Chapter III

Challenges to Stability and Cooperation

Marxist emphasis on the historical formation of identity is most damaging to the rational-choice perspective. Individual identities and thus preferences are continually molded by society: this seems unquestionable

- Przeworski (1985:38)

Within a century time-frame, no region in the world has gone under more fundamental transformations than the CSR. Engulfed by Soviet socialism, region’s traditional economy, societies, cultures and politics changed drastically and in the aftermath of Sovietization remained intact for almost seven decades. Post-Soviet Caspian Sea region witnessed widespread nationalistic aspirations and gradually attempted to move toward capitalism and non-socialist values, marking another beginning. This chapter will focus on the post-soviet period, which has witnessed radical changes in all aspects of the CSR’s societies, politics and economics. The consequences of socio-political and ideological/religious movements and above all the complex issues of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts will be analyzed here in accord with the energy potential of the CSR.

Comprising Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, the Caspian region has been the theater of countless massive migrations and is an ethnic and linguistic patchwork stretching from Turkey to China and beyond. The continued impact of the Caspian region’s oil as a turning device on the outcome of the World Wars I and II, various ethnic groups, and on regional states’ politics, geography, demography and history is not disputed. The combination of various issues and aspects has shaped a mixed scenario which will be analyzed at two levels:

- Intra-State Stability & Instability Commonalities: politics, economy, social crisis such as corruption and bribery, human rights violations, identity and ethnic conflicts
Inter-State Stability & Instability Challenges: territorial disputes, Islamic fundamentalism, kidnapping, drug trafficking, terrorism, competition for energy transport, militarization and arm-race, alliances with external powers, economic cooperation, safe energy export, common threats, cultural ties, environmental issue

Since in several cases elements of instabilities are overlapping, they cannot plainly and specifically be classified as simply intra-state or inter-state, but rather as both. Varieties of issues are challenging the stability of the CSR. These destabilizing factors are common regional concerns which require the Caspian littoral and non-littoral states’ collective cooperation in order to find solutions. States’ approach and willingness to tackle inter-states instabilities depend on each individual state’s national interest. For instance, every Caspian littoral or non-littoral state has its own approach and interest toward insurgency and ethnic conflicts in Caucasus. Thus, not all the measures taken are necessarily cooperative and constructive. As we will discuss later on, in some cases, these measures have rather been destructive and generated prolonged instabilities, ongoing conflicts or common threats. Intra-state socio-political developments have also impacted the attitudes toward regional issues. Pro-reform Kazakhstan’s domestic and regional policies for example are different than statist-oriented policies in countries like Turkmenistan.

Of the three main conceptualized cooperation models - constitutionalism, functionalism and coordination through hierarchy (also known as hegemony) - none is normally opted for and applied alone. Unlike some other countries, Caspian states prefer to use a combination of the three, depending on the nature of the cooperation and the calculation of costs, gains and losses. Constitutionalism is based on the institutionalization of a package for short-term gains while promising greater long-term gains through further cooperation. Unlike one-step solutions formula of constitutionalism, the functionalist approach claims that states are cautious of their sovereignty and thereby hesitant to accept other states’ authority to be exercised on them. An incremental approach to states’ common benefits can be free from fatal errors, thereby ending up in a lasting cooperation. In cooperation through hierarchy (hegemony), a cooperative environment established through the enforcement of a single, dominant cooperator’s will, hopes of dependency and other factors will lead to an agreed regime (Gleason 2001:1079).
Naturally cooperators are resistant to constitutionalism and coordination through hierarchy models though a necessity may require their involvement and cooperation in entering into either of these. Being the sole superpower of the region, Russia has used its power to impose its will. ‘Constitutionalized’ and ‘hegemonized’ packs such as CIS can be observed are merely signs of the Russian dominance. On the other hand, Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) introduced by Kazakhstan, or Shanghai Cooperation introduced by China rather follow the functionalist model. Cooperation developments in the CSR have shown that regional states welcoming the functionalism model have resisted to the two other models. Whether in economic, peace or security pacts, functionalism mostly prevailed, therefore making it a suitable cooperation-model to increase stability in and out of the CSR. While big powers like Russia or China can benefit from the outcome of constitutionalism and coordination through hierarchy models, less powerful and more vulnerable former Soviet republics would consider functionalism as the most advantageous model of cooperation.

Trans-border Problems and Disputes in the Caspian Sea Region

“[B]orders are the point at which the state's authority ceases; hence, they become a place where the state's power is vulnerable. Border controls arise from the state's attempt to address this vulnerability” (Chandler 1998:19). Caspian republics' sensitivity on their borders and their territorial right and integrity are mostly driven from their identity concerns.

None of the Caspian littoral states with the exception of Russia and Iran “ever historically existed within their present borders prior to the Soviet era” (Chandler 1998:19). Not only Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan but also regional states of Armenia or Georgia had historically not been sovereign entities as they are today. The border disputes after their independence are mostly due to Soviet-time insufficient and even imperfect border demarcation.

Presently, several countries in and around the Caspian region have disputes over borders. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran, Iran and Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have either serious border disputes or have not yet clearly demarcated their borders. Border issues that also involved two Caspian states were one of the main reasons for the birth of Shanghai Five. On 26th
April 1996, five bordering countries, including Russia and Kazakhstan, signed a package of 14 agreements with China on border normalization. By 2000 and even though the member states mostly addressed general political and security concerns, issues such as resolving disputes over trans-boundary water and energy resources and transport infrastructure were receiving a special attention by the neighbors. However the main border disputes are not onshore but offshore in the Caspian Sea itself and based on energy reserves issues. The offshore border dispute has even led once to a military stand off.

The long Kazak-Russian border\(^1\), changing-course of Syr-Darya and Aras rivers’ water as borderline between Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan and Iran-Azerbaijan respectively, and above all unclear and unsettled status of the Caspian Sea are amongst the main border issues. Uzbekistan’s unilateral survey of its border with Kazakhstan in 2000 faced official Kazak objection, thereby ending up with the establishment of a demarcation commission. The same year, Turkmen and Uzbek governments signed a protocol stating that ‘neither had territorial claims on the other’ (Gleason2001:1090-1).

**Disputed Oil Fields in the Caspian Sea**

With the division of the Caspian Sea into national sectors between Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, the northern Sea borders have been demarcated. However, the southern Caspian Sea’s water has remained disputed by Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan till today. The unsettled status of the Caspian Sea already created tensions and until the completion of a full demarcation of the Caspian water, such tensions are likely to arise from time to time.

**Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan Disputes**

In January 1997, Turkmenistan laid claim on Azeri and Chirag oil fields, naming them as Khazar and Osman. Azerbaijan rejected Turkmenistan claim on the ground that oil companies, which carefully studied the Azeri-Chirag fields, were recognizing those as part of the Azeri section of the sea. If that hadn’t been the case, Azeris claimed, these companies would not have signed a multibillion dollar deal. Subsequently, Turkmenistan withdrew its claim but didn’t compromise on the Serdar oilfield, known as Kyapaz by Azerbaijan. The same year, during the official visit of Heydar Aliyev to Russia, a deal was signed between

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\(^1\) With exclusion of 2477-km Canada-Alaska border segment from 8893-km US-Canada border, Kazakhstan-Russia border with 6846-km is the longest in the world.
Azeri SOCAR and Russian LUKoil and Rosneft on the exploitation of the Kyapaz field situated 145-km away from the Azeri coast. Azerbaijan had already stated that the Kyapaz field was first discovered by Azeri experts in 1959, the first oil well was dug in 1986 and 300 million tons of oil were extracted by 1988. However, amidst mounting objection of then Turkmen President Niyazov, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Valery Serov finally informed Niyazov that Russian agreement over Kyapaz/Serdar was void. Aliev's 1999 proposal of founding a joint Azeri-Turkmen company for exploitation of the Kyapaz/Serdar got no response from Turkmenistan. Since then, this field has remained disputed (Granmayeh 2004: 26).

Iran-Turkmenistan Disputes

In the summer of 1997, a dispute arose between Turkmenistan and Iran when the former invited tenders for 11 blocks in what it claimed were within its body of water. With Iran's objection Turkmenistan withdrew 3 of the 11 blocks from the tender in the same year and both countries decided to 'operate jointly in the disputed areas until the final clarification of Caspian Sea's legal status' (Granmayeh 2004: 26).

Iran- Azerbaijan Disputes

The most serious dispute has happened over an oil field to which Azerbaijan is referring to as Araz-Sharg-Alov (known as Alov) and Iran is calling it Alborz. This field would be put into Iranian water if Iran's share of the Caspian Sea was 20 %. Alov/Alborz field has been the only disputed areas which led to use of military force. In July 2001, an Iranian navy boat approaching a BP research vessel surveying the Alov/Alborz area, asked the vessel to leave the water which Iran believes to be within its own borders. An aircraft fighter maneuvered over the BP ship forcing it to leave the area. Following that BP stated that it will stop its surveillance of the field till the settlement of the dispute.

For a while tensions mounted between Azerbaijan and Iran and caused implicit Turkish reaction to the incident. Summoning Iran's ambassador, then Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Artur Rasizade called Iran's move a "gross violation of international norms" that could cause "serious damage" to relations. On 24th July Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid-Reza Assefi responded, "We are deeply astonished with (the) Azerbaijani hue and cry against measures taken by the Islamic Republic to defend its legitimate rights." Tension was high after Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister Vilayat Quliev stated, "We will not get into a
war but we will stand up for our rights" (Lelyveld 2001-July-25). Though in a statement Turkey called upon both Iran and Azerbaijan to withhold the use and the threats of force, a few days later on 13th August calling Iranian ambassador to Turkish Foreign Ministry, Ankara asserted that Turkey is ready to send troops if Iran takes any military action against Azerbaijan. Twenty days later a Turkish F-16 squadron took part in an air show in Baku to accompany General Hussein Kivirkoglu, then Turkish army chief of staff (Lelyveld 2001-August-21 and Tehran Times, 2001- August-26). Unsettled border disputes in southern Caspian Sea, Iran’s July-2001 use of military means to assert its legal right, and Caspian littoral states’ purchase of new patrol boats, etc. are sign of militarization of the Sea.

**Militarization of the Caspian Sea Region**

Border disputes, ethnic conflicts, foreign military presence and bases in the region are adding to the fears of CSR’s militarization. July-2001 incident of Iran’s use of military means against Azerbaijan supposedly to defend its border and interest can be interpreted as the commencing of a change in attitudes towards not only the Sea itself but also towards the region surroundings the Sea. A series of regional pressures, regional and international relationships and intra-states interactions have put the CSR on the verge of a drastic transformation. With military expenditure of the littoral and none-littoral Caspian states on the rise, physical presence of Russian military and bases, US military supports to its regional allies, NATO’s involvement and expansion, and Turkey’s military training of Azeri army, the instability is alarming. If constructive measures are not taken by the involved states the militarization of the Caspian Sea would be inevitable. Signs of such trend are already visible.

Despite Soviet collapse, its Caspian Sea flotilla remained intact and mostly went to Russia. With the exception of Azerbaijan which got 25 % of it, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan surrendered their shares back to Moscow though, they inherited the infrastructure. However, they have been in their quest to acquire naval vessels even if on a modest scale at present.

If intensified, external military involvement will be more threatening. Though Ross Wilson, then U.S ambassador to Azerbaijan, stressed on non-lethality of the U.S. gift of

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2 In its 50th anniversary in 1998, NATO’s new doctrine asserted that NATO had the authority to intervene in conflicts outside of its borders disregarding the UN sanction.
“patrolling’ boats to Azerbaijan, the move faced the strong criticism from the Caspian states. The US Government said that first of two unarmed boats delivered to Azerbaijan on 16th June 2001, ‘would pose no threat to its neighbors’ and won’t ‘affect the region’s balance of power’, rather it will promote regional security via coast guarding, ‘preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms, and militarily goods’ (Lelyveld 2001).

In response, Iranian and Russian media accused the US for interfering and creating crisis in the Caspian. Turkmenistan announced it would buy 20 Ukrainian patrol boats followed by the statement of then President Leonid Kuchma that the number will be only two. The next news went farther that Turkmenistan will ‘exchange gas’ for Russian arms and patrol crafts. In defense, Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister of the time Vilayat Quliev said that Ashgabat also received US-made patrol boats which was confirmed by a US official. Azerbaijani press also accused Iran for arm and army buildup in the Caspian Sea (Lelyveld 2001-June-26). Russia as the formidable undisputed military might of the CSR along littoral-power Iran and none-littoral power Turkey are shaping the balance of power in the region. The rest of the weaker states are allied with one of the three powers or are seeking the backing of the USA. The Western powers are continuously contributing to the rivalries in the Caspian region through their energy-export preferences, and denial of Russian and Iranian influences and role. This is in turn strengthening Russia-Iran military cooperation. Iran’s quest for nuclear power, supposedly for peaceful civilian use which West interprets as a quest for nuclear bomb, will definitely change the regional balance of power.

