

**IDENTITY CRISIS:
SECURITY IN THE POST-SOVIET CAUCASUS**

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INTRODUCTION

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) describes the interdependency of security as it relates to states in close proximity to each other.¹ The states that constituted the Soviet Union are currently constructed as a security complex that is durable, but not permanent.² Geography, history, identity, and power relationships all combine to create a series of relationships among and between these states that formulates the security dynamic in the region. Where RSCT describes the security relationship as emanating from the military, political, societal, economic, and environmental, this paper will focus on the first three. This is due to the fact that these sectors are the most relevant for studying security interactions over a geographically limited region. Environmental and economic sectors of security are gaining in importance and are worthy of serious study, but there is a question as to the regional nature of threats emanating from them. Immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, four distinct subcomplexes formed within the larger region: Baltic, Western CIS states, Caucasus, and Central Asia. Since the end of the Cold War and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the security environment in this complex has changed in many ways.

Only three of these subcomplexes can truly be said to remain within the security complex as originally constituted. With its ascension to NATO and the EU, the Baltic States have joined the European security complex. This does not reduce their security relationship with the former Soviet states, but it recasts the relationship as one more wholly dependent on the West. The western CIS states are involved in a tug of war with Europe and Russia over which will have more sway in those states policies and future.³ The Caucasus subcomplex has also changed as these states have been involved in armed conflict and serious revaluations of their standing within the region. Central Asia, like

¹ Buzan et al 2003: pg 13

² Buzan et al 2003: pg 16

³ Brown 1997: pg 213

the Caucasus has seen a great deal of overlay as the United States, China, and Europe have tried to expand their influence at the expense of Russia.⁴

This paper will display that RSCT is relevant to understanding regional security, most specifically in the region of the Caucasus. This paper will begin by examining the history of conflicts in the Caucasus from 1991 until 2008 focusing on four specific conflicts. Two of these are internal and two are external. The two internal conflicts are the Georgian Civil War and the conflict in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation. The two external conflicts are the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and the Armenian-Azerbaijan War. The next phase of the paper will introduce the theory behind RCST and compares it with two other major security themed theories, neorealism and constructivism. Where RSCT understands security as being derived from both neorealist and constructivist assumptions, the bulk of the derivation is from structural and power concerns. This paper will alter the ratio of assumptions more conclusively towards the constructivist research program retaining the understanding that some states still operate primarily through the neorealist lens. The paper will then critically analyze the four conflicts through the lens of RCST. The analysis will focus on how the conflicts began and why they concluded in the manners that they did. The paper will conclude with a summation of the findings and a possible look at how the region is shaping up for the future.

⁴ Buzan et al 2003: pg 432

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Structure of the Soviet Union

The main driver of events in the Caucasus was the history of the region during the Soviet period. The Soviets ruled over the many provinces under their control on the basis of ethnofederalism.⁵ Ethnofederalism is the principle of granting the predominant ethnic group in a given region the dominant power status in a governed area.⁶ This may seem commonsensical but this was opposed to the methodology that the British used to run their empire. The British Empire was ruled by empowering local minorities and granting them specific privileges.⁷ This enhanced the minority's loyalty to the central authority and committed them to holding power against the majority.⁸ Soviet ethnofederalism was successful in marginalizing minorities and in creating majorities in areas that were largely autonomous from Moscow. This allowed Moscow to devolve some authority and created opportunities for local leaders to exert extensive control. This was of course contingent on the idea that they were still beholden to Moscow and towed the party line.⁹

The structure of the Soviet Union was not as centralized as many outsiders assumed at first glance. The Soviet Union's largest political unit was the Union Republic. There were fifteen Union Republics ranging from Armenia and Georgia to Russia and Ukraine. These were considered sovereign states within the Soviet system with their own constitutions and right to secede from the USSR.¹⁰ Within these Union Republics were Autonomous Republics or ASSRs. These were separate regions within the Union Republics that enjoyed a great deal of autonomy and were usually governed by a distinct ethnic group.¹¹ While this group was a majority within its ASSR, it was a minority within

⁵ Laruelle 2007: pg 33

⁶ Ibid 34

⁷ Ibid 35-36

⁸ Ibid 36

⁹ Ibid 41

¹⁰ Service 2002: pg 165

¹¹ Ibid 177

the Union Republic. These ASSRs did not enjoy the right of secession. This structure allowed Moscow to enjoy a certain deal of influence in the Union Republics by spreading privileges in the ASSRs. An autonomous oblast or AO was a smaller political division that was similar to an ASSR except it was smaller and devised as a tool of political control rather than based upon the prevailing ethnicity of a given population.¹²

The manner in which the Soviet Union divided up the Caucasus was very important for its subsequent dissolution. Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia were Union Republics, enjoying all the privileges that that distinction carried with it. The other regions involved in post-Soviet violence, Chechnya and Abkhazia were ASSRs while South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh were AOs. These distinctions will be increasingly relevant for the formulation of identities endemic to cultural awareness and nationalist sentiments.

The history of the areas involved in the conflicts is important for understanding how the conflicts began. Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Chechnya had distinct national histories and these were major drivers for the events that would follow. South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh were also operating under national or collective consciousness. This reality will be clear and important.

GEORGIA

Georgia existed as a province of the Russian empire beginning with its conquest in 1800.¹³ The Georgian people were predominantly Orthodox Christians, but believed themselves to be of an ancient line of Christianity dating back to the Apostles.¹⁴ This distinctiveness allowed them to retain much of their national character in the face of Imperial policy and Russification. When the Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war spread chaos throughout the Empire, Georgia declared its independence.¹⁵ This national revival was short lived as Britain occupied the region as a means to exert

¹² King 2008: pg 108

¹³ Ibid 116

¹⁴ Zurcher 2007: pg 199

¹⁵ Ibid 201

pressure on the oil rich regions around Baku from 1918 to 1920. In early 1921 the Red Army conquered Georgia and installed a centralized communist government. Instability reigned for four years and a final bloody coup ended sizable Georgian resistance in 1924. The Georgian Republic was incorporated into the Soviet Union and soon became a model republic.¹⁶

The nationalist elements in Georgia were localized and most groups were content to exist within the Soviet system as it had enriched the region in comparison to the rest of the USSR. It was not until the beginnings of glasnost and perestroika¹⁷ that members of the Georgian intelligentsia began to openly call for a Georgia that was independent of Moscow.¹⁸ When these increasingly nationalistic elements in Georgia emerged, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia began to react.¹⁹

The Georgian Civil Wars began in November 1989 and they were made up by three distinct conflicts.²⁰ From November 1989 to June 1992, the separatist region of South Ossetia fought for autonomy from Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. An internal power struggle fought between warring factions in the Georgian government itself was conducted from December 1991 to November 1993. The final conflict was between Tbilisi and the separatist region of Abkhazia that ran from August 1992 until September 1993. These three conflicts were distinct but they did feed off of each other and they were interrelated insomuch as the Georgian population was the main combatant. This makes them related if not contingent.²¹

The main driver of events was Georgian domestic politics. The major Georgian factions in the late 1980s were nationalist or extreme nationalist. The nationalist groups

¹⁶ King 2008: pg 207

¹⁷ Glasnost was the opening up of the Soviet society and the encouragement to criticism of the governing structures in order to eliminate inefficiencies. Perestroika was the restructuring of the Soviet economy to introduce market reforms and better emulate Western economic performance.

