

Georgia Case Study
Part I: Context of the Territory and Conflict

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Experiential Applications – MNPS 703
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A. Description of the Territory

The country of Georgia comprises 69,700 km² (26,911 mi²), or a little less territory than the U.S. State of South Carolina and slightly more than the U.S. State of West Virginia (EIU 2009, 4; NGS n.d., par. 4; USDOSBPA 2009, par. 2; USCB 2009, par. 8), as recognized by all but three of 192 UN Member States. The Russian Federation, the Republic of Nicaragua, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognize two breakaway regions representing 14% of Georgia's territory, Abkhazia (Apsny, "a Country of the Soul" in the Abkhaz language) and South Ossetia, as independent republics (Schwartz 2009, par. 1-2; USDOSBPA 2009, par. 2; MEDG 2007, 6; Zverev 1996, part I par.1). Georgia borders Russia to the north and northeast, the Black Sea to its west, the Republic of Turkey to the south and southwest, the Republic of Armenia to the south, and the Republic Azerbaijan to the south and east; Abkhazia, roughly 8,700 km² (5,405²), borders Russia to its north, the rest of Georgia to its south and east, and the Black sea to its south and west (EIU 2009, 2; ICGAT 2006, 1).

"Wedged between the Caucasus Mountains and the Lesser Caucasus" (NGS n.d., par. 1), Georgia has only 11.51% arable land, with another 3.79% for permanent crops, and one-half the country is both mountainous and over 1500 meters high; overall, hills and mountains make up 80% of the country. (FAO 2009, par. 1,7; GG 2008 par. 3). Habib (2005) writes of Georgia as a "country of hills and valleys, which enjoy a wide range of climates" (Habib 2005, 2). Western Georgia is described as "sub-tropical," while in the mountains and the north, a colder alpine climate prevails; in the east, the plains are "hotter and drier" and the climate of the east of the country is overall described as "more Mediterranean" (Habib 2005, 2; Kaeter 2004, 105). Even though there is "heavy snowfall" in the mountains, there are few lakes, and Georgia is "dominated" by one major river called the Mtkvari, or Kura, flowing from Turkey in the west, through Tbilisi, Georgia's capital city, and further east until it leaves Georgian territory and eventually empties into the Caspian Sea south of Baku in Azerbaijan (Kaeter 2004, 106).

The World Bank (2009) describes Georgia as being "resource rich" (WBCB 2009, par. 3). "Fertile land and a favorable climate enable diverse agricultural production, including a range of fruits and vegetables, livestock, dairy products, nuts, and tea," and "recent investments in oil exploration have indicated significant oil and gas potential;" its diverse viticulture is categorized as "particularly remarkable" (WBCB 2009, par. 2; FAO 2009, par. 3). "Dense forests" are on one-third of its territory, it has a variety of mineral resources, and "numerous fast-flowing rivers offer good hydropower potential" (WBCB 2009, par. 2). Kaeter (2004) also emphasizes Georgia's water resources and notes the presence of glaciers (Kaeter 2004, 105-106). Georgia has even turned its location into a resource as King (2004) notes its ability to "leverage its strategic location on the Black Sea's eastern shore to become a major player in discussions about routes for Eurasian oil and gas exports" (King 2004, 15).

Some scholars argue that in the twelfth century B.C.E, the people who became the Georgians began to coalesce in northeastern Anatolia and were pushed into what is now Georgia c. the ninth century B.C.E. They had absorbed Hellenistic culture while in Anatolia, and spoke unique non-Indo-European, non-Altaic, non-Finno-Ugric languages from which modern Georgian is derived (Suny 1994, 4). In the western area of what is now Georgia a new proto-Georgian centered "kingdom" of Colchis-Egresi formed on the Black Sea coast (Ibid., 6-8). During the 500-400's B.C.E., other Georgian-speaking tribes came to the Mtkvari valley and "formed the nucleus of the Iberian or east Georgian nation" and "merged with local tribes to form the Georgian people;" they and the tribes in the west became heavily influenced by Persian culture throughout this formative period, which mixed with imported Hellenistic culture and local customs to form a distinctive Georgian culture (Ibid., 8-11). The origins of the Abkhaz people, a different ethnic group than Georgians with their own Abkhaz language which is unrelated to Georgian, have become politicized and highly contested; depending on who one is talking to, the Abkhaz arrived thousands of years ago or centuries ago, but regardless of the debate, they have been settled there for some time (Nodia 1998, 14; EURII 2009,66; Hewitt 2009; ICGAT 2006, 2; Zverev 1996, part I par.7).

The country's population, measured at 4.63 million in July 2008, is overwhelmingly Georgian ethnically (83.8% from a 2002 census) with fairly small Azeri (6.5%) and Armenian (5.7%) minorities and a miniscule presence of Russians (1.5%), Greeks and other ethnic groups (USDOSBPA 2009, par. 3; GG 2008 par. 6). Linguistically, Georgian, the official language, dominates as well, with 71% speaking that as of that last census; nearly 10% speak Russian, and Armenian and Azeri are generally spoken by their namesake communities (USDOSBPA 2009, par. 3; EIU 2009, 4). Ossetian and Abkhaz are also spoken, with Abkhaz being an official second language of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia (USDOSBPA 2009, par. 3; EIU 2009, 4). Orthodox Christianity is practiced by 83.9% of the population, and there is a substantial Muslim minority approaching 10% (USDOSBPA 2009, par. 3). The population is slightly more urban than rural, literacy is estimated at 100%, and life expectancy is at 76.5 years (USDOSBPA 2009, par. 3; MEDG 2007, 18).

In 1989, 1.77% of Georgia's population, including Abkhazia, was identified as Abkhaz by the last Soviet census; this represented 95,853 people (EURII 2009, 64-65). The same census shows that within the territory of the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic Georgians were 45.68% of the population, or 239,872 people; Abkhaz were 17.76% of the population, or 93,267 people; Armenians were almost as numerous as the Abkhaz themselves, at 14.58% of the population or 76,541 people, with Russians right behind them at 14.27% of the population, or 74,913 people, out of a total of 525,061 people (Ibid.). After several wars, by February of 1995, Georgians went from being over 45% to just 5% of the population, "while the Abkhaz minority increased its proportion to 50%" and the rest were Russians, Armenians, and Greeks (Mooney 1995, 198). By UN estimates, as many as "350,000 of Abkhazia's estimated population of 540,000 fled the region between August 1992 and October 1993," so only a fraction of its former population remained (Redmond 1994, par. 10). A census from 2003 conducted by Abkhaz officials placed only 215,972 people in Abkhazia; 44% were Abkhaz, 21% were Georgian, 21% were Armenian; and 11% were Russian (UNPO 2009, 1,8; Clogg 2008, 307-308). This number is disputed by Georgia, which says the total population of Abkhazia is more likely around 175,000 people (UNPO 2009, 8). A policy paper for The Atlantic Council of the United States mentions that "Census data is unreliable, with both sides adjusting numbers to support their political positions" and that "Abkhazia's population was 178,000 in 2005" (Phillips 2008, 3). Francis (2008) corroborates that there are major problems with existing demographic figures (Francis 2008, 3). The UNDP (1998) and International Crisis Group (2006) have estimates at 180,000-220,000 people and 157,000-190,000 people, respectively (ICGAT 2006, 9).

Georgia is a new democracy, having only been a "democratic republic since the presidential elections and constitutional referendum of October 1995," where shortly before it had been part of the Soviet Union (USDOSBPA 2009, par. 9). Progress was not steady though, and there was a "Rose Revolution" in response to evidence of serious electoral manipulation by the government of then President Eduard Shevardnadze; "[s]ince 2004, the Government of Georgia has turned a nearly failed state into a rapidly maturing market democracy" (USDOSBPA 2009, par. 10, 17). The World Bank credits Georgia with having "established strong mechanisms of accountability and transparency in government" during this period as well (WBCB 2009, par. 7). Still, while noting that the post "Rose Revolution" years were "marked by success" and that now parliamentary elections are "generally free and fair," Freedom House (2008) writes that the presidency as part of "the executive branch dominates other state agencies" and along with the "weak" nature of the opposition contributes to the government having an "unbalanced character;" it also reports that "the judiciary still finds it difficult to withstand political pressure" (FH 2008, par. 3, 5-6, 11). As far as political parties are concerned, "[t]he rights to join and create political parties, take part in elections, and create and engage in public associations or demonstrations are generally respected...[i]n general parties can operate freely although there have been allegations of pressure against opposition figures" (FH 2008, par. 14, 27).

The country is broken up into twelve administrative areas: nine regions, one capital district for Tbilisi, and two “autonomous republics,” all of these totaling sixty-seven electoral districts which elect 235 seats in a unicameral parliament, and local elections were instituted several years ago (EIU 2009, 5; USDOSBPA 2009, par. 4, 11; GGG 2008, par. 4.). The nine regions are as follows: Guria, Imereti, Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, Samegrelo and Zemo Svaneti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Shida Kartli (MFA 2009, par. 9). While the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia has resisted reintegration and declared independence from Georgia most recently in 1999, the other Autonomous Republic of Adjara (Achara/Ajara), in Georgia’s southwest, seems to have willingly become more integrated since the “Rose Revolution,” even though a confrontation and armed conflicted nearly resulted from Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili’s efforts to bring the region under more national control (BBC RTAb 2009, par 1-11; BBC RTAj 2009, par. 5-12; EURII 2009, 11-12). In both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia has no official control (BBC RTAb 2009, par 1-11; BBC RTSO 2009, par. 3-6).

B. Description of the Conflict

The armed struggles involving Georgians, Abkhazians, South Ossetians, and Russians with each other in the multiple Caucasian wars of the post-Soviet years have received a round of new academic examination as the world only just the previous summer watched Russia launch its largest military operation since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was launched in 1979. Tanks rolled into a Georgia that had been steadily and dramatically aligning itself with the West, and as the United States, NATO, and the EU have recently been partnering closely Georgia and with the administration of Mikhail Saakashvili, there is no shortage of material available in English. This paper presents a diversity of sources and opinions, but makes no claim on these being authoritative or representative of their disciplines. Recent history, especially, is always harder to comment upon as many of the long term effects have yet to develop, but the analyses presented here still show a number of common themes, even if there is disagreement as to the importance or centrality of these themes.

Sources of the Conflict

The reasons why the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries saw so much conflict between Georgians and Abkhaz go back many hundreds of years. They even argue about their older periods of history, over who ruled who and who lived where, and even the real history is complicated, as even today that older history is a major point of contention between them. The Tsarist period radically changed the lives and societies of both groups, unleashing and creating forces that would awaken both of their nationalist ambitions in a way that made them incompatible, and confrontational to, each others’, while the Communist-era developments would see the further development of their national movements over decades of repression and, eventually, confrontation between them, erupting in war when the Soviet state collapsed and was no longer there to mediate between the two ethnicities.

Socio-Political Structure: Pre-Russian Influences

“The creation legend of Abkhazia and Georgia is identical, a sad fact that has not led to unity and fraternity between these two peoples,” writes Goltz (2009), “but rather to a disputation of basic history and the denial of the very humanity of the other group” (Goltz 2009, 21). Abkhazia, known in early times as Abkhazeti, for many centuries was passing in and out of varying degrees of control and association with the western Georgian kingdom, known in this time period as Colchis-Egresi, and Colchis-Egresi itself was passing in and out of varying degrees of control and dominance under the eastern Georgian kingdom, known as Kartli-Iberia; Abkhazeti was often, for all practical purposes, ruled by a local prince who would show submission in one way or another to one prince or another, or one of the Georgian kings (Sunny 1994, 11-30). Colchis-Egresi went in and out of being parts of official Roman provinces from the

time of Pompey's operations there (from 64 B.C.E) until the coming of Islam in the seventh century, and was generally directly ruled by Rome or through Rome as a client state, while Kartli-Iberia was generally independent, but passed between different spheres of influence of Rome and the various Persian dynasties of the same time period (Suny 1994, 13-30; Gvosdev 2000, 1; Braund 1994, 152-313).

Muslim Arab caliphs would replace the Persian kings as Kartli-Iberia, western Georgia (now called Lazica) and even Abkhazeti became the scene of an "intense struggle" between the Arabs and the East Romans/Byzantines; since the Georgians had converted to Christianity in the fourth century C.E. and practiced the Orthodox version of that faith, they were more oriented towards the Byzantines (Ibid., 27-29). While Kartli-Iberia fell to Arab dominance, elements of western Georgia stayed free from Arab control, and a prince of Abkhazeti even revolted against Byzantium and expanded control into Lazica; as the eighth century closed and the ninth went on, the Bagratids, under Arab influence, came to power in a divided Kartli-Iberia while an budding Abkhazeti kingdom "emerged as a more powerful political authority (Ibid., 29-30). The two kingdoms switched numerous times from being allies to enemies, and meddled in each other's affairs; finally, an outside king had the heir of Kartli-Iberia installed as ruler in Abkhazeti; when his father died he ruled a unified Georgian kingdom in 1008 C.E. (Suny 1994 30-33; Rapp 2000, 576; Gvosdev 2000, 1).

Suny writes that as Georgian power expanded and conflict with Muslims intensified, "[t]he untied Georgian kingdom of Abkhazeti-Kartli was a decidedly decentralized state," where local rulers could, at times, flout the authority of the Georgian "kings" and reached out to foreign powers independently for leverage against royal, centralized Georgian authority; some even made moves for the throne (Suny 1994, 33-38). During this period, "a distinct Georgian Christian and civilization emerged...with affinities to both the Byzantine West and the Iranian west," but ultimately "Georgians identified with Byzantium rather than with Islam or Iran;" Suny presents his readers with a increasingly Christian Georgia through the eleventh and twelfth centuries protected by its "kings and the lords" "against the Muslim threat" (Ibid., 38-39). The country "remained...primarily rural" and its "towns...were largely inhabited by Muslims, Armenians, and other foreigners" until the nineteenth century (Ibid., 38).

Surviving two periods of Mongol devastation and domination in addition to the "Black Death," a reunited kingdom quickly flickered and died out in the mid-fifteenth century as a confederation of western Georgian nobles broke away from the east of Georgia; a new king of Imereti, the dominant state in the west, would emerge but "in return for their aid, the new monarch was obliged to create a principality...for each of his four major allies," and "the Sharvashidze [family] in Abkhazeti" and three others "ruled as semi-independent princes;" Georgia would not see reunification "until the annexation by Russia in the nineteenth century" (Ibid., 38-46). Until the eighteenth century, Georgia fell under the increasing domination and rule of the Muslim empires of both the Ottoman Sultan and the Persian Shah, and the princes of Abkhazeti retained a level of independence from other Georgian princes and kings (Gvosdev 2000, 2-5; Suny 1994, 46-59).

"Because, arguably, interests are tied to identities—that is, what we think we need is connected to who we think we are," writes Suny (1999), "the whole question of self-understandings, goals and aspirations, and fears and anxieties must be investigated as prerequisite to analyzing the security requirements of states" (Suny 1999, 139-140). He makes the case that Georgia is among certain former USSR nations, where "uncertainty about current politics and future possibilities are deeply embedded in more general confusion about who 'we' are and where 'our' interests lie" and maintains that "[n]ational identity is a particular form of political identification" in a world where "nation is not natural or given but must be worked for, taught, and instilled, largely through the efforts of intellectuals, politicians, and activists who make the identification with the 'imagined political community' of the nation a palpable and potent source of emotional and intellectual commitment" (Ibid., 140, 144-145). For Suny,

[m]odern nations are those political communities made up of people who believe they share characteristics (perhaps origins, values, historical experiences, language, territory, or any of many other elements) that give them the right to self-determination—perhaps control of a piece of the earth’s real estate (their homeland), even statehood and the benefits that follow. Nations are articulated within the stories people tell about themselves. Like other identification, they can be thought of as arenas in which people dispute who they are, argue about boundaries, who is in or who is out of the group, where the ‘homeland’ begins and ends, what the ‘true’ history of the nation is, what is ‘authentic’ about being national and what is to be rejected...

Most important, modern nations exist within a universe of meaning that holds that the only source of legitimacy for state authorities is that they somehow represent that nation and rule with some kind of assent...much of modern politics, and much of the conflict in the twentieth century has been precisely about the ill fit between self described nations and existing states.” (Suny 1999, 145; Suny 2001, 866)

He goes further to mention that “long-lived ‘nations,’ [like]...Georgians...who have written traditions that go back millennia, have in modern times reconstructed and made consistent the varied and changing identities and ways of conceiving themselves that existed in the past” and “earlier identities” have been molded into “frame[s] of later templates, particularly that of the nation” (Suny 1999, 146). Georgia is described as one of several former Soviet Republics where “the problems of ethnicity, identity, and the appropriate political forms to sustain the new state in the future were at the base of the devastating and violent crises that fractured” them (Suny 1999, 154).

Several authors besides Suny articulate a similar position, that the intensely-felt ancient identities of the Georgians and the Abkhaz are important components to understanding their modern struggles, and especially their conflicts with each other. Grant (2009) comments on the strength of the pre-soviet identities of the two ethnic groups, in part, when he notes that “for all its remarkable internationalism, it [i.e. the ‘shared Soviet project’ that was Georgia] was a project that never entirely convinced most populations at the Abkhaz and Georgian end of the list that they were full partners alongside the rest” (Grant 2009, ix-x). Georgia’s current President, Mikheil Saakashvili “took a holy oath” as part of his presidential inauguration ceremony at Gelati, where the “greatest Georgian king of the eleventh century...is buried. By receiving the blessing at Gelati, Saakashvili, who wants a strong Georgian state, was symbolically alluding to a period of history when Georgia had such a state” (Nodia 2005, 78). On the fact that there is a debate about history, and how history going back centuries and even millennia is being argued about and used as a modern political tool, Zverev (1996) says:

To explain why conflicts break out, geopolitics and socio-economic interests alone are not enough. A salient factor in [the Georgia-Abkhazia-Russia conflict] is the use of history in the service of particular nationalist demands. Thus, in Abkhaz literature, one finds references to the Abkhazian kingdom which existed in the 9th and 10th centuries. This is instrumental to the Abkhazian claim for sovereignty over the region, even though the same kingdom could equally be described as a common Georgian-Abkhazian state, with a predominance of Georgian language and culture. Georgian authors, in turn, stress the allegedly non-Abkhaz character of pre-17th-century Abkhazia to support their case. In a more extreme variant, a similar historical perspective gave rise to the theory of “hosts” (Georgians) and “guests” (all other minorities) on Georgian land. (Zverev 1996, part I par.7)

The debate about history, for Zverev as it was for Suny, is about presenting a case for who has the right to govern where and over whom. This representation of the debate is also corroborated by the recent EU

report on the August 2008 war, by Khazanov (1996), by the International Crisis Group (2006) and by Nodia (1998) (EURII 2009, 66-69; Khazanov 1996, 6; ICG 2006, 3-4; Nodia 1998, 14). Nodia sums up Georgian views: “Abkhazia is Georgia, because it has always been part of Georgia when it was united. Georgians cannot see Abkhazia as a ‘foreign’ land which was once conquered by them, and the accusation of imperialism usually makes them furious” (Nodia 1998, 19). Jans (1998) sums up the intersection of Georgian and Abkhazian thought, in that after the Cold War

Titular nations of Union republics and Autonomous republics found themselves locked into a process of self-definition [after the Cold War] and a quest for national and international legitimacy...Democratic politics require the definition of the demos. Democracy, understood as the rule of the people by the people, begs the question of what is to be understood as “We, the people.” (Jans 1998, 109)

He further argues that “Ethnonational identities base their credibility and legitimacy on an interpretation of the historical past;” so for Georgians and Abkhazians, the past is of very present relevance to them (Ibid., 110). Lynch (2002) says that Abkhaz claims to the right of self determination are, among other things:

based on the position that the current states represent but the latest phase in a long historical tradition. The Abkhaz foreign minister, Sergei Shamba, placed great stress on this: “Abkhazia has a thousand-year history of statehood since the formation in the 8th century of the Kingdom of Abkhazia. Even within the framework of empires, Abkhazia kept this history of stateness. No matter the form, Abkhaz statehood remained intact.” (Lynch 2002, 837)

Departing from the more neutral posture of others, Chirikba (1998), writing as an Abkhaz government official, argues that Abkhaz history shows more independence from Georgians than not, and thus provide its people with “legitimate grounds for their claims to statehood and sovereignty” (Chirikba 1998, 48). Jones (2006) dismissed the non-recent past as being particularly relevant, writing that “[n]ational conflict in Georgia (specifically Abkhazia and South Osetia [sic]) are neither medieval nor about blood. Such overly historicist interpretations simplify the causes of the post-Soviet crisis and reflect a crude primordialist view of nations in the region,” and he suggests that the issues are more local and less grandiose in nature (Jones 2006, 250). For Suny (1994), the process is fluid, as Georgia is “reinventing its past;” he comments that “[t]he key to the future lies in what a people selects from its past, how it imagines itself as a community and continues to remake itself as a nation” (Suny 1994, 334-335).

