriental refinement; the poets Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov were chiefly responsible for the emergence of this phenomenon.[67] The colonial authorities were also very sympathetic towards the Georgians, whether because of religious affinity, or because of a similarity of mindset between the Russian and Georgian nobilities. Contemporary accounts describe Georgians as

> merry, sociable and congenial in nature.... [They are] tied to the homeland and devoted to old practices, ancient myths and customs; they are trusting and sincere; credulous to the point of flippancy; adventurous, perceptive, kind to guests.... The negative personality traits of Georgians include a lack of energy and industriousness, laziness and a certain apathy, which explains to some extent their dependence on the more determined and more industrious Armenians.[68]

The Russian view of Georgians at the time was at least in part derived from the way that the Armenians were viewed. The important socioeconomic changes that took place in the region after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 (i.e., the end of traditional feudal relations and the rise of capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization) led to the painful downfall of the once all-powerful Georgian nobility; while, on the contrary, the Armenian bourgeoisie took skillful advantage of these changes: soon gaining control over the economy and, increasingly, the political life of Georgian cities. A unified Georgian national consciousness finally crystallized at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in direct *opposition* to Armenians – who had assumed the role of the notorious "others." Thus, whichever socioeconomic disputes arose soon gained such a clearly *ethnic* dimension that the members of the successful Armenian middle class became the object of the common hatred of the Georgian aristocracy and intelligentsia and also of Georgians who had formerly lived in the countryside and who were settled in Tiflis and other towns. A typical example of this is the account of a Russian commentator, dated 1873: "Trade in the Caucasus is entirely in the hands of clever and calculating Armenians. Armenians are higher than Georgians in intelligence and in love for work, and for that reason there is nothing surprising in the fact that Georgian properties are rapidly falling into Armenian hands. Georgians are dependent on them just as the Poles are dependent on the Jews and similarly feel toward them the same contempt and hatred (if not more than the Poles toward the Jews)."[69] Popular dissatisfaction with regard to the ever-growing political and

economic influence of the Armenians was subsequently synthesized to some degree with the more general dissatisfaction of the Georgian population with the ups and downs of "wild" capitalism, and with the difficulties the Russian authorities had with administration of the country.

The failure of the first (1905) Russian revolution led to a strengthening of the police state in Russia. However, prior to this, there had been a growing feeling of dissatisfaction with, among other things, the policy of Russification which had been imposed upon the provincial territories of the Russian Empire during the latter decades of the nineteenth century – this most particularly so within the spheres of the newly emerging Georgian intellectual elite, who from the 1870s onwards tended to originate more and more often from the milieu of the *raznochintsy*, and who therefore shared none of the aristocracy's privileges nor its devotion to St. Petersburg. Meanwhile, by the early twentieth century, the adherents of various socialist movements in Georgia began to strengthen their positions. Some of these movements even promoted the idea of armed resistance to Russian rule, seen as necessary for the purpose of overthrowing absolutism, and they began to form active contacts with Caucasian and Russian allies. Part of this new Georgian intellectual elite, who were beginning to develop intensive contacts with European socialists – hence, gradually beginning to lean towards the idea of socioeconomic (and national) emancipation – no longer viewed Russia as a benign, liberating state, but rather as a backward empire that was obstructing the further development of the Georgian nation. It is no wonder that in the South Caucasus, as well as in industrial Baku, it was Georgians who, along with Armenians, gave the most eager support to the first Russian revolution of 1905. By local standards, the Georgians (as well as Armenians) were already connected with a large pan-European hinterland of left-wing activists, with a well-defined socialist ideology.

These radical political sentiments gradually hardened until, finally, in the spring of 1918, soon after the Russian revolutions (and in the wake of various complicated political developments within the region), Tiflis formally declared independence from Russia, as did Yerevan and Baku. In any case, according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia had to surrender its holdings in the South Caucasus. As in the neighboring countries, the period of the first republic in Georgia (1918–21) was characterized by attempts – sometimes almost desperate – to maintain the integrity and independence of the fledgling republic. Ruled by the Social Democrats (Mensheviks), Georgia soon found itself in a state of war with the Volunteer Army of General Anton Denikin, a "Great Russia" nationalist who refused to recognize the existence of the Republic of Georgia.

In 1918 he sought to conquer the territory around the city of Sochi, which was claimed both by the White Guards, and by the government in Tiflis. However, a greater security threat to the new republic was the Bolshevik incitement of separatism among the South Ossetians and Abkhazians, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The civil war that broke out in Georgia's ethnic peripheries and cost thousands of lives, was partially instigated by the Bolsheviks who, after the defeat of Denikin's troops at the end of 1919, concentrated their efforts on regaining control over the South Caucasus region

In spite of Tbilisi's valiant efforts at resistance, by the beginning of 1921 Georgia had become the last of the countries of the South Caucasian region to be occupied by the Eleventh Red Army and, subsequently, became a part of the emerging Soviet Union, in spite of the fact that a year before the Russians had formally recognized Georgian independence. Between 1922 and 1936, Georgia – together with Armenia and Azerbaijan – had come to constitute a mere territory of the so-called Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Republic, an integral part of the Soviet Union.

During the nearly seventy years that followed, peace prevailed in the country – with the exceptions of the anti-Bolshevik uprising of 1924 and the bloody suppression of peace demonstrations in 1956.[70] Nonetheless, from the latter half of the 1950s until the 1970s, anti-Communist dissent – well-organized by regional standards – was an active current in the South Caucasus: with an obvious subtext of national liberation centered around the poet and musician Merab Kostava and the philologist Zviad Gamsakhurdia: we will return to these personalities in a forthcoming section dedicated to Georgia. The major event of that period was the series of demonstrations that broke out in the center of Tbilisi in April 1978, during which the Georgian public, led by university pedagogues and students, protested against the Soviet plan to cancel the status of the Georgian language as an officially recognized state language. By Soviet standards, Georgia enjoyed relative prosperity, and was popular thanks to its Black Sea summer resorts, its wine, cinematography, and its unique musical culture.[71] Interestingly, as with Armenia – but unlike Azerbaijan and the Central Asian nations – a relatively high level of ethnonationalism was tolerated in Georgia, according to Soviet standards.

Forging nation-states: Societal transition in the South Caucasus republics

The countries of the post-Soviet South Caucasus have experienced all of the ills of societies in transition: the birth of statehood here was

painful. Communism, which had served as the chief ideology binding society and state together, had been increasingly discredited since the second half of the 1980s, and the ideological vacuum which this process bequeathed was filled by an explosion of ethnonationalism at the turn of the 1990s. It quickly transpired that a number of latent ethnic conflicts erupted into full vigor, given the prevailing conditions of ideological and political anarchy. In multiethnic Georgia and Azerbaijan, ethnic discords which had been successfully concealed one way or another during the 70 years of Soviet domination, surfaced from the depths of time. In the opinion of many Caucasians, the gradual collapse of Soviet power – which, in conjunction with the unclear policy of Moscow, tended, to incite the conflicts rather than resolve them – created the political and ideological opportunity for the emancipatory efforts of both the "titular" large nations of the South Caucasus and for the smaller nationalities which had (generally) enjoyed autonomous status within Georgia and Azerbaijan under Soviet rule. In part as a consequence of the (less than farsighted) policies of the elites within the new republics, there followed bloody armed conflicts in South Ossetia (1989–92), Abkhazia (1989–93), and – especially – Nagorno-Karabakh (1988–94), which cost the lives of tens of thousands of people, made over a million people become refugees, and dramatically worsened the overall security architecture of this strategically important crossroads for many years to come. The very term "South Caucasus" became a synonym for a perception of deeply rooted ethnic antagonisms. There are many crisis points of conflict strewn across this entire multiethnic region and, in spite of various cease-fires, these conflicts still remain legally unresolved. The presence of these conflict hotspots continues to represent a permanent source of societal tension, *revanchism*, and uncertainty.

All of the South Caucasian countries have also encountered big economic problems: the severing of the formerly powerful economic bonds with the countries of the former U.S.S.R., which had intensified during the years of Soviet-style command economies, was so painful that it has not yet been overcome. This situation was all the more dramatic given the fact that the three South Caucasus republics had enjoyed a relatively developed economic and social status during the Soviet period. Indeed, even as late as 1990, when the socioeconomic situation in the U.S.S.R. itself was in significant decline, as a reflection of the general deterioration of the country's economic situation toward the final years of its existence, Azerbaijan's GDP per capita, based on purchasing power parity (PPP), comprised the equivalent of 4,753 USD; Armenia's was 2,936 USD, and Georgia's was as much as 5,682 USD.[72].

Importantly, this data fails to reflect the full extent of the shadow economy which had traditionally been present in the Caucasus region which, along with the Central Asian republics, was the most economically corrupt area within the former Soviet Union. According to some estimates, this shadow economy ranged in scale between one third and one half of the official GDP at the turn of the 1990s.[73] The data on GDP for this region was close to the Soviet average at the time: Yet, the economic strength of these countries was still around five to six times that of the economic average amongst the poorest countries of the Third World. Likewise, the three South Caucasus republics enjoyed an average share of the relatively highly developed provision of Soviet healthcare, housing, job security, and education – which far exceeded the standards of the world's poorest countries.[74]

Nevertheless, between 1991 and 1996, the GDP of Azerbaijan fell by 62 per cent; that of Armenia by 66 per cent; and that of Georgia by 72 per cent.[75] In 1994, inflation in Azerbaijan reached 1,800 per cent annually, a record for any post-Soviet territory.[76] Millions of people found themselves at or below the poverty level, and one could no longer speak of social security as such. Crime rose sharply in the early 1990s, threatening the lives of ordinary people from Baku to Batumi: entire city neighborhoods, and even regions, fell under the control of criminal gangs and paramilitary groups, the leaders of which usurped the decisive role within local politics. According to the World Bank, the growth of the shadow economy in Azerbaijan between 1989 and 1994 was 46 per cent, and in Georgia 52 per cent; while the shadow economy's share of the GDP of those countries in 1994 reached 58 per cent (Azerbaijan), and 64 per cent (Georgia), respectively.[77] The South Caucasian countries were overrun by heretofore unheard-of levels of corruption and cronyism, which long hindered – and unfortunately are still hindering – the development of the republics in question.

The internal political situation in Azerbaijan on the eve of the breakup of the U.S.S.R.

The role of clans in Azerbaijani politics

Historically, the formulation of policy in Azerbaijan has generally been the domain of clans.[78] Every time a representative of a particular clan comes to power in that country, he becomes its de facto ruler. He then arranges for all significant positions within the political and administrative hierarchy of the country to be occupied by members of his clan, while the members of other clans are effectively excluded from power.

This leads to a high degree of loyalty within the state machinery and, thus, to a functioning, vertically integrated power structure which should permit the uninterrupted functioning of the state. The head of state assumes exclusive influence over the formulating of foreign policy, in practical terms; while the role of competing groups within this process is minimized. Politics are thus strongly personified: governmental tasks are simplified and any degree of plurality of opinion is generally rendered impossible.

Mütällibov's rule: chaotic internal politics

The first months of the existence of the late Soviet era and early post-independence Azerbaijani state were marred by permanent domestic policy chaos, which was caused by an ever-intensifying conflict between, on the one hand, the representatives of the newly formed nationalist opposition – embodied within the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (*Azärbaycan Xalq Cäbhäsi,* AXC, or APFP) in late 1988 – and, on the other hand, the surviving Communist-era elite. The representatives of the first group made a last-second attempt to push the "foreigners" out of the game by actively mobilizing nationalist rhetoric.[79] In fact, although during the initial stages of APFP's existence prominent members of the Baku intelligentsia had participated in its founding and initiatives, some of them (including Leyla Yunusova, Arif Yunusov, and Zardusht Alizade) eventually left the party in protest at its deepening radicalization. The APFP leadership then came to be largely recruited from members of the unified Nakhichevan–Yerevan clan, whilst the Communist elites of Baku were mostly drawn from the Baku clan. Indeed, although it had originally been established in support of Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* – and had originally argued for a greater degree of sovereignty within the framework of the Soviet state – the APFP gradually changed its goals, coming to advocate a more assertive stance on the Karabakh question, and, consequently, calling for full national independence.

As far as the (rather apolitical) majority of Azerbaijanis was concerned, the chief catalyst for widespread public dissatisfaction with Soviet rule – and subsequently the central leitmotif of separatist aspirations – was originally, as in Armenia, the worsening conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and its environs.[80] It is not without significance that the initial spark for the wave of demonstrations that took place at the end of 1988 in Baku, in the second largest city, Gäncä (Gyanja), and in several other Azerbaijani settlements, was anger at the efforts of Stepanakert to build several recreational facilities in Topxana (Topkhana) National Park in Karabakh – a development which was (allegedly) to be preceded by

the liquidation or severe damaging of the famed Topkhana Forest and of several national monuments related to the Azerbaijani presence in Karabakh. These (originally ecologically focused) demonstrations soon acquired an overtly anti-Armenian spirit. Often, the participants were frustrated Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia, whose attitudes, and whose stories about the alleged grievances which they had faced in Armenia, radicalized the Azerbaijani public. In late November, Soviet troops entered Baku, broke up the unlawful demonstration in the center of the city, and arrested several participants: this, in turn, served to intensify the antagonism between the Communists and the newly emerging nationalist forces.

Relying on the republic's intelligentsia, the APFP rose to prominence during late 1988 and early 1989 precisely by reacting to these events. As mentioned above, its demands included: the strengthening of Azerbaijan's autonomous status within the U.S.S.R.; further democratization and liberalization; freedom of speech and the rule of law; and greater rights within the areas of culture and language (all of which were broadly in accordance with the Soviet *perestroika* rhetoric of the time). Above all, the APFP demanded protection of the Azerbaijani state's territorial integrity in the face of Armenian encroachment. The increasingly radicalized Azerbaijani public warmed towards the APFP demands, began to consider the efforts of the Communist Azerbaijani leadership to be only halfhearted, and increasingly demanded a more aggressive approach in Karabakh – a policy which was not necessarily in tune with Moscow's opinions. Nationalist Azerbaijanis' faith in the ability and willingness of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party to defend Azerbaijani interests against the demands of Moscow was severely shaken when Moscow assumed direct control over the rebellious area in January 1989.

Beginning on January 11, 1990, the opposition, which had already been speaking of the necessity of complete independence of the country from the Soviet Union, organized constant demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people in the center of Baku and in other cities, at which the passivity of the republic's Communist authorities was denounced, and there were growing calls for independence. These demonstrations, together with strikes, virtually paralyzed life in the country. On January13 and 14, a fanatical crowd actually began murdering local Armenians – while the Soviet Army looked passively on – murders which cost the lives of at least a hundred people. Events culminated on January 20, 1990, when Soviet troops opened fire on Azerbaijani civilians, mortally wounding around 130 while hundreds more were

injured. The fact is that, as de Waal put it, "on 20 January 1990 Moscow essentially lost Azerbaijan."[81] At the same time, the Kremlin appointed new party leadership for the Azerbaijani republic: the apparatchik Ayaz Mütällibov became first secretary that unfortunate January of 1990, and within five months he was appointed president of the country by a special resolution of the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic.

Mütällibov was a native of Baku and a long-standing loyal Soviet-era party official. He was characterized from the outset by a strongly pro-Russian stance: one which was directly at variance to the prevailing mood pervading Azerbaijani society, where the memory of the "bloody January" of 1990 (which quickly assumed an important place in post-Soviet Azerbaijani mythology) was still very fresh. Right from the start, Mütällibov

> attempted to salvage the Azerbaijani CP's legitimacy by making more concessions to the opposition. Above all, supported by Moscow, he adopted a more active policy toward the Karabakh Armenians. In late 1990 Azerbaijani security forces began to make systematic attacks on Karabakh Armenian settlements.[82]

Initially, the seemingly positive developments for the Azerbaijanis in Karabakh and its environs gained Mütällibov the cautious support of the nationalists, although the opposition further escalated its demands regarding the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, and independence. "In March 1991 Mütällibov, naturally being aware that … the prospect of remaining face to face with the nation and the Armenians would not be the most pleasant, did not desire – at least in the foreseeable future – the breakup of the U.S.S.R., and he used his loyalty to the U.S.S.R. to gain support from Moscow." And so a referendum was held in the republic on the preservation of the Soviet Union: and the result – disputed by the nationalists – was a "yes" vote by 93.3 per cent of participating voters.[83] Despite this, however, the APFP vehemently rejected the signing of the New Union treaty.[84]

The breaking point came in August 1991, when Mütällibov was one of only a few Soviet politicians to support the failed coup d'état attempt in Moscow by hard-line Communists from the State Emergency Committee (GKChP).[85] However, just a few weeks after the debacle of the *putchists*, Mütällibov performed a 180-degree political about-face and, in October – now as the newly elected president of independent Azerbaijan[86] – issued a presidential decree outlawing the Communist

Party; he next pushed through the declaration of the country's independence.

In late 1991 and early 1992, Mütällibov signed documents relating to the country's entry into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); however, the newly created Azerbaijani parliament (National Assembly, *Milli Mäclis*), controlled by nationalists, resolutely declined to ratify these documents. Mütällibov then pushed for the signing of the Union Treaty, a document promoted by Gorbachev in an effort to rescue the Soviet Union by delegating broad powers to the union's soviet republics: however, domestic opinion was once again sharply polarized, with the majority of the parliamentary deputies and members of the APFP refusing to cooperate. The nationalists were convinced that the Russian Federation was backing Armenia's efforts in Nagorno-Karabakh. They asked Moscow to recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and, in exchange for joining the CIS, they demanded the political, and even military, support of Russia in the conflict with Armenian irredentists: however, Moscow was unwilling to yield to this demand. As it soon turned out, the condition for the Kremlin's support for one or the other of the parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was to be the meeting of the Kremlin's own demands, amongst which the entry of any post-Soviet country into the CIS, the newly created power domain of Russia, did not play the chief role. On Moscow's agenda, instead, was the deployment of troops on the territory of the newly independent republics, the signing of treaties of mutual defense, and several other important treaties covering economic, military, and political affairs.[87]

The crises confronting Azerbaijan now served to hamper the process of national consolidation, since the initial riots and minor skirmishes between Armenian and Azerbaijani villagers (and activists from abroad) were more and more clearly assuming the appearance of a real war, with the use of armor and artillery. Unlike Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, however, Azerbaijan did not build up a functioning army quickly enough, as was soon demonstrated by a series of defeats on the Karabakh battlefield, which quickly assumed catastrophic proportions. As Shale Horowitz states:

> [A]mid the disarray of the period, a number of competing regional power bases developed, fielding their own militias – a tendency developed in response to the initially irregular nature of fighting in Karabakh and its environs. But the situation was exacerbated by Mütällibov's resistance to developing a national armed force following independence. Mütällibov preferred to settle the conflict as part of

> the Soviet Union or, later, the Russia-centered Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This would allow him to use more reliable Soviet or federal forces, such as those that participated in Operation Ring [see below]. He apparently feared that a strong Azerbaijani army could become an independent political actor threatening his own power. Nominal efforts to construct an Azerbaijani army were discouraged in practice, contributing to setbacks in Karabakh. In turn, this encouraged the APF [National Front of Azerbaijan] and various other political formations and regions to send their locally raised paramilitaries to bolster Azeri forces there.[88]

As a consequence of a series of defeats, the Azerbaijani military forces (although they might better have been described as militia units than as an integrated national army) were forced to retreat from nearly the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh; immediately following them were tens of thousands of Azerbaijani refugees. In accordance with the thinking of the times, many Azerbaijanis saw the ubiquitous hand of Moscow behind these military failures and increasingly associated these humiliations with the perceived incompetence of the "sold-out" and "anti-national" Ayaz Mütällibov regime. The defeats electrified public opinion. In Baku, in March 1992, a coup d'état, the first in the country's history, deposed Mütällibov: however, after a month of virtual anarchy, Mütällibov returned to the office of president on May 14, 1992, only to be deposed the next day by armed forces led by the Popular Front.

Parliament eventually restored Mütällibov's authority. Soon after he had regained his grasp on the office of president, he declared the country's intention of joining the CIS, and even – this was especially important – of bringing Azerbaijan into the CIS Collective Security Treaty, the signing of which was supposed to take place within only a month. Among other things, that agreement envisioned the placement of Russian military bases on the territory of the signatory states: which would have effectively returned the country to the sphere of Moscow's exclusive military and political influence. The prevailing general opinion was that war-devastated Azerbaijan would accept the Russian proposal, thereby securing, among other things, the favor of its powerful northern neighbor in its war against the Armenians; however, later in May 1992, Armenian forces unexpectedly took control of the town, Shusha, a key to Azerbaijani defense in Karabakh, from which the Karabakh capital had been destructively bombarded; in the same month Armenian forces also occupied the Lachin Corridor, a strategic piece of Azerbaijani territory connecting Armenia with the rebellious

Karabakh enclave. As a result, the political situation in Baku became far more tense.

Elçibäy: the nationalists in power

On the eve of the signing of the Tashkent Treaty an enraged crowd of APFP supporters marched into the government buildings in Baku, and forced Mütällibov to resign. The chairman of the APFP, a Nakhichevan-born Pan-Turkist and expert in the field of Arabic philology, Äbülfäz Elçibäy,[89] seized the presidency. Mütällibov fled to Moscow, effectively ending his political career.

With Elçibäy's ascent to power, Azerbaijani politics underwent a brief but disastrous period of nationalistic idealism; the APFP leadership adopted *ethnic* criteria as the epicenter of its domestic and – most importantly – foreign policy agenda. The new, overtly nationalist, foreign policy vision included the creation of the closest possible strategic partnership with Turkey; a radically pro-American orientation; and talk of the possible "annexation" of Iranian Azerbaijan and of the strengthening of independence from the Kremlin. As summarized by Cornell,

> the inordinately warm public embrace of Turkey and Turkism generated shock waves across the region. Aside from alienating non-Turkic minorities within Azerbaijan, it put both Iran and Russia on high alert, added a geopolitical vector to the conflict over Karabakh, and strengthened the hands of the forces in Moscow and Tehran who thought that support for Armenia served their interest in weakening Azerbaijan.[90]

Despite the initial degree of caution which characterized Elçibäy's stance during the initial phase of his government, during the ensuing months he became increasingly radicalized as a consequence of the collapse of the Azerbaijani position in Karabakh and environs.[91]

The rise of Heydär Äliyev

On June 4, 1993, Azerbaijan military units failed to put down an uprising in the Gyanja barracks. The "private army" of Colonel Sürät Hüseynov, the commander of the local military and paramilitary forces (who was being supplied with munitions from the 104th Airborne Division of the Russian [former Soviet] army, which was itself in the process of withdrawing from Gyanja) then launched a full-scale advance on the capital. A number of officers went over to Hüseynov's forces, informing the Azerbaijan central army command that they did not intend to fire

on their fellow tribesmen; the commanders of military formations that were deployed on the Absheron peninsula reacted similarly. On June 18, Colonel Hüseynov's forces were just ten kilometers from Baku, while most Azerbaijani army units were holding positions on the Karabakh front and could not leave them to come to the assistance of the capital. On that same day, Elçibäy fled to his native village in Nakhichevan. He simultaneously called upon his fellow countryman from Nakhichevan, Heydär Äliyev, who was highly popular in the country, to come to the capital.[92] The charismatic Äliyev, 71 years old at the time, accepted the unexpected offer to assume power within the republic. He flew immediately to Baku, where hundreds of thousands welcomed him as a savior. On June 25, 1993, parliament appointed Heydär Äliyev president – in violation of the formal Azerbaijan constitution. Five days later, Colonel Hüseynov was simultaneously appointed to the posts of vice-premier, minister of defense, and interior minister.[93]

The internal political situation in Armenia on the eve of the breakup of the U.S.S.R.

If we overlook the enormous economic decline of the early 1990s, the period of transformation which Armenia underwent in the late 1980s and early 1990s may be regarded as the least painful of the three countries of the South Caucasus. While the young republic had to face serious problems in the early 1990s, especially in the area of its socioeconomic development, it still managed to avoid a civil war – in marked contrast to the civil war which occurred in Georgia, or to the permanently chaotic domestic political turmoil of Azerbaijan. This broadly positive state of affairs came about primarily as a result of the ethnic homogeneity of the country's population, a factor augmented by the deportation of nearly 200,000 Azerbaijanis and Turkic-speaking Muslim Kurds. Unlike the vast majority of the countries in the region – not only Azerbaijan and Georgia, but also Turkey and Iran – Armenia is free of the "handicap" of areas of compactly settled ethnic or national minorities who might come to espouse separatist tendencies.[94]

Another important factor was the effective unification of Armenian society with respect to the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh: from 1988 onwards Armenians were mobilized, both within the country and in the diaspora, in the general cause of growing Armenian nationalism, an important part of which is anti-Turkism. The question of the capture of Nagorno-Karabakh became the central theme of Armenian political life, uniting the republic's citizens across the political spectrum. The first Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, was a philologist

and leader of the Karabakh Committee: he came to power on a wave of Pan-Armenian support for the effort in Karabakh. However, unlike Mütällibov, he proved from the very beginning to possess the necessary legitimacy to survive in office.[95]

The Karabakh Committee was founded at the beginning of 1988. In February of that year the Central Council of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Region turned to Moscow with a request for a merger with Armenia. After some hesitation, however, the central Soviet authorities denied this request. Political demonstrations then began in Yerevan, assuming ever more massive dimensions: just as in Georgia and Azerbaijan and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union at the time, the original demands made by these demonstrations were ecological in nature – however, the talk soon turned away from the issue of the closing down of the Nairi nuclear power plant near Yerevan and, instead, the growing popular demand became national unification. In an effort to dampen down the growing nationalistic fervor within Armenia, the Kremlin replaced the first secretary of the Central Council of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, the popular Karen Demirchyan, with Suren Harutyunyan; however, before long this proved to be a mistake. The new head of the Armenian Soviet state was even more sympathetically inclined towards the efforts of the nationalists than his predecessor had been.

In early 1988, once Moscow had formally rejected the request of the Karabakh Armenians for merger with Armenia, the Karabakh Committee called for a general strike. In response, at the end of November 1988 Soviet army units were deployed to Yerevan (as they had been to Baku in Azerbaijan), and a state of emergency was declared in the city: demonstrations in the center of the capital of Armenia were dispersed. On December 7 of that year, northern areas of Armenia were hit by a destructive earthquake that cost nearly 25,000 lives. This tragedy, "while temporarily overshadowing disputes over the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, had in the end the effect of radicalizing Armenian society and its attitudes, especially in the context of the inability of central authorities to secure basic necessities for the hundreds of thousands of people left homeless."[96] The common suffering of the nation in the face of a natural disaster had served to even more strongly unite it. The leaders of the Karabakh Committee were arrested on orders from Moscow. They spent half a year in prison in spite of mass protests by the country's inhabitants – in whose eyes the committee leaders now gained the aura of martyrs and of fighters for the Armenian cause.

One of the first steps taken by the leaders of the Karabakh Committee upon their release was the formation of the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PANM, in Armenian: *Hayots Hamazgayin Sharzhum*), which had the goal of uniting the broadest possible spectrum of nationalistically inclined public opinion by bringing it face to face with the deepening crisis in Karabakh and its environs, thereby motivating patriotic Armenians with an urge to save the Armenian nation. After the Armenian pogroms in Sumqayit (Sumgait) by Azerbaijani mob in February 1988 and the intensifying clashes in Karabakh itself, the nationalistically minded members of the PANM came to see their principal task as being the avoidance of a repeat of 1915. The leaders of the Armenian Communist Party, formally in leadership positions in the Armenian Soviet republic, were aware of the mass support which the nationalists were receiving, and outwardly they did not attempt to hinder these efforts: the slogan "whoever is not with us is against us" was more applicable to the ensuing situation (we will soon see how the Communist Party of Georgia was experiencing similar developments at the same time). Together with the PANM, the Communists also supported the efforts of the National Assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was dominated by local Armenians, for the creation of their own institutions and military formations. The popular credibility of the PANM was so great that the Kremlin's attempts to neuter it by removing Harutyunyan and replacing him with party stalwarts within leadership positions of the Central Committee of Armenia, were to no avail. A (generally) free parliamentary election was held in May 1990, in which the PANM received the most votes, more than one third. The situation culminated three months later when the Supreme Council of Armenia declared independence.[97] Thanks to mass public support, Levon Ter-Petrossian, known for his pragmatism, managed "to take control of some of the more unruly paramilitary groups. These had sprung up during the clashes in Karabakh and along the border with Azerbaijan.... Compared to developments in Georgia and especially Azerbaijan, these developments showed greater solidarity and autonomy of the [Armenian] reform nationalist movement during the initial phases of political liberalization."[98]

Armenia's (post-)Communist elites were opposed to the Union Treaty being promoted by Gorbachev. Since the Mütällibov regime in Azerbaijan *was* clearly willing to sign the Union Treaty, in spite of the protests of the Azerbaijani nationalist opposition, Moscow pursued a strategy of actively supporting the Azerbaijani side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – at any rate until the failure of the August

coup of 1991, which resulted in the resignation of Gorbachev and accelerated the final disintegration of the Soviet Union. In mid-1991, Soviet support for the Azerbaijani side in the conflict – which had been originally meant to be political in nature – changed into military support when the Soviet Army, together with elite units of the Azerbaijani interior ministry, launched a military operation in and to the north of Nagorno-Karabakh (which will be analyzed in the next chapter). Unlike Mütällibov's Communists, the Armenian political elite surrounding Levon Ter-Petrossian condemned the Soviet Union's August coup leaders – thereby ensuring warm future relations with the similarly reform-oriented Boris Yeltsin, whose star was rising at the time, and with Yeltsin's liberal entourage. In October 1991 Ter-Petrossian, who received 83 per cent of the votes in a free election, became the first president of now de facto independent Armenia.[99]

The internal political situation in Georgia on the eve of the breakup of the U.S.S.R.

During the Communist era, a strict information blockade prevented ordinary Georgians from becoming aware of controversial events. Georgians, together with the citizens of other Soviet states, were schooled in the tenets of socialist internationalism. Just as in the era of the tsars, the crucial role of Russia in the development of Georgian history was underscored, whilst those historical events which might have challenged the perception of Russia as a benign influence upon Georgian affairs – such as the crushing of the numerous uprisings of the later nineteenth century – were, on the whole, downplayed or overlooked. Thus, for example, the history of the Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921 was interpreted by a Marxist-Leninist historical vocabulary as the 'triumphant accomplishment of the righteous desires of the Georgian proletariat and peasantry'; whilst the more undeniably negative events of joint Soviet and Georgian history were blamed either on tsarism or on Stalinism.

This generally pro-Russian mindset within Georgian society was shaken, however, as a consequence of the tragic events of April 9, 1989, when tanks of the Transcaucasus Military District, under the command of General Alexander Lebed, opened fire on a peaceful demonstration in the center of Tbilisi, where people were shouting pro-sovereignty slogans and calling for the "full integration" of Abkhazia. Nineteen people, mostly women, were killed in the attack by the use of army shovels and nerve gas; as many as a thousand demonstrators were affected by the gas.[100] Although the top party leaders of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, who had formally sanctioned the deployment of the troops,

were soon sacked, the incident resulted in the significant radicalization of the public's mood. In the light of the April events, the reputation of the local Communists suffered a blow from which it never recovered.

In parallel with this radicalization of public opinion were the increasingly strenuous aspirations towards emancipation on the part of the various ethnic minorities within Georgia, especially of the South Ossetians and Abkhazians, whose leading representatives were turning upon Tbilisi with ever more strident demands for greater autonomy: the Abkhazians even appealed to Moscow for the status of a Soviet republic. Since the Russians did not immediately dismiss such requests, there was a growing feeling amongst the Georgian and Azerbaijani publics that the irredentism of the ethnic minorities was instigated by or directly coordinated from Moscow in an attempt to divide Georgia and so regain full control over it: as chapter illustrates, this perception served to hinder the political dialog between Tbilisi and Sukhumi, and between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. The fact is that from the very outset, the national revivalist movements in Georgia had a strongly *anti-Russian* orientation – one which was much stronger than was the case in neighboring countries.

Against the background of these developments, there was a gradual strengthening of the standing of the anti-Communist nationalist opposition centered around the person of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his closest associates. In the autumn of 1990, as leader of the coalition "Round Table, Free Georgia" ("*mrgvali magida – tavisupali sakartvelo*"), Gamsakhurdia assumed power on the basis of parliamentary elections. He shared with many of his compatriots an uncompromising attitude towards ethnic minorities, regarding them as a virtual "fifth column" of the Kremlin, and he frequently subjected them to strident chauvinistic attacks. Favoring the motto "Georgia for Georgians," he referred to ethnic minorities collectively as being mere "guests" on Georgian soil, and he repeatedly threatened them – especially the Ossetians – with deportation.[101] In early 1990, Gamsakhurdia was heard to say: "My stance is simple: the original population should predominate [politically] over other nationalities."[102] In fact, by comparison with Armenia or Azerbaijan, Georgian politics during the transitional period was significantly tied to a single personality, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whose brief tenure as the first president of post-Soviet Georgia greatly affected the country's internal conflicts, and whose legacy to this day still persists, to some extent, in Georgia's political landscape.

A philologist by training, Zviad Gamsakhurdia first took part in anti-government activities in 1956, when he was briefly jailed. As long

as his father, the respected philologist and translator, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, was alive, Zviad had been successful in avoiding persecution – however, shortly after his father's death, in 1977, Zviad was jailed, when he was 38 years old, along with several other dissidents. In prison, unlike Merab Kostava, another important figure in the dissident movement of Soviet Georgia, Gamsakhurdia vehemently distanced himself from his actions, and his public "repentance" was broadcast by Soviet television. As a result, Gamsakhurdia was soon released – while Kostava continued to serve his sentence until the years of *perestroika*. At the time of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Kostava, together with other dissidents, returned to public life and, apparently, forgave his less resilient friend. The tandem of Kostava/ Gamsakhurdia survived until 1989, when Kostava died in an automobile accident (under unclear circumstances) – so leaving Gamsakhurdia to become the only widely known person in public life credited with being a dissident.

At the turn of the 1990s, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, together with Irakli Tsereteli, was at the forefront of the radical camp of anti-Communist opposition, which regarded the Soviet regime as an illicit occupation.[103] The hardliners pragmatically avoided a (futile) direct military confrontation with the Soviet Army (as indeed was also the case with the Azerbaijani and Armenian nationalist movements), preferring instead non-violent forms of civil disobedience, whilst at the same time uncompromisingly demanding the withdrawal of Soviet "occupation" forces. The Georgian hardliners viewed Moscow's rule as illegitimate, both historically and legally: as a consequence, they felt empowered to promote the declaration of an independent Georgian state or – as it was termed at that time – the restoration of the earlier Georgian statehood from the 1918–21 period. In the realm of domestic politics, Gamsakhurdia favored a strong national state, envisaged as a sort of symbiosis of modern participatory democracy with elements of autocracy; he saw himself in the role of a charismatic leader: a national hero, ordained by destiny to play the role of the uniting figure and savior of Georgia.[104] His strong conviction in his own unifying role appears to have been the ultimate source of the degree of recklessness with which he attempted to resolve the problems of the ethnic minorities within Georgia. Whilst his brand of "ethnic populism" also served as an excellent means for further garnering the recognition and support of the radicalized Georgian public, who increasingly saw the ubiquitous "hand of Moscow" in the ambitions for emancipation on the part of those various minorities on the country's periphery.

It is worthy to note that, at the start of the 1990s, the remaining representatives of the erstwhile Communist elite themselves joined the camp of the radicals: nationalism, it seemed, was a stronger motivation than their earlier (internationalist) Communist ideals. Moreover, in the wake of the events of 1989, the Communists in general had lost their popular prestige, so the adoption of an (ultra-) nationalist symbolism, mindset, and rhetoric – whether with regard to Moscow or to the ethnic minorities themselves – appeared to the former Communist elite to be the only viable way to secure their continued political existence at a time when all established certainties were visibly crumbling. In the end, it was the representatives of the extreme right, rather than those of unpopular liberal line, who drew together a small circle of intellectuals who still favored the acceptance of rules dictated by Moscow – and who, paradoxically, filled the ideological and political vacuum left by the eclipse of the Communist Party.[105]

It was under these circumstances that, in October 1990, Gamsakhurdia's movement won the parliamentary election (with 53 per cent of the votes). In November of that year Gamsakhurdia was elected as chairman of parliament and, in March 1991, he initiated a referendum on independence, in which the majority of those polled (90 per cent) voted in favor. On the symbolic date of April 9, the Georgian parliament issued a formal declaration of independence. A month later, Gamsakhurdia's star shone at its very brightest when, in the midst of the atmosphere of euphoria after the regaining of independence, he was elected president of the republic by 86 per cent of the voters. The non-Georgian populations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, however, boycotted both the referendum and the election *en masse*.[106]

From a long-term perspective, this would prove to be the last of Gamsakhurdia's successes: not the least of his faults was his temperament.[107] In the newspapers that he controlled he made frequent attacks against his political opponents (and also against many others): he referred to opponents overtly as "agents of Moscow," or as "enemies of the state" (just to quote his milder invectives). The result of this behavior was the alienation of an influential number of his former friends; while a growing hatred of the first president increasingly united figures from across the whole of the political spectrum – radicals, liberals, and even some former Communists. Another factor behind Gamsakhurdia's growing unpopularity was his attempt to disarm the numerous militias, known as *mkhedrioni* (horsemen). Gamsakhurdia had once benefited from the existence of these militias, however, they were now under the

control of the criminal Jaba Ioseliani, now Gamsakhurdia's enemy. At the end of December 1991, after forces of the united opposition occupied government buildings as a result of the civil war, Gamsakhurdia left Georgia, and after short stays in Armenia and Chechnya, found himself in his native Samegrelo (Megrelia) in Western Georgia, from where, after not quite two years, he launched a revolt against Tbilisi.

4

Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia: The Ascent of Ethnopolitical Conflict

The ideological power vacuum which developed upon the breakup of the U.S.S.R. further deepened as a result of the inability, or unwillingness, of the central government in Moscow to effectively prevent interethnic confrontations within the outlying provinces of the former Soviet Union. This, then, resulted in the gradual discrediting of local Soviet authorities and brought about the parallel emergence of nationalist groups, for which the outstanding questions of Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia separatism were the easiest means through which to gain public support and popularity. The rhetorical indulgences of the (post-) Communist nationalists, their respective efforts to display fierce patriotism and devotion to national interests, and their newfound determination to further local nationalist interests at all costs, left little room for negotiation or compromise.

Throughout much of its modern history, Karabakh has been famed for its unique horse races, its spectacular mountainous scenery, and its legacy of artists and warriors. Documented history has borne witness to multiple episodes of Karabakh Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Kurds living peacefully side by side – and, when necessary, fighting together against foreign conquerors. Indeed, prior to the beginning of the twentieth century, there seems to have been no single instance of intercommunal conflict among the area's inhabitants that would profile along the lines of ethnic or religious identity. However, due to the reasons outlined below, there had been a certain level of Azerbaijani–Armenian anxiety during the Soviet period. Some level of competition and mutual mistrust – albeit rather latent – had clearly been present amongst the various ethnic groups within this region prior to the outbreak of violent

conflict in the final years of Soviet rule, a fact attested to by numerous sources, including the Nagorno-Karabakh inhabitants themselves. However, during the late Soviet era the actual scope and frequency of violent episodes based on ethnic animosity remained insignificant, as the vast majority of Armenians and Azerbaijanis managed to coexist peacefully in their daily lives: celebrating common holidays, maintaining friendships, and trading to mutual benefit.[1] As with other areas of prospective ethnopolitical conflict, the interrelationships of ordinary people varied greatly in character, depending upon the presence, or otherwise, of actual triggers for ethnic polarization. Importantly, Nagorno-Karabakh, with its extensive pasture lands, pleasant climate, and relatively advanced industrial base, was known to have been one of Soviet Azerbaijan's most highly developed regions.

