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### *The New NATO and opportunities for establishing security in the Caucasus after 11 September*

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## The new NATO and opportunities for establishing security in the Caucasus after 11 September

by Ayla Göl\*

In the aftermath of 11 September, world affairs in the early 21st century differ sharply from events at the end of the previous century. In the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union not only created opportunities for emerging newly independent states (NIS) in Eastern Europe, but also triggered regional ethno-nationalist conflicts in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Instability in these regions was regarded as a threat to European security.

The Balkans was the first arena to test how the European security environment could be protected. The Kosovo crisis was a turning point. This short war, casualty-free for NATO, showed that the alliance could implement new roles, such as crisis management, peacekeeping, peace-enforcing, rendering humanitarian assistance and aiding the transition process of NIS.

One can argue that NATO has gone through an unimaginable transformation since the end of the Cold War. Its primary mission of "collective defence against an adversary" has changed dramatically. NATO has become a catalyst for Euro-Atlantic security co-operation and socio-political transition of NIS in spite of scepticism about its role after the end of the Cold War. NATO has adopted a new approach to security based on the principle of co-operation with non-member states and other regional institutions. In addition, the benefits of NATO's activities extend throughout the Euro-Atlantic area, including the Caucasus.

Therefore, our departure point will be to define the Caucasus in geographical terms and then to scrutinise the elements of instability in order to understand what kind of new roles NATO can play in this region. The main concern of this article is to explore how far the Caucasian states have succeeded in developing regional co-operation and security while assessing the possibilities of NATO initiatives in the region after 11 September.

It will be argued that a proposed regional security system in the entire Caucasus region, which consists of the North Caucasus (Adygey, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karatchaev-Cherkessi, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan) and the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) is a politically-determined issue. Although the Caucasus can be geographically described as a single unit, it never historically existed as

a separate united political entity<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the establishment of any security system in the region has to be limited to the three NIS of the South Caucasus for the following reason: Russia will never easily accept the integration of the northern Caucasus, which constitutes the new southern rim of the Russian Federation (RF) after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, into a regional security co-operation with the independent states. After deciding on which Caucasus, the following section will scrutinise the elements of

**While the RF inherited dangerous conflict zones in the Caucasus, the NIS of the South Caucasus inherited important territorial disputes from the former Soviet Union.**

instability in the region, then the second section will examine the successful initiatives for regional co-operation while the new roles for NATO in Caucasus after 11 September will be dealt in the last section.

**Historical and political factors preventing regional stability**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union we can assess the role of three main issues – ethnic conflicts, the oil pipeline rivalry and the weak state syndrome – in preventing the NIS from developing regional stability. These issues will also help us to understand not only the reasons for the existence of non-regional/external actors in Caucasian politics, but also why the South Caucasus became the primary focus of Russian politics within the last decade

• Ethno-territorial disputes and security challenges

While the RF inherited dangerous conflict zones in the Caucasus, the NIS of the South Caucasus inherited important territorial disputes from the former Soviet Union. The conflict over mountainous Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan since 1988 and the secessionist movements of South Ossetians and Abkhazians in Georgia since 1992 have been threatening the security and stability of the entire region.

Although ceasefires were signed for South Ossetia in 1992, for Abkhazia in 1993 and for mountainous Karabakh in 1994 they only managed to freeze these conflicts by remaining ready to explode during any kind of security threat.<sup>2</sup> Until the 11 September attacks, foreign perceptions of the Caucasus was based on the possibility of “Balkanisation” due to the fragile state of these ceasefires in the region.

In short, the historical reasons for ethno-territorial disputes can be found in the legacy of the Soviet system. The Soviet form of political modernisation brought about the securitisation of ethnicity within a given territory. The titular nations of the former Soviet republics could not accept the loss of control over the territory which they considered as an integral part of their homeland. Although internal tensions in the other

five Caucasian republics – Adygey, Karatchaev-Tcherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, and Ingushetia – have not yet gained international attention. Nagorno-Karabagh and the war in Chechnya have been on the international agenda. This does not mean, however, that the others are less significant.<sup>3</sup> As long as the power of ethno-nationalism stays in the region, these frozen conflicts and regional instability will continue reinforcing one another.