¹⁸ King 2008: pg 212

¹⁹ Zurcher 2007: pg 201

²⁰ Ibid 43

²¹ Ibid 44

were organized around a former Soviet dissident named Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the extreme nationalists were heavily divided.²² He was able to organize a protest of 20,000 Georgians in Tbilisi in November 1988 that was seen as the first real challenge to Soviet authority in Georgia.²³ When the Abkhaz elite began to fear the growing Georgian nationalism, a similar protest was scheduled in the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi. This prompted the besieged Georgian Communist Party to request Soviet troops to control the crowds. On April 9, 1989, the protest went ahead as scheduled but violence soon erupted and 16 civilians were killed and hundreds were wounded by the Red Army.²⁴ This destroyed any legitimacy that the Georgian or Soviet governments had among the majority of the people. From that moment on the nationalist elements not only controlled the public discourse but they themselves became more radicalized.²⁵ Paramilitary groups formed around the idea of protecting civilians from Soviet depredations. The largest and most organized was the Mkhedrioni.²⁶

The Soviets responded by strengthening Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments and by replacing Georgian Communist officials.²⁷ This backfired because the replacements caved in to the demands of the nationalists and paramilitaries. Georgian was made the language of law and public records and imprisoned dissidents were freed. The Soviet authorities were paralyzed and for all intents and purposes exercised no more authority in Georgia. In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the nationalistic fervor of the Georgians threatened their ways of life and the privileges they enjoyed under the Soviet system. They petitioned the Soviet Union to be allowed to either join the USSR as independent Union Republics or to join the Russian Union Republic.²⁸ Both proposals were rejected. In January 1991, South Ossetia passed a law making

²² Zurcher 2007: pg 36

²³ Ibid 36

²⁴ Ibid 37

²⁵ Ibid 38

²⁶ King 2008: pg 112

²⁷ Zurcher 2007: pg 42

²⁸ King 2008: pg 114

Ossetian the language within the republic. This gave rise to fears within Georgia that South Ossetia was trying to secede and would disenfranchise the large number of Georgians that lived in South Ossetia. Gamsakhurdia was the most popular Georgian politician at the time and he used the South Ossetian conflict as a way to ramp up nationalist tensions. He was also in a conflict with Tengiz Kitovani, another nationalist leader, for control of the Georgian political system. Gamsakhurdia controlled the powerful Mkhedrioni and he used it to ratchet up tensions and control Tbilisi.²⁹ As South Ossetians began to persecute Georgians within its borders, Georgians began to evacuate the republic. In January 1991, Gamsakhurdia ordered the Mkhedrioni and other affiliated paramilitary groups to blockade Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital. The disparate paramilitary groups were organized into the Georgian National Guard and they numbered around 5,000. After an initially successful campaign, Gamsakhurdia was elected President of Georgia in April of 1991. However, poor training, equipment and strategy resulted in the force falling back into Georgia proper.³⁰

The National Guard proved capable of little else but looting and South Ossetia was not wealthy enough to incite its members to risk another assault. In the intervening months the Ossetians had organized themselves into effective defensive militias. In January 1992, when the National Guard was unable or unwilling to advance, Gamsakhurdia was overthrown in a military coup. The new Georgian leader, Eduard Shevardnadze, began negotiations and reinvaded South Ossetia.³¹ This time Tskhinvali was destroyed and a cease-fire was reached between the South Ossetians and Georgians. A Russian peacekeeping force was established in South Ossetia and the region enjoyed de facto independence from Tbilisi although Shevardnadze was seen as a Georgian hero for ending the fighting with some honor.³²

While this was ongoing, Georgia was engaged in a civil war, of which Gamsakhurdia's coup was only one part. While the Ossetian militias were holding off the

²⁹ King 2008: pg 115

³⁰ Zurcher 2007: pg 43

³¹ Ibid 46

³² Ibid 46

Georgian forces, Kitovani withdrew his military forces from the National Guard and overthrew Gamsakhurdia. Georgia was run by the Military Council, a group of independent paramilitary leaders that asked Eduard Shevardnadze to return from Moscow to lead Georgia.³³ He was able to leverage his popularity and end the South Ossetian war, but soon thereafter conflict began in Abkhazia.

After the Georgian declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in April of 1991, a power sharing agreement was implemented in Abkhazia that allotted representatives to the percentage of population.³⁴ By July 1992, however, the Abkhazian parliament saw an opportunity to exploit the Georgian power struggles to assert its own national claims. In August 1992, several Georgian ministers were kidnapped and held hostage in exchange for modifications to the power sharing agreement. The troops released from the South Ossetian conflict were transferred to the west and they entered Abkhazia. Abkhazia did not expect the response to be as vigorous as it was and the government fell back and was besieged. Shevardnadze could not retain power if he allowed a second region of Georgia to secede.³⁵ As the months dragged on, however, neither side was advancing. Russian forces and intelligence were made available to Abkhazia in early 1993. By September of 1993, Georgian military forces were repelled from Abkhazia and a Russian peacekeeping force was implemented.³⁶

Even with the twin defeats, Shevardnadze was able to claim that Georgia had surrendered with honor over South Ossetia and that it had taken the Russian Army to prevail in Abkhazia. He was elected as Georgia's first legitimate President in November of 1992 and Georgia continued down the democratic road.³⁷ From 1992 to 2008, Georgia withstood revolution and democratic change while maintaining vigilance over the Russian peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The nationalist elements that broke Georgia free from the Soviet Union were often unhappy with

³³ Zurcher 2007:pg 117

³⁴ King 2008: pg 226

³⁵ Zurcher 2007: pg 49

³⁶ King 2008: pg 228

³⁷ Cornell et al 2009: pg 45

Eduard Shevardnadze for his perceived closeness to Moscow. He had been Foreign Minister of the USSR in the 1980s and he maintained a warm relationship with some of the powerbrokers in the Kremlin. This closeness and his creeping autocratic tendencies brought about the Rose Revolution in 2004.³⁸

A fraudulent parliamentary election in 2003 coupled with allegations of a deal with Russia to exert influence throughout the Caucasus resulted in a new group of Georgian politicians seizing power in early 2004. The leader was Mikhail Saakashvili, a young, Western educated reform minded lawyer that won election in an extraordinary presidential election with 96% of the vote.³⁹ This created a great deal of enthusiasm in Georgia as Saakashvili promised accountability, democracy and a Western oriented foreign policy. These events were hailed in Europe and the United States as signs of democratization and were denigrated in Russia as signs of Western influence in the internal affairs of Georgia. Saakashvili immediately began gaining favor with the West and the Georgian people by taking Georgia out of the Russian dominated Commonwealth of Independent States and announcing his intention to join both NATO and the European Union.⁴⁰

Russian leaders from Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev began to view Georgia as a Western pawn designed to curtail Russian influence in the region. They immediately strengthened the peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In a reciprocal fashion, Saakashvili began to agitate for these two republics to revert to Georgian control. He postured Georgian forces outside the two separatist areas. In August 2008, Georgian forces entered South Ossetia and were immediately thrown back by combined Russian Army forces and Ossetian militias.⁴¹ The Russian Army also advanced from Abkhazia and invaded Georgia proper. The war was over in five days and Georgia was devastated, both physically and psychically. Russian peacekeepers remain

³⁸ Ibid 35

³⁹ Ibid 92-94

⁴⁰ Ibid 101

⁴¹ Ibid 41

in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and both republics have declared their international independence as sovereign states.⁴²

CHECHNYA

The Chechen Republic in the Russian Federation devolved into violence in December 1994.⁴³ Chechnya declared its independence from Russia in November 1991 and had been fairly autonomous since that time. In the intervening three years, Moscow did not acknowledge Chechen political independence due to the focus on the fight over the preservation of central authority in the capital itself. It was not until Russian President Boris Yeltsin won his political and legal battles over the Duma that he was able to turn his attention to the restive southern Republic of Chechnya. The Russian Federation was involved in a near civil war from the end of the Soviet Union until 1994 over the issue of Presidential supremacy over the legislature.