Abkhazia, too, had long been considered a virtual paradise on earth, even by Georgian standards. This tiny republic, located as it is on the sunny shores of the Black Sea, traditionally featured – along with the Crimean peninsula and the Sochi area – amongst the favorite summer resorts of the Soviet military brass, high-ranking Communist *nomenklatura* and, indeed, ordinary citizens from across the U.S.S.R. Nevertheless, by the final years of Moscow's rule, Abkhazia's various ethnic communities found themselves increasingly trapped in the net of ethnic conflict. The steep post-Soviet decline in the tourist revenues inflow into the region, which – along with the lucrative export of local citruses and tea – formerly constituted the core of the region's economic activity and served to heighten the level of socioeconomic discontent within the area: this decline therefore hastened the ethnic fragmentation of the region into an array of competing loyalties. Whereas Abkhazia's Georgian population celebrated the revival of Georgian independence, the discontent of the Abkhaz inhabitants further deepened. In the past, as described below, Abkhazians had enjoyed the formal opportunity, when necessary, to approach the central authorities in Moscow – the "honest broker" – in order to advance their complaints and push forward their age-old emancipation agenda with respect to Tbilisi. By the beginning of the 1990s, however, that opportunity seemed to have melted away, both for Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Unlike their Georgian neighbors, the Abkhaz nationalists had little reason for optimism, as they were beginning to realize the true extent of the Georgians' attempts to restore their country's erstwhile territorial integrity: an endeavor that the Abkhazians, given the unfavorable demographic composition of the republic (see below), had little chance of withstanding.

However, in the sphere of daily life, the relationships between the Abkhaz and Georgian communities were still characterized by a considerable degree of integration, one which far exceeded the case with the Karabakh community. Unlike the relatively highly segregated communities of the Azerbaijanis and Armenians, both within and outside the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomy, with their general avoidance of interethnic marriages, Abkhaz–Georgian marriages were quite common, which in turn led to a relatively high degree of ethnocultural homogeneity. Nevertheless, as intimated above, the Abkhazians – known as they were for their strong ethnonationalism – were traditionally considered to be one of the most strident ethnic communities within Georgia when it came to the expression of emancipatory aspirations. As attested to by numerous Georgians, as well as by members of other ethnic communities inhabiting Abkhazia, the Abkhazians' attitude towards Georgians was not devoid of a certain degree of mistrust and anxiety, which usually manifested itself over issues of political-administrative, demographic, or economic dominance over autonomy, while, with regard to ethnically laden symbolic issues, these same Abkhazian suspicions would manifest themselves all the more vehemently.

A situation very similar to that of Abkhazia arose in South Ossetia toward the final years of the U.S.S.R. South Ossetia's landlocked geographical position perhaps provided for the greatest point of distinction by comparison with Abkhazia: with its less fertile soil and much rougher continental climate, South Ossetia had attracted virtually no tourists from across the wider Soviet Union, and considerably lower numbers of internal Georgian immigration. In fact, both groups rather preferred to settle in or travel to Abkhazia, famous as it was for its mild climate and beautiful beaches. The weaker economy of rocky South Ossetia depended, to a considerable degree, on direct subsidies from Tbilisi. Importantly, the level of Georgian–South Ossetian ethnic intermingling was high, even by comparison with Abkhazia; Georgians and South Ossetians belonged to perfectly integrated communities, with South Ossetian nationalism playing a rather marginal role. Consequently, unlike Abkhazians, South Ossetians were on average more hesitant to agitate for secession from Georgia, or to aspire for a higher degree of administrative, economic or ethnocultural autonomy; this might have been partly occasioned by the fact that whereas there were nearly no Ossetian-language high schools in Russia's North Ossetia, such schools formed significant part of South Ossetia's educational system.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Today, if one utters the words *Artsakh*, or *Lernayin Gharabagh* and *Daglıq Qarabağ*, that is, Nagorno-Karabakh,[2] in Armenian and Azerbaijani respectively, few of the inhabitants of modern Armenia and Azerbaijan would realize that the territorial conflict taking place in that area has roots reaching back only to 1918. On the contrary, several recent generations within both countries have entertained the notion that this mountainous region is some sort of symbol of the climax of an age-old grudge which for millennia has allegedly characterized Armenia's and Azerbaijan's neighborly relations. This notion results from a retrospective epicizing of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with the important qualification that, once having gained Karabakh, militant Armenian revanchism has noticeably softened its stance – only to be supplanted by Azerbaijani revanchism: a phenomenon which is itself all the more bizarre for having come into existence over a relatively short historical period.

When the so-called Armenian–Tatar War broke out in 1905,[3] few could have predicted that it would lay the foundation for deep-rooted ethnic tensions throughout the Caucasus – the reverberations of which would not die away even after a hundred years. The original Armenian–Tatar clashes, beginning in Baku, the oil capital of the empire, and spreading more or less spontaneously to areas with joint populations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis all over the South Caucasus, were originally *socioeconomic* (rather than ethnic) in nature. The masses of Azerbaijani poor, provoked by the traditional imperial "divide and rule" policies of their Russian governors, turned upon their Armenian neighbors, wealthy industrialists and merchants, whom they regarded as predatory and unfeeling exploiters.[4]

As has been said in previous chapters, the Russians had traditionally tried to strengthen the position of the Christian, that is, Armenian, element, whom they regarded as being more loyal to the empire and a valuable asset within a potentially explosive Muslim region. On the eve of the first Russian revolution (1905) and shortly afterwards, however, the colonizers began to be worried by the growing activity of Armenian nationalist/revolutionary organizations which had been active in the region ever since the latter decades of the nineteenth century.[5] The (then still latent) Armenian–Azerbaijani antagonism (which itself had roots extending back to the era of Baku's industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century) originally had a well-defined socioeconomic, if not overtly class-based, character. It was driven by the increasing

dissatisfaction of the Azerbaijani nobility – and of the newly emerging bourgeoisie as well as the intelligentsia – with the dominance of the Armenian element within Baku's economic and public life (similar sentiments also existed in other Azerbaijani cities, although to a lesser extent). There were clashes in various towns which, given the curious neutrality of Russian military units and police that was especially apparent during the first weeks and months after fighting broke out, continued, with weaker intensity, until July of the following year. According to various estimates, this first instance of civil unrest between members of ethnic groups that had previously enjoyed centuries of peaceful coexistence[6] claimed between 3,000 and 10,000 victims.[7]

These events proved to be a breaking point. Growing Armenian revolutionary nationalism, which had assumed an increasingly apparent anti-Ottoman dimension after the anti-Armenian pogroms of 1894–96, soon evolved to incorporate the collective image of an enemy in the form of the "Azerbaijani Turk," thereby also assuming a more decidedly anti-Turkic, anti-Islamic character.

The Armenian–Tatar War also served as a powerful impulse for the emergence and solidification of a common Azerbaijani identity at a suprasectarian level – either tribal/clannish, territorial, or confessional. Indeed, as Stuart Kaufman writes:

> The blows suffered at the hands of the Dashnakist fighting squads gave a crucial stimulus to the political awakening of the Azerbaijanis. "The Armenian War" generated for the first time a united action for a cause transcending local or sectarian loyalties.[8]

Kaufman's words in connection with the current conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh are doubly applicable with regard to the period just after the Armenian–Tatar War:

> Azerbaijani fear of Armenians was further inflated, ironically, by the relative weakness of Azerbaijani identity as compared to the Armenian one. Azerbaijanis recognized their "weak sense of solidarity," so Karabakh's bid for succession rankled all the more because the Armenians, the national enemy, were so much better organized and because they were attacking Azerbaijani "statehood." ...[9]

Efforts to better coordinate the activities of commando units deployed in the fight with the Armenians contributed to the fact that the, initially spontaneous, resistance began to be institutionalized: and in the town of

Yelizavetopol (Gäncä, Gyanja), the military/political organization *Difai* (Defense) was founded in 1905.[10] It is of interest that Difai itself did *not* view the Armenians – with whom its representatives did not hesitate to cooperate on occasions – as the main culprits of the bloodshed, but rather chiefly accused the Russian colonial administration and military units (army and police) in this respect. The Russians were blamed for initiating the so-called Armenian–Tatar War and, in a broader sense, the Armenian–Azerbaijani excesses as well, and it was Russian colonial officials who became the most frequent target of attacks by Difai units.[11] Then, in 1911, another, politically stronger, nationalist Muslim Democratic Party, *Müsavat* (Equality), was formed, with the contribution of significant personalities from the bourgeois intelligentsia – the leading representatives of which seven years later found themselves unexpectedly at the head of the newly independent Azerbaijan.

After the Armenian genocide of 1915–16, tens of thousands of desperate Armenian refugees poured into Russian (that is, eastern Caucasian) Armenia, where hitherto at least a third of the population had consisted of Azerbaijanis, who traditionally controlled the fertile agricultural land.[12] Now, even the very slightest inducement was sufficient to cause the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict to flare up anew: henceforth, the periods of relatively calm relations between the two ethnic groups were periodically interrupted each time the power of the Russian state seemed to be weakened.

World War I shattered the Romanovs' empire at its foundations. In 1917, St. Petersburg saw two revolutions, after which the Bolsheviks seized power over the enormously large and multiethnic Russian Empire and the country descended into a bloody civil war. The war caused the empire to fragment: yet this period of partition quickly turned out to be only temporary. The units of Russia's imperial army had, until then, been fighting against the Turks in the South Caucasus and eastern Anatolia, and now they disbanded, returned home, or took sides with the White or Red Army divisions being formed in Russia. Now, the Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians were to all intents and purposes left to their own fates. After the brief project of a joint Transcaucasian Federation collapsed owing to the diverging interests of the political leaderships of the respective South Caucasian nations, three independent republics were declared in May 1918: the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Democratic Republic of Armenia, and the Democratic Republic of Georgia. The declaration of independence of the Azerbaijani state, the first democracy in the Muslim Orient, was preceded by bloody clashes in Baku in March 1918.[13] These clashes were between the united forces

of Armenian nationalists, supported by the Russian Bolsheviks (who had no intention of giving up Baku's oil) and the more numerous, but poorly armed and organized Azerbaijani nationalists. According to varying accounts, the resultant street fighting and ethnically motivated murders cost between 10,000 and 15,000 lives, mostly of Azerbaijani civilians: thus, during the interim years of 1918–20, "bloody March" became yet another powerful trigger for the solidifying of the consciousness of national solidarity on the part of the Azerbaijanis.[14]

Nationalists from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation immediately seized power in the Russian Empire's Armenian provinces and soon commenced an extensive campaign against their own Azerbaijani and Turkish populations. This campaign became especially intense during the 1918 war with Turkey and, again, during the months before, and immediately after, the invasion of the Turkish forces under Kazim Karabekir Pasha into Armenia in 1920 – as well as during the intervening period between 1918 and 1920, when there were regular armed clashes with Azerbaijan. As has already been noted, the ethnic cleansing and murders of this period cost tens of thousands of lives, both of Armenian and Turkic civilians (accused of supporting their Turkish and Azerbaijani fellow tribesmen), while tens of thousands more civilians were forced to flee from Armenia.[15]

Between the newly created states of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the question arose before long of the delineation of borders. The problem in this respect was particularly acute for several areas near the borders, regions inhabited by both Armenians and Azerbaijanis: Zangezur (Zängäzur in Azerbaijani transliteration, known in Armenia as Syunik), Nakhichevan, and Karabakh were each claimed by both Baku and Yerevan. The failure of diplomatic negotiations to resolve these issues soon led to an armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan during 1919–20, with military superiority alternating between the two sides, especially in the mountainous areas and in the foothills of Karabakh. The local Armenians, traditionally in the majority in these latter regions, rose up against Baku, after having initially been accommodating. Turkey soon joined the conflict on the side of Azerbaijan; while Soviet forces joined the conflict after April 1920, but even they were not able to completely suppress the resistance of the Karabakh Armenians.

The definitive end to this war did not come until after the occupation, in 1920/21, of Azerbaijan by the Eleventh Red Army, and soon thereafter of Armenia as well. In 1921 the central government in Moscow forced the leader of the Azerbaijani Communists, Nariman Narimanov, to recognize the transfer of Nakhichevan, Zangezur, and Karabakh to

Armenia. However, Narimanov soon chose to rescind that transfer, as a consequence of which Moscow then undertook – in accordance with the hastily signed Soviet–Turkish Treaty of Brotherhood and Friendship (the Treaty of Moscow), and in spite of the protests of Armenia's Communists – to give Karabakh and Nakhichevan to Soviet Azerbaijan. The years 1923–24 thus saw the creation of a new territorial entity which had never before existed: the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR), which consisted of approximately half the territory of historic Karabakh. It is important to note that within this autonomous region of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic, Armenians constituted over 90 per cent of the population.[16]

Conflict and historiography

The atmosphere of détente at the end of the 1980s ended another period of peaceful coexistence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, in and beyond Karabakh. The official Soviet ideology of the "friendship of peoples" had placed a strict taboo on any public discussion of past violence, even if a certain degree of mutual distrust still persisted. The closeness of the two cultures and traditions further ensured that conflicts arose between them only rarely. This relatively close cultural intermingling is attested to by the relatively high incidence of mixed Armenian–Azerbaijani marriages which took place in the cosmopolitan and multiethnic city of Baku, with its significantly numerous Armenian community.

The years of the U.S.S.R.'s final agony were characterized by the commencement of attempts by the local intelligentsia to create a national identity liberated from the ideological clichés of the Soviet era. Since these attempts took place alongside the escalating ethnic conflict within the region, the desired "regaining of the nation" proceeded side by side with the process of the epicizing of the conflict, and alongside that of the creation of a newly invigorated collective image of an "ages-old enemy," to such an extent that the idea of national revival became related directly to the question of keeping Karabakh for Azerbaijanis, or alternatively of recovering it for Armenians. Thus, it is here that one finds the very roots of *identity* as the basis of the conflict. In practice, the central issue of the supposed post-Soviet "restoration of justice," both for Armenians and Azerbaijanis, became the confirmation of exclusive and irrefutable "historical rights" to Karabakh, and the recognition of supposed "ages-old" ethnopolitical dominance of the given territory by each party to the conflict.

According to Armenian historiographical tradition, the origins of the history of an autochthonous Armenian ethnic community within the Caucasus can be traced as far back as 1000 years BCE; whereas the Azerbaijanis, on the other hand, are regarded as the descendants of "barbaric" Turkic nomads who arrived from "somewhere in the Altai region" in the relatively recent past – and who thus, as "guests," have no entitlement to claim any territory at all within the Caucasus region. For the Armenians, who have borne with grief the memory of the definitive loss of state sovereignty in 1375,[17] the pugilistic Armenian principalities of the upper part of Karabakh – Artsakh in Armenian – appear to be the only area of historical, or so-called Greater Armenia (its tenth province), where "the tradition of national sovereignty survived until the late Middle Ages."[18] Even during the wars of 1919–20, in spite of the great successes of the Azerbaijani (and Turkish) army on the battlefields of Karabakh, the "unconquerable citadel" of Nagorno-Karabakh was never entirely subjugated. Armenians place the very creation of the Azerbaijani Karabakh khanate in the mid-eighteenth century into the overall context of fratricidal feudal treachery between Armenians.

As stated previously, in recent years there have been attempts on the Azerbaijani side to archaicize the Turkic presence within the territory of the South Caucasus by extending its supposed lineage from the (generally recognized) eleventh-century period (in accordance with the so-called Seljuq theory) back as far as the sixth or seventh centuries (this being the so-called Khazar theory).[19] According to a further body of theory – dubbed the "Albanian theory" – which is currently a part of the state doctrine of Azerbaijanism, the territory of Karabakh was an integral part of Caucasian Albania: thus, it is argued, the original, Caucasian-speaking population, Turkified and Islamicized as it was with the arrival of Turkic tribes, in fact played a significant part in the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani ethnic group.[20] According to this view, the Karabakh Armenians were originally Caucasian Albanians: however, in the early Middle Ages, they adopted Christianity from the Armenians, and were subsequently Gregorianized and Armenicized. The Azerbaijanis, it is argued, as the descendants of the autochthonous Caucasian Albanians (as well as of the incoming Turkic tribes), therefore have a natural claim to Karabakh. Contemporary Azerbaijani historiographers also argue that, once the area was conquered by Russia during the period 1801–28, St. Petersburg instigated the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Ottoman and Persian Armenians – Christians loyal to the empire – within the territory of the Yerevan and Nakhichevan khanate,[21]

so as to create an “Armenian province.” This territory (corresponding to virtually all of the eastern part of present-day Armenia) came to be ruled, over the centuries, by khans and beks from the Azerbaijani majority: the designation Western Azerbaijan has been used to describe this region, in Azerbaijan, during recent years.

It is on the basis of such ideas as these that the myth of Armenians as “treacherous and ungrateful guests” on Azerbaijani soil has been cultivated. The concept of (Pan-) Turkism, which is immensely popular in modern Azerbaijan, as mentioned above, can allow one to regard the significant regional states originally created by local Turkic tribes as being Azerbaijani. This concept relates to the dynasties of the Seljuqs, the Ak Koyunlus, Kara Koyunlus, the Safavids, Afshars, and Qajars. At present, in Azerbaijani historiography we encounter such terms as the “Azerbaijani Qajar state” and so forth.[22] The claim that the Karabakh khanate (which was ruled by the shahs from the Turkic dynasty of the Qajars [1785–1925]) was a vassal to the Azerbaijani state of the Qajars, and not to Persia, at the start of the nineteenth century, is taken to justify a claim for the uninterrupted ethnopolitical dominance of Azerbaijanis in and over Karabakh. Armenians, on the contrary, point out the non-existence before 1918 of any Azerbaijani state – that is, a state in the name of which the word Azerbaijan would appear; and also to the “artificial” origin of the very ethnonym Azerbaijani. While they do acknowledge the fact of the (quasi-) vassal status of the Karabakh principalities under Muslim rulers, Armenians also point out the vassal status of the Karabakh khanate itself to Esfahan/Tehran. They generally try to downplay the ethnolinguistic affiliation of the rulers and inhabitants of the Karabakh khanate (as well as of the khanates of Yerevan, Nakhichevan, and certain others) by citing the fact that they constituted an integral part of the Persian Empire; or else they point out that they were Persians, or simply refer to them as Muslims with no specified ethnic origin.

Azerbaijanis, furthermore, cite the fact that, while in 1823 Armenians constituted only 9 per cent of the population of all of Karabakh, and not only of its upper part (the rest consisting of “Muslims”: Azerbaijanis and Kurds), by 1880, thanks to the influx of the Armenian population and the ebbing of the Turkic (and Kurdish) population, the Armenians had become the majority (53 per cent).[23] Armenians explain this fact by reference to the displacement to Persia of tens of thousands of Armenians from Karabakh and the territory of modern Armenia, which was ordered by the Persian Shah Abbas I at the start of the seventeenth century.

In general, a viable historical consciousness was much more easily defined amongst the Armenians, as they possessed an established school of ethnohistoriography. In spite of the formal restrictions of the Soviet era, the experience of the events of 1915 served as a strong, permanent, impulse for the maintenance of a consciousness of past wrongs, and it thus helped to shape Armenians' relations not only with the Turks, but also with the Azerbaijanis: the fact that Karabakh (and Nakhichevan) was – illegitimately in the eyes of the Armenians – placed under Baku's control was viewed by many Armenian intellectuals as an historical wrong that was waiting to be redressed. Gorbachov's period of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which brought about an easing of societal repression, seemed like a moment that should be exploited in the name of attaining historical justice: the first step in this process was supposed to be the "returning" to Armenia of Karabakh – this perhaps to be followed by the "return" of several other territories of the epic Greater Armenia. The further influence of the politically engaged Armenian diaspora, both in Russia and around the world, along with the increasingly clear ties of the Azerbaijani nationalists to Turkey, served to augment the popularity of conspiracy theories connected with the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, and reinforced the feeling of endangerment amongst both ethnic groups. According to Viktor Shnirelman,

> the end of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s in the neighboring republics were imbued with diametrically opposed yet mirroring attitudes: in Armenia they were sure of the existence of a worldwide Turanic conspiracy, while Azerbaijanis believed in a worldwide Armenian conspiracy.[24]

Thomas de Waal summarized the ethnohistoriographic narrative of the conflict surrounding Karabakh as follows:

> For Armenians, Karabakh is the last outpost of their Christian civilization and a historic haven of Armenian princes and bishops before the eastern Turkic world begins. Azerbaijanis talk of it as a cradle, nursery, or conservatoire, the birthplace of their musicians and poets. Historically, Armenia is diminished without this enclave and its monasteries and its mountain lords; geographically and economically, Azerbaijan is not fully viable without Nagorny Karabakh.[25]

Chronology of escalation

Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict

At the end of the 1980s, the dissatisfaction of Karabakh Armenians with the policy of what they considered the gradual Azerbaijanization of Nagorno-Karabakh was accompanied by concentrated lobbying activity by the Armenian (and pro-Armenian) intelligentsia in Moscow, who had to some extent instigated the dissatisfaction themselves. The intelligentsia, organized within the Karabakh Committee in Armenia, and the Krunk Committee in Nagorno-Karabakh, pushed for a reevaluation of "Stalin's decision" to hand over Karabakh and Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan. As hinted at above and detailed below, throughout the 1970s and 1980s discontent had been on the rise amongst certain circles of Karabakh Armenians regarding what they saw as planned discrimination against the region's Armenian community.

They were unhappy, firstly, with Baku's demographical policy, which sought to increase the proportion of the Azerbaijani population within the autonomous republic's overall demographic composition. According to data from the last census of the U.S.S.R. (1989), the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh was 76.9 per cent (145,500), while the share of Azerbaijanis had increased to 21.5 per cent (40,600).[26] During the period between 1959 and 1979, the proportion of Azerbaijanis within the republic nearly doubled, whereas that of the Armenians only grew by 12 per cent.[27] Curiously, Häydar Äliyev, the third president of post-Soviet Azerbaijan – who had held the position of the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic during the period 1969–82 – approved of this fact in a recent interview, claiming that he had been "trying to increase the number of Azerbaijanis and to reduce the number of Armenians."[28]

Events within Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan autonomy, which used to be home to a significant Armenian community, raised serious concerns among Armenians in this regard. At the time of the breakup of the U.S.S.R., Azerbaijanis accounted for nearly one hundred percent of the population of Nakhichevan (this as a consequence of the expulsion of Armenians in the 1920s and 1930s). The fears, stoked by Yerevan activists, that the precedent of the Nakhichevan Armenians might be repeated, served as an important motive for the Karabakh Armenians to mobilize.

Secondly – and this argument was similarly predicated on the example of the earlier Nakhichevan experience – Karabakh Armenians pointed to Baku's continuing policy of erasing Armenian cultural heritage from

the Karabakh countryside, in an identical way to that which had been previously done in Nakhichevan, where, according to the Armenians, a number of churches and other architectural monuments bearing testimony to the region's age-old Armenian settlement had either been destroyed completely or else exposed to destructive neglect. Besides this – the Armenian argument went on – only those monuments pertinent to Karabakh's Azerbaijani cultural legacy (dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) were included in tourist guides, or were given financial support by authorities – with much older Armenian sites gradually being allowed to fall into despair. Further to this, Armenian nationalists alleged, important political-administrative positions were increasingly being given to ethnic Azerbaijanis, at the cost of the (still-majority) Karabakh Armenians, who were thus in the process of losing political and economic influence within their own native area. Armenian nationalists also pointed to the fact that the region was receiving fewer subsidies from Baku than were Azerbaijan's other areas: they claimed that the socioeconomic situation of Nagorno-Karabakh was continually deteriorating, and it was only the outstanding diligence and creativity of the local Armenians that still buoyed the autonomy up.

Therefore, according to the Armenians, Nagorno-Karabakh's socioeconomic and cultural development was being actively hampered by the Baku authorities, hence, as far as at least some of the Armenian nationalists were concerned, the sole chance for Karabakh Armenians to get the things back on track in socioeconomic terms – let alone to restore historical justice and help preserve Armenian identity – would now be their region's formal unification with Armenia.[29] Importantly, at least some of the Karabakh Armenians (as well as Armenians from the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) had never reconciled themselves with their status within Azerbaijan, and in 1936, 1947, 1963, and 1977 they had appealed to Moscow for the "return" of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. At least twice within that period, in 1963 and 1968, latent conflict had turned violent, leaving casualties, the worst instance being the 1963 riots, where 18 people of Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnicity had been killed.[30]

Needless to say, at the time of the onset of conflict, Azerbaijanis began to contradict the Armenians' claims, with a set of opposing arguments.[31] Similarly, some of the Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijanis within the autonomous region themselves felt that they were a discriminated minority in their own country since, according to their arguments, most of the well-paid jobs in state administration and the greater share of power and

economic privileges were in the hands of the local Armenians; similar complaints were directed to Baku by the local Azerbaijanis.

A few words should be said about the main champions of the Karabakh Armenians' interests, both within and outside the autonomy. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the most notorious of the two, the Karabakh Committee, was established at the beginning of 1988, with the chief goal of achieving Nagorno-Karabakh's transfer from Baku's jurisdiction to Yerevan's.[32] Interestingly enough, this group gathered to itself prominent Armenian intellectuals who had previously been active within earlier Armenian–Azerbaijani debates over the rightful ownership of the area; these history-laden nationalist debates gained momentum throughout the 1980s and contributed to the strengthening of Azerbaijani–Armenian animosity amongst the ranks of intellectuals prior to the actual outbreak of violence in the late 1980s.[33] Yet, questions still remain about whether the Karabakh Committee was the primary instigator of the Armenians' efforts to rally popular support within Armenia. Already in 1987, thousands of signatures had been collected in both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh by various activists enrolled in the Academy of Science of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic in order to legitimize Nagorno-Karabakh's transfer.[34] In the course of the following year – ably assisted by leading Armenian public figures, such as Igor Muradyan, Silva Kaputikyan, and Zory Balayan – the Karabakh Committee launched a well-organized campaign to gain support for its case in the Kremlin, to which delegations were sent to advance the irredentist agenda. Indeed, a number of leading figures in the Communist establishment did meet with the Armenians' delegations, whose arguments were based on their view of Nagorno-Karabakh's past as part of historical Armenia, and upon the broader notion of democracy (with *glasnost* being a fashionable piece of vocabulary at the time). Importantly, the Armenians' case was bolstered by the participation of a number of influential Moscow Armenians: figures such as Abel Aganbegyan (a leading economist and Mikhail Gorbachev's personal adviser) as well as some pro-reformist Russian intellectuals and dissidents; other prominent figures, such as Galina Starovoytova and Yelena Alikhanova-Bonner, Armenian wife of leading human rights activist Andrei Sakharov and, indeed, Sakharov himself, were for one reason or another favorably disposed to the idea of rendering Karabakh to Armenia – this perhaps being viewed as a practical implementation of Lenin's notion of a given peoples' right of self-determination.[35] Notwithstanding Gorbachev's somewhat tardy public statements to the effect that no territorial transfer would take place in the country,[36] a feeling of anxiety was on the increase

amongst Azerbaijanis, who began to view Moscow's passivity as a sign of tacit support for the Armenians' cause. Additionally, in an attempt to exert further pressure on Baku, and so increase the likelihood of their success, a number of leading Armenian public figures began to spread rumors that the Russians had already privately expressed support for the Armenians' cause.[37] The Azerbaijanis' sense of being plotted against further deepened as, in the downtown streets of both Stepanakert – Karabakh's capital – and Yerevan, well-organized and attended meetings in favor of territorial transfer gradually grew in size. In turn, the Armenians' protests, and subsequent strikes, in both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, prompted counter-strikes in Azerbaijan; in Baku's central Lenin Square, thousands of Azerbaijanis gathered to protest the possible annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

Within this atmosphere of increasing ethnic polarization, major importance now became attached to such marginal topics as the refusal of Baku to teach Armenian history in Karabakh schools, or the (above-mentioned) plans of Stepanakert to build a recreational facility in the Topkhana Forest. It is, of course, true that "what begins as a dispute of little importance with few specifics has the tendency, because of the painful history of bloody conflict, or being interpreted through the uncompromising and megalomaniacal positions of the quarrelling sides and through total intolerance of the other side."[38]

Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic violence

Amongst the more direct triggering factors for conflict were clashes which took place in 1988 in the village of Chardakhly (*Çardaqlı)*, located in a predominantly Armenian-populated county in Azerbaijan's Shamkhor (currently *Şämkir*) district in the country's northwest, outside the area of historical Karabakh. In Chardakhly, the majority of the local Armenians refused to recognize the appointment of an Azerbaijani as the director of the *sovkhoz* (Soviet state farm); thus, initially, this particular conflict had a local context, as it related directly to the leader of the Shamkhor district, M. Äsädov, (whose appointment made local Armenians unhappy). Reports on the clashes which broke out in Chardakhly in September and October of 1987 soon reached Yerevan, where a crowd of thousands – who had originally rallied for an ecological demonstration – immediately changed their slogans to "Unification of Karabakh" or *Miatsum* ("Unification," in Armenian). Subsequently, the number of protesters grew dramatically.[39]

Soon thereafter, Armenians started to drive Azerbaijanis out of their local areas: the latter, along with some Azerbaijani-speaking Muslim

Kurds, began to be expelled en masse from Armenia and Karabakh, while violence and pillaging were also not uncommon.[40] The first officially reported bloodshed occurred on February 26, 1988, when two Azerbaijani youths were killed in a clash near Ağdam (Agdam). Over the next three days, in the industrial city of Sumgait near Baku, there were pogroms against local Armenians, apparently inspired by the arrival of infuriated masses of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as by the presence of murderers and rapists allegedly released early from prisons – all as Soviet Army troops looked on with depraved indifference. The events in Sumgait coincided perfectly with the phantoms of the past, and with the latest ideological constructs created by Armenian nationalists, the vanguard of the Karabakh movement. Then, on April 24 of that year (the day which, since 1965, had been observed as the occasion of the annual commemoration of the Armenian genocide) another taboo was violated at a meeting in Yerevan, when Ottoman Turks began openly to be equated with "Azerbaijani Turks." In the belief that self-help was vital for their physical survival, the Armenians swiftly began establishing armed forces, with the support of the diaspora.

In 1989–90 the conflict escalated further; armed clashes in Karabakh and in surrounding areas grew in intensity, and the number of victims rose. Armed Armenians and Azerbaijanis were now also attacking Soviet Army units or were negotiating with their commanders to obtain weapons and ammunition. On November 28, 1989, Moscow ended the direct rule which had existed within the autonomous region for a year, thereby amply demonstrating its inability to handle the conflict effectively. On December 1, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic unilaterally declared Nagorno-Karabakh to be part of the republic.

The events in Karabakh served as a pretext for mobilizing the Armenian, and later the Azerbaijani, public. The rapid breakup of the Soviet Union now meant that nothing stood in the way of a further escalation of the dangerous conflict. Over the previous several years, the Armenians had managed to build up an army fit for combat, whilst in Baku similar efforts had been prevented by the Communists, who were still clinging to power and were fixated on their long-term conflicts with the nationalists. On August 31, Baku declared Azerbaijan's independence. On September 2, 1991 the Karabakh Armenians also declared independence, confirmed by a quickly organized referendum, in which nearly all Armenians (99 per cent of the voters) voted for full sovereignty.[41] In turn, on November 26, the parliament of Azerbaijan abolished the

autonomy of Karabakh, a ruling that had no practical impact on developments in the region.

Phase C: Armed conflict – civil (international) war

A real war broke out in the winter of 1992. On the night of February 25 the town of Xocalı (Khojali, Khojaly), located on a strategic corridor leading from Stepanakert to Agdam, was occupied. The direct consequence of this was the brutal torture, rape, and execution of 613 of the approximately 8,000 local Azerbaijani residents, most of whom were women, children, and old men.[42] "Participating in the occupation of Khojaly and the following attacks on Azerbaijani settlements were entire divisions of the 366th regiment of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States, former states in the Soviet Union], the task of which was theoretically to prevent just such large-scale armed clashes."[43] This brutality was apparently calculated in advance to serve as a deterrent, and it was to prove of decisive importance for the success of subsequent attempts to secure ethnically "clean" occupied areas.

The reports from Khojaly shook the Azerbaijani public: parliament forced President Mütällibov to resign, but after a month of de facto anarchy he returned to power, and remained in post until May when, as a consequence of a coup organized by the APFP, he was forced to flee; Äbülfäz Elçibäy then became the president. The stimulus for another change of government in Baku came when Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh forces occupied Shusha, a town mainly inhabited by Azerbaijanis and known as the "heart of Karabakh," being its historical capital, the key for the defense of the area – and a place of deep emotional importance for the nationalist sentiments of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. At the same time, the Armenians' logistical problems of supply were definitively solved, and the course of the war was significantly influenced by the occupation of the Lachin Corridor – part of the territory of Azerbaijan lying outside Nagorno-Karabakh and connecting the territory of Karabakh with Armenia.

After the repulse of an Azerbaijani attack in northern Karabakh in the summer of 1992, the united Karabakh and Armenian troops now controlled nearly all of Nagorno-Karabakh, and in the spring of the following year they occupied areas of outer Karabakh, where the majority of the inhabitants were Azerbaijani (Füzuli, Fizuli) or Azerbaijani–Kurdish (Kälbäcär, Kelbajar). On April 30, 1993, the UN Security Council's Resolution 822 called on the Armenians to withdraw their troops from Kelbajar, since the occupying of those areas was clearly not motivated by security concerns: however, this resolution came to nothing. Armenia

apparently wanted to strengthen its position for future peace negotiations with Azerbaijan.

In June 1993 there was another coup in Baku (as has already been mentioned) when the rebellious Colonel Sürät Hüseynov ordered his units to advance to the east towards the Azerbaijani capital. After Elçibäy fled to Nakhichevan, his compatriot, Heydär Äliyev, made a return to big-time politics. With the Kremlin's blessing, Äliyev reached an agreement with Hüseynov, by which Hüseynov became the premier and defense minister and Äliyev became the country's de facto leader. Once in office, Äliyev tried to consolidate the nation, to create an army that would be fit for combat, and to improve the country's shaky international standing.

Meanwhile, the Armenians took full advantage of the chaotic domestic politics in Azerbaijan, and faced with half-hearted resistance by the demoralized Azerbaijani forces, successively occupied Agdam, Fizuli, Horadiz (Goradiz), Qubatlı (Kubatly), Cäbrayıl (Jabrail), and Zangelan, eventually reaching the Azerbaijani–Iranian border along the Arax River. Iranian army units then crossed the river northward to announce their presence. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani villagers, frightened by the practices of ethnic cleansing and by the anarchy in the Armenian armed forces, were already fleeing *en masse* before the advancing invaders. Hundreds of civilians died on mountain paths as a result of exhaustion and hypothermia. There followed UN Security Council resolutions 853, 874, and 884, demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories – but, again, these resolutions had no effect.

In the winter of 1993–94, the hastily formed Azerbaijani army made an all-out effort to begin an attack along the entire front, but after initial successes, the attack collapsed. Now, neither side had sufficient strength to wage offensive warfare and, on May 12, 1994, a ceasefire was signed in Moscow, one which is still in force today. However, as a consequence of sniper fire, mine explosions, and occasional artillery duels, approximately 200 to 300 soldiers and civilians still lose their lives on the front lines each year.

The war cost as many as 30,000 casualties, of which approximately 7,000 were Armenians; 1.1 million people became refugees, at least 800,000 of whom were Azerbaijanis. Seven districts of Azerbaijan were occupied,[44] along with the principal part of Nagorno-Karabakh, representing 14 per cent of Azerbaijani territory. Armenia found itself blockaded by Azerbaijan and Turkey, while Nakhichevan was blockaded by Armenia. Both the Azerbaijani and Armenian economies had

been devastated and, by some estimates, the number of Armenians had fallen to between two and two and a half million, as a result of migration.[45]

The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia

South Ossetia

As was the case with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Georgia–Abkhazia and Georgia–South Ossetia conflicts also lack deep historical roots: rather than arising as ethnic conflicts as such, during the initial phase of their escalation, at least, they could have been regarded as conflicts primarily based on socioeconomic factors.[46]

The present conflict between the government in Tbilisi and the South Ossetians has historical roots going back to 1918–21: the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. During that period, there were three main uprisings (in 1918, 1919, and 1920) by the South Ossetian population of the Shida Kartli region (Interior Georgia). Dissatisfaction was at first mainly directed against the economic policies of the central government, which was, in the opinion of the South Ossetians, unjustly supporting the interests of big landowners, most of whom were ethnic Georgians: this struggle soon developed into an armed uprising.[47] The conflict played itself out between two ethnically homogenous groups: the South Ossetian peasants, on the one hand, who were generally without land and were striving, under the influence of developments in Russia, to gain greater freedom and the right to own cultivated land; and the local Georgian aristocrats, on the other hand, to whom the land had originally belonged. Thus, before long, the conflict became ethnic in character.

The first armed attack by Georgian troops was turned back by the South Ossetian rebels, who then occupied the region's administrative center, the town of Tskhinvali. The Georgian population, which predominated in Tskhinvali and other towns, then became the target of attacks. Fighting continued, with mastery alternating between the two sides; however, any victories by the Georgian army were accompanied by retributive massacres that cost the lives of hundreds of South Ossetian civilians. Ethnically motivated murders and ethnic cleansing heightened the nationalist feelings of the South Ossetians and intensified their grudge against the Georgians. From 1918 onward, a growing proportion of the South Ossetian population came to believe that it could seek support in the escalating conflict with the Georgian state only from Soviet Russia, which was interested in control over South

Ossetian territory – South Ossetia being a strategically situated region adjoining the North and South Caucasus. To a large extent, the socio-economic interests of the South Ossetian peasants predetermined their ethnopolitical sympathies and antipathies. The dissatisfaction of the South Ossetians with the policies of the Menshevik government in Tbilisi strengthened their sympathy for the Bolsheviks and, in light of the traditionally warm relations between the Ossetians and the Russians,[48] and the strategic interest of the Soviets in regaining control over Georgia, this made it possible for the Ossetians to count on the military and political support of Russia. During the uprisings in 1919, and especially during the massive uprising in 1920, the South Ossetian rebels received solid – although covert – material support from the Red Army, and the Ossetain political elite directly proclaimed the goal of being annexed to Soviet Russia – and, indeed, at the end of 1919 this did partially occur.[49] In the middle of 1920 Moscow distanced itself from its South Ossetian wards in an effort to avoid engagement in an open military conflict with Georgia. The Georgian military soon undertook an extensive counteroffensive against South Ossetian positions.[50] The eventual liquidation of South Ossetian sovereignty was accompanied by ethnic cleansing, which, cost the lives of between 3,000–7,000 people, mostly civilians, while nearly 20,000 South Ossetian civilians were forced to flee to Soviet Russia before the advancing Georgian armed formations.[51] In retribution, South Ossetian volunteers joined the advancing Red Army, which occupied Georgia in February of the next year, extinguishing independent Georgian statehood. Again, in this instance there were ethnically motivated murders.

In 1922, within the overarching framework of Sovietized Georgia, the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was created: as a concession to the protesting South Ossetian Communists, who had expected their homeland to be joined to North Ossetia and Russia, the administrative borders of the region were expanded to include several communities with a mainly Georgian population.

The period of Soviet rule was characterized by an overall absence of conflicts: the high percentage of interethnic marriages, the closeness of the respective traditions and culture, and the Orthodox religion (common to both nationalities, and still having major ethnosymbolic significance), all played important roles in the maintenance of this period of interethnic peace and stability.[52] Also contributing to this period of peace was the effective cover-up of the tragic events of the first republic (1918–21) by official Soviet ideology – although among

nationalistically minded South Ossetians and Georgians, and amongst the older inhabitants, memories of the cruelty persisted for some time.

Abkhazia

Events in Abkhazia developed in a broadly similar fashion. In connection with the October Revolution of 1917, the Abkhazian National Assembly announced the formation of an Abkhazian parliament (the Abkhazian National Council), which subsequently adopted a constitution. In May of the following year, Abkhazia was formally declared part of the newly emerging North Caucasian Mountainous Republic, although it was still afflicted with strife between various political splinter groups – pro-Russian Bolsheviks, pro-Turkish aristocrats, and pro-Georgian Socialists (Mensheviks). In the spring of 1918, Sukhumi, the administrative center of Abkhazia, was occupied by pro-Bolshevik Abkhaz militias, but control over the city and region soon returned to Georgian armed forces.

Unlike South Ossetia, Abkhazia had a guaranteed status of autonomy under the constitution of the independent Georgian Republic (1918, 1921).[53] Abkhaz–Georgian relations nevertheless worsened again after the failed landing in Sukhumi in June of that year by Ottoman-Abkhaz (Muhajir) troops (an invasion organized by Abkhaz aristocrats and nationalists), and in the wake of an unsuccessful coup attempt by several Georgian officers of Abkhaz origin.[54] Tbilisi resorted to repression: the autonomous status of Abkhazia was temporarily suspended, and many separatist-minded Abkhaz representatives were jailed.