Socio-Political-Economic Structure: Tsarist Russian Influence

With Byzantium destroyed and facing increasing threats from a surging Ottoman Empire and the usual Persian threat, some princes and kings of Georgia began to look to the Orthodox Tsars of emerging power Russia as they expanded south towards the Caucasus (Suny 1994, 46-49).

Not until close to the end of the eighteenth did Russia’s expansion southward mean anything other than generally empty promises or futile attempts to aid their Georgian Christian brethren against this Shah or that Sultan, or from Dagestani raiders; still, the Georgian princes “calculated the continued decline of Iran and the expansion of Russia to the south” (Ibid., 49-55). A unified kingdom of two eastern Georgian territories, Kartli-Kakheti under Erekle II (r. 1762-1798), emerged in 1762 whose king would ally with and eventually make his realm a protectorate of Russia under the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783 in exchange for help against Muslim enemies, but Russia abandoned Georgia to devastation multiple times, withdrawing troops that were supposed to protect Georgia to fight elsewhere (Suny 1994, 55-59;

Gvosdev 2000, 26-76). Desperate still for protection for his people from Georgia's Muslim enemies, a Kartli-Kakheti successor to Erekle II offered his kingdom directly to Russia, which was formally annexed on December 18, 1800; Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) assumed office in 1801 and that year abolished the kingdom by decree, "ending any pretense of Georgian acquiescence in Russia's actions" (Suny 1994, 59; Habib 2005, 43-45). Within a few years, most of the other Georgian princes were formally absorbed by Russia as Russian troops pushed out Turkic and Persian influence and armies, with only the western Georgian state of Imereti offering unsuccessful resistance to Russia; in 1809, the ruling prince of Abkhazeti formally "placed his principality under protection" of the tsar; it would be one of only three principalities that were not directly annexed by Russia (Suny 1994, 63-64; Gvosdev 2000, 135).

As soon as Russia arrived, it wasted no time consolidating its power, and by the third decade of the nineteenth century, "Russian troops stood between the Christians of the Caucasus and the Muslims to the south;" Georgia was finally safe from the Ottomans and Persians (Suny 1994, 64). Here was a dramatic shift in Georgian norms of life; whereas before Georgia was plagued by constant warfare, it was now dominated by a single power: Tsarist Russia; whereas before the lords and nobles had ruled autocratically over their domains and clergy, "exercising police and judicial powers," now Russia introduced a bureaucracy and imposed its "norms" on clergy by removing them from princely control, and in general "the princes steadily lost ground, first as hereditary political and police authorities in their districts and later as rulers of their own vassal gentry" (Ibid., 64-67). Russia created norms for membership in the Georgian nobility as well and organized them into regional bodies; peace also brought more prosperity for the nobles in conjunction with increased rights for the serfs of Georgia, and increased regulation of all by Russian authorities (Ibid., 68). The old Georgian noble exemplified a rural character, a fighting spirit, and independence; the new one was evolving to serve the Russian Imperial state apparatus and focused on European education, Russian language, and becoming an urban instead of a rural elite; some went along with this program, others formed the backbone of several rebellions and "the first generation of Georgian oppositional intelligentsia" in the 1820's (Ibid., 69-70). The vision of Erekle II of a unified Georgia under the Russian Tsars, ruled by Russia through a Georgian king and maintaining its local customs, was never to be (Ibid., 63-66).

Georgia was still on the dangerous limits of Russia's empire, and was governed by "military men;" Suny asserts that "Russian military government, characterized by arbitrariness and dishonesty, was the reality that lay behind the façade of Russia's civilizing mission in the Caucasus...The rampant corruption and insensitivity of lower-level tsarist officials made significant segments of the Georgian population long for a return to the imperfect independence they had enjoyed before 1801" (Ibid., 68-69). A failed plot in 1832 to restore an independent Georgian monarchy led to an era of increasing Russian control and cultural impositions, and even as more officials were appointed by the government who knew local languages and customs, these customs were formally pushed out as Russia forbade Georgian "as an official language for state business;" Russians replaced all Georgians in the bureaucracy (Suny 1994, 69-72; Jones 1987, 53-76). Yet this imposed system failed under massive Georgian resistance from both the top and bottom of Georgian society and a new system was introduced, with a Viceroy Voronstov bringing about better administration and far more input of, involvement from, and participation by the Georgian nobility even while still adding more Russian norms and laws to Georgia; he made "a significant part of it [Georgia's nobility] loyal servants of tsarism" and they made their "peace with the tsarist autocracy;" "Georgians of all classes rallied to the Russian banner" and fought with distinction during the Crimean War (1853-1856) (Suny, 72-77). Georgian towns and cities became hubs of Russian administration as they came under Russian administrative and cultural norms; during this process, Armenians retained their urban merchant/craftsman role despite some competition from Russian merchants, and constituted a class which saw its fortunes rise, along with the Georgian nobility serving the Tsar, in working with the Imperial Russian administration; Georgia as a whole saw its trade and standard of living increase sharply compared to the previous centuries of chaos, and "local merchants [mainly Armenians] flourish[ed]," but

tensions with Russian practices remained (Ibid., 86-95). Suny (1994) attest to the shifts and long-term consequences of some of these developments; “significant segments” of both the

Georgian nobility and Armenian bourgeoisie...identif[ied] their security, economic well-being, prestige, and political status with the Russian connection. This was no mean achievement. Its permanence can be attested to late in the twentieth century. But at the same time that this pacification and integration was taking place, the stage was being set for a dual confrontation that would mature in the next half-century: between the two leading social and ethnic communities—the Georgian nobility and the Armenian bourgeoisie—and between Russian autocracy and the intellectual element emerging from these two classes. (Suny 1994, 95)

At the same time that large parts of the Georgian nobility were adapting to a new role, the Georgian peasants found in themselves “smoldering resentments” as a result of their increased regulation by and responsibilities to Russian practices and officials; Suny writes that “[s]erfdom had by the mid-nineteenth century been effectively remolded along Russian lines” and that “peasants periodically exploded into rebellion;” almost 70% of eastern Georgian peasants, and 30% in the west, were state-owned serfs until Tsar Alexander II’s (1855-1881) emancipation of the serfs (Ibid., 82-86). Concurrently, “[a]s the alliance between Russian officialdom and the Georgian nobility solidified, the traditional ties between the upper and lower classes of rural Georgia were strained” (Ibid., 86). A major peasant rebellion in Georgia in 1857 underscored the need for reform overall, and in 1861 the Alexander emancipated all serfs in “Russia proper;” but it would take longer and several fits and starts for that policy to be implemented fully in the Georgian provinces for there, Tsarist officials “faced a nobility [its confidence buoyed by its recent service in the Crimean War] united in opposition to the state’s plans for emancipation” and their coming together on this issue sparked a self-consciousness of their own power as a group (Ibid., 96-104) Their efforts were somewhat successful in moderating the emancipation program, but generally at the expense of the serfs-to-be freed; emancipation in Georgia lagged behind Russia proper in both implementation and results as a consequence, but despite disastrous economic consequences for the peasants, local communities became communes and took on a democratic, socialistic, and elective nature; combined with a massive, mobile proletariat that would develop from many of the Georgians for whom emancipation was inadequate, who were freed from bondage *and* the land they needed, the stage would be set for politics well into the twentieth century, uniting “the resentment of peasant and nobles alike...against the state” (Ibid. 104-112).

On the eve of Russian annexation, Georgia was incredibly fragmented; “from this rather desperate and disparate situation, the Georgians under Russian rule began a gradual resurgence,” and the reforms of the tsars and their administrators “contributed to the formation of a ‘nationality in itself;’” with “additional pressure” from tsarist administration and the “postemancipation economic environment” in the second half of the nineteenth century, “a new sense of nationality, a national consciousness, and the first manifestations of political ideology” emerged so that by the 1890’s, Georgia had “a national leadership and an incipient mass movement for liberation” (Suny 1994, 114). This new view replaced earlier “allegiances to region, religion, or traditional lords” and “for many...was intimately tied to an overtly socialist worldview” (Ibid.). The very policies that were intended to “Russify” Georgia instead produced a Georgian nation; “[t]hanks to centralized Russian administration and the growth of trade and industry, Georgia was reunited, first politically and then economically,” and even as many Georgian elite nobles “became denationalized servants of tsarism, dissident voices could always be heard” (Ibid.) The Georgian post-emancipation nobility, weaker economically without serfs and losing power to the urban Armenian middleclass of merchants, no longer “led” Georgia, yet as “a westernizing liberalism, a nostalgic nationalism, peasant socialism, and in the end, Marxism” took root as dominant forces, it was elements of this nobility, educated by Russian reforms in western tradition and ideas, that “provided the only leadership to a radicalized peasantry and the new working class” (Ibid.).

Another important reason for the development of national and ethnic consciousness was the increased interaction between different ethnicities in this period; for centuries, Armenians dominated the urban centers, Georgians the countryside, but with masses of landless peasants and many poorer nobles moving into towns and cities, “[o]ne’s ‘Georgianness’ had to be affirmed more consciously. In the multiethnic context of Tiflis [Tbilisi], the boundaries had to be defined and redefined” and the two groups’ relationships with each other “shifted rapidly after 1860” (Ibid., 114-115). Now as never before, “Georgians of various classes came face to face with a well-entrenched, financially secure, urban middle class whose members spoke a different language, went to a different church, and held very different values. Social distinctions between classes were reinforced by cultural differences;” economically depressed nobles, unable adjust to the massive societal shifts, became heavily indebted to Armenian moneymen, who often came into possession of their land (Ibid. 115-116). In Tbilisi, Armenians were almost 75% of the city’s 20,000 people at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and Georgians were just over one-fifth; by the 1897 census, the growing city of 159,000 had a dramatic shift in ethnic composition: Armenians were now just 38% (55,553 people), Georgians now 26.3% (38,357 people) and a much newer population of Russians was 24.7% of the population (36,113 people), but while Armenians and Russians held positions of “economic and political power,” Georgians experienced an “almost complete isolation from” such positions. (Ibid., 116) By 1900, 44% of the “150 largest industrial establishments in Georgia” were Armenian-owned, and a similar percentage was owned by “Russians and foreign capitalists;” only 10% were owned by Georgians; Tsarist laws aimed at reducing urban Armenian dominance succeeded in the Armenians’ “modernization” of their strategies and tactics, which in turn enabled them to retain much of their power; Georgian noble status largely disappeared as a factor in power, and together with many of the rural villages being “integrated into a national economy,” the noble-peasant distinction was replaced by a sense that all Georgians were united in one major class of people, dominated politically by Russians and economically by Armenians: the “Georgian nation.” (Ibid., 116-122). Thus, “Russian colonial domination...had fostered conditions for both national reformation and ethnic confrontation,” and Russian and Western influence and contact “worked to awaken consciousness of Georgia’s unique culture and fears that Georgia would be overwhelmed by foreign values” (Ibid., 122)

Perhaps even more dramatic forces awoke similar feelings and forces in the Abkhaz society under Russian dominion. After the Crimean War, the Russian tsar’s army “engaged in demographic warfare that would today be considered mass ethnic cleansing” against the Muslim people living on and north of the north Black Sea coast; “well over a million” of these people were forced, starting in 1860, to flee in waves to the Ottoman Empire, with hundreds of thousands perishing in the process (Williams 2000, 93). Abkhazians had mostly converted to Islam under several centuries of Ottoman domination, and the people being driven out by Russians were their ethnic and linguistic kin; roughly 110,000 Muslim Abkhazians voluntarily fled and/or were forced from Abkhazeti and went to Ottoman lands in the ensuing years, “leaving a small, largely Orthodox population that lived in coastal Georgia” (it is this largely Orthodox remnant of the population that would come into severe conflict with ethnic Georgians in modern times) (Williams 2000, 94; EURII 2009, 66; MAR 2007). This “depopulation of much of Abkhazia of Abkhazians and their replacement by Slavs, Germans, Armenians, and...Georgians” would drastically change the makeup of Abkhazia; before this form of ethnic cleansing, the vast majority of Abkhaz had been Sunni Muslims, and over 100 years later, after most of the Sunnis fled, the breakdown, as estimated by Chirikba (1998) is that c. 1998 60% of the Abkhaz were Orthodox Christian, with 40% being Sunni Muslim; the Russian census figures from 1897 counted 58,697 ethnic Abkhazians, or 55.3% of Abkhazia’s total population; this is down from an estimate of 130,000-150,000 before the expulsions and migrations (Goltz 2009, 21; Chirikba 1998, 48; EURII 2009, 68). Ethnic Georgians were 24.4% overall in the same census, with 25,875 people counted, but this was more than a few years after some of them started settling on the land earlier vacated by the Abkhaz (Chirikba 1998, 48; EURII 2009, 68).

Emancipation was a concept the Abkhaz were hostile to from the beginning as the preexisting system there was far more generous to peasants in Abkhazeti, with most of them even owning land (Suny 1994, 108-109). In the context of the wars and forced migrations to the north, Russia terminated the independent principality in Abkhazeti and directly incorporated it into the Russian Empire in 1864; during this period, Abkhaz were sporadically rebelling against Russian authorities in the years before and after the 1870 enactment of emancipation in Abkhazeti, later than in most of the rest of Georgia (Suny 1994, 108-109; EURII 2009, 66). While many ethnic Abkhaz fled, Abkhaz scholars today maintain that thousands of Georgians, Armenians, and others settled into Abkhazia in this period on much of the empty land, while some Georgian scholars contest this and claim Georgians lived there in large numbers before that time, with or without these settlers (Suny 1994, 108-109; EURII 2009, 66; Nodia 1998, 20). Nodia stresses that a key part of understanding the Abkhaz today is through the prism—what Nodia termed the “emotional cornerstone of the Abkhaz national project”—of the Abkhaz seeing their kinsmen wiped out of Russia and brutally forced to flee, and the Abkhaz not wanting to share their fate; thus, a key “feature of Abkhaz nationalism was that the national project of the Abkhaz was less about political independence than about survival as a distinct ethnic group,” something distinct from the Georgian nationalism emerging in the same time period (Nodia 1998, 20). While Abkhaz fled Russian authorities for their lives, recently freed Georgian serfs were settling on empty Abkhaz land; the Abkhaz, “being few in absolute numbers, not protected by traditions of literacy, and gradually becoming minority in their own land...faced the obvious danger of sweeping assimilation” (Nodia 1998, 20; Lak’oba 1998a, 88).

Going back to the development of Georgian national consciousness, Suny (1994) notes that the forces already discussed also took part in the creation of and flowering of intellectual, literary, cultural, and artistic developments which celebrated Georgian nationalism and Georgian ethnic identity; such activity of prominent “patriots” of the “Georgian intelligentsia” evolved from an “initial revival of the Georgian past and attention to the language in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries...[to] the journalistic activity of the 1860s and 1870s to the active political nationalisms of the turn of the century” (Suny 1994, 122-123). Writing later (1999), he also notes that “in the nineteenth century...national intellectuals emphasized the differences among the Caucasian [referring to the region, not race] peoples and downplayed the similarities” (Suny 1999, 155). He (1994) traces the birth of “the Georgian national intelligentsia” to the failed 1832 plot by certain passionate Georgian nobles to eject Russian influence from Georgia, and it was some of these nobleman and others who would become the poets, writers and historians who would create important works evoking Georgian nationalism and a desire to be free of Russian domination; they “provided the small Georgian reading public with the images required to regard Georgia as a nation” (Suny 1994, 122-125). After the education reforms and “expansion” under Viceroy Vorontsov, the eager base for such cultural works, and those capable of producing and appreciating them, grew significantly, the education in Russia of some of them exposing Georgians to the Russian intelligentsia and radicals who became much more vocal and active after Russia’s humiliation of the Crimean War, which had a “profound effect on them,” encouraging them to move from the realm of intellectual to that of activist (Ibid., 125-127).

Georgian-language newspapers emerged, financed and written by both the older generation of the 1832 plot and, later, the newer generation, and spread radical ideas to an even larger audience. From the second, Russian-educated generation, the writer and Illia Chavchavadze would become “the most influential Georgian nationalist from the emancipation until the 1905 revolution” (Ibid., 127-131). Another from the same cohort, Niko Nikoladze, even met Karl Marx and was far more radical, and his like-minded group of activists and intellectuals “was the first group of Georgian intellectuals to become primarily involved in the urban and economic life of Georgia,” fighting on behalf of the ethnic Georgian lower classes and “operat[ing] with a confidence and energy unseen in earlier generations” (Ibid., 131-132). In 1875 Nikoladze joined with Chavchavadze and a number of nobles to form a bank, but soon they were “sharply divided,” along with their respective followers, about how to use the funds: Nikoladze wanted to improve agriculture, economic production, and help sell land to ethnic Georgians to keep other

groups from buying too much Georgian land, but Chavchavadze wanted to build “schools and cultural institutions” (Ibid. 131-133) Chavchavadze’s movement would come to be the “right” part of the Georgian intelligentsia, “nostalgic nationalism;” Nikoladze and his movement would be the “reformist liberalism” “center,” and the “left” would be the populist and social(ist) democratic “emerging revolutionary movement;” the left was the newest of the group, and was largely influenced by non-Georgian writers, taking root in secret circles and seminaries, especially the Tiflis Theological Seminary, a “center of populist activity” (Ibid, 133-137). A small group of these “populists” determined that the fate of Georgia was linked to that of Russia, one of them saying that “The Georgian people can be freed only if the political order in Russia is destroyed;” much of these groups’ activities consisted of spreading radical works by authors like Karl Marx, Victor Hugo, and John Stuart Mill, among others, and attempting to awaken and engage the peasants, with some success; yet, “for all the prominence of Georgians in the Russian populist movement, the movement had very little impact within Georgia itself” (Ibid., 137-139).