Yeltsin believed that a swift and successful campaign against the secessionists in Chechnya would enhance his reputation as a fighter for the Russian people.⁴⁴ The Chechens were being led by Jokhar Dudaev, a former Soviet Air Force general that returned to Chechnya in the political chaos of the USSR's dissolution.⁴⁵ He forced the abdication of a pro-Moscow ruler in October 1991 and "won election" in a flawed process.⁴⁶ He nonetheless had the backing of most Chechens and ruled the Republic through the initial conflict with Russia. Russia invaded Chechnya in December 1994 with a mostly conscript infantry force and a belief that the war would be quick and painless. It proved to be neither. The Russian Army was a shadow of itself and was incapable of coordinated and sophisticated operations.⁴⁷ It was initially successful in

⁴² This independence is only recognized by Russia, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The two republics are currently heavily integrated with the Russian Federation for everything including economics, infrastructure and military support.

⁴³ Zurcher 2007: pg 176

⁴⁴ Shevtsova 2004: pg 301

⁴⁵ Zurcher 2007: pg 179

⁴⁶ Shevtsova 2004: pg 302

⁴⁷ Ibid 303

taking the capital of Grozny but only after a sustained aerial bombardment that destroyed the city and killed thousands of civilians.

Fighting stagnated from early 1995 until that June when a raid was launched into the neighboring Russian Republic of Dagestan.⁴⁸ Chechen fighters under the famed commander Shamil Basayev seized a hospital and demanded the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya. The failed Russian attempt to retake the hospital killed dozens of hostages and civilians while the Chechens escaped.⁴⁹ A year later, a small force of around 2,500 Chechens routed a Russian force of 10,000 in Grozny and seized the city.⁵⁰ Soon thereafter, a negotiated cease-fire took place that resulted in a tenuous power-sharing agreement between Chechens and Russians starting in August 1996. The reality was that the Russians soon had almost no armed presence in Chechnya and were at the mercy of the local forces.

In the next few years, Chechnya was ruled by various former field commanders and military strongmen. The region soon devolved into a worse warzone than during the Russian occupation with local paramilitaries running rampant throughout the countryside, fueled by criminal activities and the looting of the civilian populace. With the Russians gone, there was nothing to rally the disparate Chechen groups together. During the war, large amounts of aid and weaponry had been supplied by Islamic missionaries from all over the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia. The Saudis were very impressed with those Chechens that most adhered to the strict Wahhabi sect of Islam practiced in the Kingdom and soon powerful leaders were advocating the Islamization of Chechnya. Chechen society was predominantly Sunni Islam, but a very moderate strain infused with Sufi and local Caucasian elements.⁵¹ The Wahhabis tried to purge these elements from Chechen society and introduce Sharia law. This further divided Chechen society as secularists and Islamists vied for political and military control. This confrontation continued for three years.

⁴⁸ King 2008: pg 228

⁴⁹ Colton 2008: pg 231

⁵⁰ Shevtsova 2004: pg 304

⁵¹ Ibid 305

In the summer of 1999, Russian troops returned. During the intervening three years, attacks from Chechnya had spread to neighboring republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia as well as throughout Russia and Moscow.⁵² The newly installed Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin invaded Chechnya with a massive force and was quick to exploit the divisions within Chechen society. He empowered local military forces to seize power and he granted them future privileges in a Russian run Chechnya. He was ruthless and up front about his objectives. He framed the war in Chechnya not as a war to preserve the territory of Russia but as a fight against Islamic extremism.⁵³ Two years before the September 11 terrorist attacks this seems quite prescient. Putin's actions seemed validated after these attacks and the war in Chechnya soon became just another battlefield in the Global War on Terrorism. Chechnya is now totally controlled by elements loyal to Moscow but violence is still endemic. Large Russian forces are now not necessary in Chechnya as the work has been outsourced to Chechen military forces loyal to Moscow. This has allowed Russia to declare victory in Chechnya even though large terrorist attacks have occurred in 2002, 2004, 2007, 2009 and 2010.

ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh from 1988 to 1994. Nagorno-Karabakh was an Autonomous Oblast in the Azerbaijani SSR that was 77% Armenian and 22% Azerbaijani.⁵⁴ Armenians had long agitated for Karabakh to be a part of the Armenian SSR but for reasons lost to history when the Caucasus was being parceled up in the early 1920s by the Bolsheviks, they placed this tiny enclave in Azerbaijani control.⁵⁵ For seventy years, Armenians in Armenia, in the Soviet Union and in the Diaspora advocated for Karabakh autonomy or union with Armenia. With perestroika in the mid-1980s, Armenian intellectuals openly called for a

⁵² Colton 2008: pg 232

⁵³ Shevtsova 2004: pg 234

⁵⁴ De Waal 2004: pg 19

⁵⁵ Ibid 34

reversal of Soviet policy in Karabakh and challenged the legitimacy of the legal status of the region.⁵⁶

A demonstration was carried out in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital to protest the treatment of Karabakh Armenians in February 1988. The fear of Armenians in Karabakh was the lack of national rights.⁵⁷ As an Autonomous Oblast, Nagorno-Karabakh was not entitled to linguistic or educational freedoms and the Armenian majority felt oppressed by the Azerbaijani authorities. The protest soon turned violent as Soviet troops and Azerbaijani Interior Ministry forces broke up the protest. Sixteen Armenians were killed and hundreds wounded. This event catalyzed the Armenian population in both Karabakh and Armenia. In July 1988, the local soviet in Karabakh petitioned Moscow for either union with Armenia or direct control from Moscow. Moscow, however, denied these requests.⁵⁸

The refusal of both Moscow and Baku to accept Armenian demands resulted in the formation of Armenian militias in Nagorno-Karabakh. These militias served first as a visible sign of sovereignty and as a bulwark against Azerbaijani coercion of nationalists in the region.⁵⁹ In response, Azerbaijani militias were formed. This marked the first phase of the conflict as small scale violence broke out between ethnic militias in the disputed territory.

This lasted until January 1990 when Soviet troops were sent in force to quell all violence in Nagorno-Karabakh. This marked the second phase of the conflict. Even though the Soviets declared all militias illegitimate, they were especially heavy-handed on the Armenian militants because they were seen as the aggressors and as the group seeking special rights.⁶⁰ The Armenian militias continued attacking Azerbaijani targets but they also transitioned to attacking Soviet forces. The Armenians attacked targets of opportunity such as barracks and supply lines and ultimately caused several hundred

⁵⁶ Ibid 36

⁵⁷ King 2008: pg 330

⁵⁸ De Waal 2004: pg 42

⁵⁹ Ibid 45

⁶⁰ Ibid 48

casualties to the Red Army. The impotence of the huge military force from the Soviet Union in response to these threats only served to bolster the Armenians and it also pushed the Azerbaijanis to seek their own solutions to security.⁶¹

In April 1991, the Soviets began Operation Koltso with the Azerbaijani militias.⁶² This program was a systemic ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh of Armenians and their resettlement in Armenia. The Red Army occupied Armenian towns, expelled the inhabitants and brought in Azerbaijani families displaced by previous attacks or from Azerbaijan itself. This displayed not only to the Karabakh Armenians but also to the Armenian SSR that the Soviets favored the Azerbaijanis in the conflict. It also gave the Azerbaijanis a false sense of security about the future.