Several local uprisings soon erupted, the largest of which was the peasant rebellion of 1920, which also involved the neighboring Georgian region of Samegrelo; government troops brutally suppressed that uprising. During the ensuing tension between Russia and Georgia, the Abkhaz received support first from Denikin's Volunteer Army (February 1919), and then two years later, during the occupation of Georgia, from the Red Army.[55]

A month after the occupation of Georgia, the Bolsheviks declared the founding of the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic: Abkhazia thus gained a status equal to that of Georgia, with which it duly formed a sort of confederation. At the end of 1931, that status was terminated by a decision of the *Kavbyuro* (Committee for the Caucasus),[56] and the territory of Abkhazia was instead annexed to Georgia, on the basis of the so-called Union Treaty. Ten years later, Abkhazia was directly incorporated into the framework of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, on the principle of autonomy; South Ossetia likewise gained the status of an autonomous

Soviet Socialist Republic. Abkhaz intellectuals again began to call into question Moscow's actions – again describing Abkhazia's status as 'autonomous within the framework of Georgia' as illegitimate: "[T]he formation of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic within the framework of Georgia [in 1931] was the outcome not of the supposed granting of autonomous status to one of Georgia's minorities, as is not infrequently stated, but rather of the forcible convergence of two neighboring states through the incorporation of one of them, Abkhazia, into the other, Georgia." This remains the predominant Abkhaz viewpoint.[57]

Conflict and historiography

The effective vacuum of power and ideology which was brought about by the easing of societal repression during the years of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, created a sudden strengthening of the nationalist ideology which had previously been suppressed. In multiethnic regions of the former Soviet empire, this process was accompanied by the challenging of the established ethnoadministrative hierarchy by representatives of ethnic groups – the status of which, at least in the opinion of some of their elites, did not correspond to the changed political situation, or indeed to the demands for "historical justice." This was especially true of the so-called titular ethnic groups with territorially and politically defined autonomy within the Soviet Republics: in the South Caucasus, besides Ajaria and Nakhichevan, this primarily involved Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.[58] It can be said that the Soviet policy of "friendship of peoples," with its strict taboo on the public discussion of earlier violence, contributed greatly towards the peaceful coexistence of the Soviet nationalities, but it was far from being the case that everything was forgotten during the 70 years of the existence of the U.S.S.R. Wrongs and grudges that had long been covered up during the Soviet era still survived in latent form, and they began to resurface.

Within this tense situation of societal mobilization, the emancipation efforts of the various ethnic groups inhabiting the periphery of Georgia (and Azerbaijan) were perceived by the majority populations of these regions as an attempt by a "fifth column" (covertly directed by Moscow) to undermine the territorial integrity of their respective homelands – and doing so at an historic moment when the opportunity had finally arrived for each to build an independent nation-state. According to a Georgian author writing about the late Soviet era:

> [T]he function of an "internal front" was often delegated to various types of "movements," "forums," and "cultural associations," bringing

> together representatives of local minority nationalities, ethnicities and religious minorities. In multiethnic Georgia, striving for independence, with three autonomous units, for the experienced KGB it was not difficult to organize "counter-movements" against the breakup of the Communist empire. In the Abkhazian Autonomous SSR there thus emerged the National Forum of Abkhazia *Aydgylara* (Unity), the Russian society House of the Slavs, the Ossetian group *Alan*, the Armenian movement *Krunk* and others.[59]

In other words, it is nearly axiomatic that "minorities who are not loyal to Georgia are therefore viewed as accomplices of Russia."[60] During the years of his presidency, Gamsakhurdia summed up the opinions of the Georgian public in a far more radical way. According to him, the Ossetians were "the direct agents of the Kremlin and terrorists," who moreover "have no right to land. They are a new people here."[61]

The Georgian school of historiography, which had enjoyed a period of relative prominence during the Soviet era, dated the beginnings of the presence of Ossetians in northern Georgia to approximately the seventeenth century, while others gave the thirteenth century. Masses of Ossetian peasants, pressured by a lack of sufficient fertile land, and by the expansion of Kabarda feudal lords (in the version working with the thirteenth century, which would have been the expansion of steppe raiders from Mongolia), crossed the Greater Caucasus Range at that time, and settled to the south of it. The lands they settled – mainly involving northern districts of present-day South Ossetia, the historical region of Dvaleti – then belonged to the influential Machabeli feudal princely clan, which gave consent for the arrival of the Ossetians.[62]

An analogous historical narrative is also advanced with regard to the presence of the present-day Abkhazians in the territory which they now claim. Since the 1960s, Georgian historiography has spoken of the gradual arrival of Adyghean (Circassian) tribes, identified with the ancient Apsila and Abazga tribes[63] (these being the ancestors of the modern Abkhazians) from the northwest Caucasus, to part of the territory of present-day Abkhazia. Curiously, this view of the ethnogenesis of the Abkhaz people was articulated as early as a century ago by Irakli Tsereteli, one of the co-founders of the Georgian political nation, who states:

> Those whom we call Abkhazians are not Abkhazians. The Abkhazians were a Georgian tribe. The present Abkhazian are the descendants of Kabardeys and Balkars who migrated into Georgia in the mid-19th century.[64]

Accordingly, some influential modern representatives of Georgian historiography now cite the fact that historic Abkhazia (*apkhazeti* or *afkhazeti* in Georgian) was settled by a people speaking a West Kartvel dialect (the language of the legendary Kolkhida), said to be close to the modern Megrelian tongue; the original Georgian population of Kolkhida, however, was assimilated over time by the arriving Circassian tribes. In the opinions of many Georgian historians, this thesis is also supported by the autoethnonym of the modern Abkhazians (*Apsua*), and by the toponym, *Apsny*, which have nothing in common with the Georgian root, *abkhaz*.[65]

Just like Karabakh, Abkhazia has also played an important role in Georgian history, although it cannot be regarded as the cradle of Georgian statehood. It is noteworthy that the Abkhazian principality, at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, became a part of the unified Georgian state; it is at that point in the chronicles that we first encounter the name saqartvelo (Georgia). Situated on the Black Sea, Abkhazia was originally under the strong influence of Byzantine (Greek) culture, via which Orthodox Christianity was spread throughout the region. The Greek influence was subsequently supplanted by the growing influence of indigenous Georgian culture. The Abkhazian feudal elite were subjected to strong Kartvelization: the Georgian language became part of the local *high culture*, as writing was done using Georgian script, and it was used for religious services – hence, Georgian became the language of the court, while non-literary Abkhazian survived mainly in the countryside.

Although from the end of the sixteenth until the beginning of the nineteenth centuries Abkhazia existed either within the sphere of influence of the Ottoman Empire or was directly a part thereof (such that Abkhazians were subjected to some sort of Islamicization), Georgian authors claim that Abkhazia never ceased being a part of the West Georgian political area.

The presence of numerous ethnic minorities in the peripheral areas of the country, along with the tradition of ethnoterritorially defined statehood, contributed from the 1950s through to the 1970s towards the development of a specific view of South Ossetians and Abkhazians – as well as of Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and members of other ethnic groups – as being mere “guests” on Georgian soil. Since then, that view of ethnic minorities has become an integral part of the Georgian national narrative. The cultivation of the myth of Georgia as the “hospitable mother” has consigned South Ossetians and Abkhazians to the roles of mere guests who – only relatively recently within the context of

the long history of Georgian statehood – have settled on Georgian territory, and from whom respect for the territorial integrity of the "host" country can be rightfully demanded. Seen from this lofty perspective of "historical justice," the separatist aspirations of these subordinate peoples have, therefore, practically no legitimacy at all. This is the source of the slogans that were commonly heard in the vocabulary of many nationalistically oriented Georgians during the 1980s and 1990s: "If you don't like things in Georgia, go back to Iran" is what Ossetians heard in reference to their Iranian origin, while it was suggested to Abkhazians that they move back to the North Caucasus, to Russia and their Adyghean fellow tribesmen.

The Georgian perception of Abkhazians and South Ossetians is, however, influenced by the relatively strong intermixing of local Kartvel, generally Megrel, families with Abkhazians: today, therefore, many Abkhazian families have Megrel roots.[66] If, then, we take into consideration the exclusively "ethnogenetic" nature of Georgian nationalism, emphasizing as it does the primacy of "blood" or ethnic origin, it is interesting to note that the Georgians are inclined more favorably towards Abkhazians (and as well, to a lesser degree, to Ossetians) than towards any of the country's other ethnic groups. Even in spite of the series of excessively violent incidents which have characterized the Georgian–Abkhazian armed conflict, Georgians still tend to regard Abkhazians as a friendly, if not kindred, nationality.[67] In an effort to excuse ethnic cleansing and murders, some Georgians tend to blame such groups as the North Caucasian volunteers, especially Chechens, who fought in large numbers in the war on the side of the Abkhazians, as well as Armenians and Russians, as the main culprits for the violence against Georgians. Family relations are a truly important matter in the Caucasus, and this can also be seen as the basis of the Georgian integrative view of Abkhazians:

> Georgians and Abkhazians are united by blood relations, common families and common children. The unity of Georgians and Abkhazians is determined by life itself. Abkhazians participated actively in the process of the political unification of our common homeland and the creation of a culture common to both of our nationalities. This obligates both of our peoples to protect and deepen, and not to destroy the centuries-old tradition of our common life in peace and understanding, mutual trust and mutual support and the tradition of brotherhood made holy by the blood of ancestors.[68]

It is symptomatic of this that, although the Armenians and Azerbaijanis have incomparably fewer instances of ethnic violence and separatism, the more numerous Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in Georgia do not tend to be included in such benign nationalistic tracts.

During the initial stages of the public activity of the resurgent Georgian nationalists, there did also exist an attempt to ideologically unite *all* of the various ethnic groups within the country, in the face of the common "external threat" which was seen to be posed by Moscow. At first, some nationalists advocated *cooperation* with the emancipation movements of the Abkhazians and Ajarians, in the name of a united, independent Georgia: they were also willing to allow these movements sufficient cultural, economic, and possibly even political rights, within the framework of an already-existing autonomous national entity. As Ghia Nodia notes, "[T]he radicals worked hard to change anti-Abkhaz slogans into pro-independence ones."[69]

The South Ossetians and Abkhazians, however, rejected the Georgian version of history, perhaps with even greater vigor than their Georgian opponents had shown in constructing that history: in accordance with the typical pattern for all ethnopolitical conflicts, historians from both camps accuse the opposite side of politicizing the topic and of a biased approach. The South Ossetians, for example, are concerned with establishing the autochthonous character of the Ossetian population within the territory of present-day South Ossetia. Thus, they emphasize the Scythian (proto-Alan or later Alan) presence in both the South and North Caucasus, and they claim that the Ossetian population has been settled in the present territory of South Ossetia since time immemorial (although this can hardly be documented on the basis of available sources).[70]

Similarly, Abkhazian intellectuals point to the fact that Abkhazian princes from the ruling Shervashidze (Ch'ach'ba) dynasty declared the annexation of Abkhazia to the Russian state in 1810, independently from any Georgian state – that is, nine years after the end of (East-)Georgian statehood.[71] They regard the year 1866 as the key moment, when a mass anti-Russian rebellion broke out in Abkhazia, which was punished by, among other things, the deportation to Turkey of thousands of Muslim Abkhazians who had taken part in the uprising. In this way the proportion of Abkhazians professing Islam, who had previously been predominant in the country, fell to below the number of Orthodox Abkhazians.[72] Far more important, however, was the fact that the Russian colonial administration soon began resettling members

of other ethnic groups into the depopulated areas – besides Armenians, Ponti Greeks, and Jews, these were, in particular, Georgians, foremost among whom were the Megrels of western Georgia.

This trend then continued during the Soviet era, as a result of which the numerical proportion of Abkhazians in their own land fell to less than one fifth. Abkhazians were the only group in the region that constituted a minority within its only ethnic autonomous region, – and this inevitably increased their fear of assimilation and of demographic domination by Georgians. The mass repression that Abkhazia suffered during the 1930s – along with the rest of the Soviet Union – and which also resulted in the end of Abkhazia's status as a Soviet Socialist Republic and its subsequent annexation to Georgia, acquired a strongly *ethnic* subtext, since Joseph Stalin (Jugashvili), and Lavrenty Beria, the chief of the Soviet secret police (NKVD), were both ethnic Georgians.[73]

The conviction of being victims of historical injustice is, thus, not alien to Abkhazians or South Ossetians. In the initial phase of the conflict this feeling was (latently) directed against Tbilisi and then subsequently against Georgians as an ethnic community. A related issue is the consciousness of ethnolinguistic, cultural, and historical difference, which is typical for less populous nationalities: and, indeed, just such an awareness has been articulated with increasing emphasis amongst Abkhazians and South Ossetians. The Georgian project of integration, legitimizing as it does the idea of a common Georgian state by means of emphasizing elements of ethnic and cultural affinity, is in implicit conflict with the exclusivist South Ossetian or Abkhazian projects, as exemplified by abkhaz intellectuals:

> The Abkhazians speak a language not related at all to Georgian. They have a different culture and history. Abkhazians have never been a part of the Georgian nation, have never regarded themselves as belonging to it and have never been regarded as such by Georgians or by any other nation. With the exception of short interims, they have always had independent statehood or a high degree of political independence.[74]

In the arrangements of ethno-federalism formalized during the Soviet era (from 1931 onward), many Georgians, as well as Abkhazians (and Karabakh Armenians), saw elements of historic discontinuity: hence, the societal developments in the 1980s and 1990s gave them hope that

a different arrangement would now be possible. In the words of one Abkhazian author:

> [T]he whole Soviet period was characterized by the constant efforts of Georgia directed at assimilation of Abkhazians and the gradual liquidation of Abkhazian statehood and by an equally determined struggle of Abkhazians for the maintaining of their ethnic identity and for the raising of Abkhazia's status to the level of a Union republic.[75]

During the 70 years of Soviet hegemony, the Abkhazians and South Ossetians were broadly characterized by a favorable orientation towards the center of the Union: Moscow. Moscow was regarded as the power which guaranteed that Tbilisi would act cautiously when face-to-face with the political, administrative, and demographic preponderance of Georgians. The Abkhazians hoped that Moscow would aid the greatest possible strengthening of their autonomy, or even (especially as far as the Abkhazians were concerned) return to them the coveted status of a Union republic. Abkhazians and South Ossetians also have a strong consciousness of their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural relation to the Circassian nationalities of the northwestern Caucasus and to the North Ossetians, respectively.[76] Within the members of both ethnic groups, there is also a firm consciousness of highlander solidarity – one which connects them with the so-called mountain peoples of the (North) Caucasus; although for the North Ossetians, who have suffered quite serious clashes with the Ingush in the past, that consciousness is more ethnically based than regional.[77] The attempt to reconnect with their ethnolinguistically related (and, to some extent, also religiously related in the case of the Abkhazians) North Caucasian fellow tribesmen has gone hand in hand with efforts to gain autonomy within the framework of the Russian Federation, however timidly this may have been expressed whilst under Soviet domination. These efforts of the Abkhazians – and to a lesser extent of the South Ossetians as well – accompanied as they are by their common orientation towards the Russian language (members of the ethnic minorities were among the most vocal proponents of use of the Russian language in public life, and especially in the schools), had featured as a constant source of tension between them and the Georgians during the existence of the Soviet Union.[78] All in all, however the relations between individual Abkhazians, Georgians, and South Ossetians in everyday life in Soviet Abkhazia were characterized by a relative absence of overt conflict.

South Ossetia: chronology of escalation

Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict

As with the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians' demands, the South Ossetians pointed to the socioeconomic underdevelopment of their autonomy as a compelling grievance; they claimed that their level of economic development only equated to half that of the Georgian average at the time. An enduring source of the South Ossetians' discontent was the republic's inferior administrative status by comparison with that of Ajaria or Abkhazia: whereas these constituted autonomous republics, South Ossetia only had the status of autonomous *oblast* – which only permitted its inhabitants a lower degree of self-government.[79] In an attempt to remedy this situation, South Ossetians occasionally organized petitions to Moscow, while more militant South Ossetian nationalists were inclined to suggest a more radical approach: that being secession from Georgia and their region's unification with North Ossetia, thereby becoming part of Russia. The most notorious attempt to achieve this had taken place in 1925, when Ossetian Communist elites from Vladikavkaz and Tskhinvali sent a joint petition to Stalin. The South Ossetians expressed discontent with the fact that, in many areas of the republic, the leaders of local administrations were appointed by Tbilisi, and in a majority of cases, these appointees were Georgians, either from within South Ossetia or outside it. This was regarded by the South Ossetians as a sign of an orchestrated policy, on Georgia's part, of weakening South Ossetians in political terms. Symbolic issues also played a role in the South Ossetians' quest for more autonomy, or secession (as had been the case with both the Karabakh Armenians and Abkhazians): South Ossetians advocated more classes in the Ossetian language and history, for example. However, their attempts to introduce history textbooks written in North Ossetian into the South Ossetian educational system ultimately failed.

Tbilisi's supposedly perennial assimilatory policy with respect to the South Ossetians aroused serious concerns on the part of the Ossetians themselves. It is worth noting, in fact, that in 1989 the population of the South Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Oblast was as a whole only one hundred thousand – of which Ossetians constituted about two thirds (66 per cent), while less than a third (29 per cent) were Georgians; and of these, "half of the families were of mixed Georgian–Ossetian origin."[80] As has already been noted, during the Soviet era this fact had in itself facilitated the conflict-free coexistence of the two ethnic groups

in the area, where there had been ethnically mixed villages, with only very rare instances of ethnic violence. Moreover, as noted above, there was also a high percentage of ethnically mixed South Ossetian–Georgian marriages throughout Georgia, as an additional hundred thousand South Ossetians were distributed across the country.

Of the three cases of ethnopolitical conflict under consideration here, the South Ossetian case seems to have been the most spontaneous. Unlike the Armenian-led case of Nagorno-Karabakh secession, which seems to have been a thoroughly organized initiative (albeit with a certain degree of spontaneity), the creation in 1988 of *Ademon Nykhas* (the National or People's Front) in South Ossetia resembles rather the establishment of similar (trans-national) movements throughout the North Caucasus at the time.[81] The aim of these movements was to gather influential co-ethnics under the umbrella of a centralized institution, so as to foster ethnic solidarity and be capable of effectively advocating for perceived ethnic or regional interests, while at the same time not necessarily seeking secession. Indeed, as detailed below, prior to the escalation of the Georgian–South Ossetian conflict no single statement was made by either the official South Ossetian authorities in Tskhinvali, or by Ademon Nykhas members regarding the republic's incorporation into Russia.

Tension in relations between South Ossetians and Georgians began to escalate, however, after Tskhinvali, influenced by developments in Abkhazia, issued a declaration, in the spring of 1989, supporting the separatist demands of the Abkhazians. From August of that year, Tbilisi attempted to formalize Georgian as the sole official language of the country. This would have implied a significant weakening of the position of the Ossetian and Abkhazian languages, as well as of Russian, which served as a lingua franca amongst the South Ossetians (only 14 per cent of whom spoke Georgian as of 1989), the Abkhazians, and members of other ethnic minorities.[82] Tbilisi's move was regarded as constituting an implicit attack on South Ossetian (and Abkhaz) identity: for the Ossetians and Abkhazians, it signaled that Georgian ethnonationalism, with all of its xenophobic overtones, was in the ascendant. Furthermore, Abkhazians and Ossetians interpreted this move as another step in Tbilisi's ongoing attempts to assimilate the country's ethnic minorities. Accordingly, a few weeks later, Tskhinvali produced a proposal to give Ossetian, Georgian, and Russian, equal status as official languages of the region: however, in the light of intensifying clashes within the autonomous region between South Ossetians and Georgians, this moderate proposal was soon abandoned, and Ossetian was declared

as the sole state language in South Ossetia. At the same time, Ademon Nykhas appealed to Moscow to request the autonomous oblast's unification with North Ossetia. Simultaneously, in November 1989 the South Ossetian authorities unilaterally adopted a law elevating the status of autonomy from that of an oblast, to that of a republic within the borders of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic – that is to say making it equal in status to Abkhazia.

Tbilisi, however, immediately rejected Tskhinvali's action.

Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic violence

Throughout this period, the interethnic situation in South Ossetia had been steadily deteriorating, marked by a series of armed clashes between groups of local village militias; the response of the nationalists in Tbilisi was not long in coming. The Georgian nationalists moved to smother any outbreaks of separatism from their inception. The so-called "March on Tskhinvali," organized by Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the parliamentary deputy, Givi Gumbaridze, was held at the end of autumn in 1989: the instigators of this march intended to convene a meeting, on the central square of the South Ossetian capital, calling for the unity of Georgia. Participating in the "march" were up to 10,000 Georgians, mostly pugnacious youths, who were eventually halted in the suburbs of the South Ossetian capital by troops of the Soviet interior ministry and by South Ossetian militias and civilians. Clashes could not be averted entirely, however, since fighters from nearby Georgian villages, began carrying out "punitive" attacks against the local Ossetians: they used firearms and the South Ossetians fought back, which claimed fatalities on both sides.[83] By the beginning of the next year, however, it seemed the conflict was over, and that Tskhinvali would no longer try to escape the jurisdiction of Tbilisi, so most of the Georgian formations were withdrawn from the area. The influence of Ademon Nykhas was growing, however, and after the spilling of blood, nationalists and radicals gained more influence within the movement. They likewise began the intensive formation of armed home defense units.

The seeds of mutual mistrust had now been sown, while several further factors soon contributed to a worsening of the situation. In fact, the situation was rapidly deteriorating because of a triangular scheme of confrontation: the Georgians' emancipatory activities, aimed at loosening their dependence on Moscow, would in response bring about negative reactions from the government in Tskhinvali, concerned about the deepening of the security crisis vis-à-vis Georgian nationalists, which

would in turn radicalize Tbilisi. As an example of this, when the Georgian parliament adopted a bill, on May 9, denouncing the Union Treaty of 1922 and outlawing every juridical act since then (thereby paving the way for the formal announcement of independence), the South Ossetian authorities were quick to adopt a series of laws *reconfirming* the applicability of Soviet laws and the Soviet constitution, within the administrative borders of South Ossetia.

Then, in April 1990, the party leadership in Moscow enacted a new law requiring the strengthening of the rights of the autonomous regions and republics. This move was mainly aimed at restraining the emancipation efforts towards autonomy within the union republics, however the outcome was the exact opposite. In Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, each of which was faced with separatist or irredentist campaigns by ethnic minorities, the law was received with distrust and merely served to worsen antagonism towards both the central union authorities and the minorities, who were now regarded as a part of a "big politics," the ultimate goal of which was the undermining of the territorial integrity of the autonomous regions and republics and the strengthening of their dependence on Moscow. These repercussions to the new Soviet law manifested most clearly in Georgia, where after four months the parliament enacted a law banning regional parties from taking part in Georgia-wide elections – thereby eliminating, *de jure*, the ethnic parties of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians from the political life of the republic – even while public support for political autonomy was growing amongst these ethnic groups in direct proportion to the escalation of the conflict with Tbilisi.

In retribution, the government in Tskhinvali decided to adopt an extreme measure: in September 1990 it proclaimed the foundation of the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic and requested that Moscow annex this new republic to the U.S.S.R., with the status of a union republic *entirely independent of Georgia*. That decision, however, was overturned by the Georgian government the very next day. The Georgian public, agitated by the events of the previous April and by the escalating crisis in Abkhazia, interpreted this act as yet another attempt to cast doubt on the country's territorial integrity. Meanwhile, the South Ossetian authorities boycotted the all-Georgian election of the republic's Supreme Council, held in October and won by Zviad Gamsakhurdia's nationalist Round Table.[84] Intriguingly, one of Gamsakhurdia's first public pronouncements in his newly acquired post included his notorious assertion: "Georgia is for Georgians! Ossetians, get out of Georgia!"

Needless to say, Gamsakhurdia's rhetoric, along with some of his consequent initiatives, further intensified the South Ossetians' anxieties. At the end of the year, Tbilisi not only put South Ossetia under a blockade, but also terminated its autonomous status and declared a state of emergency in the region. Although these actions were soon *formally* negated by the Kremlin, Moscow's decree was obeyed neither in Tbilisi nor in Tskhinvali.[85] Nonetheless, Tbilisi's decision further strengthened the South Ossetians's existing fears that "their language would be in jeopardy if the autonomy were abolished. As a proof, they referred to the anti-Ossetian linguistic policy of the Georgian authorities in the 1930s-1950s," writes Anatoly Isaenko.[86] Moscow then made an agreement with Tbilisi to the effect that "its policy was subordinated to the Soviet policy of Interior, in return for an opportunity to deal with South Ossetia as it saw fit."[87]

Phase C: Armed conflict – civil war

In early January, armed clashes erupted in Tskhinvali and its outskirts, as well as in the Java district in South Ossetia's northwest, following the deployment of around 3,000 troops of the Georgian ministry of the interior. The situation worsened still further late in January of 1991 after Torez Kulumbegov, chairman of the Supreme Council of South Ossetia, was arrested while at talks with the Georgian side and taken to jail in Tbilisi, (while Russian mediators looked passively on); this arrest appears to have been carried out on orders from Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The South Ossetian public, fired by fresh memories of recent interethnic clashes, then actively participated in a union-wide referendum on the new Union Treaty (supposed to delegate greater powers to the union's republics in order to save the disintegrating Soviet state) which was then being promoted by Moscow: according to South Ossetian sources, the treaty was approved by 99 per cent of the votes. At the same time, however, the South Ossetians (like the Abkhazians) ignored the referendum on independence, which was held two weeks later, in March. Under the terms of a Russian-mediated ceasefire, Georgian armed formations had partly departed the region as early as February – even though they still controlled Georgian-populated villages to the north of Tskhinvali, were able to besiege the city, and continued to engage in armed clashes with varying degrees of intensity.

The conflict escalated in this time, as armed groups of Georgians, often members of the Vazha Adamia movement and the Merab Kostava Society, attacked the local South Ossetians they wished to drive out of

the area. The clashes intensified further, as Georgians forced Ossetians out of their homes, and vice versa. During the clashes, there were reports of dozens of deaths and injuries.[88] From June of 1991, Tskhinvali was subjected to artillery fire by Georgian paramilitary units from nearby hills, and in the autumn it was nearly encircled by Georgian forces. This encirclement took place despite the presence of some 500 Soviet interior ministry troops, who had been deployed in South Ossetia from April 1991.[89] The massive final attack which was planned on the South Ossetian stronghold was averted only by the outbreak of civil war in Georgia, which resulted in the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia. Eduard Shevardnadze then seized power.[90]

The breakup of the Soviet Union – and the unprecedented weakening of Moscow, formerly the supreme arbiter that might have been able to exert some restraining influence upon Tbilisi's actions – continued to cause South Ossetians increasing degrees of anxiety. In January 1992, a referendum was held in South Ossetia on the proposal of annexation to the Russian Federation, with about 90 per cent of the voters of South Ossetian origin voting in favor.[91] The South Ossetians repeatedly rejected the pleas of the government in Tbilisi, demanding firstly the withdrawal of all Georgian armed forces from the area, and the lifting of the blockade. Fighting eased after an uprising by backers of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in the West Georgian Samegrelo (Megrelia) region, which coincided with an attack by Georgian forces in Abkhazia, and the beginning of the Abkhazian war. Georgian artillery, strategically deployed on hilltops near Tskhinvali, opened fire on the South Ossetian capital, taking the lives of dozens of civilians. Thereafter, there was a succession of cease-fires, none of which was respected. An especially outrageous incident, certainly in the eyes of the South and North Ossetian publics, occurred on 20 May, near the Georgian village of Kekhvi, where Georgian commandos attacked a bus full of South Ossetian civilians, who were fleeing the bombardment of Tskhinvali.[92] This event galvanized Vladikavkaz into action, with a temporary shutoff of the supply of natural gas to Georgia, while behind the scenes in Moscow there was now intensive lobbying on behalf of the South Ossetians. The Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus was also roused into action.[93] Its chairman at that time, the Chechen Musa Shanibov, favored the sending of North Caucasian volunteers to the aid of the South Ossetians. This did not, however, take place because of the influence of the pragmatic Askharbek Galazov, president of North Ossetia at the time. He wanted to prevent further escalation of the conflict and its potential spread into surrounding regions. Nonetheless, a number of North Ossetian volunteers did go to South Ossetia through the Daryal

Pass, and did take part in the fighting. Following a series of tragic incidents of ethnic violence:

> The relationships between Georgians and South Ossetians worsened insofar that the idea of South Ossetia's secession from Georgia, prior to early 1991 floated only by part of Georgia's South Ossetian community, found support with the overwhelming majority of [the] Ossetian population. From this moment on, those South Ossetian politicians championing the conception of the "Ossetians' organic bond" with Georgia came to lose support.[94]

Abkhazia: chronology of escalation

Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict

The similarity between the Abkhazians' arguments and those of the Karabakh Armenians and South Ossetian was striking. Firstly, given their small populations of only approximately 100,000 people, alongside what they perceived to be the Georgians' policies (which allegedly dated back to the nineteenth century) of the gradual Kartvelization of Abkhazia, the Abkhaz community had devoted a great deal of effort to the prevention of their possible assimilation into the demographically far stronger Georgian community. According to the last Soviet census (1989), Abkhazia had a population of about half a million people, of whom Georgians accounted for 45.7 per cent of the population; while Abkhazians accounted for just 17.8 per cent, and Russians and Armenians each represented around 14 per cent (3 per cent were Greeks).[95] This unfavorable ethnodemographic composition of the republic was explained by the Abkhazians as being a result of the expulsion of the majority of (Muslim) Abkhaz families following their anti-Russian rebellion in 1864. From that time onward, the area – known for its paradise-like scenery where mountainous landscapes intermingled with the warm waters of the Black Sea – became a much-sought destination for successive waves of immigrants from all over Russia and, most particularly, as far as the Abkhazians were concerned, from neighboring and remote *Georgian* regions. Indeed, there is some evidence that Abkhazia's Megrel community had been settled in the country's south for centuries; yet, the process of population influx, which began in the aftermath of the tragic year of 1864, and subsequently intensified during the interwar period, is described by Abkhazians as constituting a well-organized invasion by the Georgians, who were deliberately seeking to shift the country's demographical balance in their favor.[96] By the end of the nineteenth

century, the Abkhazians, with 53 per cent of the population, comprised the majority of Abkhazia's autonomy, whereas the proportion of the Georgian ethnic population ranged between one fifth and one fourth of the entire population.[97]

An additional cause of Abkhaz discontent was their relative degree of economic underdevelopment. Speaking in strictly economic terms, the level of Abkhazia's industrial development was lower in comparison with Georgia's other areas: the autonomy's agricultural sector was significantly larger as compared with the national average in Georgia (33.2 per cent versus 28 per cent of total employment as of 1978), while the employment rate in industry lagged behind (13.7 per cent versus 19.5 per cent of total employment in the same year).[98] This was partly caused by an uneven distribution of investment in industry and infrastructure on the part of the Tbilisi authorities.[99] However, what the statistical evidence from the Soviet period failed to register was the share of real income which was accumulated in the autonomy's *shadow* economy. Importantly, Abkhazia's tourist sector provided local inhabitants with substantial amounts of income, upon which they were never taxed: Soviet-period common wisdom had it that the richest people in Georgia – and perhaps in the whole of the South Caucasus – lived on Abkhazia's shores, as they were able to rent out their apartments and dachas for high rates to masses of seasonal tourists from across the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Abkhazians claimed that, owing to Tbilisi's partisan support and to widespread corruption, the most valuable real estate located on the coastline was in fact owned by Georgian "profiteers,"[100] with Abkhazians being gradually displaced and compelled to move up into the mountains. To sum up, according to the Abkhazians' argument, the autonomy's "subjugation" by Georgian authorities was a proven detrimental factor with respect to the prevailing socioeconomic conditions within their own land.

Nonetheless, it appears that by comparison with the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and (especially) South Ossetia, purely *economic* arguments played a relatively minor role in the Abkhazia case, even though these arguments were, rhetorically, adopted by Abkhaz nationalists to advance their cause. Rather, the identitary – or symbolic – dimension seems to have constituted a more important factor in the arousal of Abkhaz fears and demands. In addition to the previously mentioned assimilation argument, many Abkhazians seem never to have completely accepted the 1931 abolition of the republican status of their country by Josef Stalin (another *Georgian*, as the Abkhazians would readily point out), which originally led to the imposition of Tbilisi's formal rule over

their territory. Already, during the years of Soviet rule, Abkhaz intellectuals and party officials had been attempting to raise the status of Abkhazia to the level of a Soviet Socialist Republic, or to have it directly attached to the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. To this end they appealed repeatedly (1957, 1967, and 1978) to the leaders in Moscow,– virtually all these appeals being paralleled by manifestations of public support by local Abkhazians in Sukhumi. Although their principal status-related demands were not met, the central government in Moscow did respond by gradually improving the status of the Abkhaz minority, and of Abkhazia's language and cultural rights (this was especially so in the Brezhnev era). In the autonomous republic itself, where Abkhazians constituted less than one fifth of the total population, Abkhazians nevertheless held important administrative posts and had their own television and radio broadcasts and educational system, more or less independent of Tbilisi. Since the 1960s, the first secretary of the central committee of the local Communist Party was always an Abkhazian – whereas, beforehand, the highest post in the autonomous republic had traditionally been held by a member of the Georgian community. Similarly, Abkhazians were at the head of 8 of the 12 ministries, while the ministry of internal affairs, the prosecutor's office, and the premiership remained in the hands of ethnic Georgians. This was in itself an unprecedented state of affairs in Soviet history given abkhazians' tiny share in the autonomy. For Georgians, the (supposedly privileged) standing of Abkhazians in Abkhazia, at the expense of the status of the near majority of Georgians themselves, was generally connected with Moscow's continuing efforts to weaken and undermine the Georgian state. "In Abkhazia in particular, Georgians were all the more upset by their lack of influence in policy-making and regional institutions as they actually formed a demographic plurality, just short of a majority in the autonomous republic."[101] Accordingly, during 1981, a few unprecedentedly large nationalist demonstrations took place in Georgia, at which the issue of this alleged anti-Georgian discrimination in Abkhazia was raised once again, along with issues related to the defense of Georgian cultural heritage – specifically their language and history. Meanwhile, the Abkhaz elites continued to appeal to Moscow.

As in Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia, excesses of interethnic violence were relatively rare in Abkhazia, as the Soviet authorities did their best to prevent ethnic riots from occurring; in terms of daily life, as mentioned above, Georgian–Abkhaz relationships were rather peaceful, although, as with the Nagorno-Karabakh situation, they were marked by a certain degree of mutual mistrust and anxiety.[102] According to

numerous eyewitness reports, there were quite frequent cases of Abkhaz–Georgian marriages being frowned upon by Abkhaz nationalists, which seems never to have been the case in South Ossetia.

As detailed below, Abkhaz elites were at some points in favor of the notion of a broader degree of autonomy – or perhaps attaining the status of a Soviet republic – without necessarily defying the overall principle of Georgia's territorial integrity. Yet their longest-standing – and most preferred – aspiration entailed Abkhazia's complete secession from Georgia, and the establishment of Moscow's direct control over Sukhumi. Over time, and simultaneous with the deepening of Abkhaz–Georgian anxiety, there was a fading of the already half-hearted notion of a federative state in which Abkhazians would coexist with Georgians. As with South Ossetia, Abkhaz nationalists never sought for secession from the Soviet Union, as they regarded Soviet institutions – and subsequently post-Soviet Russia – as the guarantor of their ethnic aspirations (especially in the light of what they considered to be ever-growing Georgian nationalism and aggressiveness). In this respect, the personality of the main herald of Abkhaz sovereignty, the charismatic Vladislav Ardzinba, deserves attention. He was the director of the Sukhumi Institute for the Abkhazian language, history, and literature, during the period 1987–99 – having previously obtained his degrees in history and Middle Eastern civilizations from Sukhumi and Tbilisi Universities, and having spent 18 years in Moscow, where he worked in the Institute for Oriental Studies led by Yevgeny Primakov (who is believed to have had links to Soviet intelligence and security services). An orthodox Communist, and a devoted Abkhaz nationalist who, according to a common Georgian belief, helped to stir up the July 1989 riots (see below), Ardzinba possibly developed close ties to a number of Moscow hardliners. As Ben Fowkes put it, "[Ardzinba's] evident Russian connections have given rise to the suspicions that the movement for Abkhazian secession from Georgia is really a Russian way to make sure that the pleasant seaside resorts of the Black Sea do not fall into Georgian hands."[103] Already at the time of conflict onset it was obvious that Ardzinba himself, as well as the secessionist movement largely led by him, enjoyed a certain degree of unofficial support among high-ranking Russian politicians, military, and pro-reformist intellectuals.[104] After all, the Georgians' separatist agitation, coupled with Gamsakhurdia's verbal attacks upon the central Soviet authorities, appear to have instigated serious anxieties amongst Soviet Russian elites, which eventually led to Moscow's backing for the consequent Abkhaz war of independence.[105] The widespread Georgian belief that Abkhaz secessionism was a product of the Russian intelligence

and security services attempting to reaffirm their grip over Georgia, is less likely however: in spite of the relatively peaceful coexistence which had previously been the norm between ordinary Georgians and Abkhazians, latent conflict centering upon political and symbolic issues had nevertheless existed during the Soviet period – as exemplified by the Abkhazians' efforts to reverse the republic's status obtaining independence from Tbilisi, and the Georgians' commitment to hamper them at any cost.

In 1988, at the time conflict erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh, a group of Abkhaz intellectuals sent the party leadership in Moscow a letter complaining about pressure from Tbilisi, and requesting the renewal of the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic which, from the Abkhaz viewpoint, had been terminated illegally. In their opinion,

> the economic and cultural programs initiated ten years earlier had failed to meet their goals of Abkhaz cultural revitalization. They blamed Georgian hostility for these failures.[106]

A year later the nationalist movement Aydgylara was founded in Abkhazia, and in March 1989 it initiated the gathering of 30,000 Abkhaz inhabitants at a holy pagan site near the village of Lykhny. The so-called "Lykhny letter," the signatories to which included important representatives of Abkhazia's public life and persons of minority nationalities (including around 5,000 Armenians, Pontic Greeks and, surprisingly, also some local Georgians), was addressed to the Soviet leadership: it recounted the many years of the struggle of Abkhazians to return to the country's status of 1921 and called attention to the illegality of Sukhumi's continuing subordinate status with respect to Tbilisi.

For the already radicalized Georgian public, the Lykhny Declaration was like a red flag to a bull: mass demonstrations began to be held all over Georgia, organized by nationalist movements, at which there were demands for the appropriate punishment of the "treacherous" Abkhazians. This punishment was to include the termination of their autonomous status, which had in any case, long been a thorn in the flesh of many Georgians.

Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic violence

Abkhazia, too, was not spared the fate of violent conflict. Blood was shed there for the first time in July of 1989: at least 16 (predominantly Georgian) youngsters lost their lives in clashes, and hundreds more were wounded. The factors causing the clashes seemed nonsensical

to outsiders, yet they represented an important symbolic issue in the context of the local mindset, as they were directly related to questions of identity: the Abkhaz youths involved were energetically protesting the proposed establishment of a branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhumi. Soviet interior ministry troops were deployed to the autonomous region, which succeeded in stopping further bloodshed. In August of the following year, a few months after the adoption of the new Union law which formally permitted autonomies to secede, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet unilaterally declared the founding of the Abkhazian S.S.R. – a move which caused a serious split among Georgian and Abkhaz parliamentarians. Abkhazia did not, however, rule out possible future negotiations with Tbilisi on some sort of a (con-) federative arrangement. At the end of the same year, Ardzinba assumed the leadership of Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet.

