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HOW THE US-GEORGIAN CHARTER WILL AFFECT AZERBAIJAN

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Two "Georgian" developments in the last six months have profoundly affected Azerbaijan, but if the impact of the first – Russia's invasion of Azerbaijan's neighbor in August – has attracted a great deal of attention, that of the latter – the signing of the US-Georgian Charter on Strategic Cooperation – has so far not generated as much discussion, although even the briefest consideration of that document and the new security situation in the South Caucasus that it may help create suggests that the new accord, signed earlier this month, may ultimately have an equal if not greater impact on Azerbaijan and its foreign policy.

The full meaning of the document, of course, is unclear not only because of its general and symbolic nature but also because it was prepared and signed by the outgoing Bush Administration rather than by the incoming Obama government. As a result, assessments of its general meaning have varied widely, with some dismissing it as an American consolation prize to Tbilisi after the US failed to secure the agreement of its allies to admit Georgia to NATO, and others celebrating it as a

reaffirmation of an American commitment to Georgia's security and to a continuing even expanded American presence in the South Caucasus.

However true these various assessments may be, there are three ways, some obvious and welcome and others less obvious but more troublesome, in which the new US-Georgia Charter is clearly going to have an impact on Azerbaijan.

First, the charter suggests that the United States – and in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine gas transit dispute – is focused on guaranteeing the security of gas and oil pipelines from the Caspian Basin to the West. Georgia, as the events of August demonstrated, has always been the most troubled segment of these pipelines, and an American commitment to their protection obviously helps Azerbaijan.

On the one hand, this American umbrella, if the charter in fact means what it says, will allow Baku to have greater confidence that its bet on the two pipelines westward through Georgia was a good one. And on the other, the protection of these pipelines will make President Ilham Aliyev's decision to invest in the Georgian pipeline system even more wise than some analysts thought at the time.

And this protection of the pipelines in Georgia will reduce the pressures on Baku to explore north-south routes, through Russia or Iran, thus allowing it to continue to pursue what President Aliyev calls his government's "balanced" foreign policy however much the new activism of Russia and Iran in the region have tilted that balance in another direction.

Second, by signing this charter, the United States and Georgia have made it more likely not that there will be as similar accord between Washington and Baku but rather that Baku and other regional capitals will sign similar charters both among themselves and with outside powers. As several Azerbaijani commentators, including Rasim Musabekov, have pointed out, Baku's situation is very different than Tbilisi's both with respect to Russia and to Turkey and thus an accord with Ankara is more likely than one with Washington or Moscow.

That tendency almost certainly will play into the Turkish government's effort to promote a new security platform in the region. Indeed, invoking the Georgian precedent, Ankara is now likely to pursue that goal by seeking the conclusion of bilateral security declarations with the regional states. The first of these is likely to be with Azerbaijan, not only because of their traditional cultural and linguistic ties, and the pursuit of that goal almost certainly will be a major part of the Baku-Ankara agenda over the next three to six months.

What will be important to watch is whether Turkey's interest in such an accord will have an impact on Ankara's warming relationship with Yerevan. Baku certainly does not want to see that relationship take off unless it is part of a more general settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, something that at the start of 2009 appears just as distant as it was at the beginning of earlier years, the public optimism of officials and especially diplomats notwithstanding.

And third, the US-Georgia Charter will have an impact on the actions of the two other major regional powers, the Russian Federation and Iran, each of which has already taken actions in the wake of the signing of the accord between Washington and Tbilisi, the ones that are already creating problems for Baku.

At the start of the year, Moscow transferred up to 800 million dollars worthy of military hardware to Yerevan, an action that strengthens Armenia's position and one that the Azerbaijani government has protested vigorously given its impact on the security situation of the region. Meanwhile, in the last week, Tehran announced plans to build a railway linking Iran and Armenia, a project that if realized would also reduce the pressure on Armenia to make any concessions in negotiations concerning the occupied territories.

How either or both of these efforts will play out, of course, remains to be seen, not only because they may prove less dramatic in their consequences than now appears likely or because other factors will intervene that will cause one or both of these actors to pull back from where they are now. But these events, clearly responses to the US-Georgia Charter, not only highlight the ways in which actions by one or another party inevitably lead to responses by others but also to the importance of viewing any particular action not as self-contained but rather as part of a continuing process, however easy or even convenient it may appear to do otherwise.