In August 1991, the Soviet Union essentially ceded authority to the region to the Union Republics making them de facto sovereign states. This transformed the conflict from an internal Soviet one into an interstate conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is the third and final phase of the conflict. From August 1991 to February 1992, not much changed on the ground. The situation resembled the first phase of fighting with local militias competing for towns and villages in Karabakh. But during this time, both Armenia and Azerbaijan were mobilizing their societies and institutions for war. Leftover Soviet hardware was used to create national armies and politicians jockeyed for positions in newly created states. Armenia was much more successful in creating the institutions of government and it was the first to send significant forces to the combat zone. Azerbaijan struggled for many months to create the national projects necessary to prevail in the fight.⁶³

In February 1992, Armenia sent thousands of troops into Nagorno-Karabakh and essentially reversed Operation Kolsto engineered by the Soviets.⁶⁴ Large scale ethnic violence, rapes and crimes against humanity were conducted on both sides but due to the disparity in forces in the region, the Armenians were engaging in far more. The

⁶¹ Zurcher 2007: pg 225

⁶² Ibid 227

⁶³ Ibid 231

⁶⁴ De Waal 2004: pg 141

Azerbaijani government was never as committed to prosecuting the war as the Armenians. The war became a political football for politicians in Baku and when a leader was unsuccessful in some aspect of the Karabakh campaign he was overthrown, sometimes violently. The Azerbaijani people were also not as engaged by the topic of the war. In contrast, Armenia created state institutions with the express purpose of conducting and winning the war.⁶⁵ The war served to unify and strengthen the Armenian nation and state. The outpouring of support was massive and as much as 90% of Karabakh's male population was involved in some aspect of the fighting.⁶⁶

This disparity in commitment ensured an Armenian victory. By May 1994, a ceasefire was signed through the Commonwealth of Independent States in Bishkek that ended the fighting. Armenia controlled Nagorno-Karabakh as well as 16% of Azerbaijani territory as a buffer against future attacks. The situation continues in this form to this day.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War.⁶⁷ The international security structure from 1945 to 1991 was defined by the competition between the Soviet Union and United States. This relationship created a bipolar distribution of power in the world and was unprecedented in human history.⁶⁸ Never before had only two powers decided the international security agenda and forced every other state to choose an alliance. This alliance would define each states' economic, political and military fortunes. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Buzan and Waever predicted that the international security agenda would revert to older norms.⁶⁹ This would mean a return to a regionally based

⁶⁵ De Waal 2004: pg 233

⁶⁶ Ibid 242

⁶⁷ Buzan et al 2003: pg 2

⁶⁸ Buzan et al 1997: pg 16

⁶⁹ Buzan et al 2003: pg 6

understanding of security. The distinction between the Cold War and other international security structures was the global nature of the competition. There was not a single continent or region that was not touched by the pervasive nature of the superpower rivalry. In contrast, the post-Cold War environment was to be characterized by the localization of rivalry and conflict. This would not reduce the influence of great powers on regional actors but the overriding concern of regional actors would be the local environment.⁷⁰

RSCT divides the world into regions or security complexes, roughly corresponding with the continents. They include Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Middle East to include North Africa and Iran, South Asia, East Asia, Africa and South America. Each of these regions is further divided into subcomplexes that better reflect the real security situation in the larger areas.⁷¹ The reason each region is whittled down into smaller components is that RSCT states that security relationships are most important when they are geographically concentrated. This is at odds with Cold War security which was based on the premise that state security was based on the relationship with the preeminent superpower regardless of geography.⁷² This explains the behavior of states such as Somalia, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Egypt. These states understood that the configuration of the international system behooved them to base their security concerns on superpower relationships rather than the immediate region they inhabited.

This brings us to an important element of RSCT: regional structure. The regions and subregions of the world can be divided into three distinct categories. The first and most volatile is the conflict formation category.⁷³ The security in these regions is constructed in crude neorealist predictions about balance of power and patterns of enmity. The reasons for these patterns may be societal, military or historical but they are real. States and actors in these regions view each other as adversaries in which the use of

⁷⁰ Buzan et al 2003: pg 25

⁷¹ Buzan et al 2003 pg 33

⁷² Buzan et al 1997: pg 53

⁷³ Buzan et al 2003: pg 63

force is very possible in order to resolve political problems. The Middle East represents this category.

The second category is conflict resolution.⁷⁴ This is a lessening of tension between actors from the intense security competition of a conflict formation scenario. The actors in this category still view each other with suspicion but more as rivals than as adversaries. The distinction is one of degree but important nonetheless. The patterns of behavior have become structured based around standard operating procedures, international law and mutual vulnerability. States still train for conflict but it is only in the most extreme scenarios in which force could be used to resolve a conflict. South America currently forms a conflict resolution category.

The most peaceful category is the security community.⁷⁵ This category is one in which the actors have no reasonable expectation of using force against one another. The processes of interaction are exclusively legal and political and the militaries of these actors are focused outside the region or are legacy forces from earlier iterations of the regionalization process. The only true example of this is Europe.

SECTORS WITHIN RSCT

RSCT also redefined security into five sectors.⁷⁶ These sectors are political, military, societal, economic and environmental security. The military and societal are the most important sectors for the purposes of this paper but I will define all five. The political sector is about the organizational stability of social order. The heart of political security is made up of threats to state sovereignty. These threats are typically nonmilitary in nature.⁷⁷ The economic sector is defined by threats to socialists, mercantilists or liberals depending on the persuasion of the actor. This means that economic security depends upon how economics is utilized by the studied actor. ^{78A}

⁷⁴ Buzan et al 2003: pg 78

⁷⁵ Buzan et al 2003: pg 90

⁷⁶ Buzan et al 2003: pg 14

⁷⁷ Buzan et al 1997: pg 29

⁷⁸ Buzan et al 2003: pg 32

threat for a mercantilist may be the normal efficiencies of the market for a liberal.⁷⁹ Environmental security resolves around the safety and welfare of states and individuals as related to the pollution and contamination of the natural environment.⁸⁰ This is a controversial idea because in most states, environmental concerns are filtered through the political process. But global environmental issues can influence regional security problems if the regional actors are materially or politically unable to resolve them on their own.

Military security is the most straight forward of the five sectors. This sector is the most related to conventional neorealist theory and derives its suppositions from the ability of actors to use force against one another.⁸¹ The crude military balance, however, is not enough to ensure security or insecurity, patterns of amity and enmity are far more important. This is the socially constructed relationship between actors that dictates how actions will be interpreted.⁸² This is how the theory of democratic peace has been studied. Democratic states do not fear other democratic states' military power. This does not mean they are not wary of their use or disuse, but rather that the pattern of social behavior between democratic states is one in which the use of violence has been ruled of resolving conflicts.

The Societal sector is the most important for the purposes of folding more constructivist theory into RSCT.⁸³ The organizing principle for societal security is group identity. This could mean tribe, nation or race. All of these identities comingle within and without states and they bring with them security concerns and threats. The threats that societies face often leads to a securitization of their concerns to the state level and this can rapidly escalate political conflicts.⁸⁴ The interplay between military and societal security has produced the vast amount of violence in the post-Cold War system. It is for

⁷⁹ Buzan et al 1997: pg 44

⁸⁰ Buzan et al 2003: pg 36

⁸¹ Buzan et al 1997: pg 48

⁸² Wendt 1999: pg 239

⁸³ Buzan et al 1997: pg 52

⁸⁴ Buzan et al 1997: pg 53

this reason that military and societal concerns have shaped security within the post-Soviet Caucasus.