The termination of ethnic autonomy, allied to Tbilisi's controversial language policy, together with the rhetorical exercises of the Georgian president and the increasingly dramatic developments in South Ossetia, all served to heighten the security dilemma of the population in Abkhazia, where the active formation of home defense forces had already begun. Georgian–Abkhazian antagonism increased significantly in early 1991, when the Abkhazians (like the South Ossetians) took part in a union-wide referendum on the new Union Treaty, while the Georgians generally boycotted the referendum. In an effort to bolster the standing of the union republics – and to avoid the potential breakup of the U.S.S.R., which would have resulted in their being outnumbered in a Georgian state where there was a growing mood of ultra-nationalism – most Abkhazians and South Ossetians cast their votes in favor of the new Union Treaty. This occurred in spite of the efforts of Tbilisi, where nationalists led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia had seized power, and where the referendum was rejected. On April 9, 1991, Georgia became one of the first Soviet republics to declare its independence: this step was justified as a return to the – illegally interrupted – tradition of sovereign Georgian statehood (as during the period 1918–21).[107]

For the time being Abkhazia was spared intensive fighting because Georgian commandos had been more engaged, since the second half of 1991, on the South Ossetian battlefield, as well as in civil war style clashes amongst the Georgians in Tbilisi in late 1991 and early 1992. Ardzinba, on the other hand, being aware of the Abkhazians' asymmetric weakness vis-à-vis the Georgians, made an effort to restrain the threat of concentrated military action; yet in the meantime he began

replacing Georgians in leading administrative and economic posts with fellow Abkhazians. Most importantly, however, Gamsakhurdia accepted, in mid-1991, a concession on the reform of electoral law which granted Abkhazians *over*-representation in their republic's Supreme Soviet: the Abkhazians, who comprised only one sixth of the republic's entire population, were now to obtain roughly one third of all parliamentary seats. In accordance with that agreement, ethnic quota-based elections took place in Abkhazia in September, in which Abkhazians took 28 seats and Georgians 26 seats, while the rest of the autonomy's ethnicities received 11 seats. Simultaneously, Ardzinba was instrumental in establishing the Abkhaz National Guard; units of ethnic militia that would become Abkhazia's main force in the upcoming armed conflict with Georgia. Because of the massive interference by Russian and Moscow-backed military forces in the course of the 1992–93 war in Abkhazia, a further analysis of the conflict is provided in the following chapter in the part dedicated to Russian-Georgian relations.

5
War and Diplomacy: Ethnopolitical Conflicts as a Factor in the Foreign Policies of South Caucasian Countries (1991–94)

During the period 1991–94, the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia, and to a somewhat lesser extent that of Azerbaijan, can be regarded as generally monothematic, centered on the issue of the evolving armed conflict.[1] The stage was set for an unavoidable Armenian–Azerbaijani–Turkish–Iranian–Russian chess match – enriched, from the mid-1990s onward, by the participation of the United States. Given this uneasy constellation of conflicting powers, the maintenance of state security was a difficult task for governments of both post-Soviet Azerbaijan and Armenia. From the very start of the 1990s, this task was made even more difficult by the efforts of Yerevan and Baku to maintain, or (re-) gain control over Nagorno-Karabakh: the conflict over that Armenian enclave which raged from the very first months of the existence of the independent state greatly deepened the geopolitical isolation of Armenia, contributing towards its nearly exclusive orientation towards Moscow, and causing the relatively early definition of camps of “friends” and “enemies” of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Geographic and political ties have caused Russia to play an increasingly significant role in Georgia’s ethnopolitical conflicts, while the roles of the other powers have remained quite limited throughout the years of Soviet collapse and post-Soviet transition.[2] None of the other countries – whether neighboring or remote – could compete with Russia with regard to the degree of influence over (post-) Soviet Georgia; likewise, no regional power had as many vital interests as Russia in strategically located Georgia, during the first half of the 1990s. The already

complicated relations between Tbilisi and Moscow, dating from the late Soviet period, had now become even more antagonistic, with the added complication of their very different approaches with respect to several important matters of regional security. This situation placed Russia in the position of being a country that clearly supported the separatists: the South Ossetians and, especially, the Abkhazians. The military and political engagement of Moscow in the *de jure* internal conflicts of Georgia had at times become so apparent that, instead of an internal Georgian conflict, one could far more properly speak of a conflict into which two sovereign states – Georgia and Russia – had been drawn. This catapulted the conflicts on the Russia–Georgia frontier into Tbilisi's key foreign policy calculations, determining the fundamentals of the Russo–Georgian relationship for years to come.

The geographic position of Georgia, viewed by its South Caucasian neighbors as a "window to the world," had at least one positive consequence at the beginning of the 1990s. Since Turkey was the only connection for Azerbaijan, and Russia was the only one for Armenia, the governments in Baku and in Yerevan placed great emphasis on maintaining partnership relations with its transit country: thus the latent remnants of an irredentist mood amongst the South Georgian Azerbaijanis and, especially, the Armenians, were effectively stifled by both Baku and Yerevan.[3]

The formation of the foreign policy goals and priorities of the newly established republics of the South Caucasus has been closely related to developments within the zones of ethnopolitical tension. The wars in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia dominated the formulation of the foreign policy activities of Yerevan, Baku, and Tbilisi from their very inception; in fact, until 1994, the wars absolutely dominated their foreign policies. Moreover, as this chapter will show, Russia, Turkey, and Iran – and their respective power interplays – considerably affected the dynamics of the ethnopolitical conflicts within the region.

Turkey

Relations with Azerbaijan

Elçibäy seized power in Azerbaijan at a time that coincided with the beginning of a new, hitherto unprecedented, activism within the field of Turkish foreign policy. For a period of more than 60 years after the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Turkish foreign policy followed, or tried to follow, the principle of neutrality: Ankara's main goal was the maintenance of the territorial status quo established in the

first half of the 1920s, which included its own surrendering of residual territorial claims from the Ottoman era.[4] The principle of neutrality, formulated by the founding father of the secular republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, would soon undergo a relatively significant correction under his successors: in the aftermath of World War II, the country joined NATO (1952)[5] – indeed, until recently, it was the only predominantly Muslim member state of that security organization.[6] In the course of the Cold War, Turkey played the role of an important advance base for NATO along the southwest borders of the U.S.S.R.: apart from Norway, it was the only member state of the North Atlantic alliance which shared an overland border with the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, it was not until the need arose to adopt a decisive position with respect to the matter of the allied operation against Iraq (1990–91), and the subsequent breakup of the Soviet empire, that Ankara was forced to engage in a more assertive foreign policy – one especially directed eastward.

The fact is that "having based its post-World War II foreign and security policies on the strategic importance for the West of its location vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, Turkey, at least initially, hardly welcomed the end of the Cold War. As the subject of the continued relevance of NATO in the post-Cold War world order was opened up for discussion, Turkey suddenly found itself in a 'security limbo.'"[7] However, after a certain degree of hesitation in the early 1990s, the government in Ankara began to view the formation of independent republics in the southern tier of the former U.S.S.R. – in the South Caucasus and Central Asia – as an historic opportunity to bolster Turkey's standing as a regional superpower. Ankara's strategists thus strove to occupy the ideological and power vacuums that were left when Russia departed from regions it had controlled for centuries. Turkey "was striving for a leading role in a region extending from the Adriatic Sea to China, including the Central Asian republics, the Caucasus, the region around the Black Sea and the Balkans. Finally, Turkey expected important economic benefits from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Turks received support from the former Soviet Union itself. Leaders like Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan dreamed of a unified parliament for a Great Turkey."[8]

Some Turkish politicians and intellectuals, dazzled by a vision of Turkey as a great power, put their hopes in the creation, within a few years, of a confederation of Turkic states under the aegis of Ankara, a sort of supranational entity affiliating Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan (similar ideas were by no means foreign to Elçibäy). Interestingly, another proponent of this (pan-) Turkic vision was Turkey's president at the time, Turgut Özal (1989–93), who soon

developed a warm relationship with his Azerbaijani counterpart.[9] On December 9, 1991, two weeks before the formal breakup of the Soviet Union, it was Turkey that became the very first country in the world to formally recognize the independence of Azerbaijan. Just under one year later, in a well-known speech, Özal said, "[O]ur nations are expecting a special form of cooperation between our states, since we have the same origin.... We are branches of the same great tree, and we should constitute one family.... The closest possible integration of our states is advantageous for our nations and for the region."[10] Not until some years later were the fundamental structural weaknesses in Özal's visions revealed, as confirmed by Ankara's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Relations with Armenia

Armenia underwent the experience of building itself into an independent state during years marked by the deepening conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian–Turkish relations thus crystallized under the shadow of events taking place in the mountains and valleys of Karabakh. The euphoric (re-) discovery of "Turkic brethren" in Turkey and Azerbaijan took place at the same time as the no less emotional revival of tragic images from the Ottoman past in Armenia, and this was directly related to the strengthening of the bonds between Turkey and Azerbaijan.[11]

At first, however, there existed an effort on both sides to maintain friendly relations: in December 1991 Turkey was among the first countries to recognize Armenian independence. In the spring of the following year, Turkey's then-ambassador to Moscow visited Yerevan. On the agenda for discussion were accords touching on a number of issues of a political and economic nature, including among other things the opening of the Turkish–Armenian frontier and trade in the border regions. The negotiations, however, were soon hampered by the demands which Ankara made as a precondition for the establishment of diplomatic ties with Yerevan. Besides a peaceful solution to the Karabakh conflict (in the favor of Baku, as Ankara insisted on Yerevan's acceptance of the premise of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity) – concerning which there will be discussion below – Ankara also demanded that Yerevan explicitly repudiate any claims over territory in eastern Turkey, and also repudiate its previous demands for Turkey's recognition of the Armenian genocide under the Ottoman Empire. Armenian territorial aspirations (both those of the public within Armenia, and those of the equally powerful Armenian diaspora) concerning certain areas of eastern Anatolia which were regarded in the South Caucasian country as a part

of so-called Western Armenia (seen in the republic and in communities abroad as the homeland of many Armenians) were beginning to cause significant anxieties on the part of the Turks.[12] Indeed it is not without interest that the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, one of the most influential political parties inside Armenia, still regards the "returning" of territory in eastern Anatolia as one of the priority goals of its activities; while the Armenian diaspora around the world is apt to strongly sympathize with this aspiration. Several post-Soviet Armenian parliamentary deputies have also spoken out against the recognition of the existing Turkish–Armenian borders as defined by the Turkish–Soviet Treaties of Kars (Turkish–Armenian and Turkish–Russian, 1921).[13]

In light of these territorial claims by Yerevan – although they have never been articulated officially – Ankara has been annoyed by occasional reports that Armenians sympathizing with the ethnoseparatist activities of the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya karkeren Kurdistan*, PKK),[14] have provided Kurdish commandos with bases for their armed operations against Turkish targets; indeed, according to some other sources, PKK training camps have even been established on Armenian territory.[15] These were all further reasons why Ankara was interested at first in keeping the Turkish–Armenian border area under strict control, while (in combination with the hermetically sealed borders) this state of affairs primarily served – and still serves – the interests of Baku, which is trying to weaken and isolate Armenia as much as possible.

Yerevan, which had pushed for the commencement of talks without any preconditions, rejected the demands of the Turkish side – so, in the end, Turkey and Armenia did not establish diplomatic relations. The war in Karabakh (which had been intensifying since the middle of 1992), the deepening solidarity between Azerbaijan and Turkey, together with the increasingly anti-Armenian stance of the Turkish public (and vice versa), all contributed in the first half of the 1990s, in spite of certain less than emphatic bilateral efforts to stabilize mutual relations, towards keeping Turkish–Armenian relations at the freezing point.

Turkey and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh

The main area in which Elçibäy counted on the support of Turkey, the country that he saw as the potential savior of Azerbaijan, was the conflict with Armenia: oil was the only commodity that Azerbaijan could offer in return for the hoped-for Turkish support. The shared interests of the two states, however, had a broader background: Ankara and Baku were both interested in limiting as far as possible Russia's influence in the South Caucasus; and, for the future, in Central Asia as well. Precisely

because of the growing military and political cooperation between Russia and Armenia, the initial attempts by Turgut Özal to "frighten" the Armenians by issuing unambiguous warnings or by mustering an unexpected concentration of Turkish troops near the Armenian border, failed to achieve their purpose. In fact, the result of Özal's maneuverings was that the direct opposite transpired. The tension reached a climax when, in 1992, the Russian marshal, Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, commander of the CIS Joint Armed Forces, explicitly threatened Ankara, saying that any intervention by Turkey in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict would start the third world war.[16] Interestingly, as early as May 1992, the chief of the Turkish general staff, General Doğan Güreş, admitted that he was ready to send as many soldiers to Karabakh as the Azerbaijani government might demand.[17] Moreover as the Turkish public very strongly supported their "Azerbaijani brothers," Turkey did not back down from its activism in the Nagorno-Karabakh affair. Any lessening of support for Baku would be interpreted in Turkey as losing face, not only in Azerbaijan, but also in the countries of Central Asia: this was to a significant extent a matter of national prestige. Still, in spite of all of these pressures, Ankara followed a mostly cautious approach towards the Karabakh dispute: throughout the period of the conflict, Ankara's support of Baku tended to remain at the diplomatic level.[18]

This apparent unwillingness, or inability, by Turkey to visibly influence the events surrounding Karabakh to the advantage of Azerbaijan, further strengthened the rise of the pragmatic Süleyman Demirel to the Turkish presidency after the death of the "idealist" Turgut Özal in May 1993. At that time, the (relatively few) Turkish military instructors were gradually withdrawn from the Karabakh battleground. A certain period of "cooling down" in Azerbaijan had already begun under Özal's administration: this was occasioned, amongst other things, by the following factors. After the March 1992 decision of the Turkish government to join Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenia, Ankara was subjected to increasing pressure from the United States and European countries to consent to the transporting of thousands of tons of humanitarian aid to Armenia across Turkish territory (a considerable part of this aid consisted of supplies of raw materials). In the opinion of many Azerbaijanis, this subsequent concession by Turkey's leadership influenced the successful advance of the Armenian army, which in the following months managed to occupy extensive territory in Nagorno-Karabakh and its environs.[19]

Ankara's efforts to distance itself somewhat from the declared blockade of Armenia had already become apparent, however, although this distancing had been based on rather different motives. The Armenian

government, led by President Levon Ter-Petrossian, had expressed its consent for the Turkish proposal, assuming (supposedly) the withdrawal of the Armenian demand for recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence; in return, Ankara decided to supply Armenia with 100,000 tons of grain, about one tenth of Turkey's annual consumption at the time, and this fundamentally weakened the effectiveness of the Azerbaijani blockade.[20] In November 1992, when Turkey began delivering the grain, Yerevan and Ankara agreed on the supply of 300 million kilowatts of electricity to Armenia. This plan would cover approximately 20 per cent of Armenia's annual electricity consumption and would also counteract the oil blockade imposed by Baku. The decision, supposedly made by the Turkish government for the good of Azerbaijan but without any consultation with Baku, caused a wave of protests in Azerbaijani cities. Because of the mostly negative reaction of Turkish public opinion, and because of Baku's uncompromising position, in November 1992 Özal's government canceled the electricity deal before it ever took effect. Beginning in 1993, in spite of vocal international protest, Turkey closed the Armenian–Turkish border – even for humanitarian aid to Armenia – seeking among other things to get a solid share of the "contract of the century" that was then being drafted with regard to drilling for Azerbaijani oil. In the following year, Ankara also closed its airspace to flights to or from Armenia.[21]

Another event which served to deepen the growing disillusionment of the Azerbaijanis regarding Turkey's ability or willingness to support their country, occurred in 1993, when the Armenians managed to occupy the town of Kelbajar, located to the northwest of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Because Baku had not at all reckoned on the loss of Kelbajar, the government was not sufficiently prepared to quickly secure the necessary quantity of vehicles for the evacuation of the inhabitants of Kelbajar. Baku, therefore, requested that Ankara quickly provide helicopters. President Süleyman Demirel, however, refused this request on the grounds that such an intervention would contribute toward further involving Turkey directly in the Azerbaijani–Armenian conflict, and would thus cause a dangerous confrontation with Russia.[22]

Iran

After the breakup of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, Iran, following an absence of more than 160 years from the politics of the region, returned to play an important role in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan was to be decisive for the success or failure of Iran's efforts to regain its former influence in the South Caucasus – and to a greater extent than is generally assumed

when evaluating the problems of extracting and transporting Caspian raw materials. Given the deepening of the Russian–Iranian strategic partnership during the 1990s, the factor of Russia also played a significant role in the Iranian strategic comprehension of the South Caucasus (and of Central Asia): "Because Russia is a primary partner for Iran, and because it is an important source of weapons and nuclear reactor technology, the relationship with Russia is quite important and often takes priority over other goals in the region."[23] One can say that the problem of Azerbaijani–Iranian relations (besides Russian–Iranian relations) predetermined to a decisive extent the formation of the foreign policy agenda of the Islamic Republic in the South Caucasus.

Relations with Azerbaijan

The disintegration of the U.S.S.R. in the early 1990s harbored a number of potential dangers which had the potential of threatening the territorial integrity of Iran. Nonetheless, during the period immediately following the emergence of independent Azerbaijan, nothing seemed to indicate that this new "Azerbaijani threat" would now prove to be a hot topic. Tehran recognized the independence of Azerbaijan, although after some hesitation, and not until Moscow had done the same. At the time, the two nations were bound by a feeling of Islamic (Shiite) solidarity, especially in the case of the Azerbaijani people who, after 70 years of Soviet domination, were overcome by a desire to return to their spiritual roots. The Azerbaijanis saw in Iran, a country inhabited by millions of Azerbaijanis, if perhaps not a close ally, then at least a pro-Azerbaijani oriented mediator in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. There was a great increase in the activities of Iranian religious missionaries in Azerbaijan, while trade between the two states underwent a period of unprecedented growth. Visas were not required for travel between Iran and Azerbaijan. The members of thousands of families geographically divided by the Araxes River were able to see each other for the first time since 1946, when the border between Iran and the Soviet Union had been hermetically sealed.

Nonetheless, the long-term declared populist "task" of Elçibäy's government was, from the beginning, the breakup of multinational Iran, where ethnic Azerbaijanis made up around a quarter of the population, mostly concentrated in the country's northwest and in the large cities.[24] Elçibäy, a great admirer of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and a proponent of the idea of secular statehood, scorned the Iranian theocracy, regarding Iran as a state whose "days are numbered." In none too diplomatic fashion, he condemned the discriminatory violation of the rights

of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran and publicly declared "the unification of Azerbaijan to be a question of five years at the most."[25]

Thus, the Iranians came to perceive the emergence of an independent republic in northern Azerbaijan as a possibly serious security risk. There were fears in Tehran that this potentially oil-rich country to the north of its Azerbaijani provinces could serve as an economic magnet for Iran's Azerbaijani citizens, whose own irredentist or separatist aspirations might thereby be strengthened. Iran's rather reserved approach towards its northern neighbor changed markedly during Elçibäy's rule, and this change was then further fueled by growing animosity toward Iran's traditional regional rival, Turkey, as well as by the establishment of close relations between Ankara and Baku, by the solidifying of the Russian–Iranian strategic partnership in the 1990s, and by the actions of the United States in the region – also by various other factors, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Following the overthrow of the Elçibäy regime in June 1993, and in the wake of the installation of the government of President Heydär Äliyev, something gradually began to appear in the relations between the two countries which some analysts describe as *détente*. Soon after his ascent to power, Äliyev began exerting enormous effort to achieve a normalization of relations with Azerbaijan's southern neighbor; this, however, presupposed a certain distancing from Ankara and from Washington. The new Azerbaijani president visited Iran in person several times to announce this change in his country's foreign policy priorities and to emphasize that great importance was now placed upon the maintenance of partnership relations with Azerbaijan's southern neighbor. The Azerbaijani president's efforts to improve Azerbaijani–Iranian relations were not, however, sufficient to have a major impact on the strategy that Iran had already chosen with regard to the Azerbaijani Republic: throughout the 1990s, relations between the neighboring countries developed in the spirit of Caspian "oil diplomacy," with Baku and Tehran standing on opposite sides of an imaginary front line.

Relations with Armenia

The mutual relations between Tehran and Yerevan during the post-Soviet era have been conditioned in many ways by their respective relationships with their mutual "troublesome" neighbor – Azerbaijan. The conceptual elements of Iranian–Armenian relations are derived from the policy of Tehran towards Baku, and – in the broader context of regional relations – towards Moscow, and vice versa.

Already in February 1992, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs had visited Tehran for the first time in the post-Soviet history of that region. The topics of discussion for his meeting with official Iranian representatives were the Karabakh conflict, the supply of natural gas to Armenia, and economic and technological cooperation, along with certain other subjects.[26] Initially, Armenian–Iranian relations were limited to the economic sphere. After Elçibäy came to power in Azerbaijan, however, Armenian–Iranian relations warmed considerably. The Armenian economy was almost completely dependent upon imports of goods from Iran, while, according to some sources, Iran served as a transit route for the supply of weapons and ammunition from Russia to Armenia.[27]

The economic blockade imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the chaos in Georgia – which, among other things, threatened the supply of strategic energy resources from Russia – effectively made Iran the only access route for sea-borne trade as far as Armenia was concerned, given Armenia's interior, non-coastal geography. Thus, for war-torn Armenia in the early 1990s, the border with Iran became a "path of life"[28] – and it is in this context that one must understand the precipitous growth of Armenia's trade with Iran during this period. Food, oil, and household goods imported from northern Iran enabled the Armenians to survive under the dramatic conditions of the winter of 1992 and 1993; Iran thus became Armenia's chief trading partner.[29] As Kaweh Sadegh-Zadeh summarizes:

> [T]he assistance to Armenia advanced Iran's cooperation with Russia, with which Iran shared common interests in the Caucasus by establishing what was later labeled as the Russia–Armenia–Iran axis. Armenia on the other hand, landlocked between Turkey, Azerbaijan and an unstable Georgia, needed Iran in order to disenclave itself, circumvent sanctions imposed by Turkey and win the war with Azerbaijan.[30]

Iran and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh

According to Svante Cornell, the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was of special importance to Iran for several reasons. Most importantly, perhaps, the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh (especially so in 1993) was taking place in the direct vicinity of the Iranian border: thus the territory of Iran itself was frequently under threat. Still, irrespective of the fact that it was a conflict between two states neighboring Iran, the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict played – and still plays – a significant

role in the context of the overall constellation of power in the region where Iran is one of the leading players.[31]

This circumstance led Iran to offer its services to both the warring states in hope of finding a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh; Iran's initiatives as a mediator were especially prominent in the period of 1991–92. Iran did not make active efforts in this regard, however, until Armenian troops had already reached the Azerbaijani–Iranian border at the Araxes River, and when their advance further to the east threatened to lead to the collapse of the Azerbaijani state.[32] Such a development could have had catastrophic consequences for regional security. This fact forced Tehran, together with Ankara, to appeal to the UN Security Council concerning the necessity of halting Armenian aggression: Iran gave the firm impression that it was unwilling to accept a major change to the balance of power in the South Caucasus.[33] This was most clearly manifested in the autumn of 1993, when Nakhichevan was subjected to the threat of an Armenian invasion: it was the uncompromising stance taken by Tehran (and Ankara) that finally eliminated the determination of the Armenians to annex that Azerbaijani exclave.[34]

Leaving aside situations when it was absolutely necessary to take action preventing Armenia from seriously calling into question the security architecture of the South Caucasus, Tehran otherwise took advantage of the Karabakh conflict in order to exert pressure on Baku. Iran, after all, was supplying raw materials and goods to Armenia, which was being subjected to a blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey. As mentioned above, the transport routes across the territory of war-torn Georgia were not always reliable: Russian deliveries often failed to arrive in Armenia, while the branch of the gas pipeline leading from Georgia to Armenia was the constant target of attacks, allegedly by Georgian Azerbaijanis. Some claims have been made that Iran, while following Russia in avoiding any direct military participation, served as a transit territory for the supply of weapons to Armenia.[35] A somewhat paradoxical aspect of the South Caucasian policy of Tehran, indicative at the same time of the regime's pragmatic character, was its *de facto* support of Christian Armenia in a war against (formally) Shiite Azerbaijan.[36]

The formulation of Tehran's policy towards Azerbaijan took shape following Elçibäy's controversial comments about the future of southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan, although certain concerns regarding developments to the north of the Araxes River, as has been indicated, had already existed in Iran in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[37] During the period of 1992–93, the Iranians gradually came to realize that a real threat to the

territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic existed in the area north of the Araxes River, whether in the short or the long term. Several events that took place during the Armenian–Azerbaijani war demonstrated that Tehran was aware that, in the case of a serious threat to the security situation of the South Caucasus, the territorial integrity of Iran itself could also be threatened.

Characteristic in this regard is an event of October 1993, when Armenian forces advanced to the Azerbaijani–Iranian border, and tens of thousands of Azerbaijani refugees were able, briefly, to enter Iranian territory. Many thousands of Azerbaijanis swam across the Araxes River, and were cordially welcomed by Iranian Azerbaijanis. Tehran reacted promptly: it set up refugee camps – but *not* on its own territory (as would have been most appropriate from the standpoint of safety), but rather on the territory of Azerbaijan to the north of the Araxes River, and thus in the direct vicinity of the approaching front line of the war.[38] In this connection, Cornell argues that Iran viewed the presence of thousands of northern Azerbaijanis *on its territory* as constituting a potential threat. Thanks to the arrival of this mass of refugees, the Azerbaijani community living in Iran might well have become aware of the kind of suffering to which the northern Azerbaijanis had been subjected during the Armenian invasion: in which case they might then have started exerting uncomfortable pressure on the Iranian government itself to intervene on behalf of Azerbaijan. One might have also expected that, out of solidarity with the northern Azerbaijanis, the Iranian Azerbaijanis would have mobilized volunteer forces to actively participate in fighting against the Armenians: after all, following the bloody Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88, tens of thousands of experienced soldiers of Azerbaijani origin were living in Iran. Such a shared experience would naturally also be reflected in a growing ethnic identification of Iranian Azerbaijanis with "Russian" Azerbaijanis – which would have been unthinkable for Tehran.

The Karabakh war still had some influence on Iranian public opinion. At the start of the 1990s some voices in Iran were proclaiming the need for the Islamic Republic to intervene on the side of their "Shiite brothers." The justification was not based solely on the factor of a shared religion: by origin, the Azerbaijanis were basically regarded as Iranians – whether with respect to their ethnic "Aryan" origin, or due to their common past within the Persian state. Many Iranians, and to an extent some Iranian Azerbaijanis as well, were even convinced that the Caucasian Azerbaijanis could be regarded as citizens of Iran, since all of Azerbaijan historically belonged to Iran. In the early 1990s, the Iranian newspaper *Abrar* even published the results of a campaign during which "tens of thousands"

of Iranian Azerbaijanis signed a petition demanding the immediate "return" to Iran of "seventeen cities of the Caucasus," including the capitals of independent Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia: this reflected the attitudes of a certain – although rather small – revisionist-minded part of the Iranian public, governed by a vision of ancient Iranian regional hegemony.[39] Indeed several Iranian newspapers – obviously under the influence of these wildly optimistic expectations – urged the government in Tehran to "punish Armenia."[40] Although "punishing" Armenia was definitely not on the agenda in Tehran, the Iranians do appear to have tried to limit Armenian expansionism in the region. In fact, too great a success by the Armenians on the Karabakh battlefield would have posed a threat to the domestic political stability of Iran itself, and might also potentially have caused a confrontation with Turkey; a combination of those factors would have made the northwestern border of the Islamic Republic extremely vulnerable.

Russia

As Dov Lynch points out, in terms of Russian strategic thinking,

> the North and South Caucasus are integral parts of the same security system. Developments, whether positive or negative, in one area are seen to impact automatically on the other.[41]

The parts of the North Caucasus located within the borders of the Russian Federation comprise ethnic autonomous regions (Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Adyghea) which extend from the Caspian Sea nearly to the Black Sea. There were calls for independence during the 1990s amongst certain North Caucasian ethnic groups within this territory; whilst Chechnya very nearly achieved full independence. Moreover,

> the indigenous population [of the North Caucasus] is closely linked, both culturally and ethnically, to their brethren in the south of the Greater Caucasus and the predominantly Russian-populated plains. The unity of the [Russian] Federation is therefore at stake.[42]

Separatist agitations on the part of the North Caucasians may thus either be directly stimulated from the south of the Greater Caucasus Range, or else they may be stimulated (in the future) by the example posed by the South Caucasian republics. Seen from this perspective,

the securing of Russian military and political dominance in the South Caucasus may serve as a stabilizing element for events within the North Caucasus. The North Caucasus, together with Tatarstan, has traditionally been among the Russian regions with the most pronounced tendency towards secession; but unlike Tatarstan, the North Caucasus is not in the middle of Russia, but in a strategically important border area. As has previously been said, the Caucasus are located in a strategic position between the Middle East and Russia – Europe and Asia – and is the key to the Caspian Sea from the west. Furthermore, "the strengthening US presence in the South Caucasus is seen to mean weakening Russian control over the North Caucasus."[43] Any perceivable loss of Russian influence across the North Caucasus could potentially cause a domino effect throughout the territory of the multiethnic Russian Federation. In light of Moscow's growing fears of America's activity in Russia's "soft underbelly" in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, it was necessary for Russia to do everything possible to secure firm control over the South Caucasian area. This crucial task was already motivating Russian foreign policy towards Baku and Tbilisi during the first years after the end of the Soviet Union.

Relations with Azerbaijan

Äbülfäz Elçibäy consistently rejected the entry of Azerbaijan into the CIS, the stationing of Russian military bases on Azerbaijani territory, or the guarding of the Azerbaijani–Iranian or Azerbaijani–Turkish borders in concert with the Russians. A no less serious problem was that Elçibäy's government absolutely excluded Russian (and Iranian) firms from any share in the hectically organized Azerbaijani international oil consortium, from which Baku had anticipated large financial profits and, consequently, greater political weight around the world. For Moscow, Elçibäy's (and later Äliyev's) intentions to prepare the ground for a strong Western – especially U.S. – presence in this region which was so rich in oil and natural gas, paralleled with a more significant proposed role for Turkey in the South Caucasus and was unacceptable Such a development would greatly reduce Russia's predominant standing in this strategically vital area of the Caspian, in particular, and of post-Soviet territory in general.

Significantly, during the course of 1992, the importance of the South Caucasus and Central Asia region within Moscow's overall foreign policy agenda was rather marginal. It is widely believed that this due to the general lack of interest in current developments to the south of Russia's borders on the part of Andrey Kozyrev, the Russian foreign

minister at the time. The leitmotif of the "early" Yeltsin government, at least until the middle or the end of 1992, was that of the military and political *withdrawal* of a Russian presence from its former provinces, a definitive break with its imperial past, and a "return to the family of civilized nations."[44] Moscow's gradually evolving relationship with the West was given clear priority over post-Soviet affairs, as the Russian–American relationship was then witnessing its euphoric stage, in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As far as its foreign policy was concerned, Kozyrev's administration was taking every possible effort to distance itself from what was then perceived as an imperial Soviet legacy.

Yet during the period 1993–94, following a general weakening of Yeltsin's liberal entourage and the consequent strengthening of (neo) conservative and revanchist elements in the country's internal politics – fueled by increasing popular disaffection with the ongoing socioeconomic collapse, and a marked cooling of Moscow's relationship with the West – Russian strategists dramatically reversed their attitude toward the former Soviet colonies, formulating the principles of a new foreign policy strategy in relation to the countries of the "near abroad." This new concept assumed a more proactive participation by Russia within the territories of the successor republics to the Soviet Union: predominance within those territories was, among other things, supposed to secure for the Eurasian power the renewal of its superpower status.[45] In May 1992, in the context of these renewed Russian aspirations for regional hegemony, Moscow pushed for the signing of the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty: among the original signatories were the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Armenia. Among other things, the parties to the treaty agreed to not enter into any military pacts with other countries, to join in the common defense of the "external borders of the CIS," and to prospectively permit the establishment of military bases of the Russian Federation on their territory.[46]

Moscow's strategy, however, has been blocked by the continuing unwillingness of the government in Baku to accept Russia's demands for Azerbaijan to join the CIS and to ratify the Tashkent accords. In the minds of Moscow strategists, concern is therefore growing with regard to the possible consequences of Elçibäy's policy of engaging the West in Azerbaijan. In the end, the Elçibäy regime has come to be regarded in Moscow as a sort of "Trojan horse" within post-Soviet territory: a potentially disruptive regime which is actively striving for the establishment of a strategic partnership with Turkey – a NATO member state, Russia's most important rival in the South Caucasus, and a state which

has, moreover, attempted to involve influential Western countries in events within this oil and gas-rich region. The war in Nagorno-Karabakh was, therefore, perceived by Russia as presenting an opportunity to exert pressure on Baku, which was – in the minds of Russian strategists – finally expected to accede to Russia's demands; this is also root cause for the increasing level of Russian support for the Armenian military on the Karabakh battlefield and beyond.[47]

In London, the ceremonial signing of the "contract of the century" was supposed to take place in June 1993: this was the notional description of a deal between Baku and a number of mostly Western oil drilling companies with respect to the exploitation of the rich Azerbaijani oil deposits. Indeed, at that time, it was widely assumed that Azerbaijan would soon become the "Kuwait of the Caucasus." Regardless of continuing defeats on the Karabakh front, Elçibäy's government showed no signs of flexibility, and was still unwilling to accept even the mildest of Russian demands. The end result of the uncompromising line taken by Baku, as well as of the inability of the regime to master the deteriorating military and socioeconomic situations, was by July 1993 the loss of not only nearly all of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and of several areas of Azerbaijan itself, but also a drastic worsening of relations with two powerful neighbors – Iran and, especially, Russia.

Relations with Armenia

Few people in Armenia in the early 1990s doubted that their small, mountainous country, with its meager population, would require a powerful protector in order to guarantee its territorial integrity, or even to defend the very existence of its people and its state – particularly so in view of the increasingly clear threats both from the East and the West. One could make the axiomatic assertion that Armenia was predestined to adopt an orientation towards Russia, as this was the only country able and willing to provide Armenia with these security guarantees, given the geopolitical stalemate in which Armenia found itself.

Initially, however, it was far from clear whether, or how actively, the alliance between Armenia and Russia would be promoted after the breakup of the Soviet Union. From 1990, when Ayaz Mütällibov (a post-Communist with strong ties to the Kremlin) came to power in Azerbaijan, Moscow's support for Armenian efforts in Karabakh became markedly more equivocal in nature. As has already been noted, in the spring of 1991 Soviet army units actively collaborated with elite units of the Azerbaijani interior ministry in the so-called operation Koltso (Russian for "ring"), in areas to the north of Nagorno-Karabakh: the result

of this military operation was the expulsion of thousands of Armenian civilians from their homes, a process accompanied by widespread violence and pillaging. The prevailing Azerbaijani opinion was that as long as the (pro-Moscow) Communists remained in power in Baku, such "signs of loyalty" on the part of Moscow would be consistently repeated as the need arose. Once certain conditions had been satisfied – especially that of Azerbaijan's granting of approval to Moscow for the exploitation of its oil wealth, along with the cementing of close military and political cooperation between Baku and Moscow – it was hoped in Baku that Moscow would be even more favorably disposed toward Azerbaijan, and this stance would undoubtedly come to influence the Russian attitude toward the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Moreover, Armenia's ongoing security concerns regarding Turkey (and Azerbaijan) made it Russia's ally with only very limited room for maneuver. As it turned out, however, Baku and Moscow never became that close: this was mainly due to the domestic failures of Mütällibov's rule, and to the policies of Äbülfäz Elçibäy and, subsequently, of Heydär Äliyev as well. Both Elçibäy and Äliyev were notably opposed to Russia's strategic position within the new, post-Soviet security environment prevailing in the South Caucasus.[48]

Russia and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh

After the breakup of the U.S.S.R., Russia inherited an effective tool for applying pressure on both Azerbaijan and Armenia: the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Of pivotal importance in the progress of this war was the close military and economic union of Yerevan – which supported the military campaign of the Karabakh Armenians – with its strategic ally in the region, Moscow. This factor, coupled with the unwillingness of the nationalist Baku government to yield to Russia's demands, proved to be decisive for the course and outcome of the war. In retrospect, it turned out that the 1991 joint operation in Azerbaijan's Shaumyan district was to be the only instance of Russian–Azerbaijani military cooperation in Karabakh or its environs.

There is no uniformly held opinion as to whether the Kremlin based its policy towards Armenia and Azerbaijan, before the middle of 1992 (some analysts would say early 1993), on any overall guiding concept. The established fact that Moscow did use the Karabakh conflict as an effective tool to pressure Baku will be analyzed later. Many analysts believe that Moscow's approach towards Baku and Yerevan, during the earliest period of their independence, was characterized, rather, by chaos and lack of balance. In this connection, Pavel Baev suggests that one should differentiate between the approach of senior Russian

generals toward the conflict in Karabakh, and their approach toward that in Georgia; he asserts that "the key guidelines were to stay away from the Nagorno-Karabakh quagmire and to concentrate on consolidating the military presence in Georgia."[49] The overriding strategic concern on the part of the Russians was supposed to be that of gaining control over Georgia's deepwater ports, and over the South Caucasian Black Sea region.

The occasional interventions of Russian army units and soldiers in events on the Karabakh front that did occur – as, for example, the aforementioned deployment of the 366th regiment of the Fourth Soviet (Russian) Army at the start of 1992[50] in the Armenian campaign in Nagorno-Karabakh – could be explained by reference to an overall decentralization in the process of Russian policymaking in the early 1990s, when the defense ministry was acting as an independent player, often ignoring the position of the foreign ministry. According to this interpretation, Russian military commanders intervened capriciously in local conflicts, basing their interventions on their own sympathies or ideas, without necessarily having to take into consideration the official position of Moscow; similarly, Russian soldiers and pilots (along with their colleagues from Belarus, Ukraine, etc.), who were captured by the Azerbaijani side during the conflict, were dismissed by Russia as *mercenaries*, who had no connection with the official policy of the Russian state. Even the Russian supply of weapons to both parties in the conflict was unbalanced, being dependent upon the benevolence and/or financial cravings of individual Russian commanders in the field.[51] The fact that international observers in the Karabakh conflict noted many more cases of support for the Armenians by local Russian units, can be explained by reference to the fact that there was a far higher proportion of highly placed ethnic *Armenians*, than of Azerbaijanis, within the Soviet (Russian) armies.[52] Last, but not least, Russian officers tended to be more sympathetic toward the Armenians, whom they considered to be culturally closer to themselves than the (Muslim) Azerbaijanis.[53]

Already, however, during the earliest months of the war between these new South Caucasian republics, there occurred a series of peculiar coincidences which can call into question the general thesis of the *lack* of orchestrated policy with regard to Russia's regional activism during the early 1990s. In May 1992,

> after Azerbaijan refused to enter into the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty and suspended its activities in the CIS, the Armenians decided

within a few days to go on the offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh, the result of which was the occupation of Shusha and the opening of the so-called Lachin Corridor leading to Armenia.[54]

Then, in February 1993, Sürät Hüseynov as described in the previous chapter ordered the retreat of his units from the battlefield in northern Karabakh – thereby precipitating the collapse of the Azerbaijani defense in the area of Mardakert and Kelbajar; this happened a few days after Elçibäy's government again refused to permit his country to join the CIS, or to deploy Russian peacemaking troops in Nagorno-Karabakh.[55] The Elçibäy regime accused Hüseynov of treason, claiming that he had acted on Moscow's order.