That is the analytic and political message that the recent "Georgian" events have for Azerbaijan, and it is one that if acted upon could help promote an even more sophisticated Azerbaijani response in the coming months.

TURKEY ASSERTING ITSELF AS A REGIONAL POWER

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In the wake of the conflict between the Russian Federation and Georgia, Turkey has moved to adopt a more independent approach to the region, a reflection of both the economic and political consequences of instability in the Caucasus and developments inside Turkey itself as well. But despite this shift in emphasis, Ankara is discovering that its options are more limited than it had hoped, although they do provide more scope for action than Turkey had felt it possessed in the past.

In recent months, Turkey has pursued what its leaders call "problem-free relations with its neighbors," an approach that underscores Tayyip Erdogan's statement at the Mediterranean Union summit that Turkey is "a country that offers solutions" to those living nearby and was reflected in his visits to Moscow and Tbilisi immediately after the Russian intervention in Georgia.

To understand just how serious a shift that represents, it is worth recalling what Turkey's traditional approach to the Caucasus has been. On the one hand, it has supported the independence and territorial integrity of the states in the region, something that has not changed. And on the other, Ankara has generally fallen in line behind the policies of Western countries, waiting for them to decide on a

common approach rather than striking out on its own, something it is now prepared to do.

Turkey in fact had been moving toward a more independent position for some time. It has not refrained from criticizing the West on issues like the Montreux Convention or supporting Russia, given Ankara's expanding trade ties with Moscow. But the Georgian war provided an occasion for a more public and multi-dimensional shift, one clearly intended to suggest that Ankara will now seek to play its own role as an actor in the region and beyond.

Because Turkey is a Caucasus state or at least is a neighbor to that region, the war between Russia and Georgia cannot help but adversely affect economic and political projects in which Turkey is closely involved, such as the BSEC, BTC pipeline and BTK railroad. And the increased tension after the conflict may have the effect of undermining Black Sea-centered initiatives such as the BLACKSEAFOR and Black Sea Harmony, in which Turkey had invested so much hope.

Not surprisingly, the United States reacted negatively to Turkey's moves seeing them as an indication that Ankara was reorienting itself away from Europe and NATO and toward closer ties with Russia. Turkish officials worked hard to correct this perception, but the fact that they had to reflected Ankara's relative inexperience of acting on its own, an approach that requires it explain itself more fully to traditional allies than many in the Turkish capital had assumed.

Ankara's new stance was also obvious in the evolution of its relationships with the three countries of the South Caucasus, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Until the mid-1990s, Georgia did not play an important part in Turkish geopolitical thinking. But its role in various Turkish energy projects, such as BTC and BTK, and transportation links, such as the BTK railroad, has changed that. Since the Rose Revolution, Turkey has actively contributed to many civilian, military, social and economic projects to assist Georgia's development. Largely as a result, Turkey is now Georgia's most important trading partner and the largest country in terms of Turkish investment in the CIS countries. Consequently, instability in Georgia will damage Ankara's interests and policies more than almost anyone else, and a civil war in Georgia is more of a threat to Turkey than a Georgia without the two breakaway republics but without internal civil war.

If Georgia is important for Turkey's economic interests in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan remains a crucial element in Ankara's new calculations. Historically and culturally, Azerbaijan retains its undisputed priority in Turkish political thinking. Turkey remains one of the largest foreign investors in Azerbaijan and accounts for some 15 percent of foreign direct investment in the country. Ankara, at the same time, is the largest investor in Azerbaijan's non-energy sectors of economy. Despite the fears of some and the expectations of others, this is unlikely to change, especially given Azerbaijan's rising economic and political power and its status as a bastion of stability in a troubled region.

Because Ankara's policies toward Tbilisi and Baku reflect continuing imperatives, its approach to Armenia has shown perhaps the greatest change. Turkey has been constrained in its dealings with Yerevan not only because of the latter's closeness to Moscow but also because of Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjoining regions of Azerbaijan. But the Georgian war is changing the situation: Armenia has lost its most important trade route north, and Turkey

wants as noted above to have better relations with all its neighbors, especially given the current instability in Georgia. Consequently, the two countries have been cautiously exploring a détente, via in the first instance “football” diplomacy. However, this relative opening towards Yerevan is rather a reflection of Ankara’s expectations for Armenia to change its approach towards Azerbaijan and Turkey, than an indication of Turkish weakness.