After his father was assassinated in 1881, the reign of the new Alexander III (r. 1881-1894) was, for Georgia, characterized by increasing “Russian chauvinism,” the repression of radicals and containment of nationalism, and a policy of “diverting Georgian hostilities away from the government and toward the Armenians;” the Russian word for “Georgia” was banned in print, Georgian language studies were “further discouraged,” and a “harsh Russianizing regime” was put in place in the Tiflis seminary (Suny 1994, 140; Conquest 1991, 16-17). At the seminary in Tbilisi, “Georgia’s leading academic institution,” a Georgian student slapped a Russian rector in 1885, after the rector in had insulted Georgia; the next year a student murdered that same rector, and this was just eight years before the man who would become Joseph Stalin would enter the same seminary as a student, where he would be heavily exposed to the radical writings of the time (Suny 1994, 140-141; Conquest 1991, 16-17). Thompson notes that Stalin, “strongly influenced by the Georgian milieu in which he grew up and worked as a revolutionary,” “protested” this imposition of Russian language over Georgian at the Seminary, and that “as a youth, Stalin ardently espoused Georgian nationalism. Until 1912, he used the revolutionary pseudonym Koba,” a character from one of the nineteenth-century Georgian noble-intellectuals’ tales, and notes the future Soviet dictator’s “first writings were lyrical Georgian poems” (Thompson 1996, 238).

The 1890’s saw Georgians make their first inroads into the Tbilisi city government, but the Armenians were still dominant; the clash between the two groups became more intense, and heavy lobbying by Georgians over the years finally convinced Russian authorities that “Armenians were a subversive, revolutionary threat to Russian hegemony over Caucasia;” the Russian authorities started to place restrictions on and take action against numerous types of Armenian institutions, including taking the entire Armenian-dominated Tbilisi legislative body, or *duma*, to court for corruption (the charges were dismissed) and going after the Armenian Church; in 1904, an Armenian responded by trying to assassinate the regional Russian governor, but only succeeded in wounding him (Suny 1994, 141-142). “Social revolutionary and ethnic concerns were gradually merging,” writes Suny (1994), and “[e]thnic friction, so long dormant or contained within the confines of the city *duma*, exploded into the streets, just as the social conflicts between workers and bosses, intellectuals and the state, coalesced into a broad revolutionary assault on the autocracy;” most moderate movements discussed failed to meet the needs of the discontented, the stage was set for social democracy/Marxism to take hold (Ibid., 141-143).

A group of young Russian-educated Georgians had become exposed to Marxism and social democracy while studying in Warsaw after they had been students at the Tbilisi seminary school, and arrived back in Georgia in the 1890’s, Noe Zhordania and Pilip Makharadze among them; by 1905 they were followers of the “Menshevik wing of social democracy,” and were the “de facto leaders of a massive national liberation movement, the dimensions of which had not been seen elsewhere in the Russian empire;” they would find many willing followers in the cities, which had swelled with Georgians after emancipation, Georgians that were largely the bottom of the urban socio-economic structure with little

access to political power (Suny 1994, 144-145,157). Marxism did not contain the longing for an “agrarian past” that the other movements had espoused, and it emphasized the industrial worker, who was almost always Georgian; though Marxism was a “non nationalist ideology,” it was “a weapon against both...[Georgians’] ethnic enemies: Russian officials and the Armenian bourgeoisie;” its aim was a “revolution that eliminated the dual dominion of Russian bureaucracy and Armenian industrialists” so “Georgia could be returned to Georgians” (Ibid., 145). Besides the urban Georgian masses, the Georgian peasants were also looking for drastic change, as neither “the nobility’s attempts to enforce their old obligations,” nor “a free market that, through forces beyond their control and often far from their village, could reduce them to poverty” made conditions any better for them; even though the peasants had been freed from serfdom, in reality, the vast majority of both Georgian and Abkhaz peasants they were still in a “temporary obligated” status with their noble until 1912, “long after their Russian counterparts had been freed from that category;” nobles and landowners tried to exploit their peasants for as much profit as possible, while frustrated and oppressed peasants worked only as much as they needed to feed themselves and meet their overlords’ minimums; many had to abandon their lands and became migrant labor, and the soil quality and quality of cultivation suffered greatly as a result (Ibid., 145-149). On top of all of this, Russian authorities encouraged “Russian, German, and other European” colonization of Abkhaz and Georgian lands in a situation where most rural peasants did not have even the minimum amount of land to meet their needs amid poverty and a growing Georgian population (Ibid., 146-151). Still, at the dawn of the twentieth century these peasants were “firmly” part of Georgian-wide and international commercial agriculture, and overall, the country had a new foundational “working class” (Ibid., 151-154)

While Zhordania and Makharadze were at the Seminary school, they had organized a successful strike, insisting that “Georgian language, literature, and history be taught,” before embarking upon their study in Warsaw, where they were exposed to many more socialist and Marxist ideas; they returned in 1892 and began organizing (Ibid., 157-159). This new groups of “Georgian Marxists” made their first public appearance in the spring of 1894, at a funeral of an older activist known as “Ninoshvili” and mentor to many of them, with one of Marxist giving a rousing speech, vowing “to struggle for the ‘representatives of physical and mental labor’ against the ‘bourgeois capitalist parasites;” this speech was printed in a legal, new, and “progressive” journal called *kvali*, “considered the organ of young people,” and it “had a great impact in Georgia,” with the editor of that journal even dubbing the funeral group the heirs to Chavchavadze and Ninoshvili (Ibid., 159). While Russian authorities focused on overt separatists, especially Armenians, the Marxists discreetly built up their network and built up their followers, waiting to introduce their more radical ideas until they had exposed them to readings and built trust, and stayed away from workers’ strikes; thus, they avoided attention and “were not regard[ed]...as a serious threat,” and even the workers’ “tenuous” interaction “with the social democrats had profound effects” on them. (Ibid., 160). After another trip abroad for Zhordania, this movement would make him the editor of *kvali* and would also expand into writing and disseminating “underground” illegal literature that was much more radical; legal Marxists would have to “keep clear of direct involvement in the workers’ movement,” and this, in addition to “distinct experiences and outlooks,” “divided the older legalists from the younger underground workers,” which included a young Stalin (Ibid., 160-161).

The Georgian social democratic movement became publicly known and took root, and its “epicenter” was the Tbilisi railroad workshops; just in 1900, there were seventeen strikes nationwide, only two less than the previous thirty years’ combined (Suny 1994, 161). Soon after 1900, antitsarist ideas became a major theme of organized protests, and the authorities cracked down on the movement; Zhordania was arrested, imprisoned for a year, and ineffectively exiled (Ibid., 161-162). A major strike in the port city of Batumi left hundreds of workers without jobs, and they returned home where in 1903 they energetically spread Marxist ideology to their farming kinsmen and friends, “organizing peasant boycotts against landlords;” when the police stepped in to help the landlords, “the movement broadened into a political struggle against local Russian authority and autocracy itself” with secret cells all over rural Guria province, and “[f]or the first time intellectuals from the traditional Georgian elite worked directly with

workers and peasants to change Georgian society (Suny 1994, 163; Thompson 1996, 66). Furthermore, this movement, because of the internationalism of Marxist ideology, gradually accepted Russian and Armenian participation, and thought of itself as part of the Russian Empire-wide movement; there was a First Congress of Caucasian Social Democratic Organizations, thought unlike the rest of the Russian movement, they elected city committees instead of having them appointed from above; by the time of the next international Second Party Congress, “massive strikes and demonstrations in the south of Russia and Transcaucasia” were happening (Ibid 163-164). It was at this Congress where the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks would split, and even the three-person Transcaucasia delegation was split, two Bolsheviks to one Menshevik, with the unofficial delegate Zhordania siding with the Mensheviks; after returning home in January 1905, he was able to persuade the local committees and rapidly bring them over to Menshevism, especially since they wanted to elect their own leaders which the Bolsheviks would not have allowed (Ibid., 165). Thompson (1996) notes that “[l]ocal Georgian Marxists managed in part to capture and guide this minirebellion” in Guria that “blended with” the “broader” disturbances of 1905 (Thompson 1996, 66). The Bolsheviks held out in Baku, over in Imperial Russian Azerbaijan; but in Georgia, they were easily driven out, and Georgia was firmly Menshevik (Suny 1994, 165).

Meanwhile, the Guria social democratic rebellion grew in size and effectiveness, and antitsarist sentiment was openly and constantly expressed; the Georgian Menshevik ideas, well articulated and disseminated, of “[s]elf-rule and peasant control over agriculture” caught on broadly with the Gurian peasants, and Russia’s “Bloody Sunday” massacre in St. Petersburg further “inflamed the already volatile mood among the workers in Transcaucasia” (Ibid., 166). Violent worker strikes erupted all over Georgian cities, including Abkhazia’s biggest city, Sukhumi, and local officials took up the peasants’ and workers’ cause, asking the higher Russian authorities to grant labor rights and be generous in dealing with Guria; Armenians had their church lands restored, and a regional *duma* was established as concessions, but this did not satisfy the demands of the now broad and popular Menshevik movement (Ibid., 167-169). When an angry mob stormed Tbilisi city hall and Russian Cossack troops “stormed the building, indiscriminately firing” and killing at least sixty people and wounding as many as two-hundred, a huge portion of the *duma* resigned, the mayor was fired, a strike “shut down the city,” and “general outrage followed” (Ibid., 168).

It was at this point, about a month after signing a humiliating peace with Japan ending the 1905 Russo-Japanese war, that Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894-1917) issued his October Manifesto and made Russia a constitutional monarchy, which limited the Tsar’s powers, created a national elective *duma*, and “guaranteed basic rights for his subjects;” many moderates were happy and drifted away from the Menshevik program, and “[t]wenty thousand people, among them many Russian railroad workers, marched in Tiflis singing ‘God Save the Tsar,’” but this parade came under a terrorist attack and over 100 people were killed or wounded. (Ibid., 168-169). Over a month later, ethnic violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis erupted in the region, spreading to Tbilisi; after “the social democrats ordered a huge demonstration protesting the divisive actions of nationalists,” Russian authorities actually appealed to the Menshevik social democrats to use their militia to help “keep peace,” even arming them to that end (Ibid., 169). Yet by the end of November, massive strikes and violence erupted again when the St. Petersburg soviets were arrested, from the Russian capital and southern Russia, to the Baltic to Poland, to Ukraine and Caucasia; Georgia and her neighbors found themselves cut off from the rest of rest of Russia when “revolutionaries” seized all the railroads, but come the end of January, 1906, the Tsar had sent in his military to crush the rebellions in force, including the one in Guria; executions ensued and peace was restored at gunpoint, a new military governor was installed in the province, and the members of the local Menshevik party arrested (Ibid., 170). The peasant social democrats were crushed, and the cities and towns of Georgia were secured for the tsar; “the more militant socialists” “were discouraged... from engaging in mass activity;” until the next Russian Revolution, “the political opposition shifted to a more moderate strategy, in the new state *duma* or the semilegal press,” and the Georgian “revolutionary

movement became somewhat dormant” but remained “underground” and “openly active in the new legal institutions” (Ibid., 171).

In April of 1906, the Mensheviks won “most of the [national] *duma* seats from Georgia”, and Zhordania was among them, but soon after the tsar abolished the *duma* and called for a new round of elections; Zhordania went underground, but a new round of elections brought even more social democrats to the *duma*, and the Mensheviks “swept” Georgia, with the Georgian Iraklii Tsereteli leading the entire social democratic bloc in the *duma*, but Nicholas’s Prime Minister Stolypin dissolved the *duma* and promulgated far harsher election laws, arresting the socialist and social democratic leaders; Tsereteli was exiled for a decade to Siberia (Ibid., 171-174). The first half of 1909 alone saw more than 20,000 exiled from the Caucasus by tsarist authorities, and in this period Zhordania began to call for restraint on the lower-classes in order to bring in the bourgeoisie; for this he was denounced by Bolshevik Stalin; Georgian Mensheviks supported Zhordania, and in line with their legal side of their strategy, Mensheviks were able to pass a bill that was approved ending the status of “temporary obligation” for most of Georgia’s peasants; they would finally be free of having to make payments to their old lords (Ibid., 174-175;172).

Especially after the ethnic clashes in Caucasia in 1905, the Mensheviks shied away from ethnic nationalism; yet by 1912 Zhordania had begun to believe in national and cultural autonomy; Stalin responded in 1913 at the behest of Lenin, and claimed that regional, and not cultural, autonomy should be granted, since the former would “promote the seemingly natural historical process of assimilation of smaller nationalities into larger ones,” where the latter, “with its emphasis on preserving cultural differences, would hinder this process; it would artificially maintain distinctions that, left to themselves, would disappear in time” (Ibid., 176-177) Where Zhordania was keen on “supporting, protecting, and nourishing natural culture... Stalin played down the cultural variety of nationalities and encouraged small ethnic groups to gravitate toward what he called ‘higher culture;’ this was not the Stalin of his seminary days (Ibid., 177) Still, for most concentrated ethnicities in the Russian empire, this would seemingly satisfy their nationalist demands on some level, and, it was hoped, would bring many of these nationalities to the Bolshevik cause (Thompson 1996, 130-131; Suny 1994, 177-178). At this time, the Mensheviks were already repeatedly working cooperatively with Armenians, who were scattered and would not benefit as much under Stalin’s plan and did this “repeatedly,” but with the outbreak of WWI, there was a divide where the Armenians wanted war with the Ottomans to “liberate their brethren” under Turkish rule, but the Georgians did not want to be involved and became nervous about the ethnic Georgian Adjarians in their southwest, who were Muslims and pro-Ottoman; Georgians emerged as pro-German and thus repelled tsarist officials away from ethnic Georgians, while the pro-war Armenians drew them in and formed their own units to send against the Turks (Suny 1994., 177-179). Yet when the Turks carried out genocide against the Armenians, the Russians did not make a serious push into those areas to stop it, and the Armenians were “bitterly disappointed” in Russia; early in 1917, “a secret meeting of social democrats agree[d] that if the Russians pulled out of Caucasia, Georgia should be declared independent” (Ibid., 179-180).

“After a century in the Russian Empire,” concludes Suny (1994),

Georgia had recovered the possibility of shaping her own political future. Transformed by the “gathering” of Russian lands, the economic and social integration of diverse Georgian territories under the impact of market relations and easier communication, and the intellectual awakening stirred by the noble intelligentsia, Georgia had acquired many of the attributes of nationhood. The Mensheviks provided a confident and articulate national leadership with support in almost all classes of society. (Ibid. 180-181)

They successfully brought many to their causes, workers as well as peasants, and rule under the tsars had “prepared Georgians for statehood,” but the Georgian Mensheviks were cautious and realized independence “presented dangers and difficulties,” so during 1917, they decided to “refrain from declaring Georgia independent” and looked for “the best solution” for its future” (Ibid., 181).

Jones (2006) argues that “the influence of a Russian modernizing state” in “the second half of the nineteenth century” “spread” “a modern sense of nationhood” to Georgian elites, a sense centered around “ethnicity” (Jones 2006, 253-254). Even if Tsarist Russia had unwittingly created modern Georgian ethnic nationalism, much of the Soviet period would see the Georgian national dream stifled while at the same time, encouraging the nationalist trends which began under the tsars.

Socio-Political-Economic Structure: Communist-Era Influence

With the end of Tsarist rule in Russia in February 1917, the workers’ councils (soviets) established their dominance, and Zhordania took up leadership in the Tbilisi soviet; the Romanov flag was replaced with a red one; the conflict with the bourgeoisie was “muted,” as the previously disenfranchised ethnic Georgians simply came to power through the soviets and Armenian-filled local *dumas* “simply eroded,” and Menshevik power was so secure that the Bolsheviks sent from Petrograd (renamed from St. Petersburg) were little more than observers (Ibid., 186). The Menshevik dominated soviets commanded the loyalty of the Russian army there, and when nationalists began agitating for independence, they disbanded ethnic volunteer units and censored discussion of independence in the newspapers; though the ethnic Georgian Mensheviks dominated the soviets, they still had to take in the interests of the ethnic Russian soldiers, aligned with the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) party, and the urban Armenians, allied with other parties, into consideration; but especially with the largely Russian soldiers’ soviets and Russian workers, the Bolsheviks started to make inroads as the debates and split between Mensheviks and Lenin’s Bolsheviks in Petrograd increased (Ibid., 186-189). They competed for influence among the Russian garrison in Tbilisi, even as the Mensheviks started to form their own military units; but a series of poor decisions by the Bolsheviks in Russia saw their influence fade in Tbilisi; exiled Georgian Menshevik Iraklii Tsereteli had returned, and was negotiating with the Provisional Government, headed by non-socialist parties, when a fight between the Provisional Government and a faction favoring a military dictatorship broke out; interest in working with the provisional government, which had temporarily seemed a decent option, disappeared, and the soviet in Tbilisi “called for a democratic socialist government” (Ibid., 189-190). That fall and winter saw the Russian troops withdraw (along with many Russians living in Georgia) to the north, and the Mensheviks were able to drive out the Bolsheviks from Transcaucasia, save for Baku in Azerbaijan, and politically drive the Armenians out of much of the town and city governments in Georgia; this drew accusations from Armenians of the Mensheviks being “Georgian chauvinists,” yet the Mensheviks still hoped the tensions could be defused peacefully in a democratic process; the October Revolution, in which the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, killed this hope and “the overt expression of nationalist feelings began to dominate the political scene in Transcaucasia” (Ibid., 190-191).

With Russian troops withdrawing, the Turks saw an opportunity and invaded the Caucasus in February 1918, with only irregular Armenians offering resistance; alone, the regional soviets in the Caucasus formed a Transcaucasian Commissariat and a regional legislature by January, 1918; in March, the Bolsheviks ceded three Caucasian regions to the Turks in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, including Batumi in the Adjara area of Georgia; the Georgians and Armenians banded together to face the Ottoman threat, while the Muslim Azerbaijanis welcomed them, and only a few months into the October revolution, “the Caucasian political order had totally fragmented along ethnic lines” (Ibid., 191). The regional legislature recently established, under pressure from the Turks, “voted to declare independence” from Russia, and formed the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic on April 22nd, 1918, the Mensheviks only doing so “reluctantly” (Lak’oba 1998b, 90; Suny 1994, 191-192). As Turkish troops

advanced, the Republic's unity crumbled as Azerbaijanis welcomed Ottoman intervention and the Georgians did not want to fight on behalf of Armenians; the Georgian leadership declared Georgia to be its own independent state on May 26th, 1918, and accepted an alliance with the Germans for protection from the Turks, giving the Germans some economic concessions, but felt that this protected them from losing more territory to the Turks, who had already occupied Batumi; Georgia was also seeking the alliance out of "affection for the advanced West" and a general Georgian "Germanophile mood" (Suny 1994, 192-193; Thompson 171, 172).