In the meantime, Hüseynov's troops, who had set out in June of that same year on a campaign to Baku for the purpose of overthrowing Elçibäy and thereby preventing the signing of the "contract of the century," were being generously supplied with arms and ammunition by the 104th division of the Russian Army, which had just pulled out of Gyanja. It was no secret that Hüseynov was under the protection of General Shcherbak, commander of the 104th division.[56] As a result of a coup d'état, the anti-Russian Elçibäy was overthrown, and the ground was prepared for the return to power of Heydär Äliyev, a former Communist and KGB general who was widely believed to be a pro-Russian cadre. In fact, according to a widely shared belief, the coup d'état of 1993 was organized by the Russian intelligence services.[57]

There also exist numerous testimonies that Karabakh and Armenian divisions were using Russian fuel, while it is also known that the commander of the Seventh Russian Army, deployed in Armenia, was also the chief of staff of the Karabakh Army.[58] In the summer of 1993, Azerbaijani colonel, Äliakram Gumbatov, who had close ties with Hüseynov, proclaimed a (separatist) Talysh–Mughan Republic in the southeast of the country, in the Lenkoran region – which was inhabited mainly by the *Iranian*-speaking Talysh ethnic group.[59]

The regime change in Baku might, under certain circumstances, have precipitated a noticeable shift in Russian policy towards Armenia and Azerbaijan. After taking power, Heydär Äliyev repeatedly emphasized that the republic's recovery demanded the deepening of mutual ties with the republics of the former U.S.S.R. and, above all, with Russia. He took a number of important steps with respect to foreign policy which were understood at the time as being part of a wholesale 180-degree about-face in terms of Baku's foreign policy: reorientating it away from Ankara and towards Moscow. Nonetheless, as Svante Cornell points out,

this was not an instantaneous process, so it was necessary to accelerate Äliyev's efforts somewhat:

> However, Aliyev had not yet committed Azerbaijan to the CIS [in the summer of 1993]. Just as the Armenians were about to seize Jabrail on 20 August, a Russian deputy minister of foreign affairs flew to Baku with the simple aim of "ascertaining Azerbaijan's position regarding the CIS." The Armenian offensive continued unabated, and on 5 September Aliyev flew to Moscow, and promised Azerbaijan's application to CIS membership. He even spoke of Russian military bases in Azerbaijan, financed by the Azerbaijani government.[60]

Azerbaijan finally joined the CIS in September 1993, and signed the Tashkent accords that very same month.[61] Äliyev cancelled Elçibäy's "contract of the century," and postponed its signing indefinitely. He stated that he was not opposed to the stationing of Russian military bases on Azerbaijani territory in principle, but he demanded in return for this reciprocal support from Moscow the territorial consolidation of his country – that is, in the matter of the retaking of Nagorno-Karabakh. In one of his first presidential interviews, Äliyev unequivocally stated his strategic approach:

> We understand that Russia has its interests, but we also have our own interests. The participation of Azerbaijan in the CIS depends on the prospects of regulating the conflict with Armenia.... As long as Armenia's aggression continues and the demands of Azerbaijan are not given a hearing, what would we need such a confederation for?... The key to resolving the Karabakh conflict is in Russia, which is capable of resolving the conflict.[62]

During this time, Moscow did not refrain from making conciliatory gestures towards Baku: it supported three UN Security Council resolutions (July 29, 1993, October 14, 1993, and November 12, 1993) which condemned the Armenian offensives and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from all occupied territory. In early 1994 General Pavel Grachev, the Russian defense minister, aided the effort to placate the Azerbaijani president with his statement that Äliyev had already signed the Tashkent Treaty, which was then supposed to become a new platform for further negotiations.[63] As a friendly gesture, Moscow

closed the Russian office of the separatist movement Sadval, which was demanding, amongst other things, the separation of the northern areas of Azerbaijan, which were inhabited by Lezgis. Soon, the separatist agitations in Lenkoran subsided. Eventually, "[i]n November, Kozyrev threatened the Karabakh Armenians with retaliation if they did not stop their activities; Russia also sent 200 military 'advisers' to aid the Azerbaijani army," which received helicopters and tanks and soon attempted a counteroffensive.[64]

Eventually, on May 12, 1994, a ceasefire was signed in Bishkek between Yerevan and Baku and mediated by Moscow. The signatories to the three-month ceasefire were the defense ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia, with Pavel Grachev present as a mediator. On July 27 came the signing of a framework peace agreement between the warring parties. The possibility cannot be discounted that the Azerbaijani president in fact consented to the stationing of Russian troops (most likely under the mandate of the CIS) within the territory of Karabakh during internal discussions, albeit that this would necessarily have been preceded by the complete withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied Azerbaijani areas outside Nagorno-Karabakh, and an agreement on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh itself; however, no document regarding this has (yet) been made public, and it is hard to say whether one ever existed. The Armenian side in the negotiations (Yerevan and Stepanakert) insisted, however, that it was not prepared to countenance the withdrawal of its troops from the occupied territories before an agreement was made on the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The final disagreement between Yerevan and Baku gave the Azerbaijani side a strategically important opportunity. Using this procedural hiatus as justification, Baku delayed its consent to the demand for the stationing of Russian military bases on its territory.[65] While Moscow was preoccupied with reconciling the parties to the conflict, Baku intensified its efforts to realize the "contract of the century."

Russian relations with Georgia

The history of post-Communist Georgia, torn as it was by civil wars, has been closely connected with the fate of Russia. The foreign policy agenda of the newly created Georgian state has largely evolved as a function of its domestic policy agenda which, ever since the country gained independence, has been dominated by ethnopolitical conflicts on its northern periphery. Curiously, Moscow's role in that connection has, during certain periods, been more partisan than one would expect from

a neutral country. The question of the maintenance or renewal of the territorial integrity of Georgia has, thus, never been purely a matter for the domestic politics of the Tbilisi government: it has inevitably been related to the issue of the country's relationship with Moscow.

Previous passages herein have shown that developments in Georgia during the late Soviet era took place within an atmosphere of constant confrontation between Tbilisi and Moscow: while it was during Zviad Gamsakhurdia's brief but destructive rule that this condition of confrontation acquired its present conceptual outlines. In the area of foreign policy, Gamsakhurdia – like his Azerbaijani counterpart – rigorously rejected the proposed entry of his country into the CIS and, thus, also rejected the signing of the envisioned Tashkent accords. At the same time, he also pushed for the closing of Soviet (Russian) military bases on Georgian soil. Gamsakhurdia regarded the presence of Soviet military bases within his country as a result of the occupation of Georgia in 1921 and, thus, as totally illegitimate. A similar view was held by Georgia's Supreme Council, which, in September 1991, went so far as to refer to Soviet military units in Georgian territory as "occupation" forces.[66]

According to some sources, Russia intervened directly in the very first important internal political event in the country's post-Soviet history – the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia, and Eduard Shevardnadze's ascent to power. Since Georgia's geographic position was regarded as of key importance to the Russians, "in December 1991 and January 1992, the Russian military decided to support Gamsakhurdia's enemies, because it had obviously lost patience with the increasingly irrational activities of the Georgian president."[67] This occurred just as the civil war erupted in Georgia: fighting raged in the streets of Tbilisi, with the use of tanks and heavy weapons that had been supplied to the paramilitary formations of three key opposition representatives – the warlords Jaba Ioseliani, Tengiz Sigua, and Tengiz Kitovani – by commanders of the Soviet (Russian) military bases within Georgia, which were, of course, under the direct control of Moscow.[68] At the end of 1992 the deputy commander of the Transcaucasian Military District, Lieutenant-General Sufyan Beppayev, admitted that during the fighting his formations had provided Kitovani's opposition troops with reinforcements consisting of dozens of soldiers, so as to enable Kitovani to occupy the Tbilisi television tower.[69]

Gamsakhurdia fled, and Shevardnadze returned to the presidential palace in Tbilisi in March 1992. At sixty-four years of age, the master of Georgian and Soviet politics, Shevardnadze – like his Azerbaijani

counterpart and friend Heydär Äliyev – was widely regarded as a "Soviet man," and, indeed, had once been a highly placed representative of the country's *nomenklatura*. As such, he was expected to pursue far more pro-Russian policies than had the former dissident, Gamsakhurdia.

Russian–Georgian relations and the war in South Ossetia

Some conspiracy theorists in Georgia, and beyond, assert that the "uprisings" in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (as well as those in Nagorno-Karabakh) were in fact inspired by the Kremlin, which, by resorting to a policy of "divide and conquer," was at that time seeking to maintain the cohesion of the Soviet state at any cost. A deeper investigation, however, reveals that the proximate causes of each of these conflicts were, in fact, of a specifically *local* nature. Besides the objective factors at work at the time (the security anxieties of ethnic groups during an era of the growth of aggressive nationalism, along with the wide-scale destabilizing of established regional power structures), perhaps the most damaging influence upon the region was the sheer indecisiveness and lack of professionalism of the party leadership in Moscow, particularly with regard to questions of conflict management. At the same time, the efforts of the senior Soviet leadership to seek some form of balance between the interests and demands of the various ethnic groups also had dramatic consequences for the nationalities within the region. Despite this outward quest for equanimity on the part of the Soviet high command, some facts do suggest that certain elements within the Russian power structure (especially the top brass of the army) were, in fact, pursuing definite interests during the later stages of the Georgian conflicts. Just as with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it remains an open question as to what degree the actions of individual Russian army units were coordinated or directly controlled by the Kremlin.

Although, compared with his predecessor, Shevardnadze did attempt to enact a much more conciliatory policy with respect to the Abkhaz and South Ossetian autonomies, the situation of the central Georgian government – which failed to build a unified, combat-ready army – rapidly deteriorated, and the country was effectively taken over by paramilitary units loyal to local potentates. In western Georgia, in the Samegrelo region, as well as in the southern part of Abkhazia, there was an uprising by the Zviadists, as the adherents of Zviad Gamsakhurdia were called.[70] When Georgian artillery began heavy shelling of Tskhinvali, the "hawks" in Moscow intervened. The speaker of the

Russian parliament, Ruslan Khasbulatov, threatened to bomb Tbilisi if Georgia did not end the blockade of Tskhinvali, and the number-two man in Russia, Vice-president Alexander Rutskoy, spoke of the South Ossetians as being citizens of the Russian Federation.[71] After Russian helicopters began firing on the positions of Georgian soldiers near Tskhinvali, there was a threat that the conflict between Tbilisi and South Ossetia might expand into an all-out Russian–Georgian armed conflict but, in the end this did not happen. In late June 1992, in Dagomys, a southern Russian town near Sochi, the Russians negotiated the signing of an accord sanctioning the creation of a mixed contingent of peacekeeping troops, who remained deployed in South Ossetia until the August 2008 war.

Against the background of these 1992 events – which enraged the Georgian public – and contrary to Russia's original expectations, Shevardnadze refused to permit Georgia to join the CIS and, in spite of some initial maneuvering, he also rejected the stationing of Russian military units on the territory of the republic;[72] understandably, this did not please Moscow.

Russia's approach to the Georgian conflicts must be understood in the light of the situation in Moscow itself, where, from 1992 onwards (as mentioned above) President Boris Yeltsin was increasingly distancing himself from his erstwhile liberal-reformist circle and was, instead, being drawn towards the radicals and the notorious "hawks," who were light years away from accepting a balanced approach towards solving the country's problems in the spheres of domestic and foreign policy. The defense minister, Pavel Grachev, had an especially dominant position within this circle.[73] With regard to the Caucasus, Grachev initially distanced himself somewhat from the issue of the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh and concentrated on strengthening the Russian military presence in Georgia, which he regarded as being the key country in the South Caucasus, given that it had access to the Black Sea and a border with Turkey (a NATO member state and Russia's rival in the region).[74] Russia's interests, as conceived by the group of "hawks" and radicals surrounding the defense minister, were inevitably irreconcilable with Tbilisi's ongoing demands that Russia close its (originally Soviet) military bases on Georgian territory by 1995.[75] Eventually, in February 1993, under pressure from the Georgians, the Kremlin was *temporarily* forced to accede to this demand. According to Grachev, however, such a move would have led to the loss of Russian control of the Black Sea, and so it was necessary to take "all necessary measures to ensure that our troops remained there [in Georgia]."[76]

Russian–Georgian relations and the war in Abkhazia

In the summer of 1992 there was a gradual worsening of relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi (which was escalating its political demands): the situation in Georgia at this point was chaotic, owing to the continuing clashes between the warlords and the politically weak Eduard Shevardnadze. Curiously, as Georgian–Abkhaz tensions increased, Vladislav Ardzinba's rhetoric intensified: in July 1992 he claimed that "Abkhazia is strong enough to fight Georgia."[77] In the meantime, following Gamsakhurdia's overthrow by the military junta in early 1992, Georgia's erstwhile Soviet constitution of 1978 was abrogated. In its place, the 1921 constitution of the independent Georgian Republic was adopted – which did not specify Abkhazia's special status. Thus, it appeared that the new Military Council of Georgia, which had now come to govern the country, did *not* take seriously the previous year's crucial Gamsakhurdia–Ardzinba agreement, which had granted Abkhazia's Abkhaz minority over-representation in the republic's Supreme Council.[78] Hence, the fears of the Abkhazians intensified dramatically: according to their version of the events that followed:

> To overcome a political vacuum and in order to protect its political autonomy, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet on July 23, 1992 reinstated Abkhazia's Constitution of 1925, which connected Abkhazia and Georgia on the basis of a Treaty of Union. At the same time, Abkhazia proposed to discuss a federal structure in a new state with Georgia. Georgia insisted on a unitary state, without any autonomies. Refusing to start political talks with Abkhazia, Georgia decided to solve the problem by means of force. On August 14, 1992 Georgian troops invaded Abkhazia and bombarded the Abkhazian Parliament. This marked the beginning of the Georgian–Abkhazian war.[79]

At any rate, it is clear that, after having gained control over the greater part of the region, Ardzinba announced the forthcoming entry of his country into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – at which point the Georgians decided to take action. Tank units under the control of Tengiz Kitovani, the newly appointed defense minister, entered Samegrelo, a wooded area to the southeast of the Abkhazian border. The Georgians' initial justification for this action was that the Georgian troops were trying to locate several highly placed officials, including a minister, who had been kidnapped by the Zviadists. According to the Georgians, Kitovani's action was unconnected to the Abkhazia issue, as it was taken

"for the purpose of ensuring the security of traffic on the railway line and the main roads connecting Russia with Georgia and Armenia and of defending objects of strategic importance." Furthermore,

> as a consequence of attacks by bandits [Zviadists], plundering of trains and cars and explosions of railway and road bridges, many people lost their lives. During just half a year, the losses to the national economy reached 12 billion rubles, representing half of Georgia's annual budget.[80]

However, Kitovani's forces did not stop at the border to Abkhazia: instead they entered Abkhazia – allegedly without consulting President Shevardnadze – and, in August, they occupied the capital. Shortly thereafter, as reported by Human Rights Watch, Georgian troops engaged in "vicious, ethnically based pillage, looting, assault and murder."[81] Additionally, Abkhaz cultural monuments, including the archives of the Abkhaz national museum and the buildings of Sukhumi University, were systematically destroyed by Georgian National Guard forces and mkhedrioni paramilitaries. Ethnic cleansing, accompanied by pillage and slaughter, intensified on both sides.

In September, Moscow tried to arrange a ceasefire between the separatists and Tbilisi: although the terms were generally advantageous for Georgia, permitting among other things the permanent deployment of the Georgian army in Abkhazia, Kitovani resolutely rejected this accord – allegedly in direct contradiction of Shevardnadze's orders. The Abkhazians then exploited the Georgians' apparent disarray: Abkhazian forces, concentrated at the town of Gudauta near the Russian border, were reinforced by hundreds of volunteers from the northwestern Caucasus (mostly Circassians, Kabardeys, Abazas, and Adygheans), and by the so-called Abkhazian Battalion consisting of Chechens under the command of Shamil Basayev, who had been armed and equipped by the Russian army. North Caucasian and Don Cossacks also appeared on the battlefield;[82] while Russian army units also took part directly in the renewed fighting, supporting the advance of Abkhazian and pro-Abkhazian units. Home defense units – who were ostensibly badly armed and under-equipped – suddenly had at their disposal dozens of T-72 and T-80 tanks, Grad rocket systems, artillery, and other heavy weapons.[83] Georgian positions were bombed several times by Su-25 and Su-27 aircraft flying from the Russian interior (the Georgians even shot down an Su-27 plane carrying a Russian army officer and an Mi-8 helicopter), while the Abkhazians laid around 100,000 mines.

It is a matter widely attested to that the Abkhazian units had not originally possessed any of these sophisticated and powerful weapons. At the same time, Moscow also disconnected all international telephone lines to Georgia, supposedly because of unpaid bills.[84]

The fighting, which cost hundreds of lives on both sides over a very short period, continued with interruptions until the middle of the summer of 1993; the fortunes of war shifted from one side to the other, however the (pro-) Abkhazian troops did *not* succeed in occupying Sukhumi, in spite of a concerted effort. The Russian army played a significant role in the encirclement of Sukhumi: its planes and heavy artillery regularly bombarded Georgian positions.[85] Before long, the (already limited) military strength of both warring parties was exhausted and, with the mediation of Moscow, a ceasefire was agreed in Sochi on July 27, 1993. This ceasefire proposed the demilitarization of Abkhazia, the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhazia, and the disarmament of Abkhazian troops. However, in spite of this ceasefire, "[a]s Zviadist attacks on regular Georgian and Abkhaz forces [see below] grew in early September 1993, the Abkhaz forces launched their largest offensive of the war, breaking the terms of the cease-fire and capturing Sukhumi on 27 September."[86] Thus, the war resumed: the Abkhazians and their allies (using the aforementioned attacks as a pretext, and who had – allegedly – already handed over their weapons to the Russian mediators) attacked the remnants of the departing Georgian army and gradually took control of practically the entire region, including the capital. The Russians, despite having a strong military contingent in the area, numbering some 18,000 men, declared their neutrality – ignoring Shevardnadze's pleas for help – this in spite of the fact that Russia had explicitly undertaken to guarantee the fulfillment of the Sochi accord. The almost uninterrupted advance of the (pro-) Abkhazian forces was accompanied by targeted ethnic cleansing: during the war, and especially during the August and September advance of the Abkhazian troops, tens of thousands of local Georgians were driven from Abkhazia or fled before the advancing allied forces.[87] The international reaction at the time was generally in support of the territorial integrity of Georgia: for example, UN Resolution No. 876, dated October 19, 1993, was explicitly worded to that effect: it also condemned the breach of the July ceasefire by the Abkhazians and their allies and condemned the violation of basic human rights on their part.[88]

The impressive victories of the Abkhazian army nevertheless continued unabated. After a massive uprising in Samegrelo, in early August, which had had the goal of overthrowing the Shevardnadze regime, Georgian

troops were defeated and thrown into chaos. Before long, the Zviadists had taken control of key West Georgian cities: besides Semegrelo's capital city of Zugdidi, they also took the important port city of Poti, along with Samtredia and other towns, and in the second half of October, they found themselves just 20–25 kilometers from Tbilisi itself, which they apparently intended to attack.

The worsening debacle in Abkhazia and the Samegrelo rebellion made Shevardnadze's situation truly desperate: like his predecessor and rival, he did not shrink from speaking publicly of "Russian imperialism," and he declared that the occupation of Sukhumi had been directly planned by the Russians.[89] He had no choice, however, but to accept the urgings of the Kremlin: Georgia would enter the CIS (December 1993), and consent to the stationing of Russian bases on its territory (a provisional agreement to this effect was signed in October 1993). The reward for this was supposed to be Russian help with the suppression of the escalating Samegrelo uprising – which represented an enormous threat to Shevardnadze's rule, and even to him personally. In the course of October and November, Russian army units occupied the rebellious territory without encountering undue difficulties: the very presence of Russian units very easily pacified the Zviadists.[90]

Outcomes of the ethnopolitical conflicts in Georgia

The war in South Ossetia cost the lives of about a thousand people, mostly Ossetian civilians: this mainly as the result of repeated intensive bombardment of Tskhinvali by Georgian artillery. Meanwhile tens of thousands of Georgians and Ossetians fled South Ossetia: the exact number of Ossetians who left both South Ossetia and Georgia because of the conflict has been estimated according to some sources at up to 100,000.[91]

Far more tragic were the consequences of the 13-month active phase of fighting in Abkhazia, which cost the lives of 8,000 combatants and civilians.[92] The conflict devastated the majority of the renowned summer resorts of the "Abkhazian Riviera," while some 300,000 people were forced to flee the country.[93] Besides approximately 200,000 Georgians, this total incorporated members of all ethnic groups inhabiting the country (including Abkhazians), especially Armenians, Greeks, and Russians.[94]

According to the terms of the Dagomys peace accord signed on June 14, 1992, mixed units of Georgians, South Ossetians, and Russians (North Ossetians were present within the Russian contingent), were stationed

in South Ossetia.[95] In October 1993 the Russians mediated a ceasefire, which was expanded the following May into a temporary peace accord. According to the accord, an existing Russian peace contingent of 3,000 troops was to be supplemented by units from other CIS member states; for a number of reasons, however, this did not take place.[96] At the same time, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), which was intended to supervise the implementation of the negotiated agreements, was established in Abkhazia.[97]

Establishment of Russian military bases on Georgian territory

As a result of the signing of the Russian–Georgian Agreement on the Stationing of Military Bases (1995), Georgia became, after Armenia, the last country of the South Caucasus to have Russian military bases stationed on its territory; the stated reason for their presence was assistance with the maintenance of the security and sovereignty of the Georgian state. The timescale for the presence of these bases was set at 25 years, with the option of subsequent extensions. It is significant, however, that the Georgian parliament never formally ratified this treaty and, thus, the Russian military bases have found themselves in a sort of legal vacuum. We should add that at the end of 1993 Georgia also joined the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty.[98]

The Russian bases – which, together with the 102nd base in the north Armenian town of Gyumri, constituted part of what was called the Russian Transcaucasus Group of Forces – were stationed in strategically important locations, where the power of Tbilisi (with the exception of the base in Vaziani) was either very weak, or was nonexistent. The 137th air base was stationed in the town of Vaziani, near the capital city, and was thus able to control the airspace over the central part of the country. The 12th base was stationed at the strategically important port of Batumi: the capital of Ajara, near the Turkish border. The Ajarian autonomous republic had enjoyed a de facto independent standing – although it never formally questioned that Ajaria belongs to Georgia. Ever since the breakup of the Soviet Union, this situation was guaranteed by the close ties with Moscow of the local president, Aslan Abashidze, and especially with the Russian top brass.[99] Another base, the 62nd, was established in Akhalkalaki, in the center of the Samtskhe–Javakheti region, in the south of the country, which was inhabited mainly by Armenians, who profited economically from its presence. This base also provided jobs for many local residents, who viewed it as a guarantee of their own security

in the case of a feared attack by Turkey, or of possible attempts by Tbilisi to gain actual control over the Javakheti territory. This area has, in fact, found itself outside of the de facto exclusive jurisdiction of Tbilisi. The 137th military base was then stationed in Gudauta, Abkhazia – that is, less than an hour's drive from the Russian border.[100]

By late 2007, following a decade of intense pressure from both Tbilisi and leading Western nations, Moscow had withdrawn its last military base from Georgian soil (with the sole exception of the Gudauta base).

6
Conclusion

Level of economic development

Low levels of economic development played no discernible role in the precipitation of the ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus. As illustrated in Chapter 3, both Azerbaijan and Georgia, as parts of the former Soviet Union, possessed relatively highly developed economies; the standard of living in both countries, including their autonomies, was also relatively high. However, the gradual worsening of the overall economic situation of the South Caucasian region as a whole, which was caused by the Soviet-wide economic decline of the late Soviet era, may well have played a role in lowering the standard of living of the region's inhabitants, thereby fostering their sense of insecurity and so contributing to the intensification of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia conflicts. Subsequently, as with other instances of internal turmoil, civil war types of situations across the region brought about rising criminality, a lack of basic products, and other factors which contributed to an overwhelming feeling of anxiety among local populations: a feeling for which some, at least, apparently blamed their ethnic adversaries. However, clear causal links supported by data are missing in this regard, which makes it difficult to measure the precise impact of the worsening economic situation on the likelihood of civil war initiation. Importantly, the worsening of the economic situation had demonstrably been a factor in the pre–civil war phase of conflicts, where the interplay of a host of other factors contributed to the overall probability of armed conflict initiation. In fact, it is not clear whether proximate causes of interethnic conflict *worsened the economic situation*, or vice versa; it is most likely that the causal relationship between both variables is two-sided.

Facilitating a rebellion? Natural resources, diaspora, and geography

The factor of the presence of natural resources within a given region definitely played *no* role in the course of conflict initiation. Of the three ethnopolitical conflicts detailed in this book, none was characterized by competition for mineral resources, as neither Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, nor Abkhazia in fact possessed such resources. In the case of Azerbaijan, the only South Caucasian nation to have significant natural resources – oil and natural gas – competition for them never played a role in internal Azerbaijani political discourse, let alone in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In fact, the Azerbaijani elites have for a long time seen the nation's oil wealth rather as a tool with which to attract Western attention to the region, in order both to gain considerable financial and political support from key Western nations and to reduce *Russia's* influence in the South Caucasus (especially as Russia appeared to the Azerbaijanis to be favoring Armenia at the expense of Azerbaijan).

Effective U.S. support, coupled with the general strengthening of Azerbaijan's standing on the international scene in the context of extracting and exporting the republic's oil and natural gas situated in the Caspian Sea, was seen as an essential tool for achieving military victory in Karabakh and/or a consequent political victory at the negotiating table. Yet, owing to a variety of reasons, these ambitions never in fact materialized – and, most importantly, they had no impact on either the conflict onset or its subsequent escalation. Azerbaijan's possession of natural resources did play a certain role in the conflict inasmuch as it aroused enormous expectations amongst the post-Soviet Azerbaijani elites that if they could succeed in making effective use of the country's natural resources, the conflict over Karabakh might be resolved to Azerbaijan's benefit. Nonetheless, this factor proved relevant, not in the phase of conflict onset or escalation, but rather during the post-war international negotiations to find a solution to the conflict.

It is a well-known fact that the Armenian diaspora, perhaps one of the most politically well-organized ethnic diasporas in the world, and by far the strongest of all South Caucasian diasporas, played a role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As illustrated in Chapter 3, influential Armenian intellectuals based in Moscow proved essential in rallying public support for the Armenian cause in the initial months of the Karabakh nationalist movement; their support soon proved crucial with respect to the political organization of Armenians within Armenia and

Nagorno-Karabakh, serving as an important motivational factor for their mobilization.[1] Moreover, during the course of the conflict, highly nationalistic Armenian communities in the United States, France, and a number of other countries contributed actively to the Armenian cause, providing recruits and money and ensuring international support. For example, as early as 1992, the Armenian lobby in the United States managed to promote the enactment of the Section 907 caveat to the Freedom Support Act in Congress: this restricted all direct U.S. aid to the Azerbaijani government, as the latter's policy toward Nagorno-Karabakh was termed aggression.[2]

Interestingly, just like the overwhelming majority of the other Caucasus countries, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia are all largely *mountainous* areas – which might be taken to support the proposition that rough geographic terrain increases the risk of civil war. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes obvious that geography as such was not a contributing factor to either the initiation or escalation of the studied conflicts. Armed conflict in all the secessionist territories was generally mobilized along major traffic arteries: in Abkhazia, aside from Sukhumi and some other urban areas, it was the coastline which, along with the southeast–northwest highway, hosted most military maneuvers. In South Ossetia, battles predominantly took place in and around Tskhinvali, whilst in Nagorno-Karabakh both sides largely concentrated their military activities across the autonomy's central crossroads (Stepanakert, Shusha, and Agdam), even though during subsequent fighting both mountainous and relatively flat areas of outer Karabakh also became battlefields.[3]

However, the factor of geography did play a highly significant role during some specific phases of local conflicts. Geographical proximity with Armenia was a strong motivational factor for the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, as indeed it was for the Abkhazians who, at the conflict onset phase, reckoned upon deriving support from their ethnic kin, the Circassian peoples, who were settled across the Greater Caucasus mountain range; the South Ossetians, too, largely counted upon deriving support from their fellow Ossetian countrymen in North Ossetia, on the opposite side of the Russo–Georgian border. In the course of both conflicts, South Ossetian and, especially, Abkhaz secessionists relied heavily on support deriving from Russia: this either in the form of North Caucasian or Cossack combatants, or else of equipment and ammunition supplies, as well as air support (a fact which is further highlighted below). Moreover, such cross-border assistance proved invaluable for the success of the separatists' military activities and also helped them

to assure the necessary political backing in parallel negotiations and, eventually, in whatever peace talks that might follow the conflict itself. Similarly, Nagorno-Karabakh armed forces relied heavily on military and political support emanating from Armenia. From 1992 onward, when the missing geographical link – the Lachin corridor linking "continental" Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh – had been captured by the Armenians, the army of the Republic of Armenia was involved in active military conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan: to that end, mobilization was declared in Armenia. Without strong support from Russia and Armenia, enabled by Nagorno-Karabakh's shared borders with Armenia and those of South Ossetia and Abkhazia with Russia, it is extremely unlikely that the – demographically, economically and politically weak – secessionists would have succeeded on the battlefield. Therefore, for *large-n* quantitative studies, it may prove appropriate to focus on *transnational* factors which may well influence prospective ethnosecessionist rebellions: that is to say that the *geographical proximity* of rebellious areas which are located on state peripheries *adjacent to areas which are inhabited by their ethnic kin* (or political supporters) must be seen as a factor which might actively increase the risk of civil war and/or ethnopolitical conflict.

Demographic factors: ethnic diversity, size, and proportions

The respective ethnic diversity and majority–minority population ratios within Azerbaijan and Georgia did clearly prove a factor in the initiation of regional conflicts. Collier and Hoeffler's proposition holds that once a dominant ethnic group exceeds the threshold of 45 per cent, it tends much more readily toward the use of its demographic superiority in order to suppress numerically smaller ethnicities. In the case of both Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia, majority nationalities made up at least two thirds of each country's population. However, the hypothetical proposition that the likelihood of ethnic secessionism and civil war increases in a country when a compactly located ethnic minority exceeds a certain demographic threshold, fails to apply to the South Caucasian conflict cases. While Ossetians and Armenians did numerically prevail in both South Ossetia (66 per cent) and Nagorno-Karabakh (77 per cent), respectively, Abkhazians comprised only 17 per cent of Abkhazia's population: yet, secessionist agitation was still quite widespread amongst them, as they did not hesitate to claim overall national sovereignty. Nonetheless, the argument emphasizing the absolute size of a given population with respect to territory bears no relevance to

the South Caucasus, as both Georgia and Azerbaijan are relatively small countries with small pre-war populations of around 4.5 million and 7 million inhabitants, respectively.

Regime type and regime change

Regime-based theories do hold, virtually unambiguously, when applied to the South Caucasus conflicts. In fact, during the decades of effective Soviet control, latent ethnic tensions, or attempts by local ethnic elites to reverse what they might consider to be an unduly favorable status quo with respect to minority ethnic communities, were extremely rare, as prospective dissidents feared large-scale repression. Under the conditions of the former Soviet totalitarian regime, with civil liberties largely suppressed, expressions of public protest often had dramatic negative consequences – which kept emancipatory efforts at a low-profile. The same situation applied to the ethnic elites within Azerbaijan's and Georgia's majority nationalities, who had to take into consideration the possibility of the repression which might have been imposed on them by the central authorities in Moscow had they attempted to curtail the rights or liberties of the ethnic minorities within their respective territories. This consideration, in fact, largely limited the scope of ethnic discrimination in autonomies or areas populated by members of non-majority nationalities, during the Soviet era.

Significantly, in this regard the Abkhaz, South Ossetian, and (Nagorno-Karabakh) Armenian elites all approached Moscow with their respective emancipatory agendas *during periods of Soviet-wide regime liberalization*: thus, petitions were directed to the Kremlin during the peaks of the Khrushev and Brezhnev eras. Interestingly, perhaps the most powerful appeal of Abkhaz intellectuals to the Soviet authorities, which sought to achieve the autonomy's transfer from Georgia to Russia, took place in 1978 – at a point when serious conflict impacted on the relationship between Tbilisi and Moscow, and when demonstrators took to the streets of the Georgian capital to protest the Soviet government's plans to cancel the constitutional status of Georgian as the republic's state language.[4] Similarly, throughout the modern history of the region, latent conflicts have turned violent whenever Russia's grip over the area has weakened to any discernable degree – as exemplified by 1918–20 warfare among the independent republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Karabakh, and in some other ethnically mixed areas of the Azerbaijani–Armenian borderland; and also by the Abkhaz and South Ossetian rebellions during the same period and their suppression by Georgian armed

forces. A similar situation recurred during the late Soviet era, when Gorbachev's reforms heralded an unprecedented liberalization of the public landscape: the gradual weakening of Soviet control in the second half of the 1980s, occasioned by Gorbachev's ongoing regime liberalization, allowed ever more scope – throughout both the South Caucasian republics and their ethnic autonomies – for the expression of ethnic antagonisms, for active nationalism, for emancipatory agitation, and for centripetal aspirations.

Social inequality accounts

As acknowledged by proponents of the relative deprivation theory, social inequality is always relative. Indeed, it was only Georgia's South Ossetian elites who actively aspired to gain the superior status of an autonomous republic as opposed to that of an autonomous oblast. Whereas, by contrast, the status of an autonomous republic was what the Abkhazians already possessed but deemed it unacceptable. Meanwhile, the members of a number of compactly settled ethnic groups in both Georgia's and Azerbaijan's peripheries had long been in favor of the establishment (albeit relatively) of autonomous oblasts, which they saw as a necessary preliminary condition of self-rule, which would enhance their opportunities to promote their ethnocultural rights. However, despite the fact that both Azerbaijan's compactly settled ethnic minorities (Talysh, Lezgi, and Avar), as well as Georgia's Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnic minorities, lacked autonomous status, virtually none of them showed signs of secessionism.

Contrary to this, the Communist elites in both Baku and Tbilisi sought with varying degrees of success to implement a national agenda, in that they strengthened the economic, demographic, and political weight of their respective populations at the expense of the Karabakh Armenians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians. However, as pointed out above, instances of ethnic discrimination in the Soviet Union in general, and within the South Caucasus in particular, were never widespread during the Soviet era;[5] thus, for the majority of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, the South Ossetians, Abkhazians, and members of the other nationalities of the multiethnic Caucasus, the notion of ethnic inequality was rather restricted to the *symbolic* domain, the emotional appeal of which for local populations was enormous. Instead of economic issues,[6] issues pertinent to the protection of the various ethnic groups' status vis-à-vis majority ethnicity dominated public discourse (i.e., questions such as the use of ethnic history textbooks, or the issue of ethnic language teaching).[7]

For example, although the level of economic development of Nagorno-Karabakh was amongst the highest of Azerbaijan's provinces, it yet remained below the all-Armenian average – a factor which caused discontent in the minds of Karabakh Armenians, who considered this a sign of relative disadvantage. Abkhazians were generally irritated by the fact that in order to finalize a business deal in their own country, they often had to rely on established networks of contacts in Tbilisi; in the end, as they claimed, it was easier for an average Georgian based in Tbilisi or Georgia proper to ensure a lucrative place within Abkhazia's tourist or agricultural sectors than for average Abkhazians, who generally turned out to have lower-status employment within their own country by comparison with Georgians. Hence Abkhazians sought to draw the center of administrative gravity to Sukhumi in order to make sure they, not Georgians, could take important decisions about issues related to their autonomy.

University education was also an issue for local ethnic minorities. Karabakh Armenians had to travel to Baku for university education, and they complained about being ethnically discriminated against in the Azerbaijani capital. In fact, in order to become enrolled in a South Caucasian university, one had to rely on an established network of cronyism, which outsiders generally had little chance of penetrating. Some Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians thus preferred to travel to Yerevan for their studies. Javakheti Armenians and Kvemo–Kartli Azerbaijanis faced a similar problem: for them, their lack of knowledge of the Georgian language played a decisive role, as they were not, therefore, in a position to be able to successfully pass the entrance exams to Tbilisi universities; hence, as a rule, they traveled to Yerevan and Baku, respectively, and often settled there.[8] Accordingly, this very lack of access to university education in their native tongues was interpreted by some members of local ethnic minorities as definitive proof that Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians sought either to achieve the cultural and ethnic assimilation of these various minorities, or else to drive them out of their respective countries altogether. For these minorities, this clearly was an issue of blatant social inequality.

Ancient hatreds

The notion of primordial ethnic hatreds has featured strongly within the most established accounts of South Caucasian ethnic conflict. In fact, primordial accounts are commonplace within the region when it comes to the definition of ethnic adversaries' supposed "inborn characteristics":

such (usually highly negative) characteristics are often used to justify the subservient position which the ethnic minorities in question are often required to assume vis-à-vis the "guest people." As elsewhere in situations of ethnopolitical conflict, narratives of *treason* on the part of ethnic minorities, accompanied by lurid conspiracy theories, have been widespread across the South Caucasus, creating climates of intolerance and xenophobia, and fostering lasting ethnic prejudices.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to emphasize that ancient hatreds have largely been a *product of* interethnic tension rather than a *cause* of interethnic tension. Even though a certain degree of interethnic rivalry and friction did latently exist during the decades of Soviet rule – fostered by Soviet-style ethnic fragmentation that was, inter alia, provided by the established practice of ethno-federalism – pre-established ethnic caricatures did not dominate public discourse during the onset phase of local conflicts. For instance, Abkhazians and Georgians clearly competed for political and economic dominance in the Abkhazia autonomy, while the Abkhaz minority aspired for the reversal of the autonomy's status quo, with the Georgian community opposed to this. Yet, in peacetime, both communities managed, as a rule, to live side by side without violent excesses: a fact attested to by the high frequency of interethnic marriages. In Nagorno-Karabakh, the incidence of violent clashes was also low among the autonomy's Armenian and Azerbaijani communities: notwithstanding a certain level of latent suspicion, primordial hatreds did *not* dominate their interethnic relationships. As a rule, owing to the Soviet-imposed policies of socialist internationalism, Georgians, Azerbaijanis and others remained largely unaware of previous interethnic grievances (or else such knowledge remained restricted to a relatively narrow circle of intellectuals and well-informed nationalists).

Enemy images did arise (sometimes based upon primordial ethnic hatreds), but only gradually, during the course of conflict – following a general pattern of ethnic mobilization and polarization. Phantoms of the past were deliberately (re)constructed by ethnic intellectuals who, in an attempt to draw historical parallels, pointed to instances of interethnic grievance which had in fact occurred decades, or even centuries, previously. Georgians, for example, were reminded at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s of the Abkhazians' and South Ossetians' "treacherous" rebellions in the interwar period of 1918–21, as well as of constant attempts to put Georgian statehood in doubt during the Soviet period; whilst emphasis was placed upon their alleged close collaboration with the Russians, as the latter historically sought to undermine Georgia's territorial integrity and independence. Similarly, South Ossetians and Abkhazians were told

by their intellectuals of the same rebellions: however, in this context, the narratives differed cardinally, as they had now to serve the purposes of convincing members of both communities about the Georgians' age-old efforts to subjugate, assimilate, and/or annihilate these demographically small populations. In all such instances of local conflict, the host–guest dichotomy gained momentum, prompting local intellectuals (predominantly historians) to elaborate on existing ethnonationalist narratives with the aim of justifying unshakable myths of ethnic dominance over contested areas since time immemorial, and of refuting the adversaries' opposite claims. Yet, demonized enemy images, accompanied by epicizing interethnic strife, were yet to come.

The Armenian case was exemplary in this regard: in Soviet Armenia, virtually no one was conscious of the so-called Armenian–Tatar War of 1905, of the Armenian–Azerbaijani wars of the interwar period (1918–1920), or the Karabakh rebellions of the same period. Yet, in the minds of ordinary people, Azerbaijanis were to some extent associated with the *Turks*, who were believed to have caused the biggest tragedy in Armenian history:[9] thus, by 1988, genocide-based anti-Turkish resentments had come to make up the cornerstone of Armenian nationalism. As the conflict escalated, Azerbaijanis became increasingly associated with (Ottoman) Turks in the popular consciousness, and Armenian nationalist narratives and primordial characteristics *once ascribed to Turks* began to be applied to Azerbaijanis as well. The Sumgayit and Baku pogroms played a significant role in causing this cognitive shift. In any case, the ancient hatred narratives mastered by ethnic intellectuals amply served the goal of mobilizing communities along ethnic lines, giving ideological sense to their collective action: these narratives fitted well into ethnocentrist paradigms providing clear and simple "parochial" explanations of what was at stake in the conflicts concerned.[10]

Security dilemma

A security dilemma clearly was one of the major factors behind the avalanche-like escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia conflicts. For instance, following the Sumgayit and Baku pogroms, it was the notion of self-protection which prompted Armenians to early mobilization in both political and military terms. As explained above, established narratives revolving around the issue of the Armenian genocide proved essential in deepening the Armenians' security anxieties, reviving their (essentially defensive) alliance with Russia, mobilizing their society and the diaspora, and bringing about concentrated

collective action for the sake of a victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. This, in turn, prompted Azerbaijanis to take up arms and form paramilitary units of their own, while simultaneously seeking to reassure themselves of Moscow's (and Ankara's) loyalty to their cause. The fear of physical extinction at the hands of the Georgians made South Ossetians and Abkhazians establish self-defense units which were intended to counterbalance the Georgians' numerical superiority, as the latter were in the process of deploying their own National Guard; in the meantime, the Abkhaz and South Ossetian elites sought to arouse the sympathies of Moscow-based elites.

As tensions between the various ethnic communities in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia intensified, instances of inter-village fighting increased, prompting the Azerbaijanis, for example, to ensure adequate supplies of recruits and heavy weapons so as to counterbalance the established networks for movement of military equipment, ammunition, supplies, and personnel already available to the Armenians. Every effort made by an ethnic adversary to assure its own relative security by increasing its military capability and political standing, served directly to deepen the (reciprocal) sense of insecurity on the part of the ethnic opposition – which in turn helped to hasten the downward spiral of insecurity. This seems to be a pervasive pattern which runs through the entirety of local conflicts.