**Economic Factor**

Economy could be a determining factor in the launching of future disorders in ethnic clashes and regional conflicts both at inter-state and intra-state levels. In an ethnically diverse region the issue of groups and clans and the amount of financial share they get from state resources has been and are basis for intra-state tensions and clashes. Here, the concept of poor and rich is a serious debate which could intensify with oil-export income. Indeed, the existence of an under-privileged class is a serious threat to internal stability of the CSR. Despite the fact that overwhelming majority is politically apathetic, alienated and deprived

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3 Same year despite the lack of evidence and Tehran’s denial, Azeri press reported that “Tehran planned to increase its Caspian force by adding 6,000 troops, 75 armored vehicles, eight fighter planes, 34 patrol craft, a frigate, and a submarine.”
groups of the society are posing a dangerous and unmanageable challenge that have to be taken into account. The widened gap between classes can eventually lead to cultural clashes (Akiner 2000: 93, 99).

Rapid injection of oil-export money into the littoral-state’s economy if not well planned and controlled could turn to a real disadvantage. As the experiences of developing Persian Gulf oil-exporting countries revealed, energy export can negatively affect the economy and not necessarily turn beneficial. The merry of high and fast income of almost oil exporting countries (probably with the exception of Norway) has ended in overspending on infrastructures, consumptions, and manufacture industries.

It has been underlined that “without exception, the Caspian states and their neighbors are ruled by authoritarian oligarchies characterized by suppression of opposition elements, gross corruption and cumbersome bureaucracies, in a pattern common to all the successor states of the Soviet Union” (Dekmejian and Simonian 2003: 170). In these states, the sudden and rapid income has the quality of encouraging corruption and reducing regimes’ accountability. In countries like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan where in 2004 alone, energy export amounted around 80% and 60% of total export respectively, negative side-effects of sudden high income can add to the preexisting socio-economic crisis.

In absence of democratic institutions, regimes will spend the money wherever it will please them. Oil money can be spent mostly on consolidating the power, thereby contributing to the economic and democratic stagnation of the littoral states. In absence of an efficient taxation system or inability to implement it can be used to bribe the population for being less accountable. As in many developing oil-exporting countries, such practices will be employed by the elite to keep the power and continue ruling. In the long run, the cost and burden of such practices on economy will be fatal. There is the danger of Dutch Disease, as a result of the inflation and its side effects. The North Sea oil boom affected the Dutch economy so negatively that it came to be known as ‘Dutch disease’ Economic boom and Dutch Disease could shrink the agriculture and accelerate the deindustrialization (Crandall 2006: 51-52).

At the inter-state level, impacts of oil wealth on regional ethnic conflicts, arm race or migration will be inevitable. Once enough capital is gathered Azeris can think of regaining their lost territories from Armenian via the might of their accumulated arms and capital, or
by funding Caucasian militants in order to harm Russian interests in case of tensions. Baku can invest on pan-Turkism and destabilize Iranian Azeri provinces or simply, if turned to a prosperous state, can attract Iranian Azeris. A vast, less-populated wealthy Kazakhstan can attract migrants not only from neighboring poor countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan but also from China. In a region, formerly interconnected and unified, the unequal distribution of wealth would be read as injustice which would arouse envy and dissatisfaction of the neighbors. If the gap between ‘have and have not’ remains huge, new regional instabilities are likely.

**Caspian Sea Region and Inter-States Organizations**

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) established in 1985 on the ruins of Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) which formally existed from 1964 till 1979 was founded as a trilateral organization by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. ECO’s goal was ‘to promote multi dimensional regional cooperation with a view to creating conditions for sustained socioeconomic growth in the Member States’. With Soviet disintegration and within a year, ECO expanded to 10 members including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan along with Afghanistan.

After 23 years of its creation, its achievements have barely been substantial. Member states’ differences and interests added to the absence of economically prosperous countries among the member states. This has held ECO back from accomplishing its objectives of economic development, removal of trade barriers, its integration with the world economy, development of transport & communications infrastructure, economic liberalization and privatization, utilization of the material resources, agricultural and industrial potentials, drug control, ecological and environmental protection, strengthening historical and cultural ties, and cooperation with regional and international organizations (ECO, 3 June 2009).

The main weakness of the ECO is the huge gap between economical development levels of the member states. In economic terms, none of the member states are ‘potential markets’ or ‘potential economies’. That is to say barely any member can export or absorb sizable goods of another member. Ironically, while all members are bordering each other, most of their export and import trade is not with member states but with non-member states. Of all members, however, Turkey’s trade volume with other members remains more extensive.
The ECO’s inability to contribute to the stability of the CSR is resulting from internal challenges. Beside its lack of effectiveness and strength, Russia could consider some activities of the ECO as rivaling its own CIS agenda. While Azerbaijan and Iran beside economic aspect of the organizations would prefer to see it politically active, other member states do not. While Azeris would like to use it as a platform to support Baku in NK conflict and Iran would wish to utilize it against the American interest, other members won’t prefer so. Another fact is the politico-religious divide. The organization is divided on namely ‘secular’ states versus ‘Islamic’ states and similarly there is democracy gap between Turkey and some others like Kyrgyzstan with the rest of the members. Despite ECO’s establishment of institutions like a shipping line, an investment and development bank, and, communication, trade and transportation facilities, the clashes of interests between rival member states (Tajikistan versus Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan versus Kyrgyzstan, or Azerbaijan versus Iran) not only disables ECO but makes it inefficient.

As a founding state, Iran’s interests in ECO is derived from its position in the international arena. ECO can be seen as a means for Iran to break its containment by the US. Regional organizations such as ECO are a way out of isolation and a means to bypass US-imposed sanctions. This naturally turned Iran into the most active member of the ECO. Developing its railroad from the Persian Gulf to the CSR which ended in Turkmenistan border, Iran didn’t seek the assistance of other ECO members. Iran so far remains the most active member state in the shipping line.

Thus, financial, structural, infrastructural, political and religious identity has turned ECO to a less harmonized organization thereby hampering its set of goals which are weak in reality and strong on the paper.

Since the creation of the CIS on 21st December 1991, economic harmonization and integration for creating an effective Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) and forming a firm Collective Security Treaty (CST) are challenging tasks for Moscow on the way to a strong CIS. So far and unlike Moscow’s plans and desires, the diverse interests among

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4 Eurasian Economic Community formally created in May 2001 by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Since three littoral Caspian Sea states of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Iran are not member of EEC, therefore EEC has not been discussed in detail.
FSRs and present CIS members⁵ has prevented the expected economic, defense and foreign policy cooperation that Moscow had planned.