In addition, competition over regional energy sources not only deepens these ethno-territorial disputes but also may cause interstate conflicts

• The rivalry over oil and gas resources

The importance of the region in global politics is on the rise due to Caspian oil and gas resources. Pipeline politics has enormously exacerbated regional instability despite the fact that most external agents have considered it as a source of political stability. The rivalry over the main energy pipeline among the regional states is probably the best example of “Great Game” legacy.<sup>4</sup> The ensuing struggle was described by some analysts as a new “Great Game” or a modern variant of the “Great Game”.<sup>5</sup> However, this leads to misperceptions of new developments and the role of new actors in the region. The conditions of the 19th century no longer apply to current affairs due to the following reasons: the key actors are different, this time the actors of the rivalry are related not only to states, but also to non-state organisations; and the geostrategic importance of the region after the 11 September attacks has made it clear that the region is no longer a subject of global competition between the great powers.

With the signing of the “Contract of the Century” on 20 September 1994, the leading Western and regional oil companies began to approach Azerbaijan with increased interest.<sup>6</sup> Since then the main question has remained the route of the oil pipeline, which has turned Russia and Turkey into rivals. While both sides saw the rivalry as a means of establishing regional power this rivalry escalated the tension between different secessionist movements and indirectly contributed to regional instability. For instance, one can argue that the Russian desire to control Azerbaijan’s energy sector development is one of the main reasons behind the failure to find a political solution to the Karabakh conflict. The same line of logic can be applied to the Russian-Chechen war in that Russia wanted to exercise leverage over the Caspian basin and in particular Azeri energy development through establishing its control over the Chechen Republic.<sup>7</sup>

**Pipeline politics has enormously exacerbated regional instability despite the fact that most external agents have considered it as a source of political stability.**

As long as both sides see the issue from the point of view of rivalry, none of the proposed routes will suit all the interested sides. A proposed Turkish route may mean not only Russia's being excluded from the regional energy developments, but also its alienation from political settlements. I would like to argue that it will be more advantageous after 11 September for all sides to consider the pipeline issue from the point of view of co-operation, not confrontation. The most crucial step is to build confidence and mutual trust among all the regional countries. Therefore, the most acceptable choice is the construction of multiple-pipeline networks that will allow the Caspian states to balance their external interests. Thus, diversification of transport routes will help to ensure stability in the region.<sup>8</sup> But ethno-territorial disputes and uncertainty about pipeline routes block the path to developing regional stability.

• The weak state syndrome of the NIS

Political stability and regional security require not only recognition of shared interests but also strong states, which can harmonise their policies. In a region like the South Caucasus, weakness also promotes instability. According to Ronald Suny, the three South Caucasian states are believed to suffer from the weak state syndrome. In general, weak states that cannot protect the peace internally are unreliable partners in international relations. They also encourage the imperial fantasies of more powerful neighbours.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the NIS inherited a bureaucratic bourgeoisie from the Soviet system, the Mafia, old-aged leaders, corrupt elites, and more importantly they suffer from a lack of modern statehood experience. Collectively, these features have bred instability and render these states more vulnerable to traditional or non-traditional security threats. The accepted values of the European liberal democracies are compatible with regional stability and predictability.

Although the NIS have made progress on the path of modern statehood, they still have a long way to go in the emergence of new political values. This is not an easy transition, which can occur within a decade. In this case there is a serious dilemma: how can we establish regional stability with such weak states?