Besides this, the declining power of the Soviet state itself – which resulted in its eventual collapse at the end of 1991 – had a profound impact on the increasing sense of insecurity amongst ethnic communities in conflict. This feeling of heightened insecurity was especially intense amongst the Abkhaz and South Ossetian communities, since they were acutely aware of their demographic weakness vis-à-vis Tbilisi: thus, as Moscow's grip over the region weakened, their vulnerability to a Georgian attack increased perceptibly. Additionally, whilst in 1989 and 1990 both secessionists and governments in Baku and Tbilisi had been obliged to take the opinions of the central government in Moscow into account, and thus the conflicts eventually abated, the new specter of complete anarchy which followed the breakup of the Soviet Union left the warring parties on their own to confront their fates. Needless to say, this further intensified the adversaries' mutual security dilemma, which then led to more counterattacks, and so the armed conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia further escalated.

The increasingly nationalist rhetorics employed by local politicians also played an important role in further intensifying mutual interethnic security dilemmas. For example, the chauvinistic appeals

made by Gamsakhurdia in order to gain popularity amongst the already-galvanized Georgian population (and so solidify his position in the country as a strong and confident leader and patriot) had dramatic psychological repercussions amongst the Abkhaz and South Ossetian communities. Ethnic cleansing-based statements such as the one made by Colonel Karkarashvili and his colleagues across the South Caucasian frontlines are still remembered amongst Abkhazians (and others), who continually add to it more lurid and dramatic interpretations.[11]

Symbolic (identity) politics

One of the principal findings of this study has been that of the overall applicability of *symbolic politics theory* in the context of local ethnopolitical conflicts. For the members of the various South Caucasian ethnic communities in conflict, their ethnicity was regarded as primordial, nonnegotiable and crucial for their group's survival; ethnocentrist attitudes grew in importance following the pervasive pattern of ethnic mobilization. The territorial aspirations of Azerbaijan's and Georgia's ethnic minorities were understood by mainstream society in terms of identity politics: it was the nation's identity, honor, and dignity that was thought to be centrally at stake in the respective conflicts. It was not just about a piece of land; a given territory's value was largely *symbolic* and emotion-laden. Thus symbols and ethnic myths evoked by intellectuals – and ruthlessly utilized by politicians – played an enormous role in mobilizing ethnic communities into active conflict.

Importantly, for the national liberation movements in both Azerbaijan and, especially, Georgia, the vision of independent statehood turned out to be largely associated with the strong ethnonationalisms of majority nationalities. In Azerbaijan, pan-Turkist sentiments prevailed, linking the country implicitly to Turkey and the rest of the Turkic world. Georgian intellectuals came to understand the idea of the post-Soviet nation-state as a heavily monoethnic concept, evoking a set of powerful nationalist symbols related to Georgians' past (medieval) glory, their unique language, their race, and Orthodox Christianity – all of which symbols were crafted so as to appear to entail the exclusive dominance of the ethnic Georgians within the borders of the country. Therefore, emphasis was placed upon the symbolic concept of "ethnic revival," which the escalating ethnic conflicts in the countries' peripheries served to further intensify.

Also contributing to this sense of identity-based conflict was the latent conflict within both the various republics' majority and minority

nationalities – conflict that dated back to Soviet times, and that largely profiled along the lines of ethnic dominance and subordination. As outlined above, it was the question of *status*, as well as symbolic issues such as language, culture, and history (and the political use thereof), that shaped the climate of interethnic competition and rivalry in the South Caucasian conflicts. Importantly, both Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia were multiethnic states where individuals tended to identify themselves *with their respective ethnic groups* (rather than with the nation as a whole): this was especially the case with the Georgians, given their strong ethnonationalism.

Manipulative leaders

The manipulative leaders (elites) theory clearly holds in the context of the South Caucasian ethnopolitical conflicts. Local elites commonly manipulated public consciousness in order to strengthen their own positions on the political scene of their respective countries and to discredit their opposition; simultaneously, they evoked enemy images of ethnic adversaries in order to mobilize their fellow co-ethnics and to prepare the ground for collective action.

However, it is important to point out that, in the initial stages of regional political activism, *two* types of national elites emerged, which, in some instances, competed with each other for power and prestige within their respective territories. In the wake of the dissolution of Soviet authority, the Communist elites of the late Soviet period were confronted with the dramatic increase in popularity of (post-Communist) nationalist leaders who, as a rule, were intellectuals with little or no experience in governance. Both groups' interactions and their stances towards secessionist hotbeds influenced the process of conflict onset. For example, in Georgia, the Communist era elites swiftly adopted nationalist rhetoric, forming an ideological partnership with Gamsakhurdia's post-Communists when it came to what they commonly regarded as their primary national interest: that of the restoration of their grip over South Ossetia and Abkhazia as inseparable parts of Georgia. In Armenia, local Communist elites still sought to take a balanced stance, maneuvering between the nationalist appeals of the Karabakh Committee leaders and their own continuing loyalty toward the Moscow authorities. By contrast, the Soviet elites of Azerbaijan had long opposed the Popular Front nationalists: as such, the established Communist leadership initially refrained from using nationalist rhetoric, instead relying heavily on Moscow's support to anticipate Armenian irredentism, as

evidenced by the joint Soviet–Azerbaijani military operation in the areas north of Nagorno-Karabakh that took place in mid-1991.

In all these instances, it is debatable if the (post-Communist) nationalist elites in Azerbaijan, Armenia, or Georgia in fact used nationalist rhetoric with regard to secessionist autonomies as part of their earlier plans to take over power in their respective countries during the Soviet period.[12] It appears that, at least until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, they were primarily driven by ideological motives – that is, to secure their ethnic group's political domination over contested territories – rather than by their desire to gain power in their respective countries, as will be detailed below. Whereas the Communist elites were effectively ousted in both late Soviet Armenia and Georgia, the conflict between the Communist leadership and the new nationalist leadership was exposed dramatically in Azerbaijan, where both sides of the political spectrum routinely accused each other of a lack of professionalism and of a lack of patriotic commitment to properly solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. From then on, elites in Azerbaijan and Georgia, who witnessed a number of coup d'états, routinely manipulated public consciousness with regard to the local conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia, in an attempt to gain, regain, or restore their power; by contrast, Armenians remained largely loyal to and united around the prominent members of the Karabakh Committee, which ruled over the country during the years of armed conflict.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, as mentioned above, the manipulation of public consciousness gained momentum, with nationalist narratives from the past (re)constructed and utilized by local intellectuals and politicians. Additionally, fears of territorial partition and the decline of nation-states were periodically voiced by local elites in Azerbaijan and Georgia: separatist autonomies such as Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia were believed to threaten a dangerous domino effect, which might well eventually lead to the countries' dissolution. In Armenia, the elites stressed the vital importance of achieving a military victory in Nagorno-Karabakh: otherwise, according to them, what they termed "a second genocide" might occur – effectively wiping the Armenian homeland off the face of the earth. An analogous argument was circulated amongst South Ossetians and Abkhazians. The manipulation of ethnic fears through the use of symbols and nationalist narratives proved instrumental for local elites in the mobilization of the masses along the lines of ethnic solidarity.

Importantly, the emergence of (post-Communist) nationalist elites in the South Caucasus not only coincided temporally with the

emergence of secessionist movements on the fringes of Soviet Georgia and Azerbaijan, but the former was largely a consequence of the latter. This is why the political success or failure of local post-Communist elites was to a considerable degree dependent upon how well they coped with the task of ethnic secessionism – or national liberation – either one being at the core of the political agenda that brought them to power in their respective countries. This fact, along with the general awareness that the territorial integrity (or national independence, in the separatists' vocabulary) of their country was at stake, elevated the question of ethnic conflict into the primary source of political propaganda and mobilization. For instance, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, it was the orchestrated effort of the local elites to gain public support within Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh for the cause of Karabakh secessionism that launched the conflict. While the issue of restoring national independence played a significant role within the internal discourse of late Soviet Georgia, it was coupled with the commitment of the local elites there to restore the country's territorial integrity – a factor that proved essential for the post-Communist Azerbaijani elites, as well, even though the latter did not place much emphasis on obtaining independence until well into 1992. Interestingly, however, in the initial phase of organizing Abkhazian and South Ossetian secessionism, local elites seem to have played a less prominent role: by comparison with the largely pre-organized Karabakh movement, both Ademon Nykhas and Aydgylara seem rather to have been mass initiatives which eventually generated elites. Yet, once established, those elites proved instrumental in mobilizing their co-ethnics, using heavily nationalist rhetoric.

It is worth mentioning at this point that, while researching the relevance of the manipulative leaders theory on the South Caucasian conflicts, it became unclear whether local conflicts – or their consequent escalation – were *caused by* ethnic leaders evoking enemy images in order to mobilize their ethnic kin so as (re)gain power for themselves and/or achieve victory in ethnic conflicts, or whether, in the course of respective conflicts, leaders found themselves in situations of ethnic violence, in which they were confronted with a *predetermined* ethnic conflict agenda, complete with its own ready-made set of values and rules. In fact, ethnic conflicts are not necessarily outcomes of the politics of manipulative elites, as the latter may simply reflect the heavily nationalist societal atmosphere of an escalating ethnic conflict, in which elites are in effect obliged to articulate relevant issues in such a way as to foster solidarity along ethnic lines and so safeguard what they deem their own ethnic community's security. For instance, as mentioned above, there is no

demonstrable evidence to suggest that leaders such as Gamsakhurdia, Ter-Petrosyan, or Elçibäy actually sought to gain power within their respective republics in earlier periods, such as the late 1980s, when the South Caucasus was still part of the Soviet Union, and when none anticipated that state's collapse. Yet, at the time, they each at least partly led ethnic warfare, organizing self-defense units which soon engaged in ethnic clashes. This is all the more obvious for the leaders of the secessionist movements in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, who each had little prospect of personal enrichment or tangible material interest whilst assigned their posts under the circumstances of escalating ethnic conflict; but they each still proved instrumental in mobilizing their ethnic kin around the idea of national independence. In fact, the motivations of national elites in situations of ethnic conflict and civil war may well be best described by using the manipulation argument: that is to say that they focus as much on consolidating their own power and material benefits as on their messiah-style pursuit of their ethnic community's survival.

Additionally, the escalation of violence in and around rebellious provinces had its own psychologic, which was based around increasingly fraught local ethnic antagonisms that had to be addressed by ethnic leaders. Importantly, both Elçibäy and Gamsakhurdia increasingly toughened their respective nationalist and militarist rhetorics *following* conflict escalation.[13] Possibly, the growing radicalization of the masses placed these leaders in a position in which talks about peaceful solutions to ethnic disputes, or of compromises with ethnic adversaries, would have been politically untenable. In any event, objectively verifiable data are extremely difficult to obtain when it comes to determining the real motives of individual actors – the power elites within each given conflict – just as it is equally difficult to clearly distinguish between structural and individual factors influencing the progress of any given ethnic conflict.

Expanding the theory

Distinguishing between onset-based and process-based causes of civil war and ethnic conflict

This book has illustrated that what I term onset factors do not necessarily suffice to cause ethnic civil war. The factors of regime type, social inequality, and economic (under)development each act so as to shape the background of ethnic conflict; as such, they may persist for years, or even decades, until a triggering event leads to the outbreak

of interethnic hostilities. Importantly, factors that cause the onset of ethnic conflict do not necessarily bring on its further escalation into war. Even after escalation, however, it is incumbent upon on either regime or ethnic dissidents to actually make use of a perceived window of opportunity to socially mobilize, militarily organize, and technically maintain sustainable violence – a factor that particularly holds in the case of ethnic dissidents whose in-group coherence and institutionalization, unlike that of the state, is not necessarily given in advance, yet whose attempts to reverse what they regard as an unfavorable situation is key for them to launch secessionist movements. Once the process of large-scale violence, that is, civil war, has commenced, then what I term process-driven factors come to play a tremendous role in shaping the ideological and security-based foundations of the conflict in question, increasing the spiral of violence.

In-group cohesion

Each of the three ethnic autonomies in the South Caucasus engaged in secessionist activities.[14] By contrast, neither Azerbaijan's nor Georgia's ethnic minorities (despite each lacking autonomy) raised separatist – or irredentist – claims. Thus, for example, both Lezgis and Avars, compactly settled as they each were along the state borders with Russia, largely refrained from voicing irredentist demands to join with Dagestan, Russia's multiethnic republic with autonomy status in the Northeast Caucasus, where the majority of their ethnic kin lived. Azerbaijan's Talysh minority, who inhabited the country's southeast region, hesitated to raise claims to secede to Iran, with which they share a similar language, and where hundreds of thousands of their ethnic kin live. Similarly, Georgia's large Azerbaijani and Armenian communities inhabiting the country's southern provinces have proved largely immune to manifestations of irredentism, even though secessionists' positions used to be quite strong among Javakheti Armenians.

Two major lines of explanation suggest themselves in this regard. First, the aforementioned facts may support a thesis that ethnic autonomy in fact raises the risk of secessionism and of civil war. Indeed, some observers have advanced the argument that the very act of providing Azerbaijan's and Georgia's ethnic communities with definable political-administrative borders in line with the Soviet-imposed practice of ethno-federalism served as a background cause for secessionism: the experience of actually administering ethnic autonomies turned out to be an institutionalized first stage for subsequent aspirations for the establishment of independent nation-states, or of joining with ethnic

kin abroad.[15] The existence of elements of (quasi)statehood – elements such as clearly defined borders, political and economic jurisdiction within those borders, proto-national symbols, or a certain degree of self-government organized among networks of cultivated ethnic elites – all contributed to forging a sense of in-group cohesion which enabled Abkhazians, South Ossetians, and Karabakh Armenians to eventually claim outright sovereignty over their respective territories.[16] Indeed, the ethnic autonomies concerned did provide, in practice, for an institutionalized framework that, aside from symbolic issues, allowed for the establishment of state-like centralized networks, usually policed by representatives of local ethnic communities: the Soviet authorities generally placed importance upon the provision of a certain degree of self-rule within those ethnic autonomies. Importantly, these networks created ethnic elites which largely came to adopt emancipatory agendas on behalf of their co-ethnics, thus becoming heralds of secessionism.

Similarly, as the conflicts progressed, these elites proved instrumental in fostering and consolidating public support amongst their already mobilized ethnic kin: in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, secessionist movements were effectively policed, if not entirely organized, by local ethnic elites. Whereas, the conflicts in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia crystallized along the fault lines which existed between the Communist and post-Communist national elites, the local elites of the rebellious autonomies displayed considerable unity when it came to championing their ethnic interests, both inside and outside their respective autonomies. All this ensured a tremendous degree of group cohesion, which was then further cemented by what Stuart Kaufman has termed *fears of minorities* as Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians became increasingly conscious of their relative vulnerability in the face of the numerically superior Azerbaijanis and Georgians.

The second line of explanation focuses on the degree of external support, or the lack thereof, even though the issue of (instrumentally assured) group cohesion also played a role. For instance, at least as regards Georgia's Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, it is obvious that their apparent loyalty toward their country's territorial integrity may at least partially be explained by the fact that since both Armenia and Azerbaijan had engaged in a violent conflict with each other, their governments placed the utmost importance on assuring a positive relationship with Georgia, a strategically located neighboring country whose importance lay in its capacity to ensure a secure route for supplies from Russia, Armenia's key ally. For Baku, also, Georgia's

strategic importance stemmed from the situation of geopolitical isolation in which Azerbaijan found itself once its relationships with Iran and Russia were severely damaged in the course of the Karabakh war: as the Azerbaijani elites sought to ensure the exports of the country's oil to Western markets, Georgia provided the single geographical link to Turkey and the wider world. Under these circumstances, both Baku and Tbilisi pointedly refrained from instigating centrifugal sentiments amongst Georgia's Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic minorities. Thus, the lack of external support, which in other circumstances seems to have played a vigorous role in causing ethnopolitical conflict within the region (see below), then proved decisive.

For Azerbaijan's Avar community, the lack of secessionist aspirations may be interpreted in the light of a combination of factors. First, this community only comprises approximately 50,000 people, who inhabit villages and towns both along Russia's borders and inside Azerbaijan. The majority of the Avar population is dispersed across the country's northernmost provinces. Secondly, and most notably, they lacked external support: even though, at some points, irredentist sentiments did reportedly gain some salience amongst them.

The situation of Azerbaijan's Lezgi community is somewhat more complex. Lezgis inhabit the country's northeastern areas along the borders with Russia: according to some estimates, this community comprises as many as 300,000 people. At the beginning of the 1990s, Lezgis formed a political organization, called Sadval (Unity), which advocated the secession of Lezgi areas from Azerbaijan, and its incorporation into Russia's Dagestan, or else the creation of an independent Lezgi state called Lezgistan.[17] In 1994, terrorist attacks carried out in a Baku subway claimed the lives of 27 people. According to Azerbaijani investigators, Armenian secret services were behind the attacks, which were formally attributed to Sadval. Additionally, the Russian authorities seem to have provided Sadval with a certain degree of support, which was withdrawn once Äliyev came to power in Baku. As described in Chapter 5, Sadval's headquarters in Dagestan was closed down in 1993, by way of a friendly gesture, and the organization's representatives faced dismissal. As Moscow strategists entertained hopes of achieving their goals in Azerbaijan, the Lezgi card was not played by them for the time being, as a tool to exert pressure on Baku. Again, lack of external support eventually proved essential in keeping Lezgi irredentism at bay.[18] In fact, it appears that the assumption that *autonomy* in itself caused secessionism in the South Caucasus lacks robust evidential support: because an entire range of factors were at work during the

conflict onset phase, clear causal relationships between independent and dependent variables are difficult to establish. Importantly, both the Lezgi and Avar communities lacked local ethnic elites and also an awareness of concrete borders defining what should be regarded as their ethnic homeland within Azerbaijan's northern areas. Therefore, I would argue that the possession of discrete political-administrative territorial entities, and of ethnic elites experienced in policing these entities, strengthens the in-group cohesion of a given ethnic minority: which may then itself prove essential for the process of politically organizing ethnic kin and of prompting collective action – thereby increasing the probability of ethnic rebellion. Hence, *external support* for secessionist movements seems to have been one of the major drivers of ethnopolitical conflict across the region: this factor is explained in further detail below.

External support of secessionist movements

The issue of external influence remains largely underestimated within the field of contemporary civil war and ethnopolitical conflict research. Yet, all of the cases of ethnopolitical conflict in the South Caucasus dealt with here illustrate that *external support to secessionist movements* proved crucial – either for the onset phase of ethnopolitical conflict, its escalatory phase, or both. Indeed, of the three regional ethnic wars, in at least two cases – those of Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia – attributes of international conflict were clearly identifiable. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia and Azerbaijan found themselves in the situation of war, followed shortly by Georgia and Russia.

Aside from this, it was the elites of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, not those of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, who first vocalized the issue of the autonomy's possible secession from Azerbaijan. Significantly, the Karabakh Committee (comprising influential members of the Armenia-based Armenian intelligentsia) was established earlier than the Krunk Committee, a similar organization gathering together Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. The Armenia-based Karabakh Committee – not Krunk – proved to be the ideological flagship of Nagorno-Karabakh secessionism, spreading its activities across Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Armenian communities in Russia and abroad. Moreover, as the armed conflict escalated in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, local Armenian armed forces relied heavily on the Armenian Republic's recruits and military and financial capabilities, which from time to time were boosted by military and fuel supplies provided by various Russian authorities.

Similarly, as described above, in both cases of Georgia's internal conflicts, the *Russian* authorities emerged as full-fledged participants, providing at least partial, and occasionally considerable, political, economic, and military support to the South Ossetian and, especially, Abkhaz separatists. If the formal threshold of a thousand battlefield deaths per annum is adopted to define a state of civil war, then it is unlikely that either the South Ossetian or Abkhaz conflicts would, in fact, have escalated into true civil wars had there been no military or logistical relief emanating from Russia; in all probability, these conflicts would have remained in their low-scale phases, being identified rather as ethnic riots and the like. This is especially true with respect to the Abkhazia conflict, in which the initial assault carried out by Georgian armed forces in the summer months of 1992 proved sufficient to occupy the major part of the autonomy; it was not until the advent of massive Russian-backed support for the separatists, in late 1992, that Abkhaz military forces returned to the battlefield and eventually managed to reverse the course of the war.[19]

Power asymmetry-related opportunity, institutionalization of violence, and path to ethnic civil war

Additionally, this book has shown that it was not the level or scope of the *grievance* to which members of a given ethnic minority thought they had been subjected (i.e., grievances such as social discrimination) that necessarily prompted dissidents to mobilize and take collective action in an attempt to achieve secession: as mentioned above, social inequality is always relative, and its perceptions are subjective. For instance, although the ethnocultural rights of Georgia's Azerbaijani or Armenian communities, or those of Azerbaijan's Talysh, Avar, and Lezgi communities, were respected to a considerably lesser degree than those of the Abkhazians (who enjoyed the status of autonomous republic), it was the *Abkhazians* who leaned toward secessionism (even though they already had an autonomous republic). The greed argument also fails to adequately explain the region's ethnic conflicts: the opportunity to loot and/or attain material wealth appears to have played no role in motivating the secessionism of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, the South Ossetians, or the Abkhazians. Hence, I disagree with the argument that the desire to rebel is conditioned by economic factors: in many instances of civil war or ethnic conflict, *(ir)rational* arguments of ethnic hierarchy or status, or of fear and the need for self-defense, or of retaliation and survival, in fact prevailed.

Indeed, the actual level of grievance is of less importance than the vision of perceived gain when a rebellion is started at a favorable time and place – that is to say, the factor of opportunity. In this regard, two findings are of importance. First, as outlined in the periodization scheme of conflict escalation and illustrated in the empirical chapters of the present book, the path from phase A (latent conflict) to Phase B (sporadic violence) is usually spontaneous, as it is triggered by the incidence of interethnic bloodshed, which in turn contributes to the overall radicalization of the ethnic communities in conflict. In Armenia, for instance, it was the pogroms of Sumgait, which took place in February 1988, that fostered the requisite sense of ethnic solidarity and which prompted the desire for active mobilization against a "treacherous" enemy – all driven now by fears of a "second genocide." A few days before the Sumgait event, two ethnic Azerbaijanis were murdered by Armenians during a quarrel. This event was the first to be reported by the local media, and it quickly gained salience amongst Azerbaijanis, first in Nagorno-Karabakh and then across the country. A series of violent clashes which soon followed further radicalized both Azerbaijanis and Armenians, marking the shift of the conflict from its latent phase to the phase of sporadic violence. In the case of the Georgian conflict, the killing of at least 15 ethnic Georgians by local Abkhazians during the Sukhumi riots of July 1989 marked the gradual transformation of the latent conflict into the phase of sporadic violence, even though minority Abkhazians generally had tended to keep a low profile until the massive Georgian invasion that followed three years later. Similarly, an awareness of Georgian demographic and military superiority certainly played a role in the initial phase of (latent) conflict as South Ossetians generally sought to avoid violent confrontation with the Georgians. In fact, the first incidence of (reported) interethnic bloodshed occurred during the course of the march on Tskhinvali, which then triggered subsequent intercommunal fighting in nearby areas – thereby shifting the conflict to the phase of sporadic violence.

Second, these case studies of South Caucasian conflicts have illustrated that, unlike the initial – and largely spontaneous – phases of sporadic violence, civil war is an outcome of a conscious decision on the part of agents of violence, local ethnic leadership to make use of what they deem to be an opportunity to either eliminate the embryo secessionist rebellion completely, or – in the case of ethnic separatists or irredentists – to effectively achieve secession. In both cases, civil war stems from a calculation of relative power asymmetry: that is, the perceived strength of the

in-group and the weakness of the out-group, where a favorable political constellation and/or external support that would make the secessionist movement viable, play a crucial role. Indeed, whereas the situation of latent conflict endured in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia until well into the second half of the 1980s, it was the events of cognitively significant bloodshed which finally triggered these conflicts. This, as mentioned above, shifted them first to the phase of sporadic violence, which in turn heightened ethnic polarization, and consequently intensified the sense of security dilemma amongst the members of each ethnic community with respect to their ethnic opponents. To put it another way, the path from ethnic riot to civil war leads through the institutionalization of violence, which is carried out by local elites. In order to maintain a sustainably large-scale armed conflict, a certain degree of centralization allowing for social mobilization, recruitment, military command, and financial, political, and logistic support is necessary, both on the side of insurgents and that of the regime.

In fact, it was in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet state that the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into a large-scale war in the winter of 1992. Similarly, the Georgians launched a concentrated assault in Abkhazia in August 1992, less than eight months after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R.[20] In the same manner, perhaps the most concentrated Georgian assault on Tskhinvali, with the massive use of artillery, took place in the middle of 1992.[21] Interestingly, in both cases Armenians and Georgians proved instrumental in exploiting the window of opportunity provided by the collapse of the Soviet state. Being aware of their military and organizational superiority, the Armenians seemingly deliberately chose this point to carry out a massive preventive strike on Azerbaijani strongholds, occupying the strategically located town of Shusha and the Lachin corridor. Similar arguments appear to have induced the Georgian assault on Abkhazia, as Georgian military commanders were well aware of the Abkhazians' relative weakness at the time; and so in carrying out a preventive strike, the Georgians apparently sought to occupy the autonomy's territory within a short period, thus preventing Moscow from using the Abkhazia issue as a tool in its negotiations with Tbilisi – a fact evidenced by the use of the South Ossetia conflict by certain high-ranking Russian officials in order to exert pressure on Tbilisi.[22] In all these cases, the efforts were fundamentally driven by the anarchic situation prevailing during the initial post-Soviet period, in which widespread security anxieties and the desire for self-protection – coupled with the sudden perception

of opportunity – prevailed in the strategic thinking of Georgian and Armenian political and military leaders.

Obviously, once the proposition is accepted that the path to civil war leads through the institutionalization of violence, whereby the perception of a window of opportunity then plays a pivotal role in motivating one of the actors of violence to strike first and so precipitating armed conflict, then one must attempt to define the very notion of opportunity. In fact, the perception, in practice, of what constitutes opportunity may vary significantly: the conscious decision to launch a military attack, based on the notion of opportunity, will reflect a wide array of necessarily subjective judgments as regards one's adversary's weaknesses and strengths as well as one's own,– and also a host of other factors pertinent both to domestic and external policy (along with behavioral categories such as personal prejudices, fears, preferences, cultural norms, group dynamics, risk perceptions, and so forth.)

Thus, a decision which seemingly is being taken on rational grounds, may well in fact be the outcome of *miscalculation*: hence, purely rationalist game theory based models may well fail when it comes to scholarly attempts to define – and/or anticipate – a civil war initiation. Kitovani's and Ioseliani's assault on Abkhazia may have not occurred at all had they reckoned in advance that Abkhaz forces would have been heavily supported by the Russian authorities, and had they possessed the information that Ardzinba-led Abkhaz elites enjoyed close ties with Russian army and secret service officials.

Again, ethnic civil war seems to be but one possible outcome – and not necessarily a predictable one – of a variety of possible outcomes resulting from contentious interrelations between state and ethnic dissent: but ethnic civil war is by no means the only possible outcome.

Notes

1 Introduction

1. Instead of the Russo-centric term "Transcaucasus" or "Trans-Caucasus" (commonly used until the breakup of the Soviet Union), the more politically neutral term "South Caucasus" is used throughout this study.
2. This fact may be at least partly explained by the high degree of politicization to which the social sciences were subjected within the post-Soviet states: In Soviet times, political science, history, anthropology, sociology, and related social sciences were either nonexistent or underdeveloped, or suffered from significant ideologization, which tended to deform them. Following the Soviet legacy, these disciplines – especially when issues of alleged national interest or security are believed to have been at stake – have been considered to be at the service of nation and society and thus have been brought into line with the political agenda of regimes and pro-regime intellectuals.

2 Theorizing on the Causes of Civil War and Ethnopolitical Conflict

1. Minorities at Risk Project (2002), Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, http://www.cidcm.umd.edu (downloaded on June 15, 2011).
2. Christian Scherrer, *Ethno-Nationalismus als globales Phänomen: Zur Krise der Staaten in der Dritten Welt und der früheren UdSSR*, Duisburg, Germany: Gerhard-Mercator-Universität, INEF-Report 6 (1994), 75.
3. David Singer: "Armed Conflict in the Former Colonial Regions: From Classification to Explanation." In Luc van de Goor, Kumar Rupesinghe, and Paul Sciarone, eds., *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the Causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States* (The Hague: Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs/The Netherlands Institute of International Relations: St. Martin's Press, 76).
4. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* (2003), 97: 1, 76–77
5. Bennett, D. Scott and Christian Davenport, *Minorities at Risk Dataset,* MARGenev1.0. Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/margene.htm (downloaded on June 19, 2011).
6. It is only recently, following the disastrous terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that an overwhelming interest in ethnopolitical conflict has been overshadowed by the current Western preoccupation with combating terrorism, which is now seen as the major security threat to Western interests.
7. Among others, Neal Jesse's and Kristen William's recent book, *Ethnic Conflict: A Systematic Approach to Cases of Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010)

provides an overview of some of the relevant theories which have been recently propounded. Students of ethnic conflict and civil war might also be advised to consult a recently published encyclopedia on the matter: Karel Cordell and Stephan Wolff, *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

8. Nicholas Sambanis, "Expanding Economic Models of Civil War Using Case Studies." *Perspectives on Politics*, 2:2 (June 2004), 260.
9. Rogers Brubaker and David Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24:1 (1998), 436.
10. See, for instance, Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories. Studies in Social Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 268–87.
11. David Myers, *Social Psychology* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 17.
12. In fact, an ethnic group shares a host of similarities with a nation: indeed, these are largely overlapping concepts. Albeit that there is general lack of accord in this matter, a nation is generally considered to be a socially mobilized group which strives for political self-determination, whereas an ethnic group traces its roots to common myths and symbols (see below).
13. An adherent of this approach would argue that even if an ethnic Japanese were to learn the German language, absorb German customs, convert to the Protestant religion, and subscribe to German ethnonational myths, they would never be considered to be German by mainstream German society.
14. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973).
15. Clifford Geerz (1973)
16. For a brief overview of the above-mentioned approaches, see: Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 96–97.
17. John Mueller, "The Banality of Ethnic War," *International Security*, 25:1 (2000), 62–67.
18. As for the very notion of ethnicity or ethnic groups, I use the Horowitzean concept defined by "ascriptive differences, whether the indicum is color, appearance, language, religion, some other indicator of common origin, or some combination thereof." Donald Horowitz (1985), 17.
19. See Dan Smith, "Trends and Causes of Armed Conflict," *The Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation,* eds. David Bloomfield, Martina Fischer, Beatrix Schmelzle, http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/smith_handbook.pdf, August 2004 (downloaded on June 27, 2011).
20. I largely draw on Anthony Smith's ethnosymbolist definition of an ethnic group as a community of people sharing five crucial traits: a belief in a common ancestry, common historical memories, some shared culture including language and religion, and, last but not least, a sense of attachment to a specific territory which is regarded as the ethnic homeland. Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57–97.
21. James Fearon, "Iraq's Civil War," *Foreign Affairs* 86:2 (2007), 86.
22. Dorte Andersen, Ulrike Barten, and Peter Jensen, "Challenges to Civil War Research. Introduction to the Special Issue on Civil War and Conflicts," *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 2:1 (2009), http://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/downloads/publications/JEMIE/2009/1–2009-Intro-Andersen-Barten-Jensen.pdf (downloaded on August 2, 2011), 2.

23. Roy Licklider, "How Civil Wars End," in Roy Licklider, ed., *Stopping the Killing* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 9.
24. For a wider discussion of the concept of civil war, see Nicholas Sambanis, "What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 48:6 (2004), 814–58
25. Bruce Gilley, "Against the concept of ethnic conflict," *Third World Quarterly*, 25:6 (2004), 1158.
26. Karl Cordell and Stephan Wolff, Ethnic Conflict. Causes, Consequences, Responses (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 4.
27. Ibid., 5.
28. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ordinary Language and External Validity," paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 2000, www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/ordlang.doc (downloaded June 20, 2011).
29. Chaim Kaufman, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Conflict," *International Security* 20:4 (1996), 137.
30. Ibid., 138.
31. This, in turn, accentuates ethnicity as the most eminent layer of identity furthering its politicization.
32. I define ethnic polarization as a process of increasing animosity between representatives of two or more ethnic groups in conflict who find themselves in a situation of increasing social division based directly upon ethnicity.
33. Emphasis in the original. Christopher Marsh, "The Religious Dimension of Post-Communist "Ethnic' Conflict," *Nationalities Papers*, 35:5 (November 2007), 811.
34. Nicholas Sambanis, "Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2001), 259–82.
35. James Fearon, "Ethnic Mobilization and Ethnic Violence," http://www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/ethreview.pdf August 11 (2004), 5 (downloaded on June 20, 2011).
36. Horowitz (1985).
37. Chaim Kaufman, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Conflict," *International Security* 20:4 (1996), 138.
38. Collier and Hoeffler (2001).
39. Fearon and Laitin (2003).
40. Cordell and Wolff (2010).
41. David Dessler, "How to Sort Causes in the Study of Environmental Change and Violent Conflict," in Nina Græger and Dan Smith, eds., *Environment, Poverty, Conflict*, PRIO Report No. 2 (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1994).
42. Dessler, David, "How to Sort Causes in the Study of Environmental Change and Violent Conflict," in Nina Græger, Dan Smith, eds., *Environment, Poverty, Conflict* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1994).
43. Naturally, the scheme of conflict escalation proposed here presupposes a certain degree of simplification. In fact, it is quite rare for conflicts to proceed in a perfectly straightforward fashion: only in hindsight is it possible to strictly identify specific stages of conflict. Quite often, a latent conflict

(i.e., one in its mobilization phase) will transform episodically into the stage of sporadic violence (i.e., its radicalization stage) and then back and forth – without necessarily culminating in the phase of civil war (i.e., of large-scale violence). Conflict escalation is in fact often marked by a variety of individual, micro-level determined conversions which may effectively come to influence the interplay of successive conflict stages.

44. In order to avoid conceptual divergences from the tenets of a body of quantitative scholarship which I both draw from and attest to in this book, I adopt the same definition of civil war utilized by the COW project, according to which the threshold of full civil war is defined as a thousand battlefield deaths per annum.
45. In my understanding, the extremity of such acts of violence is attributable to the cognitive strength which they assume in the perception of members of the respective ethnic communities, who begin to perceive such acts of violence within the context of an overall security dilemma. Such acts of violence do not have to necessarily be large-scale, yet they tend to gain wide public (i.e., media) coverage which dovetails convincingly with existing ethnic polarization.
46. Jeffrey Dixon, "What Causes Civil Wars? Integrating Quantitative Research Findings," *International Studies Review* 11 (2009), 725.
47. In the present overview, I focus only on major theories pertinent to the field. The categorization is rough: some of the theories outlined are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary; while some accounts, such as perceptional accounts, may well be nominally ascribed to the phase of onset causes, yet such accounts are nonetheless crucial for conflict escalation and, hence, are included within the latter section.
48. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* (2003), 97:1, 76.
49. Peter Liberman, *Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
50. James Fearon, David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* (2003), 97: 1, 80.
51. Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, Policy Research Working Paper 2355, Washington, D.C.: World Bank (2001).
52. GDP is an abbreviation for Gross Domestic Product.
53. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* (1998), 50, 571.
54. Indra de Soysa, "Paradise is a Bazaar? Greed, Creed, and Governance in Civil War, 1989–99," *Journal of Peace Research* (2002), 39:4, 395–416. See also Indra de Soysa and Eric Neumayer, "Resource Wealth and the Risk of Civil War Onset: Results from a New Dataset of Natural Resource Rents, 1970–1999," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* (2007), 24: 3, 201–18.
55. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* (2003), 97: 1, 79–80.
56. It is also worth mentioning that studies focusing on GDP levels are apt to give only limited chronological coverage, as relevant data for most countries are only available for the post–World War II period.
57. Ross, Michael L., 2006. A Closer Look at Oil, Diamonds, and Civil War, *Annual Review of Political Science,* 9: 265–300.

58. In their recent work, partially out of their recognition of the fact that greed and grievance may be two sides of the same coin, Collier and Hoeffler have come to rename their theory as the "feasibility theory," the central argument of which is the somewhat banal statement that: "where a rebellion is financially and militarily feasible it will occur." Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 61 (2009), 1–2.
59. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 50 (1998), 563–73.
60. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 50 (1998), 563–73.
61. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review,* 97:1 (2003), 75–90.
62. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56:4 (2004), 563–95.
63. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* (2003), 97:1, 75–90. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2004), 563–95.
64. Halvard Buhaug, "Relative Capability and Rebel Objective in Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 43:6 (2006), 691–708.
65. Tanja Ellingsen, "Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew? Multiethnicity and Domestic Conflict During and After the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44:2 (2000), 228–49.
66. See, for instance, Fearon's *Governance and Civil War Onset*, World Development Report/Background Paper 2011, World Bank (August 2010), http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTWDR2011/Resources/6406082–1283882418764/WDR_Background_Paper_Fearon.pdf (downloaded on July 15, 2011).
67. Ibid.
68. Keith Jaggers, Ted Gurr, "Tracking Democracy's Third Wave with the Polity III Data," *Journal of Peace Research*, 32:4 (1995), 469–82.
69. Havard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils Gleditsch, "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, 95:1 (2001), 33–48.
70. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, 97:1 (2003), 75–90; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56:4 (2004), 563–95; Charles Boix, "Economic Roots of Civil Wars and Revolutions in the Contemporary World," *World Politics* 60:3 (2008), 390–437.
71. Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995).
72. Dennis Sandole, *Capturing the Complexity of Conflict. Dealing with Violent Ethnic Conflicts of the Post-Cold War era* (London/New York: Pinter, 1999).
73. Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2004).
74. Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

75. David Callahan, *Unwinnable Wars: American Power and Ethnic Conflict* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).
76. Quoted in Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds. The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 5.
77. A set of explanations pertaining to the dynamics of ethnic conflict from the security dilemma perspective is provided by William Rose, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Some New Hypotheses," *Security Studies* 9:4 (2000), 1–51.
78. Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35:1 (1993), 27–47.
79. Barry Weingast "Constructing Trust: The Politics and Economics of Ethnic and Regional Conflict," in Karol Soltan, Virginia Haufler and Eric Uslaner, eds. *Institutions and Social Order* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 163–200.
80. Roger Brubaker and David Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24:1 (1998), 423–52.
81. Evan Lieberman, Prerna Singh, "Institutionalized Ethnicity and Civil War," http://prernasingh.net/pdf/Lieberman_Singh_Institutionalized-ethnicity-and-civil-war_july20.pdf, place and datum of publication unspecified (downloaded July 11, 2011).
82. See, inter alia, *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Michal Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999); V. P. Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security*, 19:3 (Winter 1994–95), 130–66.
83. Michael Brown, "The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview," in Michael Brown, ed., *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 20.
84. David Lake and Donald Rotschild, "Spreading Fear: The Genesis of Transnational Ethnic Conflict," in David Lake and Donald Rotschild, eds., *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 20.
85. In fact, it can be claimed that instrumentalist accounts are closely related to perceptional ones as it is ethnic mobilization that is believed to serve for political elites as a tool to ensure their grip on power and achieve political goals; to that end, they seek to incite a sense of being threatened among their in-group members, which necessarily leads to the establishment of perceptions of fear and the need for self-help.
86. Nonetheless, in some instances, civilians do become the direct targets of state authorities' terror tactics, since in order to successfully defeat a rebellion it is crucial for the state to deprive it of the support of local populations. In fact, the effectiveness of any insurgency is intimately dependent upon the assistance of civilians, who provide the insurgents with shelter, food, information, and recruits.
87. Christian Davenport, David Armstrong, Mark Lichbach, "Conflict Escalation and the Origins of Civil War," Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association Chicago (2005), www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/davenport/dcawcp/paper/111605.pdf (downloaded on July 10, 2011).