Following their ‘Civil divorce’ from Soviet Union’s disintegration, the formation of CIS is observed by some as a revival of Russian past Imperial ambitions, even though Russia is presently and economically not in position to take the burden of the old empire. Instead, Moscow is exercising its military and political capabilities to fulfill its CIS goals. The Kremlin already indicated the significance of FSRs, stationing forces that are guarding almost all FSRs’ borders with the exception of Azerbaijan and Ukraine. Except Russian technical presence in Gabala radar station, Russia has no troops in Azerbaijan. However, through CIS peace-keeping forces (in reality headed by Russia alone) Russia has kept its presence in the disputed NK and for the same reason and the same manner in Georgia. Russia’s selective policy toward member states has slowed the integration and thereby has widened the cooperation gap. Kremlin’s support to Armenia in the NK conflict or its siding with Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia already detached the loyalty of two FSRs to the CIS. Azerbaijan and Georgia have paid the price. The first lost its NK and the latter lost Abkhazia and Ossetia.

Though FSRs want less dependency on Russia, they are still dependent on each other and particularly on Moscow in one way or another. Raw materials, intra-states products, railway networks, gas pipelines, infrastructures, electricity grids, etc are only some examples. Despite this fact, all post-Soviet republics look forward for more economic self-sufficiency and economic independence from Moscow. Joining ECO or forming the GUUAM was mainly motivated by this aspiration.

One problem with the CIS is that European, Caucasian, and Central Asian sections have virtually no common interests. American influence polarized CIS further on 10th October 1997 via GUUAM which is composed of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. So CIS is finally and already divided into two Western- and Russian-oriented camps; the CSTO and the GUUAM countries. Moscow perceives GUUAM as a regional economic cooperation enhancement without Russia. Indeed American influence and Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey’s cooperation facilitated an oil-

⁵ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Ukraine. (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as associate members since 26 August 2005.)
pipeline negotiation (BTC) which bypassed Russia. More important is GUAM's growing military and defense ties with the US and NATO which is a major concern for Moscow (after Uzbekistan left the organization, it came to be known as GUAM). (Buszynski 2004: 161, 163).

Because of political divergences most of the member states prefer bilateral cooperation and selective integration within CIS. With the exception of Kazakhstan, the three Caspian littoral republics of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are less in favor of integration of the CIS and that is why at least in the CSR, the CIS role will not be a pervasive one.

As former Turkmen president said, 'it is impossible to go on living the way we lived before and it is equally impossible to break all ties with our former SSRs. Turkmenistan’s goal is to achieve a balance of interests in the CIS. The basis of any union or commonwealth is mutual benefit’ (Niyazov 1994:36). Since in reality CIS has been founded more upon strategic considerations than economic cooperation, and since unlike EU, CIS members are neither using the same currency nor sharing useful means and capital, the CIS contribution to contain instabilities in the CSR is less likely in the present scenario. Above all, even its survival is questionable, as the US move into Central Asia wiped out a decade of Russian effort for collective security pact and disabled CIS’s right arm, CST. As Ajay Patnaik puts it: “[s]o long as Caspian energy remains a main focus of US geopolitical objectives, the CIS would be under pressure to either disintegrate or remain ineffective” (Chenoy 2007: 120, Patnaik 2007: 110).

The Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) initiated by Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev attempts to be an Asian model of European OSCE. In 14th September 1999, Almaty meeting, member states declared the CICA’s principles based on: sovereign equality and territorial integrity, refraining from the threat or use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-intervention in internal affairs, economic, social and cultural cooperation and human rights and fundamental freedoms.6

6 CICA’s 18 member states are: Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Palestine National Administration, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, South Korea and Thailand. Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Ukraine, USA, Vietnam are observer-states and UN, OSCE and LAS are observer-organizations. CICA’s next steps are set on implementation of confidence building measures and a common approach to the new threats and challenges to the security in the Asia.
Despite the necessity of an effective and efficient internationally known and regionally accepted and active organization, the CICA is yet below the expected and competence level. It can be compared with Iranian President Khatami's proposed 'Dialogue Among Civilizations' (DAC) which like the CICA of Nazarbayev got recognized by the UN and held a permanent office in Tehran as CICA does in Kazakhstan. What makes both CICA and DAC more 'civil-social' and more communal than internationally empowered organizations is their lack of an executive power. Behind any successful regional or international organization lies the economic, military and political might of the founding state. Compared to SCO or OSCE both of which are enjoying the backing of big powers, CICA does not have such backing. It is less probable that China or Russia will empower CICA since their first priority is SCO and CIS. Therefore it is less imaginable that the CICA's contribution to regional stability and conflict management will exceed promoting 'good neighborly' bonds, constructive understanding, dialogue and communications. Nonetheless, for an ethnically diverse region it will be a big step forward if the CICA succeeded to implement those.

Shanghai Forum/Five (formed on 26th April 1996), was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) after admitting Uzbekistan and proclaimed in 15th June 2001 in China by its members: Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyz, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The main objective of SCO is to maintain peace, security and stability through confidence-building measures. According to the Declaration, the objectives of SCO are: promoting peace, security and stability in Central Asia; strengthening mutual understanding and friendship; maintaining the new democratic, justice and rational political and economic world order; joint fight against terrorism, and extremism, drug trafficking and illegal migration; promoting affective regional cooperation in political, trade and economic, defense, judicial, environmental, cultural, educational, energy transport, financial and other spheres; promoting economic growth in the region; coordinating approach to the integration in the world economy; promoting of human rights; keeping relations with other states and international organizations; and prevention of international conflict, etc., (SCO 2008).

Chinese masterminding of SCO can be interpreted as a response to both growing Russian and American presence in the region. Nonetheless, American presence in the region is a common concern and serious matter for both China and Russia. Chinese energizing of
the SCO is two-fold at the regional level and international level. Regionally, Beijing attempts to keep its own Muslim Xinjiang province away from separatists and radical Islam by stressing on the same threat its neighbors are facing. At the same time Beijing tries to motivate SCO members for more cooperation through economic influences. At the international level Beijing can use the SCO as a tool to counterbalance big powers.

Opening SCO’s anti-terrorist office in Bishkek on June 2002, and holding the first anti-terrorist military exercises on August 2003, was Chinese supportive assurance to smaller regional countries and a symbolic response to American advance in its surroundings. To Beijing, the SCO, as a multinational regional body, ‘has the potential to represent an indigenous solution to indigenous problems’ (Akbarzadeh 2004: 700-701). Already encircled by US, Iran can share China and Russia’s concerns about the American presence in Central Asia or in the CSR. Even though it is still an observing member in the SCO, Iran shares the same view than China and Russia hold vis-à-vis the US. Despite the fact that all big regional powers Russia, China and Iran are sharing the same common view at the international level i.e., counterbalancing the USA, at the regional level their interests diverge. With China’s economic power and less hegemonic approach, SCO has more chances to increase regional cooperation than less-united CIS. However, a decade after its formation, the SCO yet has to overcome its shortcomings and harmonize the interests of its members, whose interests sometimes clash sharply. Till economic and democratic growth of the states in Asia in general and in both East and West side of the Caspian Sea in particular is not completed, a harmonized CIS or unified SCO is less likely to emerge.