Meanwhile, Abkhazia had entered the Union of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus shortly after the fall of the tsar, and had even set up its own "Abkhazian People's Soviet" in November of 1917; a few weeks before Georgia formed its independent state, the Abkhaz had joined a number of regions to its north in forming the North Caucasian Republic (Lak'oba 1999b, 89). Initially, the Abkhaz offered warm feelings of mutual respect and support to Menshevik Georgia, but during the second half of June, 1918, Georgian Menshevik troops had occupied Abkhazia, declaring Abkhazia to be part of Georgia, and the Abkhaz violently rose to try to drive the Georgians out, just as they had against the Russians when they first arrived in the second half of the nineteenth century; the Georgians disbanded the Abkhaz soviet (twice) after it expressed vociferous opposition, and had its members imprisoned in Tbilisi, replacing it with a pro-Georgian soviet (Lak'oba., 90-91; Jones 2006, 254). Thompson argues that the Georgians' "harsh treatment of other minorities in Georgia, particularly the Ossetians, Abkhazis, and Adzhars [Adjarians/Ajarians/Adjarans], created a legacy of mistrust that would plague independent Georgia in the 1990s" (Thompson 1996, 172). The Georgians' German gamble had not worked as planned by this point, as they were surprised by Germany's defeat, and British troops replaced the Turkish and German troops at the end of 1918 with Turkey losing its claim to Batumi (Suny 1994, 193-194; Smith 2009a, 1). A British general stationed there observed in May of 1919 that

The Abkhazians are dissatisfied with Georgian rule and declare that, if they are given weapons, they will themselves purge the district of Georgian troops. The Georgians are behaving worse than the Bolsheviks: they are seizing homes and land, and they are conducting a policy of socialization and nationalization of property...As for the Sukhumi District, I have heard from other sources that a wish to unite with Georgia does not reflect the will of the population. (Lak'oba 1998b, 91)

Soon after their arrival, the British also mediated an end to a short Georgian-Armenian border war, in which Georgia enacted repressive measures against its Armenian minority, further escalating tensions between the two groups (Suny 1994, 202).

When he was head of the government during this period, Zhordania's aim as a moderate Menshevik was not to force a socialist government; for him, "the first steps of the victorious proletariat will be, not social reforms, but the introduction of democratic institutions, the realization of the party's minimum programs, and only afterwards the gradual transition to the socialist maximum program," following the traditional Marxist line of developing a democratic state before forming a socialist one (Suny 1994, 195). Still, the peasants were clamoring for land reform and this the Mensheviks did enact, in stages; overall, they eventually succeeded in giving the land, which the peasants were usually already living on and farming, to them "as private property with the right to buy and sell" and avoided the more extreme Bolshevik tactic of abolishing all private property," still allowing the nobles reduced holdings; "the last vestiges" of Georgia's medieval system "had been removed," with nobles now simply a class of property owners that owned, on average, more land than the peasants (Suny 1994, 195-200; Thompson 1996, 172).

The major world powers gave the Menshevik government in Georgia diplomatic recognition in January of 1920, at the post-WWI talks in Paris (Suny 1994, 204). The Allies, already fighting the

Bolsheviks in Russia, had “arms, munitions, and food” made available to Georgians, but by early December 1920, they had largely pulled out of Russia and the Azerbaijani and then the Armenian republics had come under Bolshevik dominion as Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR’s); there was a strong Red Army presence on Georgia’s northern border, and the Bolsheviks were already making inroads with the peasants and soldiers of Georgia as the country was suffering economically from all the surrounding wars and isolation; Menshevik “Georgia was now nearly surrounded by the Soviets, and the Red Army was poised for a final assault on the Menshevik capital” (Suny 1994, 204-206). Throughout February 1920, the Mensheviks were driven out of most of Georgia by the Bolsheviks and a new government under Makharadze, long estranged from Zhordania as a Bolshevik, was established “despite raging Georgian resistance” (Suny 1994, 206-207, 209-210; Thompson 1996, 204-205).

For Lak’oba (1998), “[t]he aggressive policies of Georgia towards Abkhazia occasioned extreme displeasure among the local Abkhazian, Armenian, Russian, Greek...people, which actually helped to facilitate the establishment of Soviet power in the region;” Bolshevik policies were “welcomed by the peoples of Abkhazia as a deliverance from the repression and meddling of the Georgian Republic” (Lak’oba 1998b, 92-93). The International Crisis Group (2006) notes, too, that “Abkhaz say they were again the victims of repression...from the Georgian Menshevik revolutionary government” (ICGAT 2006, 4). The Bolsheviks actually let the Abkhaz declare their own Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia in the spring of 1921, “and for about a year [it] was independent of both Soviet Russia and Soviet Georgia;” in addition, they gave the Adjars their own Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) within the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, and the South Ossetians were given their own Autonomous Region (*oblast*, which was another level down from the Adjar ASSR and two down from both the Georgian and Abkhaz SSR’s) within Georgia, over the next few months (Lak’oba 1998b, 93; Jones 1988, 617; UNPO 2009, 4). The EU report states that “Georgian historians see this decision as an unwarranted “gift” by the...Bolsheviks...to the Abkhaz for their pro-Bolshevik political sentiments and as a punishment for Georgia” (EURII 2009, 67).

Stalin and his fellow Georgian Bolshevik, “Sergo” Orjonikidze (Ordzhonikidze), were for strong central Bolshevik rule, while Lenin and Trotsky favored a policy more accommodating to minorities, nationalities, and autonomy; Lenin was afraid of the “danger of Great Russian chauvinism” alienating other ethnicities of the former Russian Empire, Stalin and Orjonikidze that “ethnic particularism...could lead to internal conflict and external threat;” among some of the Bolsheviks in Georgia at the time there was a “genuine feeling that Soviet power could create a new era of solidarity among the peoples of Caucasia” and that “Soviet power would resolve the constant quarrels between Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians” (Suny 1994, 212-213). The Abkhaz were “pressure[d]” to enter a “special union treaty” with Georgia, forming one federated republic between the two of them; Lak’oba maintains that this treaty, and the subsequent Georgian and Abkhazian constitutions, reflected an “equality of status of the two republics,” that “Abkhazia did not then enter into the makeup of Georgia but was in union with it” (Lak’oba 1998b). Stalin and Ordjonikidze pushed to unify the three SSR’s under a single political unit, and over the objections of Lenin and local some local Georgian communists, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were joined into a single “Federal Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of Transcaucasia” in march of 1922, Abkhazia entering not separately, but as part of this union with Georgia (Suny 1994, 214; Thompson 204-205; EURII 2009, 67; Zverev 1996, part III par. 2).

At this point, Makharadze came into conflict with Ordjonikidze, the former trying to resist giving more authority to the regional “Transcaucasian Federal Union” authorities at the expense of Georgian autonomy, and in the ensuing “stalemate,” Stalin tried to bring the three Transcaucasian republics into the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic as ASSR’s, but in response Lenin came up with the idea of separate, equal republics forming a “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics:” the USSR or Soviet Union (Suny 1994, 215; Thompson 1996, 206). Yet when it seemed that the three Transcaucasian republics would enter the USSR together as one unit, the Georgian communists under Makharadze’s leadership

“insisted” on entering the USSR separately, and the Georgian Central Committee “resigned en masse” in protest; at a meeting, Orjonikidze “slapped” a Georgian communist and this propelled Lenin to take up a defense of Georgian interests and a mission to “punish Orjonikidze as an example,” reduce the status of Stalin within the party, defend Georgian and minority interests, and curb Russian ethnic “chauvinism” (Suny 1994, 216). Stalin’s conduct over Georgia was to be the “key” reason to “demote” Stalin, but Lenin suffered his third, “incapacitate[ing]” stroke weeks before the meeting where all this would have been presented; Lenin’s influence at this time was diminished, as he was “semiparalyzed;” despite his best efforts, the Federal Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of Transcaucasia was reorganized into a single Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic, then incorporated into the USSR late in December 1922 (Suny 1994, 216-217; Jones 1988, 631; Conquest 1991, 98-104). Stalin had “won” the debate with Lenin, who would soon be dead, and was effectively the leader of the USSR from that point onward until his death.

For Jones (1988), Bolshevik Soviet policy in 1920’s Georgia “was an attempt to integrate the nationalities into a new multi-national state by accommodating national cultural aspirations” but also “encouraged the process of modern nation building that had begun under the Russian Empire, as

[t]he deliberate acceleration of modernising forces (mass education, urbanisation, improved communications and economic development) in the 1920s, combined with policies of 'affirmative action' and wide opportunities for national self-expression, resulted in a new confidence among the native elites, including those in the party, who raised searching questions about the proper relationship between the centre and the national republics. (Jones 1988, 616)

The Soviets allowed the Abkhaz the right to educate their people in the Abkhaz language and allowed them much autonomy, so that membership in the Abkhaz communist party increased significantly (Jones 1988, 617). As the economy recovered under the Bolsheviks, Suny (1994) likewise argues that “[a]t least as important as the economic recovery to the stabilization of Soviet rule in Georgia were the measures taken to promote ethnic Georgian culture—building schools, promoting publications in Georgian, encouraging opera, theater, and film. The 1920’s was a period of ferment in Georgian literature” (Suny 1994, 233). Men like Nikoladze were persuaded to support the Bolshevik government, while other writers did not, notably Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (Suny 1994, 233). Both Jones (1988) and Suny (1994) comment that Soviet policy in Georgian continued the Menshevik “process” of “Georgianisation” whereby Georgians were heavily favored over other ethnicities for important positions; this contributed to Armenians and Azerbaijanis migrating to their respective republics, where they enjoyed similar rights, and increased the percentage of Georgia that was ethnically Georgian; the same process occurred in Abkhazia for the Abkhaz (Jones 1988, 617-618; Suny 1994, 233) After a brief return of Zhordania and an ill-fated attempt at a Menshevik rebellion in 1924, “the Bolshevikization of Georgia was complete;” still, opposition was not extinguished as Trotsky found more than a few sympathizers in Georgia even when Stalin had his writings banned (Suny 1994, 225, 234; Jones 1988, 633).

Thompson would note that the Bolshevik’s program in this period ironically

contained the seeds of destruction of the Union [i.e., the USSR]. By according non-Russians the right to use their own language and to develop local literature, culture, and traditions, the constitution and the official policies that upheld it provided a way for the minorities to maintain and even to enrich their identity and national solidarity, despite decades of political and economic subordination to Communist centralizers in Moscow. In fact, Soviet nationality guidelines fostered a sense of separateness in some ethnic groups who had experienced little national feeling before 1917...when Mikhail Gorbachev loosened the bonds of censorship and centralist control after 1985, national

pride and self-assertion would explode and destroy the structure erected sixty-five years earlier. (Thompson 1996, 210)

The way Jones (1988) sees it, in terms of political independence, Georgia saw a net loss, while the Abkhaz and Ossetians saw a net gain:

1920s witnessed 'national losses' for the Georgians such as forfeiture of their political and economic autonomy to a Transcaucasian federation, repression of their national church, increased competition with other minorities in Georgia (Abkhazians, Ossetians) who also benefited from the *korenizatsiya* [indigenisation] programme, the loss of distinctive civil and political institutions, the replacement of national symbols (the flag and constitution) with Soviet versions, growing administrative centralisation in Moscow, and territorial losses. The repression of the Menshevik party, which was so closely associated with Georgia's national independence, was probably also seen by many Georgians as a form of national oppression. (Jones 1988, 634)

Noting the impact of this period on the development of Abkhaz national consciousness, the ICG report states that “Abkhaz see the 1921-1931 period as the source of their modern day statehood” (ICG 2009, 4).

If the 1920's in Georgia can be said to be one of cultural autonomy and economic recovery, then the 1930's were by any objective standard far worse. In the beginning, Lak'oba (1998) notes that Abkhazia's leader successfully resisted implementing disastrous collectivization programs in his region; Stalin finally gave Abkhazia a choice: implement the reforms or accept ASSR status within the Georgian SSR as the new form of autonomy; the Abkhazian leader accepted the demotion and Abkhazia became part of the Georgian SSR in 1931 (Lak'oba 1998b, 94; UNPO 2009, 4; EURII 2009; ICGAT 2006, 4). The EU report takes care to mention that “Abkhaz historians see this gradual process of downgrading the status of their republic primarily as a Georgian rather than a Soviet policy. Some of them also see it as a “gift” by the Soviet leader Iosif Stalin to Georgia, his native country” (EURII 2009, 67). Still, for Lak'oba, this meant that Abkhazia escaped some of the worst of the collectivization policy (Lak'oba 1998b, 94). As Georgia was fairly poor before the Stalinist programs were put in place, it was easier for them to resist having to label many peasants as *kulaks* (rich peasants) who were to be “liquidated” as a class, but when those that resisted implementing such harsh measures were purged by Stalin, while Abkhazia was successfully resisting implementing these policies, “[i]n Georgia the percentage of collectivized households rose rapidly—from 3.5 in October 1929 to 63.7 by March 1930,” in some areas even higher than that; at this point, “[n]o hesitation about applying force [against the peasants] now existed” (Suny 1994, 245). Georgia saw “mass demonstrations” against these new policies and higher resistance than in other parts of Russia, and a “state of war” between “the state and the peasantry” existed in “Muslim areas of Georgia” like Adjara; in the light of widespread failure, mass resistance, and the loss of incredibly large quantities of livestock, crops, and human life, Stalin decided to slow down the pace of collectivization in March of 1930 (Ibid., 247-248).

At this point, Stalin brought in Lavrenty Beria, an ethnic Georgian from Abkhazia, to head the regional Caucasian Communist Party organ, the Zakkraikom, and in February 1931, it promulgated a resolution calling for “struggle...against local nationalism” (Suny 1994, 252, 263). Collectivization of households had fallen drastically after the initial moderation of March 1930, so that by October of 1930, only 16.2 were collectivized; despite Beria's energetic efforts, he managed a less than 10% increase by August 1931, and Georgia “in particular was able to drag its heels and keep the rate of conversion and collectivization down below rates in other republics;” Beria was named First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, and by the end of Stalin's Second Five Year Plan in 1937, over three-quarters of

households in Georgia had been collectivized, though this level was still significantly under the national average, and would only catch up just before the Nazi invasion (Suny 1994, 252-256).

Cultural autonomy was also a casualty of this era; “Russians and Russian language” began to be promoted at the expense of other ethnicities and languages, and in 1938, all Soviet schools had to teach Russian; even “[a]s Georgia became culturally more Georgian in the Stalin period, the non-Georgian minorities paid a price” (Suny 1994, 258, 282). Furthermore:

The promotion of Russian language and culture throughout the Soviet Union set the limits for the development of national cultures. In each union republic the titular nationality used its position to develop its own version of great-power chauvinism, limiting where it was able the expression of its minorities. Georgia became a protected area of privilege for Georgians. They received the bulk of awards from society, the leading positions in the state, the largest subsidies for cultural projects, while Armenians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Ajarians, Kurds, Jews, and others were at a considerable disadvantage in the competition for the budgetary pie. Georgian nationalism was self-protection against the pressures and the blandishments of the “higher culture” of the Russians and an argument in favor of preferential treatment of one ethnic group over its rivals. Lenin’s nationality policy in the hands of Stalinists had created nationalized republics even as they tried to develop a multinational unity on the basis of the Russian language. (Suny 1994, 290)

Abkhaz historians claim that “repressive measures against Abkhaz culture” were enacted beginning in this period, including “the fact that the entire educational process took place only in the Georgian language, even at primary school level, and that any broadcasting in Abkhaz was prohibited. The Abkhaz also resented the fact that many local toponyms were replaced by Georgian names” (EURII 2009, 67-68). The UNPO report further states that by 1953, Abkhaz as a language was banned from being taught to children, Soviet authorities closed “[a]ll Abkhaz schools and institutions,” “Georgianization” of the Abkhaz language was attempted, and that Abkhaz were forced to accept passports with “Georgian” listed as their nationality (UNPO 2009, 4-5). In addition, “[t]he entire demographic make-up” of Abkhazia was changed: Beria had “tens of thousands” of ethnic Georgians, Russians, and others settled in Abkhazia, part of what Abkhaz see as a “Georgianisation” policy in Abkhazia (EURII 2009, 67-68; ICGAT 2006, 4; UNPO 2009, 4-5). At the end of the Stalin era, plans were formed to deport the Abkhazians from their homeland, but were never carried out (Suny 1994, 289). Armenians also suffered from much discrimination in Georgia during this period (Ibid.).

Though delayed for some time, Georgia, too, began to suffer from the massive purges, and Beria had both the party leadership of the Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian ASSR removed, many of them being shot as a result, in the fall of 1937; though the purges finally stopped in 1938, Suny (1994) notes that “[t]he toll in Georgia... was extraordinarily high” and “particularly ferocious,” that at the end, “a new elite had been put in place,” people raised and educated in the “Stalinist system;” he also comments that “[i]n the quarter-century between 1928 and 1953 Georgia was transformed more fundamentally than in any comparable period in its three-thousand-year history” (Ibid., 269-278, 180). He furthermore points out that

The socioeconomic transformation of Georgia under Stalin made the republic, in one sense, less Georgian, for the traditional peasant life and customs were forced into new molds; but in another sense, Georgia’s ethnic uniqueness was enhanced by the legacy of the *korenizatsiia* policies. By the early 1950s more people spoke, read, and were educated in the Georgian language than ever before. Georgian national culture was institutionalized in state-sponsored folk dance companies, operas, Georgian-language

films, and officially sanctioned literature. Illiteracy had largely been eradicated, and a network of primary, secondary, and higher education was in place. The nativization of schooling, the courts, and governmental institutions gave Georgians the dominant role in a republic that still possessed significant non-Georgian minorities. (Ibid., 281)

As far as the war years, even though Georgia itself was spared from being a battlefield, Georgians, including Abkhaz, fought—and died—in large numbers for the USSR like all Soviet nationalities; “[b]oth Soviet patriotism and Georgian nationalism were employed in the cause,” including a rehabilitated Konstatine Gamsakhurdia (who would fall out of favor again in 1952) and a Georgian soldier that was one of two Red Army men to raise the Soviet flag over the Reichstag in Berlin, marking a symbolic end to WWII in Europe; by the end of the Stalin era, “[a]ll real political autonomy for the union republics had long since been eliminated in favor of centralized decision-making” (Ibid., 283-284, 289-290).