Constructivist Security Theory

Constructivism is a theory of international relations that is based on the social construction of ideas, norms, and conceptions of the international system.⁸⁵ The nature of state and national identity is critical in understanding and predicting behavior.⁸⁶ Constructivism is based on the premise that ideas are important for the proper understanding of state motivation. They explain intentions, motivations and limitations. A state or actor can only act in a ways that their identity will allow. In this sense, norms or shared understandings are important within states in creating an identity. Constructivism, then, places a great deal of emphasis on history and the sociological construction of group identity. This is not limited to state behavior. While the state is currently understood to be the primary actor in the international system, non-state actors hold an important place and are worthy research topics.⁸⁷

The major area that separates realism from constructivism is the idea of anarchy.⁸⁸ No theory disputes the definition of anarchy as a system of states without centralized political authority. But a major constructivist tenet is that “Anarchy is what states make of it.”⁸⁹ This central idea challenges the realist contention that all states understand the meaning of the anarchical international system in the same manner. Realists understand anarchy to mean that states must act in a world of security dilemmas and balance of power.⁹⁰ Each state must rely only on self-help, but this self-help necessarily creates mistrust amongst states. Because states are always uncertain

⁸⁵ Wendt 1992: 392

⁸⁶ Wendt 1999: pg 25

⁸⁷ Katzenstein 1996: pg 66

⁸⁸ Wendt 1992: pg 392

⁸⁹ Wendt 1992: pg 394

⁹⁰ Waltz 1979: pg 18

about the intentions of other states this leads to an adversarial relationship. It creates a Hobbesian world of “war of all against all”⁹¹.

Constructivism does not predict either conflict or cooperation, but rather bases its predictions on the nature of specific ideas. While both realism and liberalism try to create replicable theories across all the international system by defining all states as fundamentally viewing the system in the same way, constructivism takes into account the history, domestic politics, and sociological norm of a state or actor.

Constructivist theory is very distinct when it comes to security formulation.⁹² Identity politics are understood to play an important role in conflict formation in all major theoretical approaches but they are taken as serious unto themselves only in constructivist discourse. Even conflicts that are explicitly ethnic or sociological are expressed in power or balancing terms in realist theory.⁹³ The constructivist rejects the idea that the power relationship is the main driver of events rather than the ideas that created it. Identity plays a far more important role.

There are three major deficiencies in realist theory that constructivism corrects. These are the ideas of agency, the use of language and the reality of change over time. These three ideas when taken together explain more events than the simplistic notion of power consideration in international relations. These three elements illustrate that international relations is made up of individuals acting based on many different considerations while not locked in to one single theoretical paradigm.

A major deficiency in realist theory is that it deemphasizes agency. Agency is the principle that an actor has the ability to alter the reality around them. This is easy to delegitimize when the worldview is that the international structure runs independent of human activity like the laws of physics or chemistry. But the reality is that a structure created by people can be undone by them. An example of this is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a military alliance that for forty years defended West Europe against Soviet attack. This was a political structure created by people that subordinated

⁹¹ Waltz 1979: pg 21

⁹² Katzenstein 2005: pg 18

⁹³ Ibid 21

individual state interests to that of a supranational entity. If that was not enough, this same entity changed its own *raison d'être* and has fought wars in Yugoslavia against ethnic cleansing and is currently in Afghanistan combating the Taliban insurgency. A realist cannot explain the formation of NATO as simple balancing because the United States was the stronger state. A realist cannot explain why states would choose to remain in an organization after its primary enemy is defeated. These are all much better explained through the idea of agency. Individual statesmen altered their understanding of what NATO was and could be and created a new reality. Rather than devolving into pre-World War II balance of power politics Europe remains unitary and committed to its vision of the world. Human beings are not stuck in some structure beyond their control.

A great deal of attention is placed in constructivist theory on language and the use of rhetoric. This is especially true when it comes to wars involving ethnic groups and intrastate conflict. Language frames arguments, focuses groups on objectives and rallies support to disparate aims. Language enables actors to mobilize populations to support their positions and to engage in activity. This is important in banal activities such as voting or demonstrating but it is also critically important in getting people to engage in physical violence, compel ordinary people to savagery in war and to propel them to acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Realists do not place emphasis on how states get individuals to act in their name. To realists, states are faceless, soulless entities that somehow react without regard for rationalization. Germany fought two wars in the 20th century and according to realism they were almost exactly the same.⁹⁴ Germany was and always will be the dominant continental European power and it engaged in two wars of hegemony in order to seize the power it had developed latently. It was stopped because a balancing coalition prevented its final victories. This misses so much of the reality of the differences between World Wars I and II that it makes them almost incomprehensible.

That World War I began as a typical balance of power collision accelerated by the security dilemma and fog of war is nothing new. What is distinct is how the next German war was understood. In World War II, German hegemony was the goal but it was coupled with a desire for vengeance against those states that defeated it in the First

⁹⁴ Katzenstein 2005: pg 215

World War. A sizable portion of German industrial capacity was used to exterminate its own citizens and defenseless civilians in occupied states at the detriment of its war fighting ability. The ability of Adolf Hitler to utilize language and rhetoric to galvanize the German people and placate international opinion until he eventually struck in Poland is not mentioned in the realist calculus.⁹⁵ Also absent is the Nazi philosophy that underpinned the state's actions throughout the period. To disregard the fundamental differences between Nazi ideology and Imperial German language and rhetoric during the wars is to misunderstand why the wars were fought.

Change over time is also integral to constructivist understanding of security.⁹⁶ What was important previously and relationships that mattered can fundamentally be altered by actions, reactions and intentions. The United States relationship with Great Britain was one of hostility from the Revolutionary War in the 1770s until the First World War. The war forced a reevaluation of the relationship between the two powers. The change would create the most lasting and durable relationship in the 20th century. This is possible due to shared identities and cultures as well as openness to the endurance of change in the international system. Realists explain the US/UK relationship by shared interests and a reconfigured power structure.⁹⁷ But this does not explain the durability of the relationship. After the change from hostility to amity the two states continued to be allies throughout the full range of power capabilities. This is not explained well by realists' explanations of power dynamics. The international system is marked by change over time that realists explain through shifting balances of power while constructivists understand it as a reaction to reevaluated cultural and ideational norms.

⁹⁵ Katzenstein 2005: pg 217

⁹⁶ Wendt 1999: pg 118

⁹⁷ Walt 1990: pg 9

Neorealist Security Theory

Neorealism is one of the major international relations theories relating to security studies. Also known as structural realism, neorealism is primarily focused on the distribution of power in the international system and the resulting balance of power.⁹⁸ The constructivist belief that international anarchy is the result of shared norms and understandings is denied in neorealism. According to neorealists, anarchy defines all state actions and forces states into certain specific actions.⁹⁹ Neorealists also ascribe to the notion of the security dilemma. The security dilemma is the idea that because states can never be certain of other states intentions they must prepare for the worst case scenario.¹⁰⁰ The worst case scenario is military conflict and that is the preparation of all realists.

Neorealists are divided between defensive and offensive variants. Defensive realists believe that states operate with a constant defensive mindset. They are always wary of other states and the predominant concern is the survival of the state. This forces them to arm themselves and seek alliances with other states in order to ensure their safety. Offensive realists believe that states attempt to maximize their power rather than simply ensure their survival. Offensive realists believe that the only way to ensure state survival is for states to expand and dominate their region, ultimately becoming the hegemon.¹⁰¹

Neorealism is intrinsically pessimistic about the future of international security. Because the inherent structure of the system forces states into security competition and conflict, warfare and violence will be a part international affairs for the foreseeable future. This is one element that differentiates neorealism from constructivism. The deterministic nature of neorealism stands in stark contrast with constructivism's contention that human agency can alter the nature of international relations.

⁹⁸ Walt 1990: pg 26

⁹⁹ Waltz 1979: 65

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 73

¹⁰¹ Mearsheimer 2001: pg 101

The positivist nature of neorealist research lends itself to quantitative methodologies.¹⁰² Constructivism is much more inclined towards qualitative case studies to understand international events. This along with the criticisms delineated in the discussion of constructivism, is a major reason that constructivists believe neorealism to be a flawed approach.

ANALYSIS OF POST-SOVIET CONFLICT

RUSSIAN EURASIANISM AND CHECHNYA

Chechnya is the only post-Soviet Caucasus conflict to take place within Russia. Chechnya was incorporated into the Russian Empire beginning in 1785.¹⁰³ Since that time, Chechens have fought external control. The latest fighting in the 1990s and today should be seen through that context. The Chechens are predominantly Muslim and as such this conflict is primarily a social one. Which group gets to decide how Chechens are ruled and how their society is ordered? This is best analyzed through the analysis of how the Russian state is constructed.