3 The South Caucasus: A History of Identities, an Identity of Histories

1. This originally Caucasian ethnic group had nothing in common with the present-day Balkan Albanians: in fact the language of the vanished Caucasian Albanians was related to the languages of the Lezgi branch of the Nakh-Dagestani language group. The North Azerbaijani Udins are regarded as a remnant of the Caucasian Albanian population.
2. The question of the ethnogenesis of the present-day Azerbaijanis – within the context of the conflicting ethnohistoriographies influenced by the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh – will receive attention below in this chapter.
3. This toponym apparently derives from the name of the old Persian province, Aturpatkan: Atropates was the name of a Persian satrap (provincial governor) and vassal of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE. The local name Aturpatkan was originally used more to designate Iranian Azerbaijan (or Southern Azerbaijan, as the Azerbaijanis call it today); during the period of Arab rule (seventh–tenth/eleventh centuries) the name was definitively changed to Adarbaijan or Azarbaijan. The name Aran tended to be used in the Middle Ages to designate a territory that more or less matches the present territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. More often, however, a toponym would be used to designate such more localized areas, such as Naxçıvan (Nakhchivan, Nakhichevan), or Şämaxa (Shemakha), Muğan (Mugan), etc. According to a competing theory, this toponym derived from the Persian word "azar" (fire), since there were a great many Zoroastrian temples, in which a flame was burning, in that country, rich as it was/is in crude oil.
4. For more details on the (politicized) debates on the Azerbaijanis' ethnogenesis, see: Viktor Shnirelman, *Voyny pamyati. Mify, identichnost i politika na Kavkaze* (Moscow: IKC Akademkniga, 2003), 165–94.
5. *Türk* is an entrenched autoethnonym for present-day Anatolian Turks, and in Turkish it is used both as a noun and as an adjective; this is also the case for the great majority of Turkic languages. It is interesting to note that the designation *Türk* in nearly all Turkic languages also means "Turkic" – and this often makes it difficult to differentiate between "Turkish" (meaning "Anatolian"), and "Turkic." For this reason the adjective *Türklü* – literally, "Turkic" – was recently introduced in Turkey (and is also used as a noun). There is also the more politicized word, *Turanlı* (Turanian), which is derived from *Turan*, a mythologized designation for a common homeland, a sort of mythical original homeland of all Turkic nations. It should be added that the word *Turan* – although much less than *Türkestan*, translated as the "Land of the Turks" – has been used as a designation for Central Asia, which together with the Altai Region is where the Turkic peoples are believed to originate.
6. In order to further clarify matters, I suggest the following timeframe: *Türk* was partly an autoethnonym, partly the official ethnonym in the U.S.S.R. in the 1930s, and partly an autoethnonym in 1992–93; Muslim was partially an autoethnonym, and the official ethnonym in the U.S.S.R. between 1918–22 and from 1924–36; Azerbaijani was the official ethnonym in 1918–20, and from 1936/37 until the present. Even today, however, a significant number of Azerbaijanis, especially refugees from Armenia and natives of Nakhichevan, still identify themselves as *Türks*.

7. We can hardly label the strongly Turkified, Muslim Laz – who have historically tended to be under the dominion of Anatolian empires – as being part of the (political) Georgian nation. Nonetheless, the Laz language (Chan) is very close to west Georgian Mingrelian. Some other areas of northeastern Turkey, claimed by Georgian as well as Armenian nationalists, are inhabited at present only by Turkish or Kurdish elements, but not by a Georgian or Armenian population.
8. It should be pointed out that, in the twentieth century, Turkey once again threatened Georgia. In 1918, the advance of the Ottoman army, supported by Muslim Ajarians and Meskhs, was halted before the suburbs of Tbilisi only by the vigorous intervention of Turkey's ally, Germany, which maintained a protective shield for the Menshevik government in Tbilisi.
9. I analyze the Azerbaijani perception of Armenia and the Armenians within its historical perspective in the part of the book which is dedicated to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.
10. These were Seljuqids, Timurids, Kara Koyunlus, Ak Koyunlus, Safavis or Kyzylbash, Afshars, and Qajars. All of these dynasties or ruling tribes, with the exception of the Timurids (the Chagatay or Qarluk branch of the Turkic languages, represented for example by modern Uzbek and Uygur languages) were descendants of Oghuz Turks; the ethnic origin of the Safivid dynasty is not entirely clear.
11. There was an exception to this period of hegemony during the time of the domination of the Mongolian dynasty of the Jalairid Il-Khans (thirteenth–fifteenth centuries), which followed the occupation of Iran by Mongolian forces in the mid-thirteenth century and the annexation of its territory to the Mongolian empire.
12. In Azerbaijani, *Qizilbash* (Qızılbaş) means "golden-headed" (*qizil* – "gold"; *bash* – "head").
13. In contemporary Azerbaijani historiography, there is a tendency to regard state entities established by Turkic dynasties not as Persian or Iranian, but as Azerbaijani, a typical tendency of post-colonial nations.
14. For more on the history of the Iranian Azerbaijanis, see in particular Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 1–77.
15. Referring to contemporary Russian sources, Tadeusz Swietochowski states that at the moment of the Russian occupation of the Azerbaijani khanates, the number of adherents to Sunni Islam was roughly equal to the number of Shiites. The number of rebellious and more politically active Sunnis gradually declined because of their migration to the Ottoman Empire. Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8.
16. Tadeusz Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905–1920," in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change. Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, Ronald G. Suny, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 211–12.
17. These were mainly Transcaucasian Azerbaijanis and Kazan and Crimean Tatars, politically the most active Muslims in the empire of the Romanovs, who were behind the emergence of Pan-Turkism and promoted it the most. Only afterwards did Pan-Turkism spread westward to the Ottoman Empire

where, after the collapse of the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Ottoman projects, it soon became a constructive ideology. From there, during World War I, it also began to be promoted back in the direction of the "Russian Turks."

18. *Azärbaycan*, September 25, 1918.
19. I will cover the question of Armenian–Azerbaijani relations in historical perspective in more detail in the following chapter, in the part analyzing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
20. In the end, the Caucasian wars did not spread to Azerbaijani areas, with the exception of the predominantly Sunni-populated, mountainous parts of northernmost Azerbaijan. This was particularly due to the fact that the resistance north of the Caucasian Mountains was fought under the banner of Sunni Islam, strongly influenced by Islamic mysticism (Sufism). From time to time the north-Caucasian highlanders were supported by Azerbaijani Sunnis inhabiting the mountainous areas bordering Dagestan which, together with Chechnya and the Circassian lands of the northwestern Caucasus, became a hotbed of anti-colonial resistance.
21. *Kavkazskiy kalendar na 1854 god* (Tiflis, 1853), 352–53.
22. Attributed to Capt. Pruzhanovsky, representing the Russian colonial administration in Shusha, Karabakh, 1845, in *Kolonialnaya politika Rossiyskogo tsarizma v Azerbayjane v 20–60ie gody XIX v.* (Moscow, 1936), vol. 2, 21.
23. Ibid., 306–307.
24. Ordinary Azerbaijanis have often fought on the side of the Russians: for example in World War I. At that time, a Tatar (Azerbaijani) regiment was part of the legendary Caucasian Homeland Cavalry Division: formed in 1914, this unit became known to its contemporaries as the "Savage Division" because of its tenacity and because of the exotic appearance of its horsemen (Caucasian Muslims). The Caucasian Division was deployed in fighting against German and Austrian forces in the western areas of the Russian Empire. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Azerbaijani volunteers from the Shiite population joined the Russian army during the Russo–Turkish War (1877–78) – while some of their Sunni countrymen allied themselves with the Turks, even going into battle alongside them.
25. *Korenizatsiya*, meaning indigenization, is a Russian term referring to early Soviet policies launched in the 1920s and carried out in subsequent decades, with the aim to promote representatives of the "titular" nationalities of the Soviet republics and ethnic minorities into local government within their respective national territories.
26. There are several different opinions regarding the origins of the Armenians. The Armenians themselves use the historical autoethnonym *Hay*, and in their country they say *Hayastan*. According to currently prevailing opinion, the Indo-European Armenians are the descendants of immigrants from the southern Balkans (Thrace), or western Anatolia (Phrygia), from the sixth century BCE, who arrived on the Armenian Plateau at the time of the decline of the ancient Kingdom of Urartu. This accords with historical accounts provided by several ancient Greek chroniclers – e.g., Herodotus in the fifth century BCE.

    In an attempt to prove the autochthonous character of their own nation, and at the same time to archaicize its history, Armenian historians have claimed that the Armenians are the direct descendents of the Urartians: however, research by linguists in the 1970s proved that Urartian was not

an Indo-European language (although in contemporary Armenian there is a fairly significant layer of lexical borrowings from Urartian). The very word Armenia (Arminia) first appears in ancient Persian in the Inscription of Darius (the Behistun Inscription) dating from 513 BCE.

27. This involves the Kingdom of Cilicia. This was a state with developed ties with the Crusader states in the Levant: it extended along the Mediterranean coast of the Asia Minor peninsula from 1078 until 1375, when it was overthrown by an incursion of Egyptian Mamluks. For the sake of completeness, it should be added that the occupation of the last independent states within the territory of historical Armenia (to which Cilicia, of course, never belonged) is dated from an earlier period: 1045 (the occupation of the Ani Kingdom by the Byzantine army) or 1064 (the occupation of the Kars principality by Seljuq troops).
28. Armenians are divided – mainly on the basis of linguistic criteria – into western (Anatolian) Armenians, inhabiting so-called western Armenia (present-day eastern Turkey) and other areas of the peninsula of Asia Minor, including Istanbul and Izmir; and eastern (Caucasian and Iranian) Armenians. Western Armenians use west Armenian dialects, while eastern Armenians use (mutually comprehensible) East Armenian dialects. Certain differences persist between the material and spiritual cultures of eastern and western Armenians. The latter now constitute the core of the Armenian diaspora abroad, mainly in France and the United States.
29. Constantinople's eighth-century banishment of the Paulicians, an Armenian religious sect, to the area of present-day Bulgaria may be regarded as the very first documented case of mass migration by the Armenian population, and of the subsequent arising of a compact ethnoreligious community beyond the historical territory of Armenia. The Greek emperors supported the migration of Armenians – which was itself related to the territorial gains of the Macedonian dynasty – from eastern provinces to the west: i.e., from the Euphrates to Cappadocia and Cilicia, in the tenth century. Armenians thus settled in border regions conquered from the Arabs. By driving the Armenian population out of its original territories (Ani, Kars, etc.), the Byzantines sought to enhance the security of the border area.
    Another wave of migration came in the Middle Ages: this was motivated mainly by economic factors. This time, the Armenian population headed for the eastern Mediterranean, Poland, Russia, certain areas of the Balkans, northern Italy, and western Anatolia, as well as to India and Iraq – mainly following trading routes. A special case was the forcible resettlement of tens of thousands of Caucasian Armenians to the interior of Persia, carried out by Shah Abbas I the Great in the early seventeenth century. The shah was attempting in this way to economically and demographically weaken the border area which had been the arena of bloody wars between Shiite Safavid Persia and the predominantly Sunni Ottoman Empire.
30. The Armenian state was the very first to formally acknowledge Christianity as its state religion. According to tradition this occurred in 301, but some critical sources give a later date. For more details on Armenian national myths in the context of the ethnosymbolic paradigm, see Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 212–21.

31. As a consequence of this council, the Armenian Apostolic Church, or Gregorian Church, (but not the Monophysites) diverged theologically from Byzantine Orthodoxy.
32. In this regard, the most telling historical document is the account of the twelfth-century Armenian chronicler, Matevos Urhayetsi (Matthew of Edessa/Urfa). The seventeenth-century historian Simon Lehatsi has interesting things to say about the now nearly forgotten Armenian–Greek antagonism.
33. This concerned bans on carrying weapons, riding a horse, owning land, holding a position in the state administration, etc. Over time, however, the restrictions eased, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – especially in Ottoman cities – it was relatively commonplace to encounter Armenians at the highest levels of state administration.
34. In an effort to limit the influence of the more numerous Greeks, especially in the towns of Asia Minor and in Constantinople/Istanbul, the Ottoman sultans did not hesitate to support Armenians (as well as Jews), who before long began to push the Greeks out of activities that had traditionally been regarded as the Greeks' domain: trade and finance.
35. For more details, see Arman Kirakosian, ed., *The Armenian Massacres, 1894–1896: U.S. Media Testimony* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).
36. Anahide Ter-Minassian, "Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912)," in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change. Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, Ronald G. Suny, ed. (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1996), 146.
37. Ronald G. Suny, *Looking toward Ararat. Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 104.
38. In view of the unfavorable light in which the "Bulgarian question" was regarded in St. Petersburg during and shortly after the Congress of Berlin, and in view of the growing strategic competition from Austria-Hungary (supported by an ever more powerful Germany), the Balkans appeared increasingly problematic as a route for an invasion into Turkey.
39. Until 1915, western (Turkish or Anatolian) Armenia was the home of the vast majority of the Armenian population. According to a census of the Ottoman Empire in 1914, 1,295,000 inhabitants of Armenian nationality were living within the territory of the sultanate, i.e., mostly within the borders of modern Turkey. (See Esat Uras, Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi – Istanbul: Belge Yayinlari, 1988), 142. According to a count made by the Armenian Patriarchate in 1913, the number of Armenian inhabitants in the empire was 1,914,000. See Raymond H. Kevorkian, Paul B. Paboudjian, Les Arméniens dans l' Empire Ottoman à la vielle du génocide (Paris: ARHIS, 1992), 22. This discrepancy of more than half a million in the data relating to the size of the Armenian population of Turkey on the eve of World War I makes it more difficult to determine exactly the number of Armenian victims during the period in question.
40. David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), 58.
41. Ibid., 60.
42. Ibid., 60.
43. The conflict between Armenians and Kurds at the end of the 1890s was close to becoming an ethnic conflict. An additional factor was the fear of Kurdish

tribal chiefs with respect to the desire for autonomy, or indeed the active irredentist aspirations of Armenians who, with the declared support of Russia and the Western powers, were striving for control over territories that the Kurds themselves claimed.

44. Attempts at a conciliation between Christians and Muslims ended definitively after the fiasco of the Young Turk Revolution (1908), which originally proclaimed the granting of equal rights to the country's Muslim and Christian communities, but which before long – after the failure of the Pan-Ottoman project – occasioned the strengthening of Pan-Turkism (and, partially, Pan-Islamism as well) as of a state ideology.
45. After the defeat of Enver Pasha's Third Army on the Caucasian front, the tsar's troops advanced fairly deeply into the Anatolian interior: in early April 1915, on the route of the Russian army into the province of Van, (which was inhabited by many Armenians) there was a massive uprising, during which thousands of Muslim civilians were murdered. What disturbed Istanbul even more, however, was the threat that the Van rebellion might spread to the vast territory of eastern Anatolia, making it relatively easy for the Russian army to advance farther in the west.
46. Armenian sources usually give figures of up to 1.5 million people. See Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995).
47. It is not without interest that Armenians regarded Azerbaijanis as "Turks" (in the light of their ethnolingual affinity with Anatolian Turks) long before Azerbaijanis had largely assumed an ethnolingual identity and began to regard themselves as "Turks" or "Azerbaijani Turks."
48. Works by chroniclers which do not accord with this image are virtually unknown in Armenia: only selected episodes of Turkish–Armenian coexistence have been accepted. Likewise, there is no mention of the prominent role played by Kurdish tribes in the massacres and genocide.
49. The Russo–Turkish Wars in particular were a powerful impulse for waves of Armenian migration to Russia. Thus, while in 1873 the Armenian population of the Caucasus was 333,242, in 1886 it was 690,615 and by 1916 it had reached 1,211,145. See *Svod materialov dlya issledovaniya ekonomicheskogo byta gosudarstvennykh krestyan Zakavkazskogo kraya* (Tbilisi, 1886), vol. 2, 234–36.
50. This Russian view of the inhabitants of the Caucasus is largely based upon a very stereotyped image of the North Caucasian highlander.
51. Yury Gagemeister, *Zakavkazskie ocherki* (St. Petersburg, 1845), 14–15.
52. *Kavkazskiy kalendar na 1854 god* (Tbilisi, 1853), 360.
53. Captain Pruzhanovsky, a representative of the Russian colonial administration in the Karabakh town of Shusha, in 1845, quoted from *Kolonialnaya politika Rossiyskogo tsarizma v Azerbayjane v 20–60ie gody XIX v.* (Moscow, 1936), vol. 2, 21–23.
54. *Russkoe slovo*, February 12, 1905.
55. This fact – beside considerations of class – played a decisive role for Armenian Communists, as well as for Armenian nationalists, in part from the ranks of the Dashnaktsutiun Party, who were in power between 1918 and 1920. After Armenia's defeat in the brief Turkish–Armenia War (1920), Armenian Communists and nationalists – who were aware of the structural imbalance between Turkish and Armenian forces and of the inability of the latter to

avoid a repeat of the Armenian massacres – caused an uprising in Armenia at the end of 1920, the purpose of which was the annexation of the country to the Soviet state. The Russians were then regarded as the "lesser of evils." The ceding of the country's independence to Russia – a potential protector – was accepted by some Armenian patriots as being the only way to secure the physical survival of the Armenian nation, given the prevailing historical and geographical circumstances. There was also a strong feeling, forcefully expressed during Soviet rule, of having been betrayed by the Western powers, who had promised Armenia significant territorial gains in eastern Anatolia at the expense of the defeated Ottoman Empire under the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) – but who never came to the defense of Armenian interests thereafter.

56. In reality, the territory of Armenia was not occupied until 1921 – after the Russian and Armenian Bolsheviks had managed, with the cooperation of units of the local Azerbaijani home defense, to crush the nationalist uprising in the Zangezur Mountains in the south of the country.
57. Such efforts to archaicize the origins of statehood, which even modern Georgian historiography has failed to avoid, is a widespread phenomenon throughout post-Soviet territory and other areas.
58. For more details on Georgian conceptions of ethnogenesis, see Shnirelman (2003), 293–353.
59. The place name, Georgia, seems to derive from Russian, and is probably an altered form of the Persian-Turkish word Gurjistan/*Gürcistan*, itself derived from the name of the patron saint of Georgia, St. George (Giorgi in Georgian). The Georgians themselves, however, now generally regard themselves as Kartvels (*qarthvels*).
60. The southwestern and western areas of present-day Georgia (including Abkhazia and Ajaria) were either under the influence of the Ottoman Empire or else directly under its administration, while the southeastern and eastern areas were subject to Persia, and the areas in the north, difficult to access, retained their independence. These spheres of power and cultural influence (west, east) were the consequence of the great power constellations which were such a feature of the political complexion of this region during late antiquity. Thus the Persian (Iranian) states or Arab caliphates or emirates collectively controlled the south of the region; while the Romans, Greeks, and Turks, controlled Asia Minor – so dominating Georgia's western areas.
61. The Surami mountain range divides Georgia's territory into two equal parts. The present Georgian nation includes a number of historically occurring sub-ethnic groups which are designated by the common term, Kartvels (Georgian autoethnonym, from which the country's historical name, **Sakartvelo**, is derived): these sub-ethnic groups speak distinct dialects and have specific cultural–regional peculiarities. These are the Kakhetians or Kakhs (the region of Kakheti), the Imeretians (Imereti), the Gurians (Guria), Ratchians (Racha), Khevsurs (Khevsureti), Meskhs (Meskheti), Tushians or Tush (Tusheti), Ajarians (Ajaria or Ajara), Ingiloys (northeastern Azerbaijan, or Hereti, in Georgian), along with certain other groups. A particular status – both from a linguistic and cultural-historical standpoints – has been assumed by two other sub-ethnic groups: the Svans (Svaneti) of the mountainous northwest, and the Megrels (Samegrelo, Mingrelia, or Megrelia) in the west

of the country (i.e., culturally and linguistically close to the Laz, who inhabit certain northeastern areas of modern Turkey): the languages of these groups are very different from the modern written Georgian language. The Svans, Megrels, and to a certain extent also the Islamicized Ajarians, still regarded themselves as independent nationalities in the first half of the twentieth century, although they are culturally and linguistically related to Georgians (Kartvels).

62. Christianity was adopted by King Mirian of Iberia in 337 after, according to Georgian tradition, the king himself had been baptized by St. Nino of Cappadocia.
63. The almost periodical Dagestani (Lezgin, Avar) raids were particularly traumatic for the territory of eastern Georgia. The valleys and foothills of Kakheti bordering upon Dagestan were often laid waste by the unexpected hit-and-run attacks of highlanders, who stole valuables, drove off livestock, and abducted people. Georgian brides are said to have been held in particular esteem amongst the highlanders – who would hide out in so-called "eagles nests" in inaccessible mountainous areas, where it was virtually impossible to apprehend them. Their banditry was sometimes also coordinated with Turkish or Persian rulers, who sought thereby to weaken the east Georgian states as much as possible. It was attacks by the Dagestanis that led the east Georgian ruler to turn for the first time to Moscow with a request for military assistance (at the end of the sixteenth century). The subsequent military campaign to Dagestan – the very first such campaign undertaken by the Russian state – was requested by the Georgians in order to strike a blow against the local ruler, the Kumyk Shamkhal. In spite of initial successes, the Muscovites' campaign, which lacked effective organization, was eventually halted by Dagestani forces; it also was opposed by the then still powerful Safavids and Ottomans.
64. At the end of the nineteenth century, Tiflis began to compete successfully against Baku, which was attracting more and more investors thanks to the industrial extraction of crude oil.
65. Especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the "urban" material and spiritual culture of eastern Georgia – the musical culture in particular – which was concentrated in Tiflis/Tbilisi, began to rid itself of "oriental" elements – i.e., the age-old influence of Persia and Turkey.
66. Quoted from that author's "*Otkrytoe pismo Ulyanovu-Leninu*," in *Ozhog rodnogo ochaga* (symposium, editor not given) (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 222.
67. For more details on the treatment of Georgia and the Caucasus in the Russian literature of the nineteenth century, see Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
68. K. K. Arsenyev, F. F. Petrushevsky, eds., *Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar* (St. Petersburg: Brockhaus–Yefron, 1913), vol. 12, 127.
69. Quoted from Sergei Maximov in: Ronald G. Suny, "The Emergence of Political Society in Georgia," in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change. Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, Ronald G. Suny, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 115.
70. These were demonstrations in the center of Tbilisi, held on March 9, 1956. The original purpose of this assembly was to protest against the ending of

the "personality cult" of Joseph Stalin (Jughashvili) – who was, himself, of Georgian origin born in the north Georgian town of Gori: Moscow's move to end the cult of Stalin occurred under the auspices of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. Thereafter, some demonstrators, mostly university students, became radicalized – slogans could even be heard calling for the renewal of Georgian independence. During the attack against the demonstrators, between 80 and 150 people, mostly youths, were killed. (This apparent discrepancy in the figures for those killed is accounted for by the fact that the incident was covered up during the decades of Soviet rule; hence, the authorities never made public the exact numbers of dead and wounded).

71. The growth of anti-Caucasian attitudes within Russian society which began to spread during the 1970s represents a special problem in this regard. For further information concerning this topic, see Emil Souleimanov, "*O fenoménu kavkazofobie a čečenofobie v ruské společnosti*," *Mezinárodní politika*, 29:5 (2005).
72. World Bank, International Comparison Program database http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD/compare?country=am (downloaded July 3, 2011).
73. Friedrich Schneider, "The Value Added of Underground Activities: Size and Measurement of the Shadow Economies and Shadow Economy Labor Force All Over the World," *World Bank Summer Research Workshop on Market Institutions*, World Bank, Washington D. C., July 17–19, 2000. Schneider's revised article is available at http://www.econ.jku.at/members/Schneider/files/publications/ShadEcWorldbank.PDF (downloaded July 2, 2011).
74. Soviet elites had previously been instrumental in assuring a fairly high standard of living for their citizens across the country, capitalizing as they did upon the high prices of its energy exports; however, this was a state of affairs which began to reverse dramatically in the second half of the 1980s.
75. Kamilutdin Gajiyev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza* (Moscow: *Mezhdunarodnyie otnosheniya*, 2003), 60.
76. Data from the U.S. Department of State, http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/a/35170.htm (downloaded on February 2, 2008).
77. Data taken from Gadjiyev (2003), 61.
78. During the past two centuries in Azerbaijan, the term "clan" has been used to refer to a larger grouping based on specifically regional criteria – and not on (now largely forgotten) criteria of blood relationships (big families – Arabic *täyfä* or Turkic *soy*). The latter would also imply a certain degree of bonding of clan members based upon their family relations, culture, and history. The current regional division of Azerbaijani society into clans follows upon the tradition of the Azerbaijani khanates, of which historically there have been dozens; gradually, however, this division is being displaced owing to the intensive efforts of the ruling and intellectual elite to unite the nation by creating a common Azerbaijani national identity.
79. The two most polarized clans are the most powerful ones: the Nakhichevan, or Nakhchivan-Yerevan clan, which has traditionally been regarded as the more nationalistic, pro-Western and pro-Turkish of the two; and the more liberal Baku clan, which is regarded as being rather more pro-Russian. One of the explanations advanced to account for this dispute is that the sheer

harshness of life in the hostile Armenian environment, especially within those areas close to the Turkish border, has served to strengthen nationalist sentiments among Armenian and Nakhichevan Azerbaijanis since the end of the nineteenth century. It is arguable that this same harshness of life has also strengthened the solidarity amongst these groups, since they have been accustomed to relying upon their own (sub-) ethnic group for their collective survival. On the other hand, life in the environment of multiethnic, liberal Baku, where the population was Russified to a considerable degree during the twentieth century, has tended to weaken the nationalistic self-consciousness of the local Azerbaijanis.

80. For detailed information on the onset of conflict, see the next chapter.
81. Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 93.
82. Shale Horowitz, *From Ethnic Conflict to Stillborn Reform. The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2005), 63.
83. Dmitry Furman and Ali Abasov, "Azerbaydzanskaya revoluciya," in *Azerbaydzhan i Rossiya, obshchestva i gosudarstva*, Dmitry Furman, ed. (Moscow: Sakharov Center, 1998), http://www.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_005.htm (downloaded on December 10, 2007).
84. Under the terms of what came to be known as the Union Treaty, Soviet republics were obliged to apply a greater degree of self-rule within the reshaped Soviet state: this followed a March 1991 referendum which was held in 9 of 15 Soviet republics (excluding the 3 Baltic countries, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova, whose leaderships boycotted the referendum). The Soviet Union had then to be renamed either as the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, or as the Union of Sovereign Republics. However, the failure of the attempted coup d'état of August 19–21, 1991 effectively rendered obsolete these plans to save the Soviet state by reforming it.
85. Interestingly, the leaders of the Central Asian republics virtually unanimously supported the attempted coup d'état in Moscow.
86. In September 1991, a quickly organized – and apparently fraudulent – election was held, in which Mütällibov, who had no rival candidate, won convincingly.
87. Cornell (2001), 333–66.
88. Horowitz (2005), 64.
89. Elçibäy, which can be literally translated as "Mister Messenger" in Azerbaijani, was the pseudonym of Abülfaz Äliyev from 1990.
90. Svante Cornell, *Azerbaijan Since Independence* (New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2010), 70.
91. Cf. Horowitz (2005), 65–66.
92. At the time, Heydär Äliyev was the chairman of the parliament of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic. Previously, he had been first secretary of the Communist Party of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (1969–82), a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Socialist Republic(1976–82), first deputy premiere of the U.S.S.R. (1982–85) and a KGB general.
93. There is a consensus of opinion that the original intention of Moscow, or of the Russian Army generals who had supported Hüseynov's campaign, had been to create the conditions for Ayaz Mütällibov, a politician absolutely

loyal to the Kremlin, to return to power, but Elçibäy's unexpected move (which needs to be understood in terms of clan politics) effectively scuppered that plan. Because the prevailing opinion at the time was that the old apparatchik, Äliyev would behave loyally towards the Kremlin, Moscow was willing to accept this unexpected development.

94. At present, besides 2% of Russians at most, the only significant ethnic minority is the community of Yazidis, a Kurdish-speaking ethnic group which, unlike the predominantly Muslim Kurds, claims Yazidism (a sort of remnant of Zoroastrianism) as its religion. See the *CIA World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/am.html (downloaded on May 15, 2007).
95. In the same period, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh founded an organization called *Krunk* (The Crane), which pursued goals similar to those of the Karabakh Committee: subsequently the two organizations cooperated vigorously. For more information on this and related issues of conflict onset, see the next chapter.
96. Tomáš Šmíd, "*Etnický konflikt o Náhorní Karabach*," in *Etnické konflikty v postkomunistickém prostoru*, Tomáš Šmíd and Vladimír Vaďura*, eds*. (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2007), 157.
97. Cf. Ian Bremer, "Armenia' s New Autocrats," *Journal of Democracy*, 8:3 (July 1997), 77–91.
98. Horowitz (2005), 79.
99. For more details on (post-) Soviet Armenian politics, cf. Razmik Panossian, "Post-Soviet Armenia. Nationalism and Its (Dis)contents," in *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, Lowell Barrington, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), http://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/0472098985-ch9.pdf (downloaded on December 24, 2007).
100. Cf. Jennifer Leaning, Ruth A. Barron, and Barry H. Rumack, "*Bloody Sunday*"*: Trauma in Tbilisi: The Events of April 9, 1989 and Their Aftermath: Report of a Medical Mission to Soviet Georgia* (Somerville: Physicians for Human Rights, 1990).
101. Cf. George Khutsishvili, "Intervention in Transcaucasus," *Perspective*, 4:3 (1994), http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol4/Khutsishvili.html (downloaded on December 23, 2007).
102. Quote from an interview published by the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, a Russian translation of which appeared in the newspaper *Soyuz* on February 12, 1990.
103. This primarily involved two parties founded from the core of the Ilia Chavchavadze Society *(ilis ch' avch' avadzis sazogadoeba)*, the very first (post-) Communist political platform, founded in late 1987: the National Democratic Party (*sakhalkho-demokratiuli partia*), led by Gia Chanturia, and the Society of St. Ilia the Righteous (*tsminda ilia samartlianis sazogadoeba*).
104. Cf. Nodia in Coppieters (1996).
105. The Communist Party was finally banned in Georgia as a consequence of the attempted coup in August 1991, in Moscow, which the leaders of the Georgia Communist Party had imprudently supported.

106. Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Case in Georgia* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2002), Report No. 61, 163.
107. At least during the initial, critical, phase of (re-) building the state, he was to concentrate power in his own hands; this did not, however, preclude the creation of some of the attributes of a democratic regime – not least in view of Gamsakhurdia's past and given the nature of his supporters, many of whom came from dissident circles. In the end, the radicals came to regard Georgia as part of the same "Western," or European, world and culture, towards which it was to have been directed after the overthrow of the "Russian/Communist yoke."

4 Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia: The Ascent of Ethnopolitical Conflict

1. See, for instance, Thomas de Waal's oral history accounts of the Azerbaijani–Armenian relationship in Karabakh, in his *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 45–55.
2. The toponym Karabakh means "black garden" (in Turkic languages, *kara* or *qara* means "black" and in Farsi or Persian, *bagh* or *bağ* means "garden"). It is believed that the area acquired its name during the Middle Ages thanks to the dense deciduous forests that covered most of historical Karabakh and, especially, its upper regions.
3. As has already been said, unlike the Armenians, who had always had a clearly defined ethnic identity, the identity and ethnic self-awareness of modern Azerbaijanis, as with the vast majority of other Turkic ethnic groups, was characterized by a certain vagueness. During recent history, the present-day Azerbaijanis have been called Azerbaijani, or Transcaucasian Tatars (under the tsars).
4. A large body of contemporaneous accounts of the Armenian–Tatar War is provided by the – otherwise somewhat pro-Armenian – work of Luigi Villari, *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1906). The book is available on-line: http://www.armenianhouse.org/villari/caucasus/fire-and-sword.html (downloaded on February 3, 2008). For a study with a strongly pro-Armenian slant, but containing a large number of interesting accounts from the researched period, cf. Pavel Shekhtman, "*Plamya davnikh pozharov*." This was a continuing study published in 1992–93 in the Moscow magazine, *Pro Armenia (1992–1993)*, see http://armenianhouse.org/shekhtman/docs-ru/opinion.html (downloaded on February 28, 2008).
5. As has already been shown, St. Petersburg had until that time supported, or at least tolerated, the armed activities or socialist agitation of Armenian organizations like Hnchak or Dashnaktsutiun, especially in the eastern vilayets (provinces) of the Ottoman Empire, which were inhabited by hundreds of thousands of Armenians. However, especially after the first Russian revolution, it began to appear to the Russian authorities that the activities of these basically leftist Armenian organizations could potentially threaten Russian interests in the Caucasus.

6. Something of an exception to this rule were the clashes between various (ethno-) territorial communities, clashes which had occurred over economic resources – during which, for example, some Azerbaijani tribe might clash with the population of an Armenian village over a pasture, or perhaps a water well. As is apparent from oral folk tradition, this problem was fairly serious. A frequent cause of these conflicts was the fact that the local Turkic (mostly Kurdish, in western parts of historical Karabakh) tribes mainly raised livestock and, therefore, had to alternate their camps regularly, spending winters in the lowlands and camping in the summer in the foothills and mountainous areas. Their regular changes of location and their efforts to find fertile fields for their large herds sometimes led to clashes with the mostly agricultural Armenians, who were determined to defend territory that they regarded as their own. The agricultural and, therefore, territorially fixed and relatively vulnerable, Armenian communities became frequent targets of attacks by (semi-) nomadic Azerbaijani and Kurdish tribes, while the Karabakh Armenians carried out well-organized counterattacks. In combination with the differing lingual and religious affiliations of the two groups involved, these attacks were the source of constant tension between these (ethno-) territorial groups.
7. Cornell (2001), 69. There exist no exact numbers on casualties during the Armenian–Tatar War.
8. Swietochowski in Suny (1996), 215.
9. Kaufman (2001), 58.
10. Gyanja (*Gäncä*) is the historical name of what today is Azerbaijan's second-largest city. In Soviet times the city was renamed Kirovabad (Sergey Kirov was the commander of the Eleventh Red Army, which occupied independent Azerbaijan in April 1920).
11. See Swietochowski in Suny (1996), 216.
12. In 1913, Azerbaijanis made up about 42% of the population in Yerevan, itself – yet they had dominated the town demographically during the nineteenth century. Data from a Russian encyclopedia (Brockhaus-Efron), according to Irad Guseynov: "*Bezhentsy, ikh polozhenie i rol v sovremennom azerbaydzhanskom obshchestve*," in *Azerbaydzhan i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, Dmitry Furman, ed. (Moscow: Sakharov-Centr, 2001), http://www.sakharov-center.ru/azrus/az_004.htm, http://www.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_011.htm (downloaded on February 28, 2008).
13. The 1918 clashes in Baku and western Azerbaijan/eastern Armenia, as well as those in Karabakh and other areas of present-day Armenia and Azerbaijan between 1918 and 1920, can be viewed to some extent as a repercussion of the earlier clashes of 1905. Because of the recent violence, villagers on both sides were agitated, and they increasingly viewed their former neighbors with distrust. Also, given the continuing custom of blood feuds within these areas, it did not require much for clashes to break out anew – and these could quickly come to afflict a fairly large proportion of the population. Thus, the massacres of Azerbaijanis in Baku in March 1918 were generally perceived as revenge for the Baku Armenians massacred in 1905.
14. For more details on this problem, see Michael Smith, "*Pamyat ob utratakh i azerbaydzhanskoe obshchestvo*," in *Azerbaydzhan i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, Dmitry Furman, ed. (Moscow: Sakharov-Centr, 2001),

http://www.sakharov-center.ru/azrus/az_004.htm (downloaded on February 20, 2008). Also see Michael Smith, "Anatomy of Rumor: Murder Scandal, the Musavat Party and Narrative of the Russian Revolution in Baku, 1917–1920," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36: 2, (April 2001).

15. It should be mentioned that during the twentieth century (in the 1920s, 1947–48, and 1965), tens of thousands more ethnic Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their homes in Armenia and to resettle in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the parallel process of Armenianizing (or using Armenian terminology, re-Armenianizing) of place names given by the original Azerbaijani (Turkic) majority was simultaneously taking place in Armenia. Additionally, there was a systematic liquidation of archaeological relics which might prove the former presence of Azerbaijani (Turkic) tribes within the territory of present-day Armenia – remains such as (numerous) mosques, or khan palaces.
16. A. N. Yamskov "Ethnic Conflict in the Transcausasus: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh," *Theory and Society*, 20:5 (October 1991), 633.
17. The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia fell because of an incursion of Egyptian Mamluks.
18. Patrick Donabedian, "Ancient and Medieval Karabakh," in *Armenia and Karabakh: The Struggle for Unity*, Christopher J. Walker, ed. (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1991), 79.
19. Various Turkic tribes are known to have passed through the eastern part of the South Caucasus in successive waves of migration: the Turkic Khazars of the North Caspian conducted not infrequent raids into Albania and other states of the region, however, there is relatively little evidence indicating the presence of a larger Turkic population within the region during antiquity or the early Middle Ages. However, an exception to this rule is indicated by the fact that between the years 735–736 the victorious Arabs placed nearly 40,000 captive Khazars within central areas of present-day Azerbaijan. Cf. Sara Ashurbeyli, *Gosudarstvo Shirvanshakhov* (Baku: Elm, 1983), 22. We also find mention of mostly Khazar invasions into the territory of modern-day Azerbaijan in the works of the Armenian chronicler Movses Kaghankatvatsi [Moisey Kalankatuysky in the Russian translation]: intriguingly, post-Soviet Azeri historiography claims him to be an ancient Caucasian Albanian chronicler – his name is transformed into the Azeri version Musa Qalangatlı – who relays an account by the second century BCE Persian chronicler, Tabari, wherein we find suggestions of a Turkic presence in the region during the fourth to sixth centuries, and so forth. Cf. Peter B. Golden, "The Turkic Peoples and Caucasia," in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, Ronald G. Suny, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 45–69.
20. As with their colleagues from the post-Soviet states, contemporary Azerbaijani historians generally try to archaicize the history of the Azerbaijani nation as much as possible. They therefore tend to regard the foundation of the kingdom known as Caucasian Albania (ca. fourth century B.C.E.) or even the Median Kingdom (sixth–seventh centuries BCE), which was inhabited mainly by Iranian tribes, as representing the beginnings of Azerbaijani statehood. With regard to the determination of the origins of Azerbaijani nation and statehood, territorial, rather than linguistic, principles tend to be taken

into account; although in recent years Azerbaijani historians have begun to combine both principles in their accounts. Cf. Shnirelman (2003), 147–65.

21. In the town of Erivan (as Yerevan was called by the Russians until the 1930s), the former capital of the khanate of the same name, the population in 1865 was ca. 14,000 – nearly half of whom (6,614) were Caucasian Tatars (Azerbaijanis), while the rest were Armenians. In the town stood seven mosques and seven churches (one of which was Russian). Cf. *Razvitie Yerevana posle prisoedineniya Vostochnoy Armenii k Rossii (sbornik dokumentov 1801–1917)* (Yerevan: Luys, 1978), 441.
22. Cf. *Istoricheskaya geografiya Azerbaydzhana* (Baku: Elm, 1988).
23. Data from Russian authorities quoted by Svante E. Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1999), http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/1999_NK_Book.pdf, 5 (downloaded on December 20, 2007).
24. Shnirelman (2003), 38.
25. De Waal (2003), 3.
26. Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 28.
27. *Sovetakan Hayastan*, February 28, 1988. (The Azerbaijani inhabitants were concentrated mainly in the town of Shusha in Central Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas).
28. *Zerkalo*, July 22, 2002, http://www.echo-az.com/archive/2002_07/383/facts.shtml#11 (downloaded on July 3, 2011).
29. For an interesting collection of Armenian-backed articles and documents of the studied period see http://armnn.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=503:2010–07–23–06–25–21&catid=46:history08&Itemid=148 (downloaded on July 3, 2011).
30. Claude Mutafian, "Karabagh in the Twentieth Century," in Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian, and Claude Mutafian, *The Caucasian Knot* (New York: Zed Books, 1994), 145.
31. For Azeri counterarguments, see, for instance, http://www.ethnoglobus.com/index.php?l=ru&m=news&id=574#sdendnote1anc (downloaded on July 3, 2011).
32. It is not without interest that the establishment of Krunk occurred only a few months after the establishment of the Karabakh Committee, in March of 1988.
33. Cf. Shnirelman (2003), 194–237.
34. Even though some commentators claim that, given the circumstances of the Soviet regime, an initiative of such an extent and scope could have not been carried out without the silent accord of either the Yerevan or Moscow authorities (or indeed of both) – however, the truth or otherwise of this assertion remains unclear due to the general lack of evidence.
35. Another possible explanation might be the fact that well-established Armenian intellectuals in Russia (whose diaspora members held influential positions) enjoyed much closer ties with their Russian colleagues than did their Azerbaijani counterparts.
36. Mikhail Gorbachev mentioned Article 78 of the Soviet constitution and pointed to the fact that several other regions in the Soviet Union were yearning for territorial changes – and he thus implied that the precedent of

redrawing the administrative boundaries of the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomy would have dangerous implications across the nation.