For the post-Stalin era in Georgia, Suny (1994) maintains that it is clear

that the experience in that country was not shaped to any great extent by the twists and turns of official nationality policy but, while evolving under the influence of general Soviet policy, was rather the product of indigenous social and political developments and local resistance to imperatives from the center. The picture that emerges from Georgia is complex and at times indistinct, but available evidence indicated that modernizing forces from beyond the Caucasus and nationalizing forces within Georgia itself have been engaged in an intense struggle ever since the heavy hand of Stalinist police rule loosened its grip. (Ibid., 1994, 293-294)

The post-Khrushchev era would see local elites build their own followings and diverge from the Kremlin, and “a new nationalism with oppositional overtones was being articulated more and more openly” (Ibid., 294). Under Brezhnev, in 1977 the Soviet Union formally adopted a new constitution which reiterated earlier constitutions’ provisions for ethnic and cultural autonomy; Brezhnev remarked that “The Soviet people’s social and political unity does not in the least imply the disappearance of national distinctions,” and referred to Lenin’s “warn[ing] against...depart[ing]” from this; Suny (1994) concludes that “twenty-five years after Stalin’s death, the tensions between assimilationist and nationalizing trends were tentatively resolved in a fragile compromise” (Ibid., 294-295). He looks at the recent past as more a product of the last few centuries than of anything from recent years, as a product of “long-term, underlying dynamics that began in the Stalin years and even earlier,” that “one can describe the last 150 years as the period of ‘re-formation’ of the Georgian nation” (Ibid., 296).

Suny (1994) reiterates points made earlier in his text when discussing the final chapter of Soviet dominance over Georgia, that it was the modernization process, transforming generally uneducated, peasant societies into educated communities, defined by Soviet design by their ethnicities, which built upon the national consciousness awoken by the Russification and unification of the tsars; that the Soviets encouraged, at first, minorities to celebrate their culture, ethnicity, and language and even made some groups think of themselves as nations where before they had not; that in the case of Georgia, the Soviets raised the Georgian peasant to be an urban dweller, and helped him replace the Armenian bourgeoisie which had dominated Georgian urban centers for centuries; that the creation of an Armenian SSR encouraged further Armenian migration and ensured further Georgian dominance; that the Soviets empowered Georgians to exercise a control over their own homeland which they had not enjoyed since the time of the fall of the Byzantine/East Roman Empire; and that all these trends combined to make Georgia especially ready and able to become a modern “nation” (Ibid., 298-300). Georgians, more than any other group in the Soviet Union, were likely to be living in their namesake Soviet Socialist Republic, with 97% of all Georgians in the world living in the Georgian SSR (Suny 1994, 299; Parson 1982, 553).

Beria's fall from grace was sudden and swift in the year of 1953, as were the falls of his henchmen; Vasili Mzhavanadze, an associate of Nikita Khrushchev, assumed leadership over Georgia in Beria's wake; officials in Adjara and Abkhazia were also replaced, and Khrushchev was content to follow a policy of "indirect rule" and take a more hands-off approach to government in the republics on the periphery of the USSR (Ibid., 301). In just the area of industrial output, 98% came from the Georgian SSR's control, as opposed to Moscow, by 1958, and schools in the Abkhazian ASSR and the South Ossetian *oblast* "were reorganized;" the Abkhaz and others had schools opened for them, newspapers in their languages established, radios programs produced, and courses offered in their own languages (Suny 1994 301-302; Parson 1982, 558). A stark incident of violence occurred in 1956 when Khrushchev, as part of de-Stalinization, let the third anniversary of the former leader's death pass by without ceremony; a crowd of mainly students, with little or no memory of the worst of the Stalin purges or collectivization, gathered around a statue of Stalin in Tbilisi, spontaneously praising Stalin; Suny (1994) calls the protests "peaceful," but Sergei Khrushchev, writing about his father six years after Suny, describes the protests as being violent and riotous in nature; either way, the authorities, while first allowing the protests, cracked down on the students and others with force, killing several (Suny 1994, 302-303; Khrushchev 2000, 163-164). Jones marks this as one of the most significant post-WWII-era incidents of Georgian nationalism, and cites the toll at "twenty to thirty" (Jones 2006, 255). Areshidze (2007) emphasizes the role of these protests as one of the first modern expressions of Georgian nationalism, too (Areshidze 2007, 18). Suny (1994) concludes of the protests that a

new society had been imposed on the Georgians by an alien political elite working through national cadres. At the same time, Georgian national culture had been revitalized through Soviet sponsorship. Georgians had become a cohesive nationality with large numbers of people educated in a national language and history. By 1956 the growing national awareness, coupled with anxiety about the loss of unique ethnicity in the face of modernization, had led to a strong resurgence among young people of a commitment to Georgian ethnic identity.

For young Georgians, not fully acquainted with the darker side of Stalin's reign, his memory was still sacred, and his career represented a great achievement by one of their nation. Stalin's denigration was an appropriate symbol for the treatment of Georgian national consciousness at the hands of the Russian (Soviet) rulers. Patriotic pride was mixed with political protest in [the demonstration at the Stalin statue]. (Suny 1994, 303-304)

In the years after the protests, Moscow "made some concessions to Georgian national pride and loosened cultural controls on Georgian art and literature, and allowed more local political control; but this led to more "Georgianizing," as ethnic Georgians were overrepresented for their overall population in Georgian universities; non-Georgian minorities were underrepresented in proportion to their population, so "[c]learly Georgian control of the local party and republican institutions was not resulting in egalitarian application of Leninist nationality policy, but in officially sanctioned discrimination against minorities within the republic;" consequently, the Abkhaz had a history of petitions and protest rallies, going back through the Stalin era and up until the breakup of the Soviet Union (Suny 1994, 304-305; UNPO 2009, 5; ICGAT 2006, 4). Still, as the years went on after Khrushchev had fallen from power, Mzhavanadze's regime in Georgia operated with "corruption, inefficiency, and discrimination against minorities" as hallmarks; others noticed, and in the words of Parsons (1982), "First Party Secretary Mzhavanadze was able to run Georgia like a personal fiefdom for 19 years from 1953 to 1972" (Suny 1994, 305; Parsons 1982, 554).

It was in this period when modern Georgian “dissident” nationalism began in the 1970’s and had as “[i]ts most articulate and active advocates... a small group of students and professional people stimulated by their aversion to the all encompassing corruption around them” (Suny 1994, 308). Prominent in this group was Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a university professor and Konstatine Gamsakhurdia’s son; he and those in his circle realized that Georgian historic treasures were being mal-treated and in 1972 became aware some objects were being pilfered; they raised this to the attention of the minister of interior affairs, Eduard Shevardnadze; the ensuing “investigation led to the wife of First Secretary Mzhavanadze” (Suny 1994, 308-309). Though this scandal was kept from the public, on top of the corruption Moscow had had enough, and after 19 years in power Mzhavanadze was replaced that same year by Moscow with Shevardnadze (Suny 1994, 305-309; Thompson 1996, 453). Besides reducing corruption, Shevardnadze’s regime was characterized by “a marked tendency towards increasing the representation of Azeris, Abkhaz and Ossetians” but not Armenians (Parsons 1982, 554).

Areshidze and Jones both emphasize the 1978 protests against the constitutional reform proposals authored by the Kremlin in developing national consciousness, emphasizing their successful nature, when “for the first time the Georgian public saw and experienced the power of their free action against Soviet totalitarianism” in “protecting their national language through a minor ‘rebellion’” (Areshidze 2007, 18; Jones 2006, 255). For Suny (1994), “[i]n the spring of 1978 the potency of Georgian nationalism was revealed;” the proposed constitution would have made Russian an official language and made it official for all government documents, and also restricted the teaching of Georgian, and the Georgian protests prevented this (Areshidze 2007, 18; Suny 1994, 307-309; Thompson 1996, 451-452). Even with Shevardnadze’s more favorable policies, Abkhaz saw the surge of nationalism in ethnic Georgians and it made them nervous, so they asked Moscow for permission to secede from the Georgian SSR and join the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, but this was rejected; in a dramatic scene, Shevardnadze confronted a crowd of 20,000 people in Abkhazia’s main city, Sukhumi, and engaged in a dialogue; as a result, Moscow eventually started to do more to help the Abkhaz, building a university in their ASSR, starting up an Abkhaz TV station, and sending subsidies that went directly to the population; the Abkhaz also “were granted substantial overrepresentation in the government and in the administration of the autonomous republic;” this, in turn, made the ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia feel they were being discriminated against, saying that they should not pay the price or “be blamed for misguided Soviet policies,” as “Georgia was a country occupied by a foreign power (Soviet Russia); the fact that ethnic Georgians happened to be at its helm did not make the entire Georgian nation responsible for their errors” (UNPO 2009, 4; EURII 2009, 68; ICGAT 2006, 4; Goltz 2006, 59). Still, by 1988 Abkhaz leaders were again calling for secession, but this would spark a massive reaction from ethnic Georgians, discussed later, that would begin an era of bloodshed for Georgia (Suny 1994, 321).

Areshidze explains a theory that the “system of ethnic autonomies [in Russia/the Soviet Union] was ostensibly a means of protecting national minorities, but in reality it was a time bomb that Moscow could blow up at its leisure by pushing the ‘protected’ minorities towards separatism. Thus, this situation gave Moscow a means to weaken and destabilize republics whose nationalistic feelings ran high” (Areshidze 2007, 22). Zürcher echoes this analysis, stating that “South Ossetia and Abkhazia... turned out to be powerful examples of the potentially subversive mechanism of Soviet ethno-federalism (Zürcher 2005, 99). Offering another perspective, Castells (1996) posits that

in Russia and the ex-Soviet Union, the strong development of nationalism in the post-communist period can be related... to the cultural emptiness created by 70 years of imposition of an exclusionary ideological entity, coupled with the return to primary, historical identity (Russian, Georgian), as the only source of meaning after the crumbling of the historically fragile *sovietskii narod* (Soviet people) (Castells 1996, 24).

As Suny (1994) explains, four major trends in the last half of the twentieth century in Soviet Georgia produced the intense nationalism in Georgia that would lead to so much conflict after the demise of the Soviet Union; firstly, the “relaxation” of Khrushchev’s “de-Stalinization” led to a freedom of expression, especially in terms of nationalism; secondly, this freedom of expression, coupled with less direct rule by Moscow, “gave the national [Georgian] elite the chance to cultivate popular support through the exploitation” of nationalism; and increasingly, this would mean Georgian elites would favor ethnic Georgians over other groups, such as the Abkhaz; this “ethnic consolidation...also contributed to the rise in national identification and pride” (Suny 1994, 314). Continuing this analysis to his third point, Suny says that:

Georgian nationalists feared the loss of their language and its replacement by Russian, the destruction of their ancient monuments, and the elimination of their unique customs, traditions, and way of life. Built into their nationalist fears was a deeply rooted conservatism and apprehension about what the future in a multinational state holds for the minorities. There was also a positive side to this anxiety. Not only did it work to preserve ethnicity in the face of modernizing pressures, it also provided an alternative to the model of development imposed by the dominant Soviet nationality. Many Georgians, in their nationalistic pride, came to feel that their further evolution was hindered by the restraints placed on them by the Russians. An attitude arose that, left to themselves, the Georgians could more quickly realize their historical potential. (Ibid.)

“Finally,” concludes Suny (1994), “the erosion of Marxist ideology within the Soviet Union cleared the way for its replacement” by the forces already unleashed in the post-Stalin era. Together, these trends “produced an increasingly potent nationalist mood in all parts of Georgian society—and counternationalism among the ethnic minorities within the republic;” overall, “[t]he new permissiveness toward open expression of political dissent stimulated a rapid escalation of ethnic politics in Georgia” for both Georgians and Abkhaz (Ibid., 313-315, 320-321). “The specific goals of Soviet nationality policy, the rapprochement and eventual merging of nationalities, were further from realization in the 1980s than they had been at any time in Soviet history” in Georgia, among other Soviet Republics (Ibid., 316). For Remington (1989),

[t]he opening to freer political expression under Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* and democratization has exposed tensions in the Soviet political system which formerly had been concealed from public view...the emergence of organized movements... directed at achieving greater autonomy for the national republics in the political, cultural, economic, and social spheres...[and the] self-assertion by national minorities within union republics for greater status and autonomy, which in many cases has in turn provoked counter-claims by the host nation,” were the results. (Remington 1989, 145)

Writing in 1999, Suny would note that, as in the tsarist era, Georgian elites played up their differences with other groups, like the Abkhaz, and avoided the shared characteristics; overall, the “ironic result of Soviet nationality policy, long unrecognized by Sovietologists, was that a Marxist state dedicated to internationalist ideology and antinationalist agenda actually fostered the formation of relatively cohesive national communities” (Suny 1999, 155). Writing even more recently in 2001, he builds on this theme:

If the irony of Soviet nationality development was that an antinationalist state helped create nations within it, the irony of post-Soviet states is that their determined efforts at creating national histories and identities are resolutely carried on as if a real past can be recovered, as if a continuous, unbroken existence of a coherent nation has come down through time. What is not recognized in the rush to nationhood is just how much work by

intellectuals, activists, and state administrators goes into the forging of new nations. Nationalists often strive to get history "right." In their "objectivist" reading of the past—showing the past as “it actually was”—they set themselves up as representing the only true account. This pretension to an untroubled authenticity of a single reading is a powerful claim to the legitimacy of the nation and particular claims to territory and statehood. But it does not come without costs. If the nation is real, ancient, and continuous, then in its own view (and in the discourse of the nation more generally), its claim to sovereignty is unique, uncontested, and not to be shared. The road is open to exclusivist, homogeneous nations that in our ethnically mixed, fluid, changing world require desperate policies of deportation and ethnic cleansing to secure. Constructivists propose a more open view of national history in which human actions and interventions have made the world the way it is today. If the lines between peoples are blurred and shifting, if many possible claimants to a particular piece of the world's real estate are allowed, then we can conceive of political communities in the future that permit cohabitation with shared sovereignties in a “national” space. (Suny 2001, 895-896)

The EU report concludes that

the Soviet Union failed to lay firm foundations for lasting peaceful coexistence among the numerous nationalities and ethnic groups that inhabited...[its] empire. When the power of the centralised Communist party waned at the end of the 1980s under the double pressure of democratisation and nationalist mobilisation, there was no political framework that would have been strong enough to integrate the conflicting national demands. (EURII 2009, 63)

Trends were in motion that would soon explode into violence, war, and revolution.

Arms

As will be discussed in the “parties to the conflict section,” both sides of this conflict have major military support from a major world power, and the ease of accessibility of arms has made it easier for Georgians and Abkhaz, among others, to engage in violence.

C. Parties to the conflict

Here will be discussed the different “actors” on the “stage” of conflict; internal actors will be described in terms of self-definition, salient traits, and leadership; external actors will be discussed in terms of their interests in the conflict. For simplicity's sake, the Soviets/Russians operating through the USSR/Russian Federation will be included among the external actors.

Government of Georgia/ethnic Georgians

As has already been discussed, as the USSR stagnated towards its collapse, and Georgian nationalism was on a fervent rise; the leadership of the Georgian “liberal nationalism,” as Areshidze (2007) calls it, “was most heavily influenced by the Georgian Orthodox Church,” described as “the center of the anti-Soviet movement in Georgia;” the Patriarch Ilia II served for Georgian Orthodox the role that John Paul II had served for Polish Catholics, campaigning for Georgian Orthodox Church autonomy from the Russian Orthodox church for a decade and achieving it in 1989 (Areshidze 2007, 17-18). The character of Georgian “liberal nationalism” contained “a belief that Georgians were first and foremost Georgian and not Soviet, that its people were ‘Western’ and had the right to live in an independent country” (Ibid.). Still, Georgians are not wholly monolithic; “[s]trict liberals may not like privileging the

dominant Orthodox Church or the rhetoric of strong-state nationalism characteristic of the pro-Western modernizers now in power,” but those reformers “know that the success of their reforms depends on finding the proper formula for marrying traditional Georgian values and identity with modern liberal ideals” (Nodia 2005, 82). Nodia (2005) notes that:

Georgians...have defined belonging to a nation in an ethnically exclusivist way. For the vast majority of Georgians, a “Georgian” was a person who shared both a (mythological) common origin (that is, who was a Georgian “by blood”) and a Georgian culture (especially Georgian language). For many (but not all) Georgians, this also included the Eastern Orthodox religion. Therefore, Georgian political nationalism was also ethnic: it implied that Georgians as a nation deserved an independent and indivisible state of their own, but only ethnic Georgians were considered full members of the nation.

This naturally left open the question about the status of ethnic minorities within Georgia. (Ibid., 45-56)

“The predominant assumption,” he continues, “has been that ethnic minorities have the right to stay in Georgia [with minority rights] and to maintain their cultural otherness, but only under the condition that they are loyal and support” Georgian nationalism; “as long as minorities are not integrated in this sense, their very existence may be seen as challenge to the state,” and “[i]f particular ethnic minority elites espouse their own exclusivist nationalist ideologies and can mobilize support for them, these attitudes constitute a recipe for violent conflict with the central government (Ibid., 46). He then points out that Georgian-Abkhaz national movements are a perfect example of this (Ibid.).

Even the official Georgian government website showcases the Georgian independent spirit on its main national general statistical information page and reads:

The Georgians are one of the most hospitable peoples in the world. They greatly respect their traditions and customs and believe that “guests are envoys of God.” The Georgians treat friendship to be of paramount importance and value it above all else. The main character traits of the Georgians are depicted in Rustaveli's immortal narrative poem *The Knight in Panther's Skin*. Georgians are a proud and freedom-loving people who highly value individuality. (GG 2008, par. 6)

Georgia also maintains an exile Abkhaz government that does not have actual authority there, and uses it as a way to work with the many Georgian Abkhaz IDP's (Lynch 2002, 843-844).