Russia has existed as a unitary state since the 10th Century.¹⁰⁴ This state was centered on Moscow and Kiev and was large by contemporary standards but it was nowhere near as large as the current Russian Federation. The history of Russia is one of expansion on a scale unseen by any other state.¹⁰⁵ The modern Russian state became an empire, incorporating nearby nations and societies into a Russian dominated political structure. This new state was largely organized around an ideology of Eurasianism. Strictly defined, Eurasianism is the belief that Russia constitutes the center of distinct society that blends Slavic and Turco-Muslim identities.¹⁰⁶ This places Russia in the primacy role over its new conquests and as the center of a legitimate civilization, not on the periphery of Europe. This ideology is one of expansion and is used as a rationale for

¹⁰³Shevtsova 2004: pg 156

¹⁰⁴ Laruelle 2007: pg 3

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 16

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 12

Russian control of Slavic regions of eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. This ideology has become so pervasive that societies within this region have also compartmentalized it. New states such as Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Armenia have espoused Eurasianist principles that subordinate their national identities to a larger pro-Russian one within a Eurasianist civilization.¹⁰⁷

Important to note is that many societies did not and do not accept this ideology. Chechnya in particular has fought for its own political control since its incorporation into the Russian Empire. This fight has been waged politically, militarily and societally. Chechens fought insurgencies against Russian control throughout the 19th century until being brutally suppressed by Moscow. During the chaos of the Russian Civil War from 1918-1921, an independent Chechen state emerged that was later incorporated into the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁸ From 1941 to 1943, many Chechens joined the invading German forces in order to free Chechnya from Soviet rule.¹⁰⁹ Thousands joined partisan groups and attacked Red Army targets throughout the Caucasus. In order to maintain control of Chechnya, Joseph Stalin deported almost the entire Chechen nation to Kazakhstan to remove them from the fronts of the war. It was not until 1956 under Nikita Khrushchev's radical de-Stalinization policies that the Chechen people were repatriated to their lands. But even this was with the pervasive Russification that was characteristic of Soviet control. Chechens were denied leadership positions within Chechnya and the language was not allowed in education.

Chechen society took the news of the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a joyous event.¹¹⁰ The immediate reaction of the Chechen elites was to declare independence in 1991. This singular action displays the fact that the Russo-Chechen conflict was a societal one. The Chechen people never accepted the legitimacy of the Russian rule from 1785 until the present day. Chechen society is still centered on local tribal politics and

¹⁰⁷ Laruelle 2007: pg 26

¹⁰⁸ King 2008: pg 157

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 159

¹¹⁰ Ibid 160

while they may have to live with a current Russian presence, it is only through a heavy handed occupation that Russia retains controls.

The Russian campaigns in Chechnya also highlight how Russian society viewed the conflict. It was not merely a situation in which a small, insignificant republic wanted to gain autonomy. The very identity of the Russian state was in peril. If each constituent part of the Russian Federation could gain independence then this put the lie to the principle of Russian Eurasianism. The principle of Russian dominance over a shared civilization was tested by the declaration of independence of Chechnya. This explains the brutal tactics that the Russian Army utilized in ending the fighting. Not since World War II had such large scale loss of life taken place in a European country. The Chechen use of suicide bombers as well as other forms of terrorism also displays their emotional attachment to the issue of Chechen independence.

The Chechen conflict illustrates very clearly that cultural and societal identities can be the underlying reasons for violence. The nature of political control and infighting may have been the proximate causes but centuries of violence, occupation and repression were the most important causes. RSCT is instrumental in understanding this conflict because it allows us to view the conflict from many different lenses rather than from a purely power perspective. Constructivism also gives us the tools to interrogate each side's claims to identity and societal primacy. These elements are lacking in realist arguments.

THE GEORGIAN CIVIL WAR: WHO IS A GEORGIAN?

The Georgian Civil War was a fight for independence between the Georgian government and the secessionist provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The main driver in this conflict is also one of identity but also one of citizenship. In the case of Chechnya, there was never a question of Russian superiority over a Chechen entity. In the case of Georgia, the two secessionist regions were allowed many benefits and prerogatives within the Georgian republic because of their supposed loyalty to Russia.¹¹¹ The question of continued benefits arose following Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union and what constituted a citizen of the new state.

¹¹¹ Zurcher 2007: pg 67

Abkhazia and South Ossetia were both incorporated into the Russian Empire around 1800. South Ossetia is a part of the larger Ossetia that is also a republic of the Russian Federation. Neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia had any history of self-rule as independent political entities. Both provinces were contested territories between the Russian and Ottoman empires from the 14th to 19th centuries.¹¹² When Russia consolidated its control over the region, the history of docility in the imperial structure earned them a privileged status. Although they were incorporated into Georgian entities in the Soviet Union, many Russians emigrated to both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the time of the fall of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia had one of the highest per capita incomes in the USSR.¹¹³ South Ossetia was not as wealthy but it enjoyed a higher standard of living of the remainder of the Soviet Union as well as the remainder of Georgia, save Abkhazia.

Georgians resented the second-class status conferred upon them by Russia. Even though they were granted a Union Republic, the component parts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were flush with Russian cash and appointments in the local governments.¹¹⁴ In no other Union Republic were ASSRs and local ethnicities granted privileges to the detriment of the larger population. This created grave problems when Georgia assumed its independence in 1991. The Georgian government was heavily nationalist and was committed to “restoring Georgian rights in Georgia.” This caused a great deal of concern in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In fact, neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia was happy with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Both entities knew that they would lose their privileged positions in any independent Georgian state. Even though it was outlawed, local education and business was conducted in the local dialect rather than Georgian. Abkhazians and South Ossetians were content to acquiesce to Russian domination but not Georgian.¹¹⁵ In some ways, Abkhazians and South Ossetians

¹¹² King 2008: pg 208

¹¹³ Zurcher 2007: pg 112

¹¹⁴ Ibid 117

¹¹⁵ Ibid 118

considered themselves loyal subjects of the Russian Federation first and members of a subject ethnic class second.

Ancient Georgian conceptions of identity dating back to the dawn of Christianity and their long resistance to Russification promoted a sense of superiority over their non-Georgian citizens. Where it is well documented that Chechens long fought Russian domination, the history of Georgian resistance is more nuanced. It would be fair to describe Georgian activities within Russia as opportunistic rather than adversarial. Many significant Soviets from Joseph Stalin to Eduard Shevardnadze were Georgians. This speaks more to the political skills and pragmatism of the individuals rather than the multiculturalism of Soviet life, but it is also important to note few other comparable achievements by many Soviet ethnic groups.

As described previously the use of the nationality issue was a major driver of Georgian domestic politics. Zviad Gamsakhurdia and other Georgian nationalists believed that a successful Georgian campaign to control South Ossetia would ensure the continued loyalty of the Abkhazians as well. This strategy failed due to military incompetence and soon Gamsakhurdia was deposed. Russian peacekeepers were installed as part of the end of the fighting in 1992 to South Ossetia. Later in the year, Abkhazia, with Russian backing, began a crisis with Georgia that involved heavy fighting in that region. Abkhazia announced its independence and soon was victorious over Georgian forces.

It is important to note the heavy influence of Russian forces in these conflicts. The two separatist regions were declaring independence in name only. They were remaining heavily integrated with Russia as seen by the deployment of Russian military personnel, economic programs and infrastructure links. This was perceived in Georgia as a continuation of Russian domination and a validation of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian desire to remain Russian.