Environmental Security of the Caspian Sea

The least discussed issue of the CSR is the challenges threatening both the Sea and the littoral states. Environmental damages have direct impact on national security, demography, health, food supplies and economy. These hazards have a more negative impact on the CSR due to Caspian Sea’s location and characteristic. Off shore drilling accidents, pipeline breakages and seismic problems can damage the sea. Till an over-all agreement on legal environmental regime has not been reached and “an effective means of monitoring and enforcement” – in an area known for its inobservance of laws- has not been
set forward, then the environmental problem of the Caspian Sea will remain in the place (Gregory2000: 38).

Being the biggest enclosed body of water on Earth, Caspian Sea does not have any natural connection to the world’s oceans. Being larger than Lake Victoria, its length is approximately 1,030-km and its width is between 196-km to 435-km. With 78,700-km³ water areas its total coastline is about 7,000-km long. Among 130 rivers, the Volga River running from north to the Sea brings 60% of the Caspian Sea’s water. From west, Kura and Araks are adding 7% and from south Iranian rivers are adding another 5%. The rest comes from direct precipitation and groundwater. Most of the water loss is from evaporation and flows to Garabogaz Gol, the largest lagoon in the world, in Turkmenistan coastline. To stem any further drop in sea level, a dam was built across Garabogaz Gol’s strait in March 1980. Isolating Garabogaz Gol from the Caspian basin, this dam prevented further outflow of water to the bay, thereby raising the water level by 11 cm. During subsequent years and due to re-rising of the Caspian water level, the dam was completely removed in June 1992.

Rise and fall of Water Level

The Caspian Sea can be divided into three northern, middle and southern parts. Average air temperature in north ranges between -10C to 26C and due to subzero climate in some months the northern sea which is the shallowest part is ice-covered. The average temperature in south ranges between 10C to 30C. While the depth of water in north along the Russian and Kazakh coast is 25 meters and sometimes less than 5 meters, in the southern absolute lowest point close to Iran, it reaches to 1000 meters. The middle part, stretching from Kazakhstan’s Mangyshlak peninsula to Russian Federation’s Chechen Island and parallel to Turkmenistan’s Turkmenbashi peninsula to Azerbaijan’s Apsheron peninsula, has the average depth of 100 to 788 meters (Akiner 2004: 343-359, 384 and caspianenvironment: 7 November 2004).

The fluctuations of the Caspian water level which has yet no solid scientific explanation can be divided into three periods. From 1840 to 1930, the water level changed between 40 to 70 centimeters. During the second period, from 1931 to 1977, water level fell drastically about 2.8 meters and in the third period from 1978 to 1998 it rose by 2.5 meters. Causes of water level rise and fall are; excessive irrigation use and municipal demands, huge
hydraulic engineering projects and construction of hydroelectric stations on Volga, affect of Aral Sea, tectonic activity in Sea floor and climate change. The rise of water level already imposed huge financial burden on coastal countries which erected breakwaters to fight the water advance (Akiner 2004: 343-359, 384 and caspianenvironment: 7 November 2004).

Sources of Pollution and Ecological Threats

Human factor is one of the most serious threats to the Caspian Sea and a source of pollution for its ecology. Man-made hazards and wastages enter either directly into the Sea or through the rivers. The largest pollutions reach the sea through the rivers. The north Volga River (around which major Russian heavy industries and military plants are stationed) contributes up to some 84% of the Caspian pollution. The largest share is from polluting substances such as petroleum which account for about 98% (Akiner 2004: 343-359, 384).

Table 4. Rivers as the Major Sources of Caspian Sea Pollution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties and Rivers</th>
<th>Water flow cubic km/y</th>
<th>Oil Million t/y</th>
<th>Phenols million t/y</th>
<th>Detergents million t/y</th>
<th>Cu million t/y</th>
<th>Zn million t/y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terek</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulak</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samur</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kura</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<td>Kazakhstan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ural</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from “Program for the Protection of the Caspian Sea from Industrial Pollution: Project for the Governments of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Russia and Turkmenistan”, UNIDO, UC/RFR/95/103, Vienna, 1998, p.44.

Note: Cu= Copper, Zn=Zink, t/y = ton per year

From the western coast the major polluting factors are oil industries of Azerbaijan’s two main cities; Baku and Sumgait. The Azerbaijani offshore Oil Rocks complex, an engineering marvel of 1949, considerably harmed the sea environment, mainly because of its aging equipments from Soviet era. Many leakages have been noticed or have simply been ignored. In some cases, it took months to bring the leakage incidents under control. For instance, on August 1983, drilling on the platform 60 years Azerbaijan, about 250 miles from Apsheron coast, proved to be fatal. As the drilling reached a depth of 1,600 feet and hit a high-pressure layer of oil, “the platform shook to its foundation as a hot gusher spurted a 100 feet up into the air.” Attempts to control the high-pressure well and to collect the leaked
oil went in vain and for about two months hundreds of thousands of tons of oil spilled into the Caspian water. Two years later, on 27th November 1985, as the drilling tube of the platform Khazar-3 broke down on the seabed at some 10,000 feet, the crew had to be evacuated. Following the incident, the oil continued to leak into Caspian underwater for years (Van der Leeuw 2000: 113).

Armenia and Georgia are having their share of polluting the sea through rivers running through their territory and finally ending in the Caspian Sea. From the eastern part, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan contribute. There are allegations that Kazakhstan’s BN 350 reactor in Aktau (though closed down on April 1999) added to environmental pollution, though this has not been scientifically proven yet. Observers agreed on Iran’s less polluting role in the southern Caspian. However, the 1980s introduction of azolla (a native Philippine plant) in Iran’s northern provinces’ rice farms harmed the sea ecology. Used at first as fertilizer, the plant reproduced so fast that it finally covered Anazli’s wetland and then moved to the sea. Covering a large water surface, it completely suffocates the sea life below. On the other hand Iran launched a research (September 2001) in Fisheries Research Center of Mazandaran to find out the effects of beroe (Bero ovate) on comb jellyfish which is threatening Caspian Sea fishery since the late 1990s. Out of 115 species of fish, the highest threat was on highly prized and worldly known beluga sturgeon.

Being accidently introduced in the Black Sea and from there in the Caspian Sea through the Volga-Don canal, jellyfishs (Mnemiopsis Leidyi) which are 5 centimeters in size, without any natural enemy and native of the east coast of America, can double their size in a day, reach maturity in fortnight and produce 8,000 offspring per day. They therefore become threatening for the environment as they consumme zooplankton which is the main source of diet for spart (kil’ka), a main diet for big predators like sturgeons and seals, but also for human beings. The impact of mnemiopsis leidyi on sprat has been huge. By mid-2001, the school of the latter dropped by half, thereby affecting the southern region where mnemiopsis were more numerous than in the north or south Caspian.