Many Georgian nationalists are apprehensive of minorities like Ossetians and Abkhaz having too much autonomy and see this as a threat to the integrity of Georgia, and it was ethnic Georgian protests *against* the Abkhaz request for separation from Georgia in 1989 which sparked the rapid acceleration of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's nationalist, anti-ethnic minority agenda and “radicalized” Georgia's nationalism; Georgians became more belligerent towards perceived threats from minorities, especially Ossetians and Abkhaz (Suny 1994, 317-323; Zürcher 2005, 90). For Devdariani (2005)

Gamsakhurdia and his administration perceived Abkhazia and South Ossetia as simply tools for Russian pressure directed against Georgian independence. As a result, the concerns of local elites in these areas were not taken into consideration, and channels of communication were blocked. In the absence of dialogue, tensions spiraled into violent clashes. By refusing to see how its own quest for independence challenged the identities of the Abkhazians and Ossetians, Georgia failed to create a more integrated national identity. (Devdariani 2005, 161)

Jones (2006), seeking to downplay ethnic tensions in favor of economic ones, disagrees that the protests were about Abkhazia and argues they were more about “Georgian independence,” while Zürcher (2005) maintains with the others that the Abkhazian call for secession “led” to the protest, “one of the largest in Tbilisi’s history” (Jones 2006, 257; Zürcher 2005, 89). Even though that is the case, Jones (2006) still describes Gamsakhurdia as “using nationalist slogans to gain authority” and “manipulat[ing] a formerly moderate Georgian populace into a chauvinistic mob (Jones 2006, 257). The EU report states

Georgian dissident movements, which emerged in the second half of 1970s, strove for language and cultural policies that were in favour of the Georgian part of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They criticised the Soviet federal policies for having granted too many concessions to minorities. Such criticism was very much in line with the concerns of the Georgian public – which may help to explain the huge popularity of Georgian nationalist leaders, and first and foremost that of the former dissident and later President of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. (EURII 2009, 69)

This rising group “viewed the national minorities in Georgia as *stumrebi* (guests), there at the tolerance of the majority population,” or as “foreigners... more loyal to the imperial Russian power than to Georgia;” in the end “Gamsakhurdia’s exclusionary nationalists proved to be more divisive than integrating” (Suny 1994, 324-326). Georgians also thought that “the Abkhazians has been put up to it [secession] by Moscow” (Nasmyth 2006, 15). Another dimension is that the ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia “complained about the disproportionate allocation of key positions in Abkhazia” (Zürcher 2005, 89). Clogg (2008) also discusses the concerns of the non-Abkhaz living in Abkhazia, writing that “[t]he predominant fears expressed by the non-Abkhaz population were of being excluded from life in Abkhazia, or of being forced into exile in the event of resumption of hostilities [especially for Georgians];” she also noted that the non-Abkhaz population “expressed the feeling that while they are considered to be citizens of Abkhazia when outside the region, they are not always treated as such within Abkhazia” (Clogg 2008, 317). Furthermore, there was a “widespread idea that the Abkhazians were in general Muslims, a negative feature in the collective consciousness of Georgians,” which “was...incorrect” (Anchabadze 1998, 74). Francis describes the Russian dimension in the minds of Georgians in general, saying they

always felt insecure vis-à-vis their giant neighbour. In their eyes, Georgia’s independence was always brought to an end by Russia, either by the Tsars or by the Soviet regime. Therefore, since the independence in 1991, one of the first priorities of the Georgian leadership was to sever the links of dependence with Moscow. The moves of Russia in Abkhazia and South Ossetia awoke fears of annexation. (Francis 2008, 3)

Soon after being elected the leader of Georgia in the fall of 1990 within the USSR and seeing Georgia through to full independence, Gamsakhurdia “went steadily toward a more dictatorial posture” and dragged Georgia into ethnic violence; he was deposed in a violent coup by some of his fellow nationalists in December 1991-January 1992 (Suny 1994, 326-328; Areshidze 2007, 20-26; Jones 2006, 256-259). The prolific former Communist leader of Georgia and former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze tried to mediate, but quickly became the next leader, though he was soon (manipulated?) brought into a war with the Abkhaz, the results of which would plague him throughout his long presidency; still, at the helm of his creation, the Citizens’ Union of Georgia party, he was comfortably in power with only weak opposition (Areshidze 2007, 26-29; Nodia and Scholtbach 2006, 8-14; Suny 1994, 328-335; Phillips 2008).

The pragmatic and diplomatic Shevardnadze is regarded by some as a transitional leader, who staunchly oriented Georgia with the West and gets mixed reviews; while he “gave birth to Georgia’s second democratic opening...his willingness to give significant power to people who had no interest in

real democracy, and his own methods of rule, made it impossible for Georgia to take advantage of this opening” (Areshidze 26-27, 33) While corruption was rampant, public trust in the government was low, and elections increasingly questionable, Shevardnadze reigned in militants and kept a fractured, failing state from splintering any further after the Abkhaz war, and increased ties to the West and especially the United States (Nodia and Scholtbach 12-18, 35, 77). Areshidze concurs, writing that “[i]f Georgia remains an independent country well into the twenty-first century, which is likely, this will largely be because of the indispensable role Shevardnadze played in the 1992-1995 period...Nonetheless, he is also responsible for the failures that followed 1995” (Areshidze 2007, 50). Nodia and Scholtbach (2006) also credit Shevardnadze with introducing reforms that Europeanized Georgia and with having “brought the spirit of pluralism into Georgian society,” but “effective participation” in democracy only belonged to “the relatively small elite” (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006, 14-15).

1995 saw the rise of a group of “young reformers” of Zurab Zvania, who was a key ally of Shevardnadze in the election of that year; they included Mikheil Saakashvili and made major gains into developing civil-society through the promotion of NGO’s, tapping into local civil and business elite communities; those communities collectively had become dissatisfied with the pace and scope of democratic reform and grew impatient for their own day in power; Saakashvili turned on his former political allies, and within a few years, swept to power in the Rose Revolution of November 2003, in which blatant vote manipulation and massive protests caused Shevardnadze to resign and Saakashvili’s United National Movement party swept into power; Saakashvili’s charismatic personality emerged as the dominant one after playing an active role in the protests, and in January 2004 he assumed the Georgian Presidency (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006, 15-21; Areshidze 2007, 51-195; Jones 2000, 42-73).

“What had appeared as delusionary ideas of crazy NGO activists,” writes Areshidze, “had now become a reality (Areshidze 2007, 185). Saakashvili has also built upon Shevardnadze’s orientation with the West significantly (Nilsson 2009, 98-101). He also “sees ‘reunification’ [of Abkhazia and South Ossetia] as one of the key priorities of his presidency;” on this issue there was “an unquestionable national consensus” (Antonenko 2005, 206; UNPO 2009, 6; Francis 2008, 2; EURII 2009, 7-8, 107-109). At the UN General Assembly in 2004, Saakashvili called South Ossetia and Abkhazia

black holes that breed crime, drug trafficking, arms trading and, most notably, terrorism...These lawless zones have the potential to affect European security as long as they remain unresolved(...). [The international community] can no longer afford to ignore the security risks that emanate from these black holes and smugglers’ safe havens. (EURII 2009, 108)

He remains controversial; in a segment of his book describing “pro-Saakashvili analysts” as “heavily influenc[ing]” “the media” while “present[ing] themselves as neutral,” Areshidze calls Ghia Nodia, cited elsewhere in this paper, “[o]ne of them,” and quotes him as saying that Saakashvili’s “style of speaking is very emotional. This creates the image that he’s unbalanced;” Areshidze then adds that “[t]he implication was that Saakashvili’s ‘unbalanced’ appearance was merely a perception, and had little to do with his real state of being” (Areshidze 2007, 165). Thomas Friedman (2008), writing for *The New York Times* during the Olympics and the 2008 war, wrote “If the conflict in Georgia were an Olympic event, the gold medal for brutish stupidity would go to the Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin. The silver medal for bone-headed recklessness would go to Georgia’s president, Mikheil Saakashvili” (Friedman 2008, par. 1). *The Economist* (2008) calls him “an impetuous nationalist...[who] has led his country in a broadly democratic direction, curbed corruption and presided over rapid economic growth that has not relied, as Russia’s mostly does, on high oil and gas prices” and that “Mr Putin...dislikes the puckish Mr Saakashvili intensely” (Economist 2008, par. 6-7). Making good on his promises early on, Saakashvili brought Adjara fully back under Georgian control in 2004 (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006, 22; Nodia, 2005 53-56; Kaeter 2005, 111; EUR II 2009, 11-12). Nodia and Scholtbach state that the

“spectacular success” of the Adjara situation “encouraged” Saakashvili to move on the South Ossetian separatists soon after, with far less satisfying results (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006, 22). The Minorities at Risk Project (2006) states that “the new Georgian leadership under Saakashvili has demonstrated a willingness to engage in brinkmanship to re-unite the fragmented country” (MAR 2006, par 1). Regaining control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are still central to the Georgian government’s agenda; Saakashvili is in an unfamiliarly precarious position domestically now after the war with Russia in August of 2008, and what his opponents say are increasingly “authoritarian” measures have come under criticism, but the opposition remains disunited and ineffective:

Following a mass opposition rally in the capital, Tbilisi, on May 26th [2009] that attracted around 50,000 demonstrators...the wave of opposition protests that began in April has started to lose momentum. Opposition unity was undermined by a failure to agree on a joint plan of action to achieve the opposition's main demand, for the holding of pre-term presidential and parliamentary elections. A part of the opposition—most notably the Democratic Movement-United Georgia of the former parliamentary chair, Nino Burjanadze, and the Movement for a United Georgia, founded by a former defence minister, Irakli Okruashvili—refused all talks with the government and favoured radical protest actions, such as the blocking of railways and roads. Another part, consisting of the National Forum, led by Kakha Shartava, and the Alliance for Georgia, which unites a former Georgian ambassador to the UN, Irakli Alasania, with the Republican and New Rights parties, favoured less confrontational tactics and demonstrated a willingness to negotiate with the authorities on certain issues. On June 9th Levan Gachechiladze, one of the main opposition leaders, broke ranks and met with the president, Mikheil Saakashvili, even though such a meeting had not been agreed with other opposition leaders. (EIU 2009, 15-17)

Furthermore, as the EU report states, “when his...Mikheil Saakashvili was later criticized by various Georgian parties for his authoritarian tendency, there still remained a strong consensus among all these parties on Abkhazia and South Ossetia” (EURII 2009, 8).

Abkhaz Government/ethnic Abkhazians

From the late 1950’s onward, “Abkhazian cultural movements and parts of the intelligentsia (and some high-ranking Communist Party functionaries in 1977) requested that Moscow integrate Abkhazia into the territory of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic;” the Russians said “no,” but in 1978 granted Abkhazians greater and “disproportionate” control over the local government: the nearly 18% of Abkhazian residents that were actually Abkhaz were guaranteed “67 percent of government and party positions” even though ethnic Georgians there were over two-and-a-half times the ethnic Abkhaz population, and the Abkhaz made significant economic gains, gains they saw as threatened by Georgian nationalism (Zürcher 2005, 86-89; Areshidze 2007, 27). As the Soviet Union died, “Moscow’s increasing weakness together with the gradual destabilization of political control and property rights, [also] threatened this system, particularly the privileged position of the Abkhazians” (Zürcher 2005, 99). Antonenko (2005) characterizes the Abkhazians as seeing the struggle against Georgians as “a struggle for national survival and [about] the imperative of preserving their national identity;” as the USSR crumbled and disappeared, “the Abkhazian elite saw the rise of nationalism in Georgia as both a threat to their survival and an historic opportunity to build first a nation and then a state for themselves” (Antonenko 2005, 206). These elites were the Abkhaz governing from the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, and late in 1990 Vladislav Ardzinba rose to become its leader and began clamoring for more freedom for Abkhazia; under his direction, Abkhazia overwhelmingly voted to stay within the USSR in 1991 even as Georgia boycotted the same vote (Zverev 1996, part III par. 11-16). At this stage, “Abkhaz longed for the status of Union republic with the possibility of installing special state-legal relations with Georgia”

(Francis 2008, 2). Yet Gamsakhurdia was too much for the Abkhaz and drove the call for more minority rights (as noted before, the Abkhaz were only about 18% of the population in their own Abkhazia) into an independence and secessionist movement (Nygren 2008, 119).

Jans further echoes the concern that has long been on the minds of the Abkhaz and surmises that “[t]he rigid Abkhaz bargaining stance seems to be fuelled by a strongly held sense of demographical and cultural insecurity. Abkhaz references to the fate of the vanished Ubykh people (the last Ubykh language speaker died in 1994), who populated the Russian Black Sea coast are a very clear indication of the primordial Abkhaz fear of extinction” (Jans 1998, 124). For Clogg, “[i]ntegral to the ongoing conflict are Abkhaz concerns for the preservation of cultural identity and language, and fears regarding the demographic balance” (Clogg 2008, 305). Nodia (1998) suggests that the “crisis in Georgia may have created a mood of ‘now or never’ among the ethnic Abkhaz leadership, and their actions seem to have been quite compatible with this mood. Instinctively, they may have been driven to the violent outcome, which is not the same as saying that they had a clear and coldly calculated plan to provoke a war” (Nodia 1998, 32). As the leader of the Abkhaz, Ardzinba maintains that “the vast majority of the current population of Abkhazia would, in virtually every circumstance, seek closer relations with Russia than with Georgia, and Abkhazia would ideally prefer to join a Russian Federation than any Georgian equivalent;” in those times of strife, Georgians had sought to limit Abkhaz rights and the use of Abkhaz as an official language while the Russians had empowered the ethnic Abkhaz (Zürcher 2005, 90; Tarkhan-Mouravi 1998, 90).

Jans notes that the “Ardzinba government mainly focuses on unilateral strategies (referendums, elections, the drafting of a constitution, the return of the diaspora [i.e., the Abkhaz who fled over a century ago from the tsarist armies]) in an attempt to consolidate the independent status of Abkhazia; the Abkhaz side seems to view continued coexistence with Georgians within Georgia as the least desirable option” (Jans 1998, 123). King makes the point that decade later, “[a]s soon as Shevardnadze fell, the renegade regions appealed to Russia, their long-time protector, to dissuade the new Georgian leadership from making aggressive moves” after the Rose Revolution (King 2004, 16).

The Minorities at Risk Project (2006) maintains that there is an economic dimension to how Abkhaz view the Georgians, that “Abkhazia's Black Sea coastline features some of the choicest vacation spots in the former Soviet Union, and during Soviet times the Abkhaz believed that tourist revenues which were their proper due were instead diverted into Tbilisi's coffers by greedy Georgian officials,” and that they have asked for \$13 billion in compensation (MAR 2006, par. 5).

In November of 1996, Abkhazia held parliamentary elections that drew widespread condemnation. Chirikba (1997) elaborates: “[t]his decision caused an angry reaction on the part of Georgia, Russia, the UN and the European Parliament. . . [a statement from Russia read] that the elections could hamper the peacekeeping efforts of Russia and other interested sides and complicate the situation in the talks on the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict” (Chirikba 1997, par. 28; Avebury 2006, 165; UNPO 2009, 6). In response

Georgian authorities organised a plebiscite among the Georgian refugees from Abkhazia “on the legality of the parliamentary election in Abkhazia.” According to Shevardnadze's decree, persons who were “de facto refugees” but had no official refugee status were also entitled to take part in the plebiscite. The Georgian authorities claim that over 99% of the refugees said “NO” to elections in Abkhazia (Chirikba 1997, par. 31).

October of 1999 saw Ardzinba reelected President in an uncontested election (ICGAT 2006, 12). The next election for President of Abkhazia would be in 2004; Russia's supported candidate and candidate of outgoing President Vladislav Ardzinba, Raul Khadjimba (Khadzhimba), was “apparently” beaten by Sergey Bagapsh (described as a “strong advocate for independence”), but:

The tense situation in the republic led to the cancellation of the election results by the Supreme Court. After that, the deal was struck between former rivals to run jointly: Bagapsh as a presidential candidate and Khadjimba as a vice presidential candidate. They received more than 90% of the votes in the new election. (UNPO 2009, 6)

The last few years, Ardzinba's health had declined so severely that "the door to corruption and behind-the-scenes-maneuvering by self-seeking Russian politicians and business elites" was "opened" (Antonenko 2005, 259). Khadjimba was seen as a pawn of Russia, while newcomer Sergei Bagapsh, the head of an Abkhazian utility company, was popular enough with the people to be seen, by virtue his popularity, as being better able to resist pressure from both Tbilisi *and* Moscow (Ibid., 261). Abkhazians saw this election as "a chance to vote on Ardzinba's record," "not a referendum on policy toward Russia or Georgia;" furthermore, Abkhazians resented the Russians' blatant attempt to pressure the election outcome for Khadjimba. Massive unrest followed initial confusion, "threatening to escalate to violence," but in the end, Russia brokered a deal that put Bagapsh in power and Khadjimba in a symbolic but far less potent Vice-Presidency, created just during the mediation; still, the whole affair was messy, embarrassing, and took nearly three months to resolve (Antonenko 2005, 261-269; UNPO 2009, 6; Nygren 2008, 139-140). Bagapsh says he is against settling any more significant numbers of Georgian refugees in Abkhazia (SO 2009, par. 14-17).

Now Abkhazia has a permanent, veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council recognizing it as an independent state, and the next round of presidential elections is in December of 2009, with "Beslan Butba, businessman and chairman of the Party for Economic Development of Abkhazia and Sergey Shamba, Minister for Foreign Affairs" challenging the incumbent Bagapsh; some in the opposition are worried about the level of Russian influence in Abkhazia (UNPO 2009, 6; SO 2009, par. 20). Twenty years after the fall of communism, Russia was still the ethnic Abkhaz people's primary benefactor; as Bagapsh says, "At the moment, our connections with Russia suffice to allow us to develop our economy" and that "Liechtenstein is dependent on Switzerland, Luxembourg on France. We are all dependent on one another. Georgia is dependent on America; we are on Russia;" Russian money accounts for two-thirds of the Abkhazian budget (SO 2009, par. 3, 19-20)

Other minorities in Abkhazia

Ascherson (2004) articulates that most Armenians in Abkhazia support Abkhaz efforts to gain independence and autonomy, and this is echoed by Clogg; as explained earlier in this paper, Armenians had suffered generations of discrimination at the hands of Georgians (Ascherson 2004, par. 7; Clogg 2008, 317). When hostilities first broke out between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhaz, the Armenians and Russians there, though having their own tensions with Georgia, tried to remain neutral, but "largely" supported the Abkhaz; "Georgian atrocities against civilians," writes Viacheslav (1997), forced all non-Georgian populations of Abkhazia to consolidate around the Abkhazian authorities, who organised armed resistance to the invaders" (ICGAT 2006, 5; Viacheslav 1997, par 12). Antonenko remarks that the "Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, which despite economic and geopolitical rationales, evolved into an ethno-political conflict that divided the multinational society of prewar Abkhazia into two camps. Mobilization took place on the basis of ethnic identity, with a majority among some ethnic minorities (Russians, Armenians, Greeks [descendents of the Black Sea Greek colonists from antiquity]) fighting o the side of the Abkhazians" (Antonenko 2007, 206). Some Abkhazian Armenians even formed their own military unit, the Bagramyan Battalion, which engaged in ethnic cleansing against Georgians and even attacked targets across the Abkhazian border within the rest of Georgia (START 2008, par. 1).

Russia

Historically, Russia has felt that it has given a lot to Georgia; Grant (2009) muses on the Russian and Soviet perspective, quoting a non-Caucasian, (former Soviet) Ukrainian as saying “We gave them so much, and yet, everywhere you looked, you could see what they had done with what we gave them;” for Grant, “[t]he effective message was, they never really understood what we were offering. Or, perhaps, they took what we gave, but they took inappropriately;” in Russian eyes, they came with a civilizing cultural mission, and they became the “conquering victim” (Grant 2009, ix-xiv). The modern sentiments articulated by Grant have an historical, but still relevant echo in Viceroy Vorontsov, one of the few Russian rulers appreciated in his own time by Georgians, as he saw “Russia’s role in Caucasia as not simply an exploiter of local resources but the developer and civilizer of ‘backward Asiatic’ peoples” (Suny 1994, 83). Grant notes that, over time, “[t]he Russian investment over the course of the Caucasus wars [against Persia and the Ottoman Empire] was indeed substantial, with estimates of the number of...soldiers lost between 1801 and 1864 ranging from twenty-five thousand to seventy-seven thousand. This was in a territory where it would be many decades before ready material gain would be realized” (Grant 2009, 38-39). As the reader of this paper has seen, the investment did not end in 1864.