However, making reductionism either empirically or theoretically is misleading. It would be too simplistic to argue that regional security cannot be promoted because of "weak state syndrome" or to suggest that regional conflicts are due to decisions made in Moscow. These factors are certainly important, but not explanatory enough to understand the security dilemma of the Caucasus. For instance, removing the Russian factor from the region does not stop "conflicts between Georgians and Abkhazians over such important issues as language and education, or between Azerbaijan and Armenia over territory on Nagorno-Karabakh".<sup>10</sup> Therefore, we must consider the inter-state or

inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus in their full complexity, including the role of political, military, economic and international factors

**Regional co-operation and security organisations**

There has been a search for establishing security among the regional states through different organisations and initiatives since the beginning of the 1990s. There have been three initiatives for establishing regional organisations. The first example is the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC) in 1992, then the Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova (GUAM) followed in 1997, and finally a proposal for a Stability Pact was put forward in 1999.

First, the BSEC was designed as a forum for regional co-operation in the Black Sea area after the collapse of the Soviet Union. On 25 June 1992, the BSEC was established by Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. Although the high expectations of its founding father – Turgut Ozal, former President of Turkey – did not materialise in the short term, the BSEC managed to develop economic co-operation and multilateral dialogue on common interests. After the creation of its Charter in 1998 the BSEC was transformed into a fully-fledged regional economic organisation by its eleven founder members on 1 May 1999. Within less than a decade it has contributed to the development of co-operation on important issues such as trade and transport, banking and finance, energy and electric networks, combating organised crime and simplification of cross-border and customs procedures in the member states. These developments are very encouraging and are setting the BSEC on its way to achieving its long-term goal, the integration of the region into the European structure.<sup>11</sup>

Second, in order to broaden international contacts with European institutions and to seek their security through Western security organisations – i.e. NATO – Georgia and Azerbaijan initiated GUAM in 1997.<sup>12</sup> Armenia was totally excluded from GUAM's co-operation schemes. The member states of GUAM are opposed to any further strengthening of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at the expense of their sovereignties. Only Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus managed to avoid the return of Russian troops to its territory. They view the CIS mainly as an instrument of Russian influence over the republics. In May 1998, GUAM announced its plan to create a common peacekeeping force "under the UN aegis", which aimed to avoid reliance upon Russian peacekeepers in the future, especially in Georgia. They believe that such a

**There have been three initiatives for establishing regional organisations: BSEC, GUAM and a Caucasus Stability Pact.**

peacekeeping force will promote regional security and guard the proposed export oil pipeline for Azeri oil. They attempt to act as a single entity in their relations with NATO and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative, which was launched in 1994.<sup>13</sup> They also hope to play a significant role in plans to revive the Silk Road from Europe to Asia. GUAM's attempts are little publicised but the group is actively promoting them.

**Turkey's membership of NATO makes it attractive for GUUAM, which aims to increase co-operation with NATO through the PfP programme.**

In 1999, when Uzbekistan became a member of the regional organisation, its name changed to GUUAM. The institutionalisation and expansion of GUAM is a significant event as it coincides with the renegotiations of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) of the CIS, which Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan refused to join despite Russian pressure. "In fact, the CIS has now for all practical purposes been divided into two camps: the Russian-led CST and the pro-Western GUUAM. This had practically neutralised whatever political influence the CIS has as an organisation".<sup>14</sup>

Without wanting to alienate Russia, Ankara has become a tacit supporter of GUUAM, which is simply in line with Turkey's own interests to strengthen co-operation among the regional states. Turkey's membership of NATO makes it attractive for GUUAM, which aims to increase co-operation with NATO through the PfP programme. Turkey can also provide human resources and experienced military personnel to the regional states. Thus, Turkey represents itself as an advocate of encouraging regional conflict resolution through the OSCE, as well as security co-operation through GUUAM.<sup>15</sup> Despite its encouraging initiative GUUAM did not make any contribution to the regional stability which lead the regional states to search for a Caucasian Stability Pact (CSP).