Until 1990s, the Caspian Sea was producing 95 % of the world’s caviar which comes from sturgeon. However, it’s interesting to notice that within two decades only, from 1970s to late 1990s, official sturgeon catches dropped to less than one-tenth of 30,000 tones. Iran and Russia are the two most active countries in sturgeon hatcheries thereby big contributors
to caviar production. The highest sturgeon catches till late 1990s was due to Soviet 1960s release of 4 million juvenile sturgeons. Sharp decrease of sturgeon population was reported due to pollution and invasion of comb jellyfish. In April 1998 and to force Caspian littoral states to abide the ecological norms and illegal sturgeon poaching, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) requested littoral states to introduce labeling sturgeon products and export permit, and fixed export quotas for each state. Iran was exempted of restrictions due to its already existing effective management plans.

The sudden death of thousands of Caspian seals (*Phoca caspica*) in 1997 and in 2000 was a worrisome news. Though post-mortem examination stressed on DDT as the cause of 1997 deaths and canine distemper virus as the causes of 4,000 seal deaths of 2000, Kazakh environmentalists pointed at toxic discharges of Kashagan filed. Whatever was the cause of the deaths, Caspian seal were added to the red list of International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) as an endangered species and Kazakhstan succeed to enforce foreign energy companies to comply with environmental standards.

Iran’s 1992 Caspian Sea Co-operation Zone which included environmental issues of the sea didn’t gain enough support and faded away. But the 1994 Co-ordination Committee for Hydrometeorology and Pollution Monitoring of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM) and the 1998 Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP), backed by UN and multinational agencies, gained weight and cooperation from the other littoral states.

To sum up, NGO’s have already taken Caspian environmental issues out of their local context and have internationalized them. But as Akiner puts it, ‘a co-ordinated, integrated approach is vital if transboundary issues such as coastal degradation, sustainable exploitation of fish stocks, industrial and agricultural pollution, invasion by alien species, degradation of biodiversity, and the damage to the health and well being of local populations are to be addressed effectively”. Lastly, states should take precocious measures to prevent environmental disasters which may occur by local or international terrorist networks probable attacks on oil extraction and exporting facilities like, during April 2004 “sea-born suicide attacks on Iraqi oil export facilities” (Akiner 2004: 343-359, 384 and caspianenvironment:7 November 2004). As an Al-Qaeda affiliated Web site stated in “Map of Future Al-Qaeda Operation”, terrorists would make it a priority to attack Middle East oil
facilities.” Al-Qaeda’s call for “hitting wells and pipelines that will scare companies from working there and stealing Muslim treasures” has been already referred to in the US House of Representatives. Caspian oil and gas facilities could possibly be a target too (Mahapatra 2007: 166-7).

**Energy and Intra-State Instability**

Political crises, absence of democracy, regime change, social dislocation, corruption are among domestic ills of the oil producing countries. As the events of Venezuela, Iran, Nigeria, Algeria, and Mexico have shown oil can bring socio-political crisis and regime change. In all oil producing countries, with the exception of few like Norway or Canada, the absence of a democratic system is a reality. Undemocratic regimes, concentration of power in the hands of a few, poor governance and economic mismanagement, despite the huge wealth coming from oil export, lead to inflation and low level of living standard.

Unlike other commodities, producing oil requires huge capital investment and thus state involvement is necessary. Since oil is a highly strategic material and a source of high and fast income, regimes maintain tight grasp on it. While international companies are securing their oil contracts, regimes prefer to secure their control over the ‘black gold’ which in turn brings lack of transparency, centralization of power; and ironically the degradation of living standard. In Nigeria, Africa’s largest oil producer, where oil revenue has been over $300 billion in the past 25 years, 60 percent of the population still live with less than $2 per day (Tsalik 2003: 9-10).

In the present world, the principle of democracy has become so universal that its importance and effectiveness cannot be denied. When it is conceived as a mean rather than an end, democracy signifies a form or a method of social control. Democracy being ‘power of the people’ cannot be exercised in its literal sense, therefore people’s representatives exercise it on behalf of the people. Apart from this there are certain elements that define democracy in more objective terms such as multi-party system, free and fair elections, free press, separation of power, respect for human rights, individual as well as collective liberty, civil society i.e. plurality of social organization and also widespread sharing of democratic values in the society (Thimm 1995: 88-100). If these values and institutions are rightly respected in the society, certainly it can turn into a ‘Democratic Political Setup’, which is missing in the CSR at many levels. Post-1990s vacuum following the receding of socialistic
ideology and failure of command economy in the CSR got filled by capitalistic market economy and democratic values. Failure or misuse of both economy and democracy can provide a fertile ground for either religious elements or opportunists to destabilize the present internal and regional power composition. However, if Caspian states succeed in their economic development, all kind of extremism, political as well as religious, could be prevented (Ahrari 1994: 525-538).

All Caspian littoral regimes without exception are none-democratic and authoritarian. Power is concentrated in the hands of either one individual or a few selective ones. In case of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, first Presidents after Independance Aliyev⁷, Nazarbayev⁸, and Niyazov exercised absolute power, while in post-Putin Russia and post-Khomeini Iran, power is shared between some individuals, constitutional institutions or unconstitutional centers (Akiner 2000: 76-77).

It has been said that to know if a country is democratic or not, one has to check up on state tolerance of the media and status of women. Ironically, the constitutions of all littoral states contain democratic measures and political freedom. The only difference is that, while in Iran non-Islamic parties literally are not allowed to campaign; in other littoral states Islamic parties are banned. With the exception of Islamic Republic of Iran, civil societies exist in all other countries. Unlike Turkmenistan, freedoms of expression, thought and information are guaranteed in the constitutions of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Turkmen constitution forbids dissemination of materials that are considered critical of official policies. Any individual practicing this, according to the law, “commit[s] criminal deeds” and is liable to prosecution (Akiner 2000: 87). According to Akiner, “though by no means free but relatively and compared with other Caspian republics, Azerbaijan is “slightly more pluralistic” and has “the most developed political system and the largest number of parties.” (Akiner 2000: 84, 95).

⁷ Heidar Aliyev (b.1923-d.2003), originally from Nakhichevan, acted as the head of Azerbaijan’s KGB, and as the first Secretary of the Communist Party from 1969 to 1982. In 1993, he was elected President of the republic with a vast majority. He got re-elected in 1998 with a smaller but still rather substantial share of the vote. He passed away on 12 December 2003. His son Ilham Aliyev is the current President.