Russia is by far the most dominant power in this region and has been for over 200 years; consequently, Russians are hardly uninvolved in Georgia, and looking at all the crises and conflicts in Georgia in the 1990’s, Gordadze argues that, “[w]ithout underestimating the local dimensions of each of these crises, it is not difficult to discern the hand of Russia in all of them”(Gordadze 2009, 47). Areshidze maintains that in the years before the breakup of the USSR, Soviet leaders encouraged South Ossetian and Abkhazian nationalism in an effort to counterbalance rising Georgian nationalism and Gamsakhurdia (Areshidze 2007, 22). Russia also feels a need to have troops in former USSR countries like Georgia in order to “limit, or counter, the growing US presence in the space of the former Soviet Union” (Deyermond 2008, 145-146). During parts of the wars and skirmishes on Georgian territory, “Russian forces openly fought on behalf of the [Abkhazian and South Ossetian] separatists,” and “it became clear that Georgia was also fighting against shadowy elements of the Russian military who supplied the motley Abkhaz forces with weapons, logistics, and even aviation” (Areshidze 2007, 26; Goltz 2009, 25; Devdariani 2005, 163). Russia withdrew most of its troops from Georgia since those wars of the 1990’s, but not its peacekeepers in Abkhazia (Deyermond 2008, 149-150). Francis argues that

Russia’s priorities were twofold: to stabilize its country, especially its unruly Northern Caucasus, and to keep a say in the development of the South Caucasus. To reach those goals, Russia has been trying to hinder the apparition of anti-Russian regimes in the region, to keep the status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia or to negotiate peace agreements where it acts as a security guarantor. The Rose Revolution in 2003, which brought the corrupted regime of Shevardnadze to a close, and the coming to power of the pro-Western president Mikhail Saakashvili were therefore felt as a credible threat, all the more with Georgian desire to access NATO. The potential presence of the Alliance, still perceived by Moscow as an anti-Russian military institution, on the Southern flanks of the Russian territory has been felt as a deeply hostile move. (Francis 2008, 304)

Ambrosio (2009) claims that Russia has even had a policy of trying “to damage Georgia economically and undermine its government” since 2006 (Ambrosio 2009, 137). Nilsson discusses different levels of Russian pressure as Russia tried dominating Georgia in a variety of ways:

Georgia's Western course and especially its prospects for integration into NATO were utterly incompatible with Russian designs for the region. Russia viewed these ambitions on the Georgian government's part as directly contradicting Russian interests, aimed at exercising an exclusive influence over the South Caucasus. Hence, Russia by all means available sought to apply pressure on the Saakashvili government to moderate its course. Levers applied have ranged from ones related to energy and trade, to exploiting its dominance over Georgia's separatist regions. As these had few effects, Russia resorted to military force through bombing Georgian territory, downing Georgian reconnaissance drones over Abkhazia, and ultimately through war in August 2008. (Nilsson 101-102)

Writing after that August 2008 war, *The Economist* comments that

The latest fighting in South Ossetia may have been triggered by the Georgians, but it was largely engineered by the Russians, who have, over the years, fanned the flames of the conflict...This was no sudden response to provocation, but a long-planned move. Mr Putin resents the West's influence in former Soviet countries such as Georgia and Ukraine...by thumping down Russia's military fist in the Caucasus, he has made clear that Russia will not tolerate excessive signs of independence from its neighbours, including bids to join the NATO alliance. (Economist 2008, par. Par. 4-6)

Antonenko notes "Russia's geopolitical worries grew with the appearance of U.S. military trainers [whose job it was to equip and train the Georgian military] in Georgia," and Abkhazia's President Ardzinba warned that this deployment "could lead to an escalation of the conflict with unpredictable consequences;" in reaction, Antonenko mentions that Russia's *Duma* voted 235-1 in favor of a motion "condemning" this U.S. military aid to Georgia, "expressing concern that U.S. trained troops might be used in future military operations against Abkhazia" (Antonenko 2005, 232-233).

Russia also recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries, and views Kosovo as a legitimate comparison, and the West's position on Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states as hypocritical, and dismissing all criticism; (Goble 2009, 183; Economist 2007). The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) argues that this "response" to Kosovo is "legitimate" (UNPO 2009, 7). Though Venezuela and Nicaragua have followed suit, and Russia may be close to getting a number of other small nations to recognize the two breakaway republics, Russia's relationship is the only significant one Abkhazia has to rely on for now (Economist 2009 par. 6; News from Armenia 2009). Hitchens (2008) dismisses, in turn, Russia's argument, and goes on to say:

it is almost certainly true that Moscow's action in the Ossetian and (for good measure) the Abkhazian enclave of Georgia has been, in a real sense, the revenge for the independence of Kosovo (on Feb. 14 Vladimir Putin said publicly that Western recognition of Kosovar independence would be met by intensified Russian support for irredentism in South Ossetia). (Hitchens, par. 1)

While the rest of the world looked at the 2004 Abkhazian election as illegitimate, it was Russia, not Georgia, which brokered a resolution to that crisis. "Russia's policy regarding Abkhazian elections," writes Antonenko, "demonstrated how far it was willing to go in attempts to control Abkhazia, and, at the same time, highlighted the real constraints on its ability to exercise effective influence" (Antonenko 2005, 258-259). Russian "involvement initially contributed to destabilizing the situation, but later helped to broker a political compromise between the two main presidential candidates by seeking to reconcile a dangerously divided Abkhazian society" (Ibid., 258-268).

Russia was also actively trying to make South Ossetians and Abkhazians “Russians” in a legal sense or at the very least, pry both regions away from Georgia even before the 2008 war; “[o]n the Russian side, there was a...consensus [among the whole country] that the majority of non-Georgian residents of both territories—with their anti-Georgian and pro-Russian mood and with Russian passports distributed to them by the Kremlin on a massive scale—were to be protected as ‘Russian citizens’ against possible ‘Georgian aggressions’” (EURII 2009, 8; Devdariani 2005, 177). The EU report continues:

The clearest demonstration of this Russian policy of integrating separatist entities of neighbouring states into its own legal jurisdiction was “passportisation”, the awarding of Russian passports and citizenship of the Russian Federation to residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In this context, in 2007 Russia paid residents of Abkhazia a total of 590 million rubles in the form of pensions and allocated 100 million rubles to South Ossetia, where the overwhelming majority of the non-Georgian population were already holders of Russian passports. According to commentaries by Russian political analysts, Moscow was using economic means “to try to caution Georgia against attempts to take back the unrecognised republics by force. (Ibid., 19)

The report also notes that “some 97 per cent of residents of South Ossetia had obtained Russian passports;” Abkhazia claims that over 90% of its people have Russian citizenship (EURII 2009, 409; Illarionov 2009, 63). Russia also eliminated the need for visas to get in and out of Russia from both breakaway regions (Devdariani 2005, 177).

Russia also has been angry with Georgia because Chechen and other militants have attacked Russian military forces in Chechnya and other border regions of the Russian Federation from the border region of Georgia, and Georgia did not give the Russians permission to pursue them into Georgia (Devdariani 2005, 178-190; EURII 2009, 7, 9). Finally, Russia has vital economic concerns in the area, especially when it comes to energy; as Jervalidze takes the position that “Russian regional, foreign, and energy policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia played a decisive role in the developments in Georgia. It created the background for...[an] economic collapse and heightened political and social tensions in the Georgian state” (Jervalidze 2006, 2). Russia views Western attempts to enter this region’s gas and oil industry “as an attempt to undermine its own geoeconomic position in the wider Caspian region” (EURII 2009, 6).

United States

Nodia and Scholtbach (2006) remark that “the governments of the US and a number of European countries, as well as some private foundations, have had a considerable impact on the development of Georgian political and civil society institutions,” and that this “[o]rientation...has been one of the notable points of consensus in mainstream Georgian politics” as Georgia eyes NATO and the EU (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006, 6). Georgia has been particularly close to the United States in recent years, making itself a resourceful if small ally, and Nilsson (2009) remarks that “Georgia’s primary asset in its relations with the West, apart from being a transit country for Caspian oil and gas as well as for troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, was its image as a rapidly democratizing country in Europe’s Eastern Neighborhood and the prospect of a success story of Western engagement in the region” (Nilsson 2009 101-102). Blank (2009) describes U.S. policy towards Georgia as “supporting and strengthening Georgia,” and the EU report takes care to detail the history of growing ties between the two nations (Blank 2009, 116; EURII 2009 33-48).

Nilsson explains the Russian view of the United States instigating conflict in the Caucasus:

From Moscow's perspective, the Rose Revolution did not constitute an expression of public discontent with a failing government. Rather, the events of November 2003 in Georgia were seen as a political shift orchestrated by the U.S. In this understanding, the U.S. simply replaced a CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] government [Georgia] that had fallen out of favor with Washington with a new one that would be more decisively under U.S. control, allowing for the enlargement of NATO into what Russia considered its "near abroad." These fears were fuelled by the events in the fall of 2004 in Ukraine, leading on the part of Russia to the perception of "color revolution" in the CIS as a coordinated bid to counteract Russia's effort to re-establish a sphere of influence over the former Soviet space.

After all, USAID had provided considerable financial support for the development of Georgia's party system and civil society, while American NGOs such as the National Democratic Institute had supported exit polls in the November elections. Not least, George Soros's Open Society Institute had supported Khmara [a student movement that helped to put Saakashvili in power] with Otpor [a student movement in Serbia which had helped to bring down Slobodan Milosevich]. Russia understood these facts as evidence that the political shift in Georgia had been designed by the U.S. and that the changes brought about contradicted Russian interests. (Nilsson 2009, 101-102)

As far as USAID, the very first sentence on the agency's website's profile of Georgia reads "Georgia is a key U.S. ally in the war on terrorism and a gateway for energy resources from the region to Europe and beyond" (USAID 2009, par. 1) For Helly and Gogia (2005), Washington's attempts to prop up Georgia's role in regional energy markets is more about "geopolitical than commercial calculations;" U.S. desires "to bypass Russian territory [with a different pipeline] in order to reduce Moscow's influence over its southern neighbors" and to keep Iran out as a factor in that region's energy market are primary motives, then (Helly and Gogia 2009, 277). Gordadze points out that "During the ten years of Shevardnadze's leadership, Georgia moved from a condition of quasi-domination by Russia to become one of the largest beneficiaries per capita of aid from the United States" (Gordadze 2009, 47). Writing on a particular chapter of the ongoing back-and-forth hostility between Georgia and Russia, Sawyer (2006) makes several points about U.S. aid to its tiny ally:

Media coverage of the dispute has focused on the behavior of the principal antagonists, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and Russian President Vladimir Putin. But there is another powerful player who has remained far off stage: the United States. Its fingerprints aren't obvious, but Washington has helped to fuel this crisis—by showering Georgia with cash and praise, by extending the promise of NATO membership, and by standing silent as Saakashvili and his government made ever rasher attacks on Russia.

U.S. security aid to Georgia totaled \$30.5 million in fiscal year 2006, on top of \$60.5 million the previous year and \$60 million the year before that. Due in large part to American largesse, Georgia's overall military expenditures shot up 143 percent last year. Georgia has also been a favorite of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Bush administration's signature program that was intended to reward those developing countries that demonstrate effective governance. Contracts totaling \$295.3 million have been signed with Georgia, making it fourth in the world in total Millennium Challenge aid.

Flush with cash and the superpower's blessing, the American-educated Saakashvili has become more brash with time, seizing every opportunity to stick it to the colossus to the north. "We can't be treated as some second-rate backyard to some kind of re-emerging empire," Saakashvili told reporters earlier this month as the latest crisis gained momentum.

The tough talk plays well at home, as evidenced this month when Saakashvili's United National Movement party swept more than three quarters of the vote in local elections. But it is a triumph of bluster over geographical common sense in a nation that remains very much in Russia's shadow. (Sawyer 2006, par. 3-6)

In terms of that military support, Nilsson comments that "[t]he buildup of the Georgian military, largely conducted with U.S. financial support, provided Georgia with an army well trained for counter-insurgency operations, and with increasing numbers of soldiers who had served in Iraq" (Nilsson 2009, 93).

Writing nearly two years before the August 2008 war, Sawyer argued "If Saakashvili gets the war with Russia he has sometimes appeared to seek, it is the people of his country who will pay the price. But, far away from the fighting, the United States will bear a large part of the blame" (Ibid., par. 16) Georgia even played a role in the U.S. presidential election in 2008, and John McCain made headlines by saying "Today, we are all Georgians" when Russia was invading; Saakashvili quoted him that night at an outdoor rally in Tbilisi, and the line drew intense applause and roars from a "huge" crowd (Rhee 2008, par. 7) When Vice-President Joseph Biden visited Georgia in July of 2009, he said that

support for Georgia is "a bipartisan sentiment in my country." He said he had come to Georgia "to send an unequivocally clear, simple message to all those who listen and those who don't listen, that American stands with you now and will continue to stand with you."... "One of the messages of the trip [said a Biden advisor]... is to reaffirm and restate what both the Vice President and President have been very clear on ... which is that, in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, first of all, the United States is not, will not, recognize them as independent states, and we stand firmly for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia." (Rozen 2009, par. 7, 9)

At least two things are clear, then: the U.S. government's position at the highest levels is that it has a bipartisan, long-term strategic relationship with Georgia, and Georgia is caught, as so often has happened in its millennia-old history, between competing major world powers.

Non-State Actors

Throughout the 1990's and even more recently, an array of ethnic fighters and mercenaries has entered the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict in support of the Abkhaz against the Georgians; some of these were the Abkhaz people's kinsmen, both "diaspora" Abkhaz and other related ethnic groups, who had fled the Tsar's armies in the second half of the nineteenth century; some were other similar non-Russian ethnicities with similar aspirations for national freedom from neighboring Russian territories, especially Chechens [including ones who would later plague Russia in its wars in Chechnya]; also included in this group were mercenaries and "Cossack freebooters and other Slavic soldiers of fortune" (Goltz 2009, 24-26; EURII 2009, 252). Aves (1996) describes how the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples organized volunteer fighters for the Abkhazians, and mention strong Abkhaz ties in general with "the volatile north Caucasian republics in the Russian Federation," and Zverev too discussed the strong popular support and irregular fighter Abkhazia received from the North Caucasus republics in Russian (Aves 1996, 27; Zverev 1996, part IV par. 7-11).

D. Milestones of the Conflict

The final segment of this paper will give a brief summary of the roughly two decades that span the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Being discussed will be *Prewar Tensions*, the *Georgian-Abkhaz War*, *Pre-Rose Revolution*, *Post-Rose Revolution*, and the *August 2008 War and its Aftermath*.

Prewar tensions

As has been stated earlier, the Abkhaz resumed calls for secession from Georgia in the late 1980's, and both Abkhaz and Georgian demonstrations fed each other, until March 1989 saw two massive protests by both the Abkhaz, first, and then the Georgians; the Abkhaz protests were resolved peaceably, but in Tbilisi the Soviet authorities became nervous and eventually called in troops in early April; Soviet troops used force on the crowd and "hundreds were wounded and nineteen people were killed" (Zürcher 2005, 89-90; EURII 2009, 4). This radicalized the Georgian movement as noted before and projected Gamsakhurdia into the center of the political scene, with the overall situation deteriorating rapidly, as by July, violence erupted between Georgians and Abkhazians in Abkhazia's main city of Sukhumi (Suny 1994, 232; Zürcher 2005, 89; EURII 2009, 4). Late that August, Georgian officials passed a law which required the use of Georgian for all government purposes, alienating Abkhaz and South Ossetians (Zürcher 2005, 90).

In March of 1990, the Abkhaz authorities put into a effect a "Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic," making it clear they intend to break with Georgia, and in December elect Vladislav Ardzinba as their leader (ICGAT 2006, 4; EURII 2009, 73). Gamsakhurdia and his party win elections at the end of October, and Georgian forces initiate a year-and-a-half conflict against South Ossetia in January, 1991 (Zürcher 2005, 92-93). March of 1991 sees Georgia boycott a referendum on preserving the Soviet Union, but many Abkhaz and South Ossetians vote and vote in favor of staying in the Union; in April of that year, Georgia declares formal independence from the USSR, and in May, with the South Ossetians and Abkhazians sitting out, Gamsakhurdia is elected president with 86% of the vote (Zürcher 2005, 93; EURII 2009, 73-74; ICGAT 2006, 4). The Georgian National Guard commander, Tengiz Kitovani, stops following Gamsakhurdia's orders, and as the Abkhaz hold parliamentary elections that same month, overthrows Gamsakhurdia, who flees Tbilisi for the west of Georgia as civil war erupts and drags on until 1993; the violence in Abkhazia is not organized (ICGAT 2006, 4; Zürcher 2005, 93-94; Suny 1994, 328-329).

That February, after re-adopting its own constitution from 1921, Georgia ignores a feeler from Abkhazia to discuss outstanding issues of autonomy; Eduard Shevardnadze is named the head of an interim government in March of 1992, and agrees to a cease fire with South Ossetia under military pressure from Russia in July; that same month, as chaos rages in Georgia, Abkhazians adopt their constitution from 1925, which "declared Abkhazia to be a sovereign state," and, "urged on by Moscow," Ardzinba declares Abkhazian independence from Georgia (Zürcher 2005, 94-95; EURII 2009, 75-76; Areshidze 2007, 27; Suny 1994, 329). Also in July, pro-Gamsakhurdia militants reportedly captured several Georgian officials and took them into the Gali district of Abkhazia (Zverev 1996, part IV par. 2; Zürcher 2005, 96; ICGAT 2006, 5).

Georgian-Abkhaz War

Kitovani, now the defense minister for Georgia, moved his forces into Abkhazia on August 14, 1992, and the "war" between Georgia and Abkhazia ignites; Russian regular and irregular forces come to the aid of Abkhazia, including Chechens and others from the Russian North Caucasus, and this surprises Kitovani's Georgian forces; it is not even known for certain if Shevardnadze knew about the invasion

prior to its occurrence or if he was involved in ordering it at all, but the Georgians claimed to be going in to rescue hostages and secure a rail line; instead, they ended up attacking government buildings (Areshidze 2007, 27-29; Zürcher 2005, 96-96; EURII 2009, 76; Zverev 1996, part IV par. 2; ICGAT 2006, 5) Zürcher argues that “the [Georgian] National Guard’s move on Abkhazia was to a very large extent the action of a private army out for plunder (Zürcher 2005, 103). Russia brokered a cease fire in September that fell apart by October, and Abkhaz forces, supported by Russians and irregulars, took over all of western Abkhazia; the same month and the next saw elections legitimize Shevardnadze’s authority as leader of Georgia, but the war still dragged on; Sukhumi and the east part of Abkhazia would be the center of much of the heavy fighting as the war continued into 1993 (EURII 2009, 76-77; Suny 1994 329-33).