Third, the governments of Turkey and the Southern Caucasus have been making separate proposals for security arrangements such as a Stability Pact for the Caucasus since the end of 1999.<sup>16</sup> In their speeches to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Istanbul Summit, the Armenian president Robert Kocharian and the Azeri president Haydar Aliyev both advocated a South Caucasus security system that would complement the existing European security arrangements. The following initiative was that of President Demirel, who proposed the idea of a CSP on 16 January 2000 at a speech in Tbilisi, while meeting with President Shevardnadze of Georgia. The original structure of the pact, as suggested by Demirel, was "3+3+2" - three South Caucasian countries, Armenian, Azerbaijan and Georgia; plus their three big neighbours, Iran, Russia and Turkey; plus two non-regional actors, the European Union and the US.<sup>17</sup>

The EU has not been very active in the Caucasus. It was in 2000 when the EU decided to take a constructive strategic view of the region. The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels suggested a Caucasus G8 - the EU, Russia, America, Iran, Turkey, Armenian, Azerbaijan and Georgia - by revising its own suggestion of a CSP in May 2000. The CEPS paper argues that the CSP is in the interests of both Russia and the EU. It also urges the need for strategic co-operation between the EU, Russia and the US to seek solutions for the Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts.<sup>18</sup>

However, regional experts agree that any success of such a stability pact is unrealistic while regional conflicts - especially the war in Nagorno-Karabakh - remain unresolved. Although the political resolution of the Karabakh conflict is one of the most important conditions for establishing regional co-operation, international conditions might dictate their own rules to both sides for such a co-operation. More specifically, the EU and the US have reached the conclusion that security in the Euro-Atlantic area is considerably influenced by stability in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The flux of international events after the post-Cold War era has turned all traditional strategic concepts upside down. For instance, the first sign of the recent US-Russian co-operation revealed itself with the opening of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) pipeline in November 2001, which was the largest US (and the largest foreign) investment in Russia. This was a clear indication of a new strategic understanding of the Caspian energy issue as an area for potential co-operation between the US and Russia.<sup>19</sup> The 11 September attacks were the other unpredictable international factor in dictating even greater co-operation between the two states.

#### The new roles for NATO in the Caucasus after 11 September

This section will argue that the time is ripe for NATO to think systematically about its role in the Caucasus after 11 September. Although the Caucasus has been accepted as an area of instability by European states, the 11 September attacks paved the way for three new opportunities to foster stability and security in the region: Russian-American "pragmatic" co-operation, the new NATO-Russian Council; the US-led NATO initiatives in the South Caucasus.

- Russian-American "pragmatic" co-operation

Before 11 September, Moscow was strongly opposed to American security guaran-

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tees to Caspian regional actors or the enlargement of NATO to the Baltic and the Caucasus. When President Putin became the first world leader to speak with President Bush after the attacks it seemed very clear that 11 September was a turning point in Russian-US relations.<sup>20</sup> Russia has offered the Allies substantial and significant co-operation in the campaign against terrorism. The "pragmatic collaboration" between the US and Russia at the Moscow summit in May 2002 declared the end of not only the ideological rivalry of the Cold War, but also the geopolitical competition of the Great Game in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Although President Putin and President Bush met to sign a new treaty decreasing strategic nuclear arsenals by two thirds, their intentions were more than this. In addition to the non-nuclear agenda of the

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Moscow summit, they tested each other's willingness to co-operate on combating global terrorism, improving energy security, strengthening economic relations and promoting regional stability in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

They both are aware that such co-operation between the two arch-enemies is necessary against the threats and possibilities of terrorism in Russia's near abroad. As one senior US diplomat argues, working with Russia is now in America's larger strategic interest.<sup>21</sup> The US and Russia can collaborate and promote stability in Central Asia and the Caucasus, preventing more radical ideologies taking root in the region. Although it is a win-win situation for both sides now, the new rapprochement cannot fully escape from the burden of competing interests. However, a new era in US-Russian relations can be built on three common strategic interests.

The first strategic interest requires the end of the Great Game in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which had only increased the risk of confrontation. The two leaders stated that they would co-operate in order to find a solution to the issues of Karabakh and Abkhazia, which are the two main problems for regional stability. The second relates to the energy resources of the Caspian region. Putin and Bush stated that they would start a new constant dialogue on the transportation of energy resources to world markets. Russian and American firms will take the initiative together for materialising a multiple pipeline network, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. According to Bush administration sources, the White House is working on an initiative to lessen US oil dependence on the Middle East, in partnership with Russia.<sup>22</sup> The third strategy is based on the new roles for NATO to promote regional stability, which will be discussed in the last section. In the final analysis, one can argue that promoting regional security in the Caucasus has become the key to the new strategic American-Russian partnership.