The Georgian Civil War illustrates the lengths to which societies will go to remain true to their norms concerning identity. The Abkhazians and South Ossetians were adamant that they were Russian subjects first and foremost and were willing to fight violently to preserve their privileged positions vis-à-vis Georgia. Georgia showed that it took its identity as the bulwark against Russia in the Caucasus seriously. It was also

clear that Georgia was setting itself up as the Kremlin's foil in the region. This would be a perennial problem returned to later.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH WAR: MUSLIM VS. CHRISTIAN

The main fault lines between Armenia and Azerbaijan are religious; Armenians are Christians while Azeris are Shi'ite Muslims. This distinction survived the imposed atheism of the Soviet era and roared into full force when public expression was opened up in the time of glasnost. The main driver of conflict was over ownership of the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh located in the Azerbaijani Union Republic. It is not known for certain why Nagorno-Karabakh was placed under Azeri sovereignty but a possible reason is to divide the Armenian population. Armenia is an ancient society that traces its lineage back to the earliest days of Christianity in the Caucasus. The pull of history is a strong one and Armenia has many rivals in the region from Turkey to Iran as well as Russia. Armenia was incorporated into Russia following the Civil War in 1921 and memories of genocide at the hands of the Muslim Turks were still very fresh.¹¹⁶ The decision of Stalin to incorporate an Armenian region into Azerbaijan may have been a tactic to transfer Armenian resentment from Russian domination towards the Muslim Azeris that were occupying their land. If so, the strategy was incredibly prescient for it worked well.

For its part, Azerbaijan was always a part of the Safavid or Persian Empires until the 20th Century.¹¹⁷ With the consolidation of the Soviet Union following the civil war, Persia acknowledged Russian sovereignty over the present day Azeri territory. Allowed independence briefly, it was conquered in 1922 and made a Soviet Union Republic. There was talk of Azerbaijan being annexed directly to Russia but it was made an equal Union Republic to offset the Christian republics of Georgia and Armenia.¹¹⁸ Azerbaijani national identity was very primitive and was usually defined in terms of Turkish or Muslim identity. This is contrasted to Armenian identity that has centuries of

¹¹⁶ King 2008: pg 225

¹¹⁷ De Waal 2004: pg 8

¹¹⁸ Ibid 10

independent history and mythologies. Azerbaijani national identity truly began as part of an orchestrated effort in the 1920s. Azerbaijani identity was to be Muslim, but secular in outlook, modern in governance but also Eastern in temperament.¹¹⁹ This was displayed in the prominence Azerbaijan placed on engineering and energy. The distinctions between the rest of the Soviet Union and Azerbaijan were downplayed and Azerbaijan was a loyal Soviet Union Republic until 1991.

As the Armenian independence movements were gaining momentum in the mid-1980s, the Azeris had no real counterparts. Like Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Azerbaijan was a privileged region the Soviet Union. Baku, the capital, was flush with schools, universities, infrastructure and cash for its role as an energy hub that supplied the Soviet Union and by extension the export market. Some Azeris envisioned an independent future for the republic based on neutrality and energy but most officials were content to remain Soviet.¹²⁰ In contrast, Armenia was simmering with nationalist sentiment. The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was no better or worse than it had been for sixty years, but the opportunity to discuss Armenian national identity made the placement of so many Christian Armenians under the yoke of Muslims in a historical context long deprived them. This made the capture of Nagorno-Karabakh a historical, ethnic and above all a religious issue.

The issue never gained that much meaning in Azerbaijan. The region was important because it represented a sovereign territory of the republic but it did not hold the emotional attachment that Armenia felt. This distinction is seen in how the fighting was conducted. Azerbaijan has a population twice as large as Armenia with a considerable resource and geographic advantage. These advantages were never utilized to fight the war from 1988 to 1994.

Immediately following independence, Armenia created institutions for the express purpose of winning the looming war. Azerbaijan concentrated on creating energy infrastructure to connect to the non-Soviet world. The war was important but not all consuming to the Azeris while to the Armenians it represented defense from future genocides and protection for fellow Christians against Muslims. This one-sided vitriol

¹¹⁹ De Waal 2004: pg 21

¹²⁰ Ibid 23

resulted in the Armenian victory. It is almost entirely certain that had the issue been framed in Azerbaijan as one of survival or identity then they would have fought harder or better. But this ignores the reality that to them it was not. Azerbaijan controlled far more territory than Armenia and they were aware that Nagorno-Karabakh was almost totally Armenian. This reality did not dissuade them from fighting but it did dissuade them from bankrupting themselves either financially or morally in order to win.

Military setbacks did result in governmental changes in Azerbaijan but they did not threaten the independence of the republic. In Armenia the war was portrayed as one of national survival even if it was not in reality. These perceptions illustrate very clearly the constructivist explanation for conflict formation. The war was continued almost entirely because an actor felt their identity threatened from another when it did not exist. Azerbaijan did not display overt threats or actions. There was not even a security dilemma in place because it was the Armenians that armed and acted first. Even in light of Armenian actions and violence, Azerbaijan acted only in those ways to protect its national territory and conducted the minimum number of operations to ensure that it saved face. Realists would predict a much more full throated military operation against Armenia due to its perceived military superiority. Realists are also at a loss to explain why states would fail to fully prosecute a war that would result in a neighbor being stronger at the end of it.

THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR: EAST VS. WEST

In 2008, Russia and Georgia fought a brief but intense war over the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While this may seem like a continuation of the conflict described earlier it involved far more than the fate of two small separatist regions in the Caucasus. The immediate cause of the fighting was an extension of the previous violence in the early 1990s but the intervening years placed more emphasis on other influences.

When the Georgian wars ended with the de facto independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia was integral to the maintenance of the ceasefires. Russia possessed the most capable military force in the region at the time of the ceasefires but in the intervening time Russian forces were defeated in Chechnya and were seen as inferior to Western militaries. The perception of Russian power was that it was on the

rapid decline. The financial shocks that struck Russia in 1998 left it economically weak. The political system was ineffective and corrupt.

But much changed since the nadir of 1999. Vladimir Putin became President after Boris Yeltsin's resignation on December 31, 1999.¹²¹ The ascent of a new type of Russian leader revitalized the Russian security services and the political system was reorganized. Putin espoused a system of "sovereign democracy"¹²², a Russian take on the democratic process that centralized authority in Moscow and reinvigorated Russian nationalism. Russian nationalism as a political force had been dormant throughout the 1990s due to repeated attempts by the Russian Federation to join the West through institutional reform. After the inclusion of former Soviet satellites into NATO and the European Union and the NATO air campaign against Serbia on behalf of Kosovo, Russian nationalism began to reemerge as a counterweight to Western pressure.¹²³

The opposite was true of Georgian nationalism. Long dormant due to its inclusion in the Soviet Union, Georgian national identity was fiercely nationalistic following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The period following the Georgian separatist wars of the early 1990s saw a Georgia somewhat isolated from the outside world. This all changed with the Rose Revolution in 2004 and the resulting pro-West government in Tbilisi. American-educated Mikhail Saakashvili became President of Georgia and reversed years of isolation and authoritarianism endemic to the post-Soviet system. He advocated membership for Georgia into NATO and the European Union and formulated a foreign policy opposed to Russia in the Caucasus.¹²⁴

The fight was on. Russian national identity in the post Yeltsin era was one defined as the anti-West and demanded a return of Russian influence to the former Soviet space. Georgian national identity in the post-Rose Revolution was diametrically opposed to any kind of Russian influence and was poised to follow Europe into that continent's institutions. This was a situation in which conflict was inevitable. While the

¹²¹ Colton 2008: pg 405

¹²² Cornell et al 2009: pg 35

¹²³ Ibid 36

¹²⁴ Ibid 42

immediate outbreak of violence was caused by the ill-timed Georgian incursion into South Ossetia, Russia had long been looking for an excuse to rein in Georgia's pro-Western policies.¹²⁵ Saakashvili's foolish military adventure into South Ossetia gave Moscow that excuse. Georgian authorities believed that their tacit alliance with Washington would protect them from Russia but the United States was not prepared to physically protect the small Caucasian country. Russia and Georgia fought their brief war over the question of which identity would prevail in Georgia. Would Georgia be allowed to dictate its own foreign policy and trajectory or would Russia return to its imperial past and decide the fortunes of its Near Abroad? This is decidedly in the constructivist understanding of international relations theory. Russia did not attack Georgia out of fear of its military power or of US troops in Georgia threatening Russian national security. The Russo-Georgian War was fought because Russian identity as based on the imperial ideal that meant Russian greatness was predicated on control of adjacent territory. It is no surprise that Russian history is replete with examples of expansion and territorial overreach. Russian hegemony over Georgia is derived from this identity crisis and not of power considerations.