The Russians negotiated another cease-fire in late July of 1993, which became known as the Sochi Agreement, and the UN a month later authorized a United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) to ensure compliance with the cease-fire by all parties (EURII 2009, 76-77). Still, only a few weeks later the Abkhaz and their allies began an offensive which would eject the Georgians from Sukhumi and the nearly all of Abkhazia; this was made a far easier task as Gamsakhurdia returned to Georgia, with some Russian support, attacking Georgian forces in Abkhazia from the Georgian side of the border with the Abkhaz in an attempt to overthrow Shevardnadze’s government, who himself had to “flee the city [Sukhumi] at the last minute” as the Abkhaz took over their capital on September 28th, 1993 (Areshidze 2007, 27-28; Zürcher 2005, 96; Goltz 2009, 25-27).

Moscow at this time was convulsing from a crisis between Yeltsin and the Russian *Duma*, and in the days after the Georgians were driven out of most of Abkhazia, bloody fighting erupted in Moscow, with tanks shelling the Russian White House; at the end, Yeltsin was more firmly in control, and with “the defeat and dismemberment of the country [of Georgia] looming,” worked out an agreement with Shevardnadze: Georgia would (reluctantly) join the Russian dominated CIS and agree to Russian military bases in Georgia in exchange for military aid against Gamsakhurdia, whose forces were defeated with the aid of the Russians; Gamsakhurdia “either killed himself or was killed by his feuding followers” at the end of 1993 (Areshidze 2007, 27-28; Zürcher 2005, 96-97; Suny 1994, 331; EURII 2009, 78). Fighting continued in Abkhazia’s Kodori Valley until the spring of 1994, when a full ceasefire, the “Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict” and related agreements were agreed to by the Abkhaz and the Georgians under UN and Russian auspices, which provided for a Russian-led CIS peacekeeping force, UN observers, and several layers of demilitarized zones separating the Abkhaz and Georgians (EURII 2009, 78; ICGAT 2006, 6-7). While fighting was still going on in the Kodori Valley, Shevardnadze dismissed Kitovani, who may have been responsible for starting the war (Zürcher 2005, 97). During the fighting, 200,000 to 300,000 people, including virtually all of Abkhazia’s ethnic Georgians, fled or were driven out of Abkhazia during this conflict, “the most gruesome act of ethnic cleansing in the former Soviet Union” and “the only case of a plurality nationality being ethnically cleansed by a small minority,” and as many as 10,000 people were killed (Areshidze 2007, 27-28; EURII 2009, 78-79; ICGCHG 2008, par. 7).

Pre-Rose Revolution

Russian (nominally CIS) peacekeepers entered Abkhazia shortly after the war (Antonenko 2005, 220; EURII 2009, 78). The uneasy peace remained in place while Russia fought a bloody war in Chechnya, just north of Georgia’s border, as Shevardnadze reached out the West and reformed his government, ushering in a new constitution in August of 1995, and soon after the “young reformers” came to power with the reelection of Shevardnadze (Gordadze 2009, 40; Areshidze 2007, 40). In Abkhazia, a new constitution was adopted late in November 1994, and, as previously discussed Abkhaz leaders held “disputed” elections 1996, with Georgia responding by having a vote among the Georgian refugees from Abkhazia on the legitimacy of the Abkhaz elections (a resounding “NO”); (UNPO 2009, 6). Throughout

the next few years, Russia, the UN, and others attempted to achieve a breakthrough by holding talks between the parties, but these proved fruitless in the end (EURII 2009, 80-84; Antonenko 2005, 223).

Though thousands of Georgian IDP's had started "spontaneously" resettling in the Gali region of Abkhazia during the years after hostilities ceased, the cease-fire broke down in May of 1998 in that very region; two Georgian paramilitary groups, with links at some level to the Georgian government, "cross[ed] the cease-fire line and Abkhazian forces...undertook a security operation against them;" as a result, hundreds were killed, many houses were destroyed (including many rebuilt by the UN), and 20,000 to 40,000 of the IDP's that had resettled fled; thus, in some ways, "the peace process practically reversed," though many of those IDP's returned in 1999; during the fighting, Russian peacekeepers did little to stop the violence, but also suffered casualties (Zürcher 2005, 223-224; EURII 2009, 86).

Soon Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia, he would engage in Russia's bloody second Chechen war, with negative consequences for Georgia; amid the thousands of refugees streaming into Georgia's Pankisi Gorge in the fall of 1999, there were also several hundred Chechen militants and even a few "foreign Islamist combatants;" when Georgia refused to let the Russian military carry out missions in the gorge, "Russia accused Georgia of giving Chechen fighters and their al-Qaeda allies safe haven there," (Ambrosio 2009, 133; EURII 2009, 39; Gordadze 2009, 42; Antonenko 2005, 229). In fact, Pankisi Gorge "slipped from effective...[Georgian] control," and Georgia was reluctant to send its own forces there for fear of becoming drawn into the war in Chechnya (EURII 2009, 39; Antonenko 2005, 229). The Chechens stayed there and in October of 2001, Chechen militants, possibly coming from the Pankisi Gorge, tried to take over an Abkhaz village in the Kodori part of Abkhazia; Abkhaz security forces beat them back, but the Abkhaz claim Chechens shot down an UNOMIG helicopter, killing all on board, and Russia blamed Georgia in part because they were not able to prevent the Chechens from travelling through Georgian territory; however, UNOMIG later said there was no evidence that it was Chechens who shot down its helicopter (Wines 2001; BBC 2001; EURII 2009, 88; Nygren 2008, 143-145; INA 2001). Antonenko maintains that Georgian officials aided the militants' passage through Georgian territory, for possible the reason of destabilizing Abkhazia, and Helly and Gogia support this line of thought, though Gordadze questions such a conclusion (Antonenko 2005, 230; Helly and Godia 2005, 293-294; Gordadze 2009, 42).

The issue of fighters in the Pankisi Gorge and Kodori area severely damaged the relationship between Russia and Georgia, and the situations in both areas would remain tense and volatile, and "[t]he deterioration in Russian-Georgian relations led to a reorientation of Russian policies toward Abkhazia. Following years of limited engagement, Putin moved to step up Russia's relations with Abkhazia. Moscow tacitly endorsed the Presidential elections in Abkhazia and a referendum that led to a declaration of Abkhazian independence in October 1999;" in addition, the "passportisation" by Russia in Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) alluded to earlier in this paper was something "Georgia regarded...as a de facto annexation of Georgian territory" (Antonenko 2005, 230-231; Nygren 2008, 134-136). For Antonenko

the events in Pankisi and Kodori played a key role in shaping Russia's policy toward the conflict. In the first years of Putin's presidency, relations with Georgia and Abkhazia moved much higher on Russia's political agenda. While relations with Georgia passed from crisis to crisis and were often on the verge of open conflict, Moscow pursued a policy of active engagement with Abkhazia. Support for Abkhazia was further reinforced by Russia's declared "victory" in the second war in Chechnya. Although Russia's military campaign had failed to produce a comprehensive political solution in the breakaway Russian republic, the prospect of Chechnya's successful secession from Russia diminished. As a result, Russia was no longer concerned that its support for separatist regimes elsewhere would echo within Russia itself. (Antonenko 2005, 230-231)

Post-Rose Revolution

The Rose Revolution brought Saakashvili to the Georgian presidency at the beginning of 2004, and he had campaigned heavily on reintegrating Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Adjara; Adjara was quickly reintegrated as mentioned earlier, but that clearly was not the case with the other two regions; 2004 also brought about a change in power in Abkhazia that would put Sergey Bagapsh in its presidency. The situations in Georgia's breakaway regions would continue to worsen and "[t]he steadily deteriorating political relationship between Georgia and the Russian Federation in 2006 - 2008 was accompanied by rising political tension, particularly in the conflict zones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia" (EURII 2009, 200).

After resolving the Adjara situation in 2004, Saakashvili called Putin to thank him for a tension-defusing role he played at the end of the conflict; Putin reportedly responded by saying "Now remember, we did not intervene in Adjara, but you won't have any gifts from us in South Ossetia and Abkhazia," and by the dawn of 2006, "Russian deliveries of military equipment to...[both regions], with a combined population of about 250,000, exceeded the total military capacity of Georgia, with a population of 4.5 million... [b]y...2008...[both regions] had received at no cost more than twice the military equipment possessed by Georgia" (Illarionov 2009, 55, 60). Furthermore, at the end of January 2006, Putin publicly asked "if somebody assumes that Kosovo can achieve full state independence, then why should we refuse it to the Abkhaz and South Ossetians?" and Russia began looking into a "legal formula" for formal recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states (Ibid., 55; 661).

That June, leaders of both breakaway regions and a third breakaway region in Moldova met in Abkhazia; there they agreed to support each other militarily and "proclaimed their loyalty to Moscow," with Putin asserting that they each had a right to self-determination (Ibid., 61). The summer of 2006 would see Georgian regular security forces oust a "renegade [Georgian] militia" from Kodori, reestablishing Georgian government control there and enabling Georgia to move its Abkhazian government-in-exile to the area, into actual Abkhazian territory, that July; this exacerbated an already tense situation, and Abkhazia cooled to negotiations as a result; the EU report notes that some analysts thought that establishing the exiled government there "could adversely affect the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process," while others "regarded the installation of the pro-Georgian administration in Kodori as a preventive move aimed at making Russia's recognition of Abkhazia more difficult, and therefore less feasible" (ICGAT 2006, Executive Summary; BBC RTAb 2009, par. 17-18; EURII 2009, 89-90). That September, Russia's response to Georgia's announced uncovering of a Russian spy ring in Georgia and its arrest of four Russian intelligence officers was to call for an immediate UN Security Council session on Abkhazia; as Moscow adopted extremely harsh measures against Georgia and ethnic Georgians in Russia, in October Abkhazia "again petitioned the Russian leadership to recognize its independence and to establish an association agreement between the two countries," while the leader of Russian Chechnya declared that "Chechens were ready to intervene in Abkhazia and South Ossetia if war should break out there;" and towards the end of the year, the Russian State Duma officially asked for Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as full, independent states (Illarionov 2009, 62-64; EURII 2009, 19-24).

A major speech by Putin in February of 2007, in which he denounced U.S. foreign policy attempts to create a "uni-polar" international order, sparked discussions of a "new Cold War;" "[w]ithin two days Mikheil Saakashvili responded with the promise that Georgia would join NATO in 2009 (Watson 2007; Illarionov 2009, 64; Ambrosio 2009, 151). The next month, Russia launched a helicopter gunship attack on Georgian targets in the Kodori region; Georgia responded with a unanimous vote in its parliament to pursue an attempt to join NATO, and the U.S. Senate voted to support both Georgia and Ukraine's NATO aspirations (Illarionov 2007, 65-66). August would see Abkhazia violate the cease-fire

by moving “heavy [military] equipment” into a restricted zone, and in October, “a Russian unit allegedly attempted to take control of a Georgian ‘patriotic youth camp’ (Illarionov 2009, 66; EURII 2009, 17).

Soon after Saakashvili was reelected at the beginning of 2008, the declaration of independence by Kosovo from Russia’s ally Serbia in February 2008, and almost immediate diplomatic recognition by most leading members of the West (including the U.S., U.K., and France), set off a chain of events that would lead to an eruption of violence in Georgia later in the year; March saw Dmitry Medvedev elected Russia’s new president, and the the same month, the Russian *Duma* passed a resolution “endorsing...[both Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s] requests for recognition;” Georgia’s NATO membership or an outbreak of war, according to an “anonymous Russian diplomat,” were to be seen as pretexts to recognize Georgia’s breakaway regions (Illarionov 2009, 67-67; ICGGRA 2008, 2-3; Smith 2009b, 127-132). The EU report notes that

Decisions on Kosovo’s independence and its international recognition, together with the Bucharest NATO summit of 2-3 April 2008, with its promise of Georgia’s future NATO membership, complicated the international context in which events were unfolding. The decision by the Russian Federation to withdraw the 1996 CIS restrictions [an embargo which was in practice violated by Russia anyway] on Abkhazia (March 2008) and to authorise direct relations with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian sides, in a number of fields (April 2008), added another dimension to an already complex situation in the area. (EURII 2009, 123)

In terms of the ending of the CIS sanctions, “[a]part from being a diplomatic slap in the face to Georgia, the move cleared the way for overt Russian arms shipments to the Abkhaz separatists,” with the U.S. Ambassador to the UN echoing this concern (Smith 2009b, 129). The ICG (2008) also discusses the events of early 2008:

The Georgian-Russian relationship hit a new low after Kosovo’s declaration of independence on 17 February 2008 and the pledge of NATO’s Bucharest summit on 2-4 April that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually be admitted to membership in that alliance. Russia took a series of legal, diplomatic and military steps to increase its support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and openly warned that its assistance “will continue to have not a declarative, but a substantive character.” Georgia interpreted this as meaning that Russia intended to maintain an occupation of part of its national territory. (ICGGRA 2008, 2-3)

While not giving Georgia or Ukraine the specific dates or timetables they desired, NATO’s Bucharest Summit still showed that they had support for their NATO aspirations and kept the option open; as much as this displeased Russia, at the same time they knew that neither country would be in NATO anytime soon; “[t]he Head of the Russian Military Staff...[said] that ‘We will do everything [necessary, word added by Illarionov] to prevent Georgia from joining NATO,’” while Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that his country “would do its utmost not to allow Georgia and Ukraine into NATO;” Russia’s NATO envoy proclaimed that “As soon as Georgia gets some kind of prospect from Washington on NATO membership...the next day the process of real secession of these two territories from Georgia will begin” (EURII 2009, 25; Illarionov 2009, 68; Smith 2009b, 125-126). Furthermore, Putin proposed a relationship between Russia and both of Georgia’s breakaway regions which “was virtually identical” to the relationship between Moscow and the federated republics within Russia, a move condemned by EU countries and the U.S.; Georgia’s foreign ministry responded by saying that Russia “has deprived itself of any political, legal or moral right to claim the role of a neutral and unbiased mediator in the conflict resolution process” (Illarionov 2009, 68; ICGGRA 2-3, 2n10; EURII 2009, 27-28).

Towards the end of April 2008, a Russian MIG [sic] jet shot down a Georgian UAV drone over Abkhazia, and this was later confirmed by UNOMIG; five more were shot down in the following weeks, and the rest of the spring would see a large buildup of Russian troops, checkpoints, bases, and equipment; multiple training exercises involving the Russian Army, Air Force, and Black Sea Fleet; and a request from Bagapsh for “Russia to establish a permanent military presence in Abkhazia;” this was all in violation of Russia’s own signed agreements (Illarionov 2009, 70-72; ICGGRA 2008, 4-5). May would also contain an incident where Georgian security forces detained a group of Russian peacekeepers who were on the Georgian side of that country’s border with its breakaway region Abkhazia, further ratcheting up tensions; many assumed at this point that war was inevitable, though that summer there was a flurry of diplomatic activity as Saakashvili, the U.S., Germany, the EU, the OCSE, and Finland all made multiple attempts of negotiate a settlement, but Russian, Abkhaz, and South Ossetian leaders “brushed them all aside” (Illarionov 2009 70-71; EURII 2009, 30-31, 90-92, 201-203).

Both Georgia and the Abkhazia conducted major military exercises in July, with both U.S. and Russia participating with their respective sides (Illarionov 2009, 71; EURII 2009, 195; EURI 2009, 19; Popjanevski 2009, 148). July saw several bombs kill people in the Abkhaz border area with Georgia, and low level violence, more intense than in Abkhazia, began in South Ossetia as well, increasing at the end of the month and the beginning of August; Russia and some irregulars mobilized troops on Georgia’s border and sent some others into South Ossetia; in addition, in the second half of July, a massive cyber attack was carried out on Georgia’s computer network infrastructure, including major government offices, and “media, communications and transportation companies;” Georgia blamed Russia for the attacks (Illarionov 2009, 72-75; Popjanevski 2009, 145-150; EURII 2009, 203-208; Markoff 2008; EURII 2009, 217-219). Regarding Abkhazia, both sides claimed the other was preparing for an offensive (EURII 2009, 211). When Saakashvili wanted to reach Medvedev on the phone, the Russians responded with a brusque statement “The situation is not yet ready for the Presidents to talk to each other. Let the Presidents speak later” (Illarionov 2009, 76).

August 2008 War and its Aftermath

The “war” began on August 7th, as Georgia attacked South Ossetia and the Russians poured troops into the area; Georgia assaulted Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital, with heavy artillery support but the next day, Russia pushed most of the Georgian forces from South Ossetia’s capital and conducted air strikes near Georgia’s capital, Tbilisi; that same day, Abkhaz forces violated the cease-fire by moving heavy weapons into a restricted zone and began attacking Georgian forces in Kodori; August 9th would see Russia open a second front, with even more troops than its deployments into South Ossetia sent into Abkhazia, where they engaged Georgian forces in Kodori already fighting Abkhaz units and pushed into Georgian controlled territory outside of Abkhazia; Georgian forces in Abkhazia were overwhelmed and forced to retreat, and the Black Sea Fleet blockaded the Georgian coast, reportedly engaged Georgian naval vessels, and landed more troops into Abkhazia (Popjanevski 2009, 152-153; Felgenhauer 2009, 171-174; ICGRGF 2008, 1-3; EURI 2009, 10-11; EURII 2009, 211-213) All total, the Russians may have deployed 15,000 troops and hundreds of heavy vehicles into Abkhazia during the war, and overall, 40,000 troops (EURII 2009, 212-126).

Finally, on August 12th, 2008, a cease-fire was agreed upon and signed a few days later, largely because of the efforts of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, which was based on a return to prewar positions (ICGGRF 2009, 3; EURI 2009, 10-11; EURII 2009, 219). Over 850 people were killed, thousands wounded, and of the 100,000 people who were displaced by the fighting, 35,000 still have not been able to return home a year after the conflict (EURI 2009, 5; EURII 2009, 223-225). The EU report notes the “failure by Russian forces to prevent and stop violations by South Ossetian forces, armed irregular groups and armed individuals before and after the ceasefire in South Ossetia and the adjacent

territories” and “widespread campaigns of looting and destruction of ethnic Georgian settlements by South Ossetians” occurred (EURI 2009, 27). In general, Russians have violated the cease-fire by not allowing international monitors into Abkhazia or South Ossetia, and in both regions the Russians have built “forward bases;” they are keeping their troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and some parts of Georgia on the borders of the two breakaway regions, which Russia has recognized as independent states as of August 26th, 2008; this is also incompatible with the cease-fire, and alone among nations Nicaragua (September 5th 2008) and more recently Venezuela (September 10th 2009) have followed Russia in recognizing both breakaway republics as independent nations (EURI 2009, 22; EURII 2009, 219, 440; AP 2009; Schwirtz 2009, par. 1).

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