• The new NATO-Russia Council

The real significance of Russian-US co-operation is what has come with it the NATO-Russia Council was suggested by the British prime minister, Tony Blair, in November 2001 to integrate Moscow into Western security institutions.<sup>23</sup> Even before 11 September, the NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council (PJC) was established by the Paris Agreement of 1997. According to this agreement, NATO would agree to a common position on any issues involving the Russians, and only afterward present it for discussion. This arrangement clearly left Moscow feeling isolated.<sup>24</sup> On 28 May, 2002, NATO's leaders signed a pact in Rome to set up a new NATO-Russia Council. The new deal gives Russia not only equal standing in decisions of common interest, ranging from counter-terrorism to peace keeping and arms control, but also "in helping Russia restructure its armed forces through a joint training centre, a striking example of willingness in Russia to engage with NATO even in sensitive areas".<sup>25</sup> Moreover, President Putin declared that the impact of global terrorism lead Russia to take an entirely new position on NATO enlargement.

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In the past five years, on three occasions Russia has indicated its unwillingness to accept NATO expansion in particular areas. Not surprisingly, Russian perceptions altered on each occasion according to the changing nature of circumstances. First, the Moscow government saw the extension of NATO membership to the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland as a source of fundamental opposition; but that was eventually set aside with the establishment of the NATO-Russian PJC. Second, NATO's involvement in the Kosovo conflict was deemed to be a fundamental turning-point in Russian-NATO security relations; but the NATO-Russian PJC was in operation by the autumn of 2000. Third, Russia objected fundamentally to President Bush's National Missile Defence system, over which there could be no negotiation; but Russia accepted compromise afterwards at the Genoa G8 summit in July 2001.<sup>26</sup> However, it would be misleading to regard these changes as fundamental shifts in Russian security policy. On the contrary, they indicate the adaptation of Russian policies to the changing nature of both national and international politics.

In a BBC interview, President Putin did not even exclude Russian membership of NATO some time in the future. While this may sound unlikely for the immediate future, we should not dismiss his statement as only campaign talk, but rather as a possible – and encouraging – sign to indicate a change in the Russian perception of NATO. President Putin also made it clear in another occasion that Russia would reconsider its

position with regard to such expansion if NATO became a political organisation (27) It is clear that while Russia would not itself seek to join NATO in the short term, it would not oppose the next round of NATO's enlargement at the Prague summit in November 2002 where some or all of the nine applicant states – Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Macedonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia – will be invited to join NATO.<sup>28</sup>

The process of widening membership of the alliance has become a fundamental pillar of post-Cold War NATO policy. In parallel with this development, continued NATO enlargement is regarded as an essential part of the Alliance's strategy for unifying and stabilising Europe. Therefore, as a consequence of its changing policies, even before the 11 September attacks the Alliance had been seeking to increase co-operation with the Central European Countries, Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasus

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• NATO and the NIS of the South Caucasus

In 1994, the three South Caucasian states signed up to the PfP to start concrete co-operation with NATO. PfP was set up to develop individual programmes of practical co-operation between NATO and partner countries in order to strengthen the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NAAC), which was created as a forum to build up mutual trust between NATO allies and former Warsaw Pact countries in December 1991.