Looming behind the three countries of the South Caucasus is the Russian Federation, with which Ankara is pursuing what it calls “an enhanced multi-dimensional partnership.” Trade between the two countries is growing rapidly and is expected to reach \$38 billion this year – an amount equal to Russia’s trade turnover with Germany. And that reality, combined with changes in the Caucasus and inside Turkey itself, promises to move Ankara away from its traditional moorings toward a more independent role, something that will bear watching in the coming weeks and months.

AZERBAIJAN RECLAIMS ITS NATIONAL PAST

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Various factors help shape the way any human community perceives its past and hence defines itself. In many cases involving nations, one can even speak of a certain “politics of memory,” driven by competing forces including often most importantly nationalism and helping to define what is included and what is left out of narratives about the past. Having regained its independence only relatively recently, Azerbaijanis now face a number of challenges and dilemmas on their way towards the redefinition of their national identity, and I argue most of those have their roots in the Soviet past.

From the outset, the Soviet government strictly controlled historical accounts, not only modern but also ancient, out of a belief that only by controlling the past could it ensure its control over the present and future. With regard to academic history, the Scientific Council of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences set specific and oft-changing agendas for national scholars on the basis of instructions from the various departments of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) Central Committee. And nowhere was the influence of these groups on historical accounts and hence national definition greater than in the case of the Muslim communities which found themselves under Soviet rule.

Most of these peoples lacked a national historiographic tradition of their own and consequently were clean slates on which the Communist Party could impose its vision. The party did so through the Oriental studies system which Moscow held responsible for ensuring that the collective memories and national identities of these groups were consistent with Marxism-Leninism.

In the first years of Soviet power, Moscow viewed the Turkey of Mustafa Kemal and even the entire Muslim East through friendly eyes as about to awaken

from centuries-old slumber and thus to join the Bolsheviks in fighting against Western capitalism. But by the early 1930s, Moscow changed course and instead of pushing research stressing the links between Muslim peoples inside the USSR and Muslims abroad, the Soviet government and its Oriental studies arm did what they could to cut the one off from the other. Scholars working on Azerbaijan thus had to tread carefully lest they fall afoul of the party and be accused of pan-Islamism or Pan-Turkism. That they had to do so, of course, had a doleful impact on historical scholarship.

However, many Azerbaijani scholars succeeded in advancing the study of the past by carefully selecting, translating and providing commentaries on primary sources from the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish worlds. They embraced the chance to get involved in scholarly debates on issues where Moscow had not defined a specific line, such as the discussion of the legacy of Caucasian Albanians that took place between Azerbaijani and Armenian scholars from the 1970s on. And they also engaged in a variety of other informal communications and scholarly networks to advance their understanding of the national past.

With the rise of Gorbachev and the beginnings of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Azerbaijani interest in and ability to study accurately the national past exploded, all the more so because the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict prompted Azerbaijani historians to look into the historical record for arguments explicitly proving that Nagorno-Karabakh was an inalienable part of Azerbaijan and not the Armenian outpost that Yerevan and its supporters claimed.

But Azerbaijani historical scholarship did not limit itself to this task. It also called into question long-standing but ultimately distorted Soviet understandings as the history of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the 19th century, the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan, and the course of Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes in the first decades of the 20th century. Ziya Bunyatov, an Azerbaijani Orientalist, played a key role in publishing documents and studies on all these issues in the last years of Soviet power.

After Azerbaijan regained its independence, two kinds of nationalism – one based on ethnic attachments and the other based on citizenship – entered into intense political competition and had an impact on historical understanding and research. Ethnic nationalism reached its apogee under President Abulfaz Elchibey, who was himself an Orientalist by profession. He regarded Azerbaijanis as Turks and their language as a dialect of Anatolian Turkish, and he was responsible for getting the parliament to change the name of the national language from Azerbaijani to Turkic. But after he was replaced by Heydar Aliyev, who was more committed to nationalism based on citizenship, much of this movement in the ethnic direction was reversed, including the official name of the language.