37. Svante Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Report no. 46, Department of East European Studies, Uppsala University (1999), http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/1999_NK_Book.pdf (downloaded on July 10, 2011).
38. Dean Pruitt and Jeffrey Rubin, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement* (New York: Random House, 1986), 64.
39. According to some observers, it was the secessionists' initial intention to portray these mass demonstrations in Yerevan's central Opera Square as being ecological in motivation in order to obtain the authorities' approval, which otherwise would have never been granted; however, there is no evidence to support this argument.
40. Given the perfect timing, organization, and scope of the expulsions that followed immediately thereafter, some observers claim that the clashes arose as a direct result of provocation by at least some amongst the Armenian elites, or else that the latter had been awaiting such an excess in order that they could use it as a pretext for the launch of a broader anti-Azerbaijani campaign. Nonetheless, as with the previous argument, there is no proof supporting this viewpoint.
41. *Hayastan*, September 4, 1991.
42. The tragic events of February 26, referred to as the Khojaly genocide, became the cornerstone of the subsequent mood of anti-Armenian mobilization, a sort of Azerbaijani equivalent to April 24 for the Armenians. Officially, however, March 31 was declared as the Day of the Azerbaijani Genocide. As has been discussed above, on that day in 1918, nearly 15,000 peaceable or poorly armed Azerbaijanis were killed in street clashes in Baku by Russian Bolsheviks and Armenian nationalists.
43. Svante E. Cornell, "The Nagorno Karabakh: Dynamics and Resolution Perspectives," in *Azerbaydzhan i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, Dmitry Furman, ed. (Moscow: Sakharov-Centr, 2001), 445. In connection with Russian military participation in the conflict, mention was made in the previous chapter of "Operation Ring" ("Koltso"), which began in the spring of 1991. The operation was initiated and directed from Moscow, and it was carried out by Russian Army troops and special forces of the Azerbaijani ministry of the interior. As a result of the operation, thousands of Armenians were driven out of the Shaumyan and Geranboy districts to the north of Nagorno-Karabakh. The operation was conceived as a sort of "reward" for the loyalty to Moscow of Azerbaijan's Communists – however, it ended definitively with the failure of the August coup in Moscow and the ascent to power of Boris Yeltsin's democratic forces.
44. These are Laçın (Lachin), Qälbäcär (Kelbajar), Agdam, Fizuli, Kubatly, Jabrail, and Zangelan.
45. For more details, cf. Emil Souleimanov, "*Arménie: bezpečnostní dilema na prahu 21. Století*," *Mezinárodní politika*, 25:1 (2001).
46. It should, however, be emphasized that we find information in older documents about conflicts between South Ossetian settlers and the Georgian nobility who were trying to subjugate the entire region. These clashes were of an economic and, to a certain extent, class and political nature.

The geographically isolated mountainous areas of the Great Caucasus Range, being less economically advanced since the natural conditions did not permit the intensive development of agriculture, provided no scope for the rising of a powerful nobility; while the local Ossetian population tended to live in so-called free mountain communities, unwilling to recognize the power either of their own, or of Georgian, feudal overlords. East Georgian rulers undertook numerous campaigns into the Dvaleti region (primarily inhabited by the Ossetian element) as well as into several other mountainous areas inhabited by ethnic Georgians, with the outcomes being sometimes in favor of the mountaineers, and sometimes in favor of the Georgians. In recent years the party to the conflict which has made extensive use of these narratives have been mainly South Ossetian intellectuals – who tend to epicize the conflict with Tbilisi, or to emphasize the originally independent standing of the South Ossetians and their "centuries" of heroic resistance to Georgian efforts to dominate the areas inhabited by them. Cf. Yury Gagloyti, *Problemy etnicheskoy istorii yuzhnykh osetin* (Tskhinvali: Alaniya, 1996).

47. South Ossetian peasants, for example, refused to pay tax to Tbilisi. It must be said that in connection with the (1917) February Revolution in Russia, an Ossetian National Council was formed in the parts of present-day South Ossetia where Ossetians were in the majority. The Bolsheviks soon controlled the council, demanding the annexation of South Ossetian territory to Soviet Russia – however their influence had not originally been very significant.
48. The great majority of Ossetians (including South Ossetians), like the Russians, profess Orthodox Christianity. This fact is especially important in the North Caucasus where the Ossetians, surrounded as they were by Muslim neighbors, were traditionally regarded as agents of the Russian colonization of the region. In 1918, the so-called Mountainous Republic was formed in the North Caucasus, its borders formally reaching from the Caspian to the Black Sea. At that time there were clashes between the North Ossetians and members of the Ingush ethnic group. At the instigation of the nineteenth-century Russian colonial administration, the North Ossetians had occupied the fertile territories of their Ingush neighbors to the east: thus, the Orthodox North Ossetians often supported the military initiatives of their Russian neighbors, the Cossacks, in their clashes with the Vaynakhs (the joint name for the Ingush and the Chechens); while, subsequently, they also supported the White Guard divisions of the Volunteer Army of General Anton Denikin, as well as the advancing divisions of the Red Army, after their defeat in the latter half of 1919.
49. After the failure of the previous uprisings, in May 1920 the South Ossetians declared the so-called Rokskaya Soviet Republic in the northern part of modern South Ossetia (which they effectively still controlled) near to the border with Northern Ossetia, part of Russia.
50. Russia was then still torn by a bloody civil war, and Moscow was interested in keeping stable relations, especially, with Great Britain, which nominally supported the independence of Georgia.
51. David M. Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 228.
52. Ossetians are divided into three sub-ethnic groups: the Kudars (in South Ossetia), the Irons, and the Digors (both in North Ossetia). Most of the Digors

profess Sunni Islam. Centuries of life together have contributed to a great cultural affinity between the Kudars and their Georgian neighbors.

53. Tbilisi also guaranteed autonomous status to the Batumi region (Ajaria) and the Zakatal region, in the southeast of Georgia – which was claimed by neighboring Azerbaijan, and which became a part of Azerbaijan during the first years of Soviet rule.
54. It should be emphasized that the vast majority of the invaders were Ottoman citizens of Abkhazian origin, known as descendants of the Muhajirs, who were mainly 1860s refugees from Abkhazia.
55. We should add that in February 1919, Denikin's troops managed to drive the Georgian troops completely out of the Sochi region, and subsequently to occupy part of northwestern Abkhazia.
56. Kavbyuro was a regional branch of the Central Committee of the Workers and Peasants' Party (Bolsheviks) in the Caucasus, which existed from 1920–22.
57. Vyacheslav Chirikba, "Gruzino-abkhazskiy konflikt: v poiskakh putey vykhoda," in *Gruziny i abkhazy. Put k primireniyu*, Bruno Coppieters, Ghia Nodia, Yury Anchabadze, eds. (Moscow: Ves mir, 1998), 7.
58. Interesting remarks on this phenomenon appear in a study by Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics*, 54:2 (2002), 245–76.
59. Georgy Zhorzholiani, *Istoricheskie i politicheskie korni konflikta v Abkhazii/ Gruziya* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 2000), 62–63.
60. Ghia Nodia, *Causes and Visions of the Conflict in Abkhazia* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), Working Paper, http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp /publications/1997_02-nodi.pdf, 19 (downloaded on November 1, 2006).
61. *Sovetskaya kultura*, March 16, 1991.
62. Thus, the place name Samachablo, Georgian for "Land of the Machabelis." This term has been widely used by Georgian nationalists in an attempt to underscore the area's genuinely Georgian character.
63. The Abkhazians, together with the Circassians, Adygheans, Kabardeys, Abazas, and some other, demographically smaller yet related, ethnic groups belong to the Adyghean-Abkhaz language group, which is unrelated to Georgian.
64. Natella Akaba, "Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Georgian-Abkhaz War," www.apsny.org/pitsunda11.html (downloaded July 17, 2008).
65. Regarding the conflicting theories of the ethnogenesis of the Abkhazians, cf. Shnirelman (2006), 368–85. It should be added that whilst the claim of the arrival of Ossetians to the territory ruled by Georgian feudal lords at a time in the not too distant past is supported by historical documentation, the fact that the present-day Abkhazians are also an allochthonous population of the area, is difficult to prove.
66. This is even apparent from the originally Megrel surnames of ethnic Abkhazians (mainly ending with *-ia*), which constitute up to a third of all surnames. Cf. Yury Vachnadze, "*Psevdoetnokonflikt*," *RFE/RL*, April 10, 2007, http://www.svobodanews.ru/Article/2007/04/10/20070410000145157.html (downloaded on April 12, 2007).
67. It is typical that, while as a consequence of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, all Armenians had to leave Azerbaijan and all Azerbaijanis had to leave Armenia, in Georgia (notwithstanding the departure of some Ossetians

and Abkhazians) thousands of Ossetians and Abkhazians have remained. (Where, in each country, some of each group did remain, it was because they had managed to successfully adapt their identities to those of the majority community: this mainly involved Armenian wives of Azerbaijanis in Baku).

68. Zhorzholiani (2000), 88.
69. Nodia in Coppieters (1996).
70. For an analysis of conflicting ethnohistoriographies, cf. Shnirelman (2003), 461–503.
71. 1864 or 1866 are frequently cited as the year when Abkhazian territory definitively came under the administration of St. Petersburg (i.e., the suppression of the pro-Turkish uprising).
72. At present, Orthodox Abkhazians in Abkhazia and in the post-Soviet republics constitute around 70–80 percent of the population, while the vast majority of the descendants of Abkhazian immigrants (known as Muhajirs) in Turkey and other countries profess Sunni Islam.
73. Incidentally, in the opinion of many Ossetians, Stalin was by origin a Kartvelized Ossetian.
74. Chirikba in Coppieters, Nodia, and Anchabadze (1998), 6.
75. Madina Zukhba, *Problemy nezavisimosti Abkhazii v istorii i politike (XX-nachalo XXI veka)* (Sukhum: Alashara, 2008), 6.
76. In this regard, it is not without interest that while until 1989 there were no secondary schools in North Ossetia where instruction took place in Ossetian, in South Ossetia, such schools were in operation.
77. Abkhazia is also linked with the large majority of North Caucasian nationalities by the factor of Muslim religious solidarity. After the massive emigrations of Abkhazians to the Ottoman Empire, at present not more than 20 percent of Abkhazians from the republic, or from the post-Soviet countries, profess Islam; while the great majority of the Abkhazian population is indifferent towards religion.
78. For more details on this problem, cf. Nodia in Coppieters (1996).
79. In the Soviet Union, possession of the status of autonomous republic, or oblast, conferred certain advantages to ethnic minorities, such as political-administrative and economic self-rule – and, hence, a lesser degree of dependence upon republican centers: on Baku, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, and on Tbilisi, in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The status of an autonomous republic was somewhat higher than that of an autonomous oblast.
80. Alexey Zverev, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988–1994," in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Bruno Coppieters, ed. (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1996), http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0103.htm (downloaded on December 24, 2007).
81. One may assign to this category the all-North Caucasian Confederation of the Caucasus Peoples, the Kumyk organization called *Tenglik* (Equality), the all-Circassian *Adyghe Khase* (loosely translated as Adyghean Tradition), the Avar *People's Front of Imam Shamil*, the *National Congress of the Chechen Nation*, etc.
82. Cornell (2001), 165.
83. *Yuzhnaya Ossetia*, 1. 12. 1989.

84. In response, South Ossetia's Georgian minority boycotted a similar election which took place in the autonomy the following month.
85. Cornell (2001), 166.
86. Anatoly Isaenko, *Polygon of Satan: Ethnic Traumas and Conflicts in the Caucasus* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 2010), 161.
87. Zverev in Coppieters (1996).
88. *Yuzhnaya Osetiya*, April 18, 1991.
89. Concerning the course of the conflict, cf. Marietta König, "Der georgisch-südossetische Konflikt," in *OSZE-Jahrbuch 2004* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005), 253–66.
90. Between 1968 and 1972, Shevardnadze held the post of interior minister of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (G.S.S.R.). In 1972 the Kremlin appointed him first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the G.S.S.R., a post he would hold until 1976. In 1976–85 he was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. During Gorbachev's rule, as a pro-reform politician in 1985–90, he became Soviet foreign minister of foreign affairs of the U.S.S.R.
91. The Georgian population largely boycotted the referendum.
92. South Ossetians usually speak of there having been 32 victims of this tragic incident, which some of them call genocide. The shooting up of a bus full of civilians soon became a part of the modern ethnic narrative of the South Ossetian nation. During the ensuing years, the representatives of the pro-Russian government in Tskhinvali cited it as proof of the maliciousness and brutality of their "ethnic enemies," and of the impossibility of peaceful coexistence with them within the same state. During the post-war period, South Ossetian intellectuals elaborated on the Kekhvi tragedy which – along with the 1920 events – are treated as yet another part of what they term *South Ossetian genocide* carried out by Georgians during the twentieth century. Cf. the Internet site dedicated to the "genocide of the Ossetian people" is at http://osgenocide.ru/index.php (downloaded on February 28, 2008).
93. This was the reorganized Assembly of the Peoples of the Caucasus, consisting of representatives of the North Caucasian nationalities; it strove for political integrity based on mountaineer and Muslim solidarity.
94. Anatoly Tsyganok, *Rossiya na Yuzhnom Kavkaze: gruzino-osetinskaya voyna 8–13 avgusta 2008 goda* (Moscow: AIRO, 2010), 37.
95. Regarding these figures and information on the ethnodemographic dynamics in Abkhazia, cf. Eva-Maria Auch, "Der Konflikt in Abchasien in historischer Perspektive," in *OSZE-Jahrbuch 2004* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005), 243.
96. The then-chef of the NKVD, Lavrenty Beria – himself an Abkhazian Megrel, who is said by Abkhazians to have masterminded the policy of the gradual Kartvelization of their homeland – was instrumental in carrying out the intense purges of Abkhaz elites during the 1930s and to have supervised the abolition of Abkhazia's status as a sovereign Soviet republic, putting it under Tbilisi's control. According to mainstream Abkhaz opinion, Beria's efforts were distinguished by his (ethnically laden) animosity towards everything Abkhazian.

97. The results of the 1897 All-Russian census are available at http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/emp_lan_97_uezd.php?reg=470 (downloaded on July 5, 2011).
98. Boris Ashuba, Natalya Bushina, and Alexandr Gulia, *Problemy razvitiya regionalnoy ekonomiki v Abkhazskoy SSR* (Tbilisi: Ekonomika, 1982), 56.
99. Darrell Slider, "Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The case of Abkhazia," *Central Asian Survey*, 4:4 (1985) 51–64.
100. Spekulyant was a Soviet term for lawbreaking business people, that is, those working in the area of the shadow economy.
101. Cornell (2001), 160.
102. Curiously enough, both Abkhazians and Georgians, have complained about their respective opponents as being arrogant nationalists – especially when it comes to discussions over political and symbolic issues related to Abkhazia's past, present, or future.
103. Ben Fowkes, *Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Communist World* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 139.
104. Curiously, Andrei Sakharov notoriously called Georgia a "small empire" – by way of obvious comparison to the Soviet Union as the "big empire."
105. This issue is detailed in the next chapter.
106. John M. Cotter, "Cultural Security Dilemmas and Ethnic Conflict in Georgia." *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 19:1 (1999), http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JCS/bin/get4.cgi?directory=spring99/&filename=cotter.htm (downloaded on December 24, 2007).
107. In fact, throughout the period between 1989 and 1991, with respect to the Russian and Georgian authorities, both South Ossetians and Abkhazians proceeded in a similar fashion – forming a sort of tandem as far as the "war of laws" between Tbilisi and its autonomies in the north was concerned; given this circumstance, the extent of the treatment of the Georgian–Abkhaz standoff in the domain of legal conflict is somewhat reduced in this chapter.

5 War and Diplomacy: Ethnopolitical Conflicts as a Factor in the Foreign Policies of South Caucasian Countries (1991–94)

1. In fact, in addition to the Karabakh issue, post-Soviet Azerbaijani elites concentrated rigorously on international attempts to ensure the export of oil (and natural gas) from what they considered to be their national sector of the Caspian Sea.
2. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the difficult position of Ankara, which had to reflect both the strongly pro-Abkhaz sentiments of Turkey's influential Adyge (Adyge–Circassian–Abazin–Abkhazian) community, and the country's strategic interest in maintaining the most stable possible relations with Georgia as an important geographical link to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. In view of the goals and structure of this study, this aspect of Georgian–Turkish relations does not receive special attention.
3. Throughout the 1990s there were anxieties regarding the (rather bold) irredentist efforts of the compact Armenian population of southern Georgia:

unlike the Azerbaijanis who live in the lowlands, the Armenians inhabit the mountainous Samtskhe–Javakheti region, which is isolated from the rest of Georgia by the Lesser Caucasus range.

4. Something of an exception at first were Ankara's aspirations in the area of Mosul and Kirkuk, rich in oil, which at present are formally a part of Iraq, but are de facto under the control of the local Kurdish government, who regard the area as an integral part of (southern) Kurdistan. In the early 1920s, the Turks strove for control over that area, which they regarded as a part of the emerging Republic of Turkey; in view, however, of the negative stance of the British who controlled the area at the time under a League of Nations mandate, Ankara never laid down formal claims to the area.
5. After 1945 Stalin exerted pressure on Ankara in an effort to force Turkey to surrender part of what was regarded as territory of historical western Armenia (and Georgia) to the Soviet Union, and to give *de facto* consent for the placement of Soviet military bases in the vicinity of the Turkish Straits. Moscow supported the Turkish Communists, and there were therefore fears that the situation in the country could begin to develop along the lines of the Greek scenario – where a bloody civil war had been fought, beginning in the mid-1940s, between pro-American (or rather pro-British) advocates of the monarchy, and pro-Soviet Communists. During the period of growing American–Soviet antagonism which finally developed into the cold war, Turkey received considerable financial support from the United States, under the terms of the Marshall Plan.
6. Turkey's status as the sole predominantly Muslim member state of NATO was challenged in 2009, when Albania, another predominantly Muslim nation, joined the North Atlantic alliance.
7. Mustafa Aydin, "Turkish Policy towards the Caucasus," *Connections*, 1:3 (July 2002), 39.
8. Freddy de Pauw, "Turkey's Policies in Transcaucasia," in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Bruno Coppieters, ed. (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1996), http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0801.htm (downloaded on December 25, 2007).
9. Characteristically, soon after taking power, Elçibäy appointed the controversial Iskender Hamidov, founder and leader of the Azerbaijani branch of the ultranationalist pan-Turkic organization Bozkurtlar ("Grey Wolves"), as interior minister: the Grey Wolves called for the creation of a Greater Turan – encompassing, besides Azerbaijan and Turkey, vast areas of Russia, Iran, and China, inhabited by ethnic groups of Turkic origin.
10. *Dünya*, November 6, 1992.
11. Hints of the revival of the pan-Turkic project at the beginning of the 1990s, and concerns as to its possible impacts on Armenia within the context of the deepening conflict with Azerbaijan (and Turkey), served to increase the security concerns of Armenians. Especially deserving of attention in this regard is the work of Alexander Svarants: *Pantyurkizm v geostrategii Turtsii na Kavkaze* (Moscow: Akademiya gumanitarnykh issledovaniy, 2002).
12. One should remember that these areas are at present mainly inhabited by millions of Kurds: all that remained of the formerly numerous Armenian population, after the tragic events of 1915 and the following years, were a few thousand Armenian inhabitants, who (unlike, for example, the large

Azerbaijani population of northwestern Iran or the similarly large Kurdish population of Turkey's southeastern provinces) cannot represent a threat to the territorial integrity of the Turkish state.

13. *Hayastan*, April 20, 1992.
14. As is well known, the PKK has been waging an armed struggle for the creation of an independent Kurdistan since 1984, in the underdeveloped, mountainous areas of southeastern Turkey, inhabited mostly by Kurds. Until his arrest in 1998, the leader of that separatist organization, which professed Marxism-Leninism, was Abdullah Öcalan, who is now serving a life sentence in Turkey.
15. In recent years, these reports have emanated often from Azerbaijani politicians and statesmen, who now speak of the PKK not only in Armenia, but with increasing frequency in the territory controlled by Stepanakert as well. *Turkish Weekly*, February 18, 2008.
16. De Pauw in Coppieters (1996).
17. *Turkish Daily News*, May 27, 1992.
18. Important exceptions have been the training of thousands of Azerbaijani officers in Turkish military academies and the participation of Turkish instructors in the Azerbaijani army and navy.
19. *Azadliq*, March 7, 1993.
20. *Yerkir*, September 22, 1992.
21. *Turkish Daily News*, August 21, 1994.
22. *Turkish Probe*, April 6, 1993. It should be added, however, that on the day after Armenian troops occupied Kelbajar (April 3, 1993), Turkey completely closed its border with Armenia.
23. Olga Oliker and Thomas S. Szayna, *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the U.S. Army* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003), 210.
24. According to various estimates, ethnic Azerbaijanis comprise around 15–25 million people in contemporary Iran, even though exact figures are not available due to the fact that Iranian censuses do not take ethnicity into account.
25. For more details about Iranian–Azerbaijani relations, cf. Emil Souleimanov, "Íránská politika na jižním Kavkaze," *Mezinárodní vztahy*, 36:3 (2001). Cf. also Emil Souleimanov and Ondřej Ditrych, "Iran and Azerbaijan: A Contested Neighborhood," *Middle East Policy*, 14:2 (2007), 101–16.
26. *Lraber*, February 26, 1992.
27. Svante Cornell, "Iran and the Caucasus," *Middle East Policy*, 5:4 (1998), 60.
28. This term was frequently used by Armenians at the time of the Karabakh conflict – by analogy with the path of the same name which half a century earlier had connected Leningrad (St. Petersburg), when it was besieged by the Nazi Germans.
29. The irony of fate is that the majority of the merchants who are trading with Armenians are ethnic Azerbaijanis from northwestern Iran.
30. Kaweh Sadegh-Zadeh, "Iran's Strategy in the South Caucasus," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2:2 (Winter 2008), http://cria-online.org/j2_5.php (downloaded on February 3, 2008). Importantly, the Armenian–Iranian strategic partnership manifested itself most clearly during the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and a few years later in the context of the Caspian 'oil politics' which remain out of the focus of this book.

31. Cornell (1998), 64.
32. Abdollah Ramezanzade, "Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis," in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Bruno Coppieters, ed. (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1996), http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0701.htm (downloaded on January 3, 2008).
33. Suha Bölükbasi, "Ankara's Baku-Centered Transcaucasia Policy: Has It Failed?" *Middle East Journal*, 50:1 (January 1997), 135.
34. Ramezanzade in Coppieters (1996).
35. Cornell (1998), 63.
36. For more details on proof of Iranian support for Armenia during the Karabakh war, cf. Cornell (2001), 327–30.
37. We should add that protests within the former Persia were occasioned by the very fact that the newly created republic in the eastern part of the South Caucasus (1918) had chosen the name Azerbaijan: there were already fears in Persia that this amounted to an integral part of a Turkish project to penetrate Central Asia to the east – a phase of which process was to be the annexation of the Persian province of Azerbaijan to the realm of the proposed Greater Turan, especially so since parts of Persian Azerbaijan had been occupied by the Ottomans during World War I.
38. Geoffrey Gresh, "Coddling the Caucasus: Iran's Strategic Relationship with Azerbaijan and Armenia," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 1:1 (Winter 2008). Also cf. Abdollah Ramezanzadeh, "Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis," in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Bruno Coppieters, ed. (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1996), http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0701.htm (downloaded on January 3, 2008).
39. Ramezanzadeh in Coppieters (1996).
40. *Resalat*, April 14, 1993.
41. Dov Lynch, *Why Georgia Matters* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, February 2006), Chaillot Paper No. 86, 50.
42. Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Security Interests and Policies in the Caucasus," in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Bruno Coppieters, ed. (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1996), http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0301.htm (downloaded on January 3, 2008).
43. Lynch (2006), 50.
44. Cf. Petra Kuchyňková, "Utváření ruské zahraniční politiky po roce 1991 v postsovětském prostoru," in *Rusko jako geopolitický aktér v postsovětském prostoru*, Petra Kuchyňková and Tomáš Šmíd, eds. (Brno: Mezinárodní politologický ústav, 2006), 22–25. For a categorization of particular phases of the foreign policies of early post-Soviet Russia, cf. Nicole Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
45. Wynne Russell, "Russian Relations with the 'Near Abroad'," in *Russian Foreign Policy since 1990,* Peter Shearman, ed. (Westview, 1995), 50.
46. The Tashkent accords were thought to lay the ground for the establishment of a military and political framework for the planned integration – military and economic – of the post-Soviet republics into the CIS. Since 1993, Russian foreign policy has generally become more steadfast and ambitious: Moscow's exclusive dominance in the South Caucasus, among other places, seems to be a necessary starting point for the recovery of Moscow's power in the

post-Soviet space as a whole, thereby guaranteeing the country equality in terms of relations with the West.

47. For more details on this matter, cf. Svante E. Cornell, "Undeclared War: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Reconsidered," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 20:4 (Fall 1997).
48. Fears that Baku and Moscow would make an agreement "behind their backs," and that the victim of that agreement would prove to be Armenia, continue to feature to some degree in Armenian society to this day.
49. Pavel Baev, *Challenges and Options in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, April 22, 1997, Strategic Studies Institute Report, http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps12677/00111.pdf. (downloaded on August 20, 2008).
50. In formal terms, the Russian army was only established in May 1992.
51. Cf. Trenin in Coppieters (1996).
52. Cornell (2001), 355.
53. In this regard, the case of the former Soviet General Anatoly Zinevich, who had been involved in the planning and realization of a number of important operations of the Armenian forces of Nagorno-Karabakh from 1992 until the end of the war, is emblematic. For more information on the matter see, for instance, Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian, and Claude Mutafian, *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geopolitics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (London: Zed Books, 1994), 17–18.
54. Jan Wanner, "Kavkazský region a ruská zahraniční politika," in *Vztahy Ruska a postsovětských republik*, Bohuslav Litera, Luboš Švec, and Jan Wanner, eds. (Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 1998), 120.
55. Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *Back in the USSR: Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy toward Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 12–13.
56. Vladislav Shorokhov, "Energy Resources of Azerbaijan: Political Stability and Regional Relations," *Caucasus Regional Studies*, Issue 1 (1996), http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/crs/eng/0101–04.htm (downloaded on December 28, 2007).
57. Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, op cit, ibid. See also Stephen Blank, "Russia's Real Drive to the South," *Orbis*, 39, Summer 1995, 371.
58. Trenin in Coppieters (1996).
59. Elkhan Nuriyev, *The South Caucasus at the Crossroads. Conflicts, Caspian Oil and Great Power Politics* (Berlin: LIT, 2007), 226–27.
60. Cornell (2001), 357.
61. In 1999, however, Azerbaijan withdrew from it.
62. Quoted by Shorokhov (1996).
63. Wanner in Litera, Švec, Wanner, and Zilynskij (1998), 120.
64. Cornell (2001), 357.
65. Jan Wanner points out Äliyev's eventual unwillingness to accept a peace contingent in Nagorno-Karabakh (more than a quarter of which would have consisted of Russian soldiers) in this connection, thereby effectively rejecting Moscow's 1994–95 proposal. Wanner in Švec, Litera, Wanner, and – Zilinsky (1998), 114.
66. *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, September 20 1991.
67. Trenin in Coppieters (1996).
68. Cornell (2001), 346.

69. *Moskovskie novosti*, December 15, 1992.
70. Zviad Gamsakhurdia came from Samegrelo region and was of Megrelian origin.
71. *Moskovsky komsomolets*, June 25, 1992.
72. It is not entirely clear which factors were most important in determining Shevardnadze's behavior in this matter. Generally it is pointed out that Shevardnadze's position in the country was quite weak from the very beginning: a large proportion of the population perceived him as a usurper, since he had seized power by illegal means, as a consequence of a military coup. Because the anti-Russian mood was still strong across the country – including within the milieu of the powerful warlords – Shevardnadze was seriously concerned that by yielding to Russia's demands he would further undermine his already shaky position. According to another widely held opinion, he was willing to accept Russia's demands in exchange for Moscow's promise of de facto acceptance of Georgian territorial integrity. Some commentators counter that what happened in Shevardnadze's case was exactly the same thing that had taken place in neighboring Azerbaijan, where Heydär Äliyev seized power. Although both statesmen – each of whom had a strongly Communist background as Apparatchiks background were generally expected to take a strongly pro-Russian line, in fact in the leadership of their respective countries, they tended to perceive their national interests differently.
73. Other important figures at that time who played a key role in Russian policymaking included Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets, Minister for Nationalities and Regional Affairs Sergei Shakhrai, the president's chief of staff, Sergei Filatov, Yeltsin's security chief, Alexander Korzhakov, and Minister of Nationalities Nikolai Yegorov.
74. Relations with Iran, which Moscow regards as a strategic partner, developed in the opposite direction. With the exception of Tajikistan in the early 1990s, Iran's limited penetration of the South Caucasian/Central Asian region did not meet with Russian objections.
75. Cf. Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewitt, "Back in the USSR: Russian Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for the United States Policy toward Russia," Harvard University research paper, presented at the JKF School of Government (January 1994).
76. Quoted by Cornell (2001), 345.
77. Quoted in *The Moscow Times*, March 5, 2010.
78. It is worth adding that Abkhaz nationalists were not especially happy with that agreement, either, perceiving it as a half measure that did not do much to further Abkhazians' demands of sovereignty and independence from Tbilisi.
79. Viacheslav Chirikba, "Abkhazia: Review of Events for the Year 1996," exact place and time of publication not provided, http://www.abkhaz.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=41&Itemid=37 (downloaded July 5, 2011).
80. Zhorzholiani (2000), 69.
81. *Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Peace and Russia's Role in the Conflict*, Human Rights Watch Report 7:7, March 1995, 21.
82. The organization and transportation of North Caucasian volunteers, who fought on the side of the Abkhazians because of Caucasian mountaineer

and Muslim solidarity (which in itself is interesting, since only part of Abkhazians profess the Islamic faith), was conducted under the auspices of the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus, which then enjoyed the support of Moscow.

83. For a broad discussion on Russia's military involvement in the conflict, cf. Oksana Antonenko, "Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict over Abkhazia," in *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution,* Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds. (London: MIT Press, 2005).
84. For testimony on particular cases of Russian intervention in the Georgian–Abkhazian conflict and elsewhere, cf. Cornell (2001), 171–72, 344–53. Also cf. Roy Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, November 1994), Chaillot Paper No. 18.
85. Cf. Cornell (2001), 345.
86. Alexandros Petersen, "The 1992–93 Georgia-Abkhazia War: A Forgotten Conflict," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2:4 (Autumn 2008), http://cria-online.org/5_3.html (downloaded on July 15, 2011).
87. We should add, however, that during the conflict there were documented cases of ethnically motivated murder, violence, and looting committed by *both* sides.
88. *RFE/RL*, October 21, 1993.
89. *Archiv der Gegenwart*, 1993, 37820.
90. Zviad Gamsakhurdia himself fled, and he died at the end of 1993. He appears to have committed suicide, although there has been some speculation, especially among Zviadists, that he was murdered by the Georgian secret police on Shevardnadze's direct order.
91. Cf. Zverev in Coppieters (1996).
92. This data mainly relates to the ethnic cleansing which occurred during the first months of the armed conflict; the brunt of the ethnic cleansing which occurred after the incursion of Kitovani's troops was suffered by the Abkhazians, and in the following months by the Georgian population of the former autonomous region. *Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict*, Human Rights Watch Arms Project, 7:2 (March 1995).
93. Vakhtang Darchiashvili, "Gruzínsko-abcházský etnický konflikt," in *Etnické konflikty v postkomunistickém prostoru*, Tomáš Šmíd and Vladimír Vaďura, eds. (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2007), 264.
94. In both instances of ethnopolitical conflict in Georgia – just as in Nagorno-Karabakh – it is technically difficult to determine the exact numbers of victims and refugees.
95. The maximum number of soldiers on each side was supposed to have been 500, with each cohort to be monitored by a mixed monitoring commission. In spite of relatively serious problems with the functioning of the mixed units and the monitoring commission, it can be stated that the Dagomys Agreement served well as a basis for peace negotiations in South Ossetia until the deterioration of the Russo–Georgian relationship in the period 2004–06, and the actual eruption of war in South Ossetia in August 2008. However, in the opinion of some, it merely sanctioned the (scarcely controllable) military presence of Russia within this strategic area – a factor which has served in the ensuing years as a source of increased tension between Tbilisi and Moscow.

For more information about the initial stage of the activities of peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia, cf. Alexander Sokolov, "Russian Peace-Keeping Forces in the Post-Soviet Area," in *Global Insecurity. Restructuring the Global Military Sector*, Mary Kaldor and Basker Vashee, eds. (London and Washington: Pinter, 1997), http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/peace/peacekeep.htm (downloaded on January 2, 2008).

96. For more details on this topic, cf. Evgeny Kozhokin, "Georgia-Abkhazia," in *U.S. and Russian Policymaking With Respect to the Use of Force*, Jeremy Azrael and Emil Pain, eds. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006).
97. Sokolov in Kaldor and Vashee (1997). UNOMIG ended on June 15, 2009, when Russia vetoed an extension of the mission in the aftermath of the 2008 South Ossetia War. One of the reasons behind that decision was Moscow's formal recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence, and its implementation of extensive military, economic, and political cooperation with both separatist republics. Following the August 2008 war, all of the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were brought under firm control of Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, with the remnants of the Georgian population being driven out completely.
98. In 2002 the organization was renamed as the Collective Security Treaty Organization.
99. It is not without interest that only the explicit threat of the use of force by the Russian base prevented the Georgian army from intervening in Ajaria in 1992.
100. For more details on the question of Russian military bases, cf. David Darchiashvili, "The Russian Military Presence in Georgia: The Parties' Attitudes and Prospects," *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 2:1 (1997).

6 Conclusion

1. Curiously, some observers have even gone so far as to express doubts about whether the Karabakh movement would have come into existence had there not been hope amongst Armenians with regard to substantial diaspora-led backing within the Moscow cabinets.
2. Paradoxically, until 2001, when the caveat was eventually canceled, Azerbaijan – a strategically situated country rich in oil and, as it later turned out, one of the key lynchpins of American strategy within the Caspian region – had been the only state of the former Soviet Union effectively deprived of U.S. financial support.
3. The fact that the region's terrain proved to be largely irrelevant to the course of the fighting may be explained by the manner in which all of the three local wars were waged: even though paramilitary units did participate in important phases of the wars, centralized conventional warfare, making use of artillery, tanks, and air forces, became the prevalent mode of warfare, even if accompanied by (extremely rare) instances of guerrilla-style fighting.
4. Interestingly, Abkhazians supported Moscow's initiative, and once it was eventually declined by Soviet government, Abkhaz intellectuals expressed their discontent with what they considered to be the victory of Georgian nationalists.

5. This held with the notable exceptions of anti-Semitism, and certain anti-Chechen sentiments, which persisted within the Soviet state.
6. After all, Azerbaijan's and Georgia's ethnic autonomies were part of the Union's centralized economy, and emphasis was placed by the Soviet elites upon the assurance of a certain level of equality among the nation's various territories.
7. Interestingly, during the period of nation-wide deficit, Moscow and central Russia were in fact distinguished by relative wealth: yet this played no part in instigating secessionism amongst Soviet peoples.
8. Moreover, some of Georgia's ethnic minorities, especially Tbilisi Armenians, have complained about high levels of ethnic discrimination and anti-Armenian xenophobia on the part of the majority population.
9. This process was accelerated, given the intensification of Soviet-sanctioned Armenian nationalism from 1965 onwards, with its strong anti-Turkish overtones, which was in turn paralleled by growing, yet still relatively weak, anti-Azerbaijani sentiments – given the latter's perceived ethnolinguistic and religious closeness to the Anatolian Turks.
10. It is interesting to observe the different ways in which ancient hatred accounts have evolved across the South Caucasus since the end of armed conflicts in the first half of the 1990s. In post-war Azerbaijan, large-scale demonization of Armenians, instigated by the authorities, has come to dominate the country's public discourse: for instance, Baku officials routinely refuse to permit ethnic Armenians, of any citizenship, to enter the country. By contrast, in contemporary Georgia, the approach has changed dramatically, with Tbilisi officials and Georgian intellectuals claiming that Abkhazians and South Ossetians have always been Georgians' "brethren," and a constituent part of the Georgian political nation. Instances of ethnic separatism and conflict within both autonomies are ascribed to the Russians' supposedly orchestrated efforts to drive a wedge between Georgians and those ethnic communities which have an extremely close affinity to the Georgians in terms of culture, race, and historical legacy. Hence, the overwhelming Georgian line of argumentation goes, it is neither the Abkhazians nor South Ossetians who are to be blamed for secessionist wars in Georgia – but rather the Russians, who allegedly provoked certain circles of pro-Russian Abkhaz and South Ossetian nationalists to rebel against Georgia's territorial integrity, with the Moscow-imposed aim of fatally undermining its territorial integrity and independence. In South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Armenia, primordial accounts explaining the local conflicts from the perspective of ancient hatreds still prevail, even though they are currently not as exaggerated as in the Azerbaijani case.
11. Indeed, militarist and nationalist quotes originally uttered by Elçibäy, Gamsakhurdia, and other leading politicians and army leaders during the conflict years, have been widely utilized by Armenian, Abkhaz, and South Ossetian intellectuals as evidence of the adversary's (allegedly) sinister motives.
12. Something of an exception was an unprecedented (free) election in Soviet Georgia in 1990, when Communists where ousted, and Gamsakhurdia's Round Table gained power.
13. In Georgia, that shift occurred both in a time of societal uniformity – when no political opposition threatened Gamsakhurdia's status of national leader,

as in 1990 and early 1991 – *and* during the year 1991, when Gamsakhurdia's positions were heavily threatened by the Ioseliani – Kitovani forces. In Azerbaijan, Elçibäy's heavily nationalist rhetoric gained momentum from mid-1992 onward, after the Communist elites were effectively ousted from power in Baku, and when no consolidated opposition confronted him.

14. In addition to Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan possessed another autonomous territory: the Nakhichevan Soviet Socialist Republic, an exclave enclosed by Armenia, Iran, and Turkey; while the Ajarian Soviet Socialist Republic belonged to Georgia. Importantly, both autonomies were largely inhabited by the members of their majority nationalities: Azerbaijanis and Georgians, respectively.
15. Cf. Svante Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics*, 54:2 (January 2002), 245–76.
16. Additionally, as illustrated by Viktor Shnirelman in his brilliant *Voyny pamyati* (2003), "intellectual wars," over the disputed issues of ethnic genesis, and historical ethnopolitical domination over contested territories, which had been going on since the end of the 1940s amongst scholarly elites within the South Caucasian elites (mostly historians and linguists) became increasingly nationalistic toward the 1980s. While these disputes were largely contained during the Soviet period, as they were initially confined to a relatively narrow circle of specialists – with the gradual liberalization of the second half of the 1980s, they began to actively shape the public discourses within the region dramatically: further contributing to ethnic polarization – and the consequent increase of ethnonationalism to that end – between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Georgians and Abkhazians, as well as Georgians and South Ossetians.
17. In the meantime, interethnic clashes amongst Azerbaijanis and Lezgis were reported in Azerbaijan's northeast and in Dagestan's southeast – regions inhabited by members of both ethnic communities.
18. Additionally, domestic factors seem also to have played a role with regard to Moscow's – less than assertive – policies with respect to utilizing the Lezgi question in its relationship with Baku. A unification of Azerbaijan's northern Lezgi-populated provinces with Dagestan would considerably affect the demographic balance within that multiethnic republic – given that it is already prone to ethnic nationalism, subjected to the Sufi–Salafi divide and has witnessed the growth of Islamist insurgency. Notably, Lezgis would become Dagestan's numerically predominant ethnic group, outnumbering Avars (and Dargins), a development which would necessarily affect the republic's power-sharing mechanisms, as the government in Dagestan has largely been founded upon the principle of consociationalism. Endangering this republic's fragile interethnic balance would have far-reaching negative consequences.
19. Even though South Caucasian republics formed part of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the independent republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in late 1991, and the large-scale interference of Russia and Armenia in the three local wars, problematizes the use of term *civil war*, as the armed conflicts in question were waged to a large extent by sovereign states.
20. A Georgian attack on Abkhazia might have taken place earlier in the year, had it not been for the civil war in Tbilisi, which had started in September

1991 and lasted until January 1992 (with Eduard Shevardnadze returning to power in the country as late as March 1992).

21. Curiously, in strictly formal terms the case of South Ossetia qualifies as civil war at all, as the thousand deaths caused by the 1991–92 war in this autonomy did not all stem from battlefield injuries.
22. Additionally, domestic factors, such as the desire of the newly established Military Council to strengthen its position across the country following the 1991–92 civil war and the subsequent overthrow of Gamsakhurdia, as well as its desire to ensure the security of Abkhazia's Georgian population, have played a role.

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