¹²⁵ Cornell et al 2009: pg 116

CONCLUSION

The dissolution of the Soviet Union offered a unique opportunity to examine conflict formation regimes in real-time following a geopolitical event that shook up the entire world. The international system of the Cold War constituted a bi-polar contest between the world's two superpowers. Each region of the world was forced to choose its orientation vis-à-vis the military powers and this created a system unseen previously and since. The system that emerged in its wake is much more recognizable. While some believe that the current system is unipolar with the United States as the sole pole of power in the world, Regional Security Complex Theory offers a better way to examine the system.

Security in the post-Cold War world is much more regionalized and emanates from smaller and smaller actors. The Cold War system was hierarchical and revolved around the international actors. Modern RSCT explains what we see in the system today. Regional actors are acting in their accordance with their own national interest and identity to the detriment of many great powers and the greatest power, the United States.

Constructivism also prevails over realism in the post-Cold War security system. The vast majority of international relations researchers believe that neorealism best explains the Cold War system and most believe it explains the present system.¹²⁶ This paper states that constructivism coupled with RSCT is better. Constructivism is better at explaining the timeline of conflict seen around the world. Neorealism is often guilty of missing the forest for the trees, i.e. disregarding the details of how conflicts form and break out. The fallacy underlining neorealist security theory is that the resulting behavior is more important than the events that led up to it. This is accepted as true by most theorists but it is only in international relations that we accept this chain of causation. Constructivism also defines neorealism as one of many identities that actors will adopt in accordance with their interests.¹²⁷ This opens up the possibility that neorealism does explain some aspects of international relations but only within the rubric of constructivism and only for some states.

¹²⁶ Walt 1990: pg 11

¹²⁷ Wendt 1999: pg 332

This all relates to the Caucasus in many ways. The four conflicts delineated in this paper are regional in nature and are squarely in the post-Cold War security system. All of these conflicts are the results of identity politics. The upending of fifty years of superpower imposed docility on actors in the Caucasus created a situation in which old enmities, ethnic tensions and re-emerging empires were allowed to reappear. The Caucasus should be understood as a microcosm of the post-Cold War international system. While most regions of the world do not contain scenarios as explosive, many do and the events of this region could easily be replicated elsewhere.

The Caucasus is still divided by ethnicity and identity politics. The region has been oriented away from the West and European institutions in recent years and this trend will likely continue. Russian and Turkish influences have been on the rise and the smaller states have been trying to avoid being forced into a one or the other paradigm.

Georgia has been humbled since its disastrous war with Russia in 2008. There is continued talk of EU and NATO membership but this is entirely rhetoric. There is no chance that either institution will challenge Russian preeminence with regards to Georgia. A renewed opposition movement has also emerged in Georgia with the stated goal of removing Mikhail Saakashvili as President. Saakashvili, entirely unrepentant about the war in 2008, has become more unpopular as he has used increasingly authoritarian tactics to retain support in Tbilisi. It remains to be seen if the opposition can muster the support to remove him from office, legally or otherwise, but it is clear that Georgian politics will remain domestically focused for some time.

Armenia has moved closer to Russia since the mid-1990s, ensconcing itself as Moscow's most reliable ally in the region. This has not benefited the Armenian economy, which was stalled before the financial crisis and is only surviving due to loans from Russia. The Armenian political system is dynamic and representative but a vocal authoritarian movement has begun to pick up support. This segment is especially worried about renewed hostilities against Azerbaijan. Tensions between the two states have intensified recently as Azerbaijan has economically benefited from energy exports and foreign investment. If right wing politics overtakes Armenia it is conceivable that an arms buildup could deteriorate relations further with Azerbaijan. Armenia is also

undergoing negotiations with Turkey to normalize relations.¹²⁸ The two states have not had diplomatic relations as a result of the genocide perpetrated against the Armenian minority of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. These proceedings are independent of any final resolution of the dispute with Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has a strong alliance with Turkey, a state that shares a religion and ethnicity. But Azerbaijan is also closely tied to Russia due to business and energy links. Baku is constantly trying to balance these conflicting interests. There has also blossomed in Azerbaijan a pro-Nagorno-Karabakh element to domestic politics. The current Azerbaijani government has refused to acknowledge the resolution of the earlier conflict. The separation of the Armenian enclave from Azerbaijan and its subsequent occupation has spurred nationalist sentiment in the state starting after the war. The vast influx of cash and investment has allowed Azerbaijan to modernize its military and recently the rhetoric has called for “a final showdown”¹²⁹ to determine the ownership of the disputed region. The possibility of renewed fighting is very real.

The largest Caucasian state, Russia, has undergone the greatest change since the end of the Soviet Union. The Russian republic of Chechnya has been thoroughly occupied by pro-Moscow elements. Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov is a Kremlin appointee and he is ruthless in suppressing separatist elements in the region. This has not eliminated all violence as evidence by regular bombings and shootings targeting local officials and security forces. Chechen rebels have also been successful in conducting attacks in the rest of Russia. A passenger train between Moscow and St. Petersburg was derailed twice by explosives, once in 2007 and again in 2009. Two subway trains were attacked by suicide bombers in March 2010, the attackers linked to Chechen Islamic militants. Russia controls Chechnya territorially but it has been unable to eliminate militants within and without the region.

Russia itself has undergone a renaissance in terms of its political, economic and military power. The ability of Russia to suppress militancy in Chechnya, invade and dismember Georgia and steadily grow its economy has greatly enhanced its prestige regionally and globally. All the states in the Caucasus are forced to orient their foreign

¹²⁸ De Waal 2004: pg 304

¹²⁹ Ibid 324

and domestic policies with an eye towards Russian interests. Russia has also begun to adopt neoimperialist policies in these states.¹³⁰ The traditional alliance with Christian Armenia is offset by an understanding with Azerbaijan. Georgia is thoroughly disciplined and some elements of the Georgian political opposition have openly declared that the state must orient itself towards Moscow because “that is the reality of Georgia’s current situation”.

To say the region is controlled completely by Russia would be inaccurate. Turkey enjoys some interest in Azerbaijan and Saakashvili’s Georgia still tries to embark on a pro-Western path. But each state that tries to involve itself in the Caucasus must acknowledge a Russian sphere of interest. This sphere of interest looks very similar to the old Soviet ethnofederalism which itself resembled the imperial structure of Tsarist Russia. The national character of Russia is one of imperial expansion and the policies it has implemented following the collapse of the USSR only further support this reality. The USSR did not collapse because it was anathema to Russian identity or history; rather it collapsed because it was inflexible politically and economically.¹³¹ The more representative and economically diversified Russia will have a much longer lifespan than the Soviet Union.

¹³⁰ Laruelle 2007: pg 264

¹³¹ Zurcher 2007: pg 17

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