Like the national narrative of any people, Azerbaijanis have sought answers to the fundamental question: what does it mean to be a member of that community? That in turn requires deciding who is the “we” and who is the “other.” Given the conflict with Armenia, defining the major other has not been hard, but Azerbaijanis have had problems in articulating answers to the other questions, all the more so because of the lack of a venerable national historiography and the continuing impact of Soviet policies. Consequently, questions of how to write national history and whom to include in the list of “national heroes” remain unresolved.

The demands of the Communist ideology of the past could hardly satisfy the interests of contemporary Azerbaijanis. That was particularly the case with regard to Soviet efforts to "construct" Azerbaijani identity by consciously setting it in opposition to "pan-Islamism" and "pan-Turkism." Moscow clearly expected that its model of the "Azerbaijani nation" would make it easier to integrate Azerbaijanis into the "Soviet people." To that end, Soviet scholars created "a national history" and a list of "national heroes" to distance Azerbaijanis from other Turkic peoples. Among those included in this list were Javanshir, a seventh century Albanian Christian prince and commander, and Babak, a ninth century defender of Zoroastrianism and the leader of a rebellion against Islam. These individuals, connected to Azerbaijan only by their birthplace were, in the Soviet vision, to stand for an Azerbaijanism cleansed of Islamic and Turkic features.

Such a rendering of the past not surprisingly is of limited value to Azerbaijanis now in their quest to define their past as they seek to evolve as a nation state. Indeed, many Azerbaijani nationalists today argue that what the Soviet version represented was a history of "Azerbaijani territory" rather than a history of the "Azerbaijani people," whose connections to the Turkic and Islamic world are ignored. As a result, contemporary Oriental studies in Azerbaijan are driven by a nationalist ideology that seeks to link the nation to its Turkic and Islamic roots.

Thus, one can say that there are two main approaches to Azerbaijani nationhood, one that traces the history of Azerbaijan and another that considers the history of the Azerbaijani people. Serious debates are taking place between the two. Supporters of the former are convinced that the construction of national history should take place within the basic Soviet paradigm with the addition of data on the Turkic and Islamic features that had been neglected in the past. Those who support the latter approach believe that the Soviet paradigm of Azerbaijani history must be abandoned and that a new historical narrative must be composed. The future of nation building in Azerbaijan will to a certain extent be defined by the ways in which this debate is resolved.

A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

In his New Year's message to the Azerbaijani people, President Ilham Aliyev says that Baku will continue to devote all its efforts to the restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan by ending Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjoining regions. He says Azerbaijan currently enjoys broad international support for its position, as shown by the adoption of the UN General Assembly last March. And he notes Baku's "growing authority" around the world on energy transit and other issues (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/142394.html>).

The Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry distributes a declaration condemning Russia for supplying arms to Armenia, an action which "will serve to strengthen the military potential [of a country] which occupies part of the territory of Azerbaijan." This action, the declaration continues, "violates UN Security Council resolutions and the UN General Assembly resolution of March 14, 2008. The ministry statement says

that Baku is deeply concerned by this action given its friendship with Moscow and Moscow's involvement in the Minsk Group which is attempting to resolve the conflict (http://mfa.gov.az/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=633&Itemid=1).

In its report on Baku's foreign policy during 2008, the Azerbaijan foreign ministry says that the events in Georgia have led to an intensification of negotiations within the Minsk Group concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, that Azerbaijan achieved a notable victory with the adoption by the UN General Assembly of its resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh question, and that the country had achieved successes in energy negotiations along both the East-West and North-South axes. In addition, the report calls attention to the OIC to declare Baku the capital of Islamic culture for 2009, the convention of a forum on broadening the role of women in international dialogue, and Baku's bilateral and multilateral negotiations with leaders of Europe and Eurasia. And finally, it notes the opening of an Azerbaijani embassy in Syria and an office in Afghanistan, as well as the opening of Tajik, Turkmen, Hungarian, and European Commission missions in Azerbaijan (http://mfa.gov.az/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=632&month=01&year=2009&day=15&Itemid=67).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