In parallel with these developments, the South Caucasian states did not hesitate to become members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which replaced the NAAC in 1997. The EAPC was established not only as a multilateral forum to promote transparency and mutual confidence between partner countries and NATO members, but also as the political framework of PfP.<sup>29</sup>

Given the fact that the basic aims of PfP are to promote transparency in national defence planning and military budgeting as well as the democratic control of armed forces Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have shown an interest in developing Individual Partnership Programmes within the framework of PfP according to each country's specific interests and needs. In spite of their financial constraints, each of them has established a diplomatic mission at NATO headquarters, and assigned an officer to the Alliance's Partnership Co-ordination Cell.<sup>30</sup>

The main institution for NATO's efforts to promote transparency and confidence-building with the NIS has been the EAPC Ad Hoc Working Group on Prospects for Regional Co-operation in the Caucasus. This working group identified certain priority

areas for practical regional co-operation such as defence-economics issues, civil-emergency planning, scientific and environmental collaboration, civil emergency planning and information activities.<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the US in September 2001, it was decided that increased attention would be given to measures to combat international terrorism. On 12 September, the day after the attacks, the EAPC issued a strong statement to express its solidarity with the people of the US, pledging to undertake all measures to combat the scourge of terrorism.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the EAPC's emphasis on terrorism was also in the interest of the South Caucasian states. They were aware that regional co-operation issues such as border control and energy security in the Caucasus need intensified exchanges on terrorism. Increased US interest in regional security after the 11 September attacks also played a crucial role in drawing all three South Caucasian states closer to the US. The first consequence of the attacks for Caucasian politics was seen in President Bush's decision to a waiver of the controversial Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act in January 2002. This section was passed by the US Congress in 1992 at the height of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. It not only blocked the US government's technical aid to Azerbaijan, but also forbade military assistance to Armenia. Therefore, the waiving of Section 907 has opened up new possibilities for bilateral programmes between the US, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The first of these bilateral programmes was the opening of the US-Armenian de-mining centre, where sixty-five people would be trained in the destruction and de-activation of mines. It is believed that the de-mining programme was intended not only to make dangerous areas safe and to collaborate on information about minefields but also to remove tension in the border zone between Armenian and Azerbaijan.<sup>33</sup>

The second consequence of the terrorist attacks in regional politics is the Armenian-US military co-operation that would have been unthinkable before 11 September. The continuing after-effects of the "war on terrorism" brought Armenia and the US closer together when Armenian Defence Minister Serzh Sarkisian signed a joint communiqué with the Americans on military co-operation between the two countries at the Pentagon on 21 March 2002. Sarkisian argued that by developing collaboration with the US in the defence field, the Yerevan government was not setting out to replace the Russian military presence in Armenia with the US presence, but to complement it. In this new "complementary policy", Armenia regards the accommodation of both Russia and the US in Armenian defence policies as a means of enhancing regional stability.

**...the Yerevan government was not setting out to replace the Russian military presence in Armenia with the US presence, but to complement it.**



The consequent US-led war on terrorism after 11 September also influenced Georgian policies and its relations with the US. On 17 March, the first US military advisers arrived in Tbilisi as part of a mission to train and equip Georgian special forces to deal with suspected Al-Qaeda militants in the Pankisi region. This new Georgian-US military co-operation has provoked fears in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that the Tbilisi government might be tempted to move against them. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have unilaterally declared their independence from Georgia. But as relations between Tbilisi and Moscow have deteriorated over the past few months, the leaders of both self-proclaimed republics have also recently publicly discussed another option, unification with Russia.

Although Moscow condemned the American military deployment in Georgia in principle, it chose to warn the Tbilisi government. The Russian parliament adopted a resolution, which had threatened to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia if Georgia began to act more aggressively towards these republics.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, these developments can be interpreted as a clear example of Russian-American pragmatic co-operation in the Caucasus. The US relations with the three NIS show that the US

existence in the region is not only complementing the Russian presence, but that it is also limited to the war on terrorism.