⁸ Nursultan Nazarayev, (b.1940). In 1984, he became Chairman of the Council of Minister of Kazakhstan. Two years later, in 1986 he became member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. From 1989-1991, he acted as the first Secretary of the Communist Party. In 1990, he became the first President of Kazakhstan when it still was part of the Soviet Union.
Republic of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's economic performance has been the best in whole Central Asia, and further exploitation of oil and gas resources promises a flourishing future for its economy. However, despite energy sector development and rapid economic growth, inflation has not yet been curbed, poverty and unemployment are widespread and economic challenges linger as Kazakh government's main concern. Meanwhile, Kazakh society is divided into groups of 'haves' and 'haves not'. Post-independence privatization, business deals and beneficiaries from energy deals have formed a very rich elite group which is nevertheless labeled as corrupt. Bribery in oil and gas projects has contributed to the growth of corruption, even among high rank politicians and officials in charge. In the words of Sally N. Cummings, "As with the political elites in the Middle East, the Kazakhstani elite exploited their position in the political sector to reinforce their social and economic position. To achieve this, the Middle Eastern political elites used their major policy mechanism nationalization; the Kazakhstani political elite, by contrast, sold off state assets to foreign buyers to enrich themselves personally" (Cummings 2005: 122).

Kazak President has allegedly amassed not only political capital but also much wealth. Like Uzbek and Turkmen presidents, Nazarbayev held a referendum to extend his presidential term without election until 2000, and won with overwhelming majority. Despite opposition protests, December 2005 elections led to the return of Nazarbayev for a further seven-year term with more than 90% of the votes. 2007 Parliament's vote allowed him to stay in office for an unlimited number of terms. The 1995 New constitution had already created a presidential dictatorship, with Nazarbayev as the head of state, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and able to veto any legislation passed by the parliament.

Despite the constitutional guarantee of press freedom, Kazakhstan’s 'privately-owned' and 'opposition media are subject to harassment and censorship' according to Reporters Without Borders. It is no surprise in a country where 'private life, health and financial affairs of the president are classified as state secrets' and defaming of the president and officials is a crime. In the same way, privatizated media, printed press and electronic

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9 The case of 'James Giffen' who was arrested in New York on 30 March 2003 was finally linked to Kazakh President. Arrested on Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (a US law which bans bribing of foreign officials), James Giffen was said had received some US $115 million from Western oil companies. Out of that amount $78 million was said to have gone gone to a secret Swiss bank which ultimately was tied to Nazarbayev.
media are under state control through president's close associates, among who is his eldest
doughter, Dariga. The combination of Dariga's Asar party with President's Otan party in
July 2006 further consolidated Nazarbayev's power (BBC: Country Profile-Kazakhstan, 3
April 2008).

**Russian Federation**

Energy and military are shaping both internal and international Russian polity. Its
energy sector has played the main role in domestic politics especially in post-Soviet years.
The state-run gas monopoly Gazprom - the world's largest producer and exporter- alone has
influenced and affected Russian power structure immensely (Gidadhubli 2007: 34). During
1990s privatization years, oligarchs acquired power via getting involved in enterprises
especially in energy and media sectors. This was the beginning of new era for Russian
political life. Unlike Boris Yeltsin, Putin did not allow oligarchs to influence the hub of
Russian politics; neither did he set media completely free. Among oligarchs who faced
Putin's liquidation was Mikhail Khodorkovsky, head of the Yukos oil company, who, being
convicted on tax and fraud charges, is now serving eight years in jail.

Putin's determination to crush on separatist Chechens to prevent any secessionist
movement in the Russian Federation and the use of controlled media and centralized power
to curb politico-economic and social disorders face critics within and outside Russia. Several
influential daily newspapers and TV channels are either owned by the state or are under
indirect state control by being bought by Kremlin-affiliated companies. May 7th 2008
election of former Gazprom chairman, Dmitry Medvedev as President (who was with Putin
since early 1990s), and Putin's move from President to premiership just one day after shows
that Russian politics won't undergo major shifts. Remaining at the heart of power, Putin

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10 The largest natural gas company in the world, Gazprom, was a fully state-owned company till 1993, when it
was set up as a joint stock company with the 38 % ownership of the state. With merging of state-owned
Rosneft with Gazprom the share of state increased to 50%. With its over 93,000-miles pipeline, Gazprom
controls 90% of the total gas production in Russia and about one-fifth of the world's total natural gas market. It
generates over $ 17 billion (about 8%) of Russia's Gross Domestic Products and about a quarter of Russia's
federal tax revenues. Gazprom and Russian control over the natural gas market could further enhance if
Moscow succeed to form an 'Alliance of Gas Producers', a plan which is on Russia's agenda. Russia has been
trying to form an international natural gas export organization with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

11 Using his business, Mikhail Khodorkovsky had lent his support for liberal politics. Yukos's assets were later
acquired by the state owned Rosneft.

12 Two of the three main federal channels - Russia TV and Channel One – are controlled by government while
Gazprom owns NTV.
will continue to play a ‘key role’ this time as the Prime minister (BBC: Country Profiles-Russia, 3 April 2008).

**Republic of Azerbaijan**

Post-independence Azerbaijan has been mainly shaped by Heidar Aliyev. Born in Nakhichevan, he joined the Soviet security services and served in a WWII ‘military counterintelligence group’ in Ukraine. He then got appointed as head of Azerbaijan’s KGB in 1969 as Communist Party first secretary of his republic. With former KGB Chief Yuri Andropov succeeding Leonid Brezhnev as general secretary of the Soviet Union in 1982, Heydar Aliyev was made deputy prime minister and a full member of the elite Politburo. Believing that communist ideals had distanced from the revolutionary days, Andropov thought that discipline and toughness can restore those ideals. He saw Aliyev as the man who could help. Climbing to upper levels in Moscow, when Gorbachev came to power in 1985, Heydar Aliyev was already the fourth most powerful man in the Soviet Union. Chaotic late-1980 Moscow politics forced him to retreat to his boyhood home where he ran for Nakhichevan’s seat in Azerbaijan parliament, won with 95% of the vote and finally becoming the republic’s president in June 1993 (LeVine 2007: 175-179).

Upon beginning of his presidency, Heydar Aliyev paved the way and engineered the succession of his son Ilham Aliyev. Deputy leader of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) and appointed as vice chairman of the state oil company and later as prime minister, Ilham was prepared for the republic’s Presidency. His ‘highly critical’ 2003 presidential campaign as his father’s ‘political successor’ was followed by opposition demonstration crushed by violent police intervention. Like his father, his human right and media freedom record, and commitment to democracy are often criticized by international observers like the OSCE. Since Azerbaijan’s independence, Ilham Aliyev nevertheless managed to build substantial political power and personal wealth (BBC: Country profile-Azerbaijan, 3 April 2008).