At the conclusion of his three-day visit to Baku, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves stresses that "Estonia is a country close to Azerbaijan and this is not simply a matter of words." Tallinn has strongly supported Azerbaijan in the Council of Europe and considers itself an advocate of Baku in all European institutions. Ilves continues by saying that recent events around Ukraine have highlighted the growing importance of Azerbaijan as an energy supplier and transporter for the continent. And he says Estonia supports the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through peaceful negotiations (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143577.html>). Earlier, in advance of his visit to Azerbaijan, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves says that Tallinn is interested in "problem-free, professional, and non-bureaucratized cooperation of investors from Estonia with their Azerbaijani partners" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/142956.html>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

15 January

The Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry distributes a declaration condemning Russia for supplying arms to Armenia, an action which "will serve to strengthen the military potential [of a country] which occupies part of the territory of Azerbaijan." This action, the declaration continues, "violates UN Security Council resolutions and the UN General Assembly resolution of March 14, 2008. The ministry statement says that Baku is deeply concerned by this action given its friendship with Moscow and Moscow's involvement in the Minsk Group which is attempting to resolve the conflict (http://mfa.gov.az/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=633&Itemid=1).

14 January

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Russian Ambassador Vasily Istratov to query about Moscow's provision of arms to Armenia. The ministry press service says that Azerbaijan was not satisfied by Istratov's response and called on the Russian government to provide "a more precise answer" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143865.html>).

Ganira Pashayeva, a parliamentarian who serves on the Azerbaijan delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, says that her group will present documentation to the winter meeting of that body concerning the 60th anniversary of the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, as well as pertaining to the 90th anniversary of the genocide of Azerbaijanis perpetrated by Armenians after the 1917 Russian revolution (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143695.html>).

Azerbaijan takes part in a session of the executive committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held in Istanbul and devoted to events in Gaza (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143388.html>).

13 January

President Ilham Aliyev receives Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves and the two leaders sign a joint declaration on expanding cooperation between their two countries (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143467.html>). President Ilham Aliyev says that the signing of the joint declaration with Estonia is yet another demonstration that Azerbaijan is "a reliable partner" for foreign governments and firms (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143567.html>). The same day, Azerbaijan's First Lady Mekhriban Aliyeva receives her Estonian counterpart, Evelina Ilves (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143486.html>).

12 January

The Azerbaijan foreign ministry calls in Russian Ambassador Vasily Istratov to ask for an explanation of Moscow's transfer of arms to Armenia. Istratov says that he "found out" about the transfer only "from the mass media in Azerbaijan" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143420.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives new Indian Ambassador Debnath Shaw (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143311.html>).

11 January

Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov names Vasil Kalinov as Sofia's new ambassador in Baku, replacing Ivan Palchev, who completed his assignment in the Azerbaijani capital in July 2008 (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143233.html>).

9 January

Azerbaijan parliamentarians express outrage at reports that Moscow has supplied Armenia with 800 million US dollars worth of arms (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143037.html>).

Goran Lennmarker, the special representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, arrives in South Caucasus for a two-day visit (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/143124.html>).

8 January

Matthew Bryza, US deputy assistant secretary of state and co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, says that he hopes the upcoming visit of the co-chairs of that group to the region will lay the foundation for the next meeting between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/142950.html>).

6 January

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe announces that it will not send observers to the March 18th referendum in Azerbaijan concerning amendments to that country's constitution (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/142654.html>).

The Azerbaijani foreign ministry expresses its concern about the situation in Palestine and especially in Gaza, noting that "Azerbaijan supports the efforts of the Palestinian people to achieve peace and stability in the region, as well as the establishment of an independent Palestinian state" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/142646.html>).

5 January

Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of Chechnya, expresses regret that relations between Grozny and Baku have not gone beyond shopping trips by Chechens in Azerbaijan and the presence of an Azerbaijani diaspora in Grozny. He recalls that in Soviet times, links between the oil industries of the two republics were very close (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/142525.html>).

4 January

Parviz Shakhbazov, Azerbaijan's ambassador in Berlin, says that "if the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is not re-established, then there will never be peace and stability in the region" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/142448.html>).

Note to Readers

The editors of "Azerbaijan in the World" hope that you find it useful and encourage you to submit your comments and articles via email (adabiweekly@ada.edu.az). The materials it contains reflect the personal views of their authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.