From the perspective of the South Caucasian states, these close relations with the US will help their integration into Western military structures. In particular, Azerbaijan and Georgia have both expressed the idea of becoming NATO members. While they perceived NATO as having a role in protecting the region's energy infrastructure and routes before 11 September, the Alliance's perception of the region was different and its expectations increased due to its strategic importance. For instance, the US-led NATO has been urging Georgia to press ahead for early NATO membership after 11 September. However, President Shevardnadze declared that Georgia was unlikely even to make its 2005 target date for membership.<sup>35</sup> Both President Shevardnadze and President Aliyev know perfectly well that the process will take a long time before either Georgia or Azerbaijan can meet the NATO criteria for membership. But this fact should not prevent us from discussing the possibilities of future developments. A decade ago no one could imagine that Armenia would host the NATO regional military exercises in 2003 within the PIP Programme.<sup>36</sup>

These all represent the unpredictable nature of international politics. The unthinkable US presence in the South Caucasus is a result of not only its improving relations

between Moscow and Washington but also the Russian changing perception of NATO.

The South Caucasian states have long shown an interest in co-operating with NATO on a range of issues, including scientific collaboration and civil emergency planning. After 11 September, they included military co-operation in their US-led relations with NATO. This development is the main reason for the optimistic view that NATO will contribute to the solving of regional conflicts and helping to stabilise the region. In the case of intensifying existing conflicts requiring NATO involvement in crisis management must be prudent. If the Alliance becomes more active it should not claim a leading role in facilitating the peace processes in the region. Most importantly, through its PIP and EAPC programmes NATO must support the efforts of regional institutions, such as GUUAM and the Caucasian Stability Pact. Moreover, NATO's role in the region through its PIP initiatives have to be increased in harmony with other European organisations, such as the European Union, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the OSCE, as well as with international institutions, such as the UN.

#### Concluding remarks

It has been argued that the Caucasus has been accepted as an area of instability due to ethnic conflicts, the oil pipeline rivalry, and the weak state syndrome until the 11 September attacks. These issues have been preventing the NIS of the South Caucasus from developing regional security despite the (un)successful examples of regional co-operation such as the BSEC, GUUAM, and the CSP. The 11 September attacks showed that NATO will remain the pivotal organisation in the shaping of Euro-Atlantic security, which will depend on the development of the overall security structure not only in the Balkans but also in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Therefore, NATO has to think systematically about its role in promoting regional security on two levels. On the one hand, the EAPC must develop formal links with other European organisations in order to play a role as a facilitator of regional co-operation. On the other hand, the increasing positive relations between Russia and NATO must continue. Both the US and NATO must keep bearing in mind that a crisis-ridden Russia and an unstable Caucasus will severely damage the development of all Euro-Atlantic security.

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## Russia's southern regions: threats and opportunities

by Robert Ortung\*

Instability in Russia's southern regions poses a threat to the continuation of the country's overall political and economic reform, and to regional stability in Central Eurasia. These regions, which already possess Russia's most fragile local economies, face a variety of problems emanating from the weak and failing states to their immediate south. Most visibly, there is the threat of terrorism, an increasing flow of illegal narcotics from producers in Afghanistan, an influx of contraband goods that wipe out Russian jobs, and illegal immigration. With few resources and extensive corruption among key officials, Russia's southern regions are poorly equipped to deal with these problems. Developing mutually beneficial trade links between Russia's southern regions and its neighbours in Central Asia, China, and Mongolia can mitigate instability and economic stagnation in this region, help to rebuild regional economies, generate income, and better enable governments to provide security and basic human services to their people. The West can support these developments as well as help combat organised crime, target corruption, and improve border security.

### Key recommendations

- Russia should improve border guard training, target corruption and aim to reduce the level of smuggled Chinese goods entering its southern regions. Narcotics, contraband, and people flow freely into Russia as a result of porous borders and untrained or corrupt border guards. The cash-strapped population in this zone has little choice but to purchase contraband or engage in the lucrative drug trade. Russia should pursue reforms and targeted infrastructure projects to facilitate legal trade flows in co-operation with its neighbours.
- American and European policymakers should supplement their security-related engagement with assistance strategies to boost regional economic development. Without dramatic improvements in the regional economic situation, the circumstances that produced the Taliban in Afghanistan are likely to appear elsewhere in Central Eurasia. Security and stability will only flow from secure borders, legal cross-border trade and regional political and economic development.
- Central Eurasian leaders should improve trade linkages with Russia's southern regions and implement economic reforms that approximate European standards. The