**Republic of Turkmenistan**

Being under direct control of Saparmurat Niyazov since Soviet time, post-independent Turkmenistan remained largely closed to the outside world. Styling himself as Turkmenbashi (Father of the Turkmen), turning his country to one-party state through his Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), making himself president for life in 1999,
introducing his compulsory book, Ruhnama as a set of cultural, historical and spiritual guidance codes and spending public money on numerous grandiose projects, Niyazov presented an odd picture of his country to the world.

After his death in December 2006 and under Turkmen constitution the presidency should have gone to the People's Council chairman Ovezgeldy Atayev who under criminal charges was sacked soon after Niyazov's death. Instead, former deputy prime minister, Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, became acting president and along with five other candidates in the poll (all from the DPT campaigned for the presidency) in February 2007 won with 89% of the votes. Weeks later, he got chosen as chairman of the People's Council, Turkmenistan's highest legislative body. Nonetheless, the presidential election was considered 'rigged' by western commentators. The new president promised to continue Niyazov's policies but also said he will introduce reforms (BBC: Country Profiles-Turkmenistan, 3 April 2008).

Ethnically the most homogeneous Caspian republic, Turkmenistan is virtually free from inter-ethnic hostilities. However, tribes and tribal allegiances play a prominent role in the society. Possessing the world's fifth largest reserves of natural gas and being unable to attract foreign investors, Turkmenistan remains impoverished. Whether post-Niyazov Turkmenistan under new President Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov will continue to be repressed by the omnipresent cult of personality or not, one has to wait and see (BBC: Country Profiles-Turkmenistan, 3 April 2008). Unless and until Turkmenistan does not manage to create an alternative none-Russian gas export route, its economy and to a large extent its politics will remain handicapped by Moscow's interference. Exporting 90 to 95 percent of its gas through Russia leaves Ashgabat under not only dictate trade terms but also under political influence of the Kremlin. To know the impact of such dependency's, it is worth to remember 1996 pricing dispute when Niyazov briefly cut off gas exports to Russian Gazprom. The same year, the Turkmen economy virtually collapsed. Russia in 2008 purchased 1000 cubic meters of Turkmen gas for approximately $100 which was below the market price. In the European Union, the normal price for the same gas was $250 (Kaplan 2008).

13 Born in 1957 and once personal dentist of Niyazov, Berdymukhamedov first became Turkmen health minister in 1997 and then deputy premier in 2001. One of his tasks was to implement Mr Niyazov's health service reforms.
None of the Caspian littoral states' internal and external politics is as complex and controversial as post-1979 Iran's politics. Once a great Zoroastrian Persian empire, present Shiite Iran has defined its political life by religiosity.

Succeeding Ayatollah Khomeini (the founder of the Islamic republic), since June 1989 Ayatollah Ali Khamanei rules for life. As the supreme leader - the highest power – he appoints; the head of the judiciary, top police and military commanders, the head of radio and TV and Friday prayer leaders. Moreover, he selects six of the twelve members of the influential body, Council of Guardians, which passes all legislation and has the power to veto presidential and parliament candidates prior to elections. Constitutionally, the Council of Guardians approves the Assembly of Experts candidates, which in turn supervises and elects the Supreme Leader. The main internal opposition to ruling conservative regime, the reformists, claims that the existing undemocratic and complex system has created a closed circle of power. Defending the system, conservatives assert that in the current Islamic republic, checking and balancing structures do exist, like in any system.

The election of Mohammad Khatami as president of the Islamic republic in 1997 was a milestone in post-1979 revolution and Iran’s politics. Himself a clergy, Khatami led the reformists and held the office for two successive terms. Despite enjoying the backing of the majority of the Iranian population, heading the executive branch, he failed to implement the reforms he had promised prior to election. Indeed, power structure of the Islamic republic, namely Council of Guardians, Islamic Revolutionary Guards, Judiciary branch and in general hard-line elements could not be challenged easily.

Neither President Khatami, nor the victory of the liberals in 2000 parliamentary elections could limit powerful conservative elites and end up with social and political reforms and freedoms. Thus, with ultra-conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad’s victory in June 2005 presidential election, conservatives gained ground again and halted the political and social transformation initiated by President Mohammad Khatami.

The struggle for influence and power among the three main political forces in Iran – conservatives, moderate-conservatives and reformists is played out in the media. In the absence of any private channel, all radio and TV channels are state-run and under direct control of the ruling conservative elements. 80 % of Iranians are regular TV viewers and
many are daily readers of the 20 daily newspapers available (BBC: Country Profiles-Iran, 3 April 2008). Relatively free printed-press, one of former President Khatami's achievements is strictly controlled today. Closure of pro-reform publications and imprisonment of reformist writers and editors are among the measures taken to preserve the current conservative power structure.

Under relatively liberal reforms of Khatami, post-1997 saw more formation of political parties and groups of both reformist movements and opposition hard-liner groupings. Nonetheless, while any political party adhering to none-Islamic agendas cannot be registered, nationalists are somehow tolerated. Since its establishment in 1979, the Iranian Islamic regime faced opposition from a few armed political groups, including the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, the Fedayeen-e-Khalq, and the Kurdish Democratic Party. Being extremely suppressed within the country they are active abroad.

Ahmadinejad government's controversial nuclear program and rupture with Western countries currently constitute the main internal, regional and international issue and a source of huge international debates (BBC: Country Profiles-Iran, 3 April 2008).14

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14 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (b.1956) is a former Ardabil Province governor, Tehran's mayor and Revolutionary Guards officer. As an active person in the Islamic revolution and a founding member of the Islamic Student Union, he reportedly participated in taking over the US embassy and taking its staff's hostage in 1979. He denies being part of the group that overtook the US embassy.
Ethnic Conflicts

Gorbachev's firm anti-Stalinist but not anti-socialist policies were planned to refresh the 'ideas of Socialism' in an attempt to return to the ideals of Lenin who 'lives on in the minds and hearts of millions of people', as he wrote in his Perestroika (Gorbachev 1987:218-220). Elements of Gorbachev reforms had been present in the agendas of the Soviet leaders previously. But his determination to implement these changes differentiated him from his predecessors. Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost were designed not to destroy but to cleanse the Soviet system and gain public support for his reforms. However, loose control of the press, radio, television, and the film industry split away the control of public opinion from Gorbachev's grasp. Freedom of expression had by now given a voice to the nationalities but openness had also released aspirations for freedom and assertion of identity which had been suppressed for 70 years under Soviet rule. During the upheavals on the eve of Soviet collapse, when CSR republics were wondering 'whether

to celebrate their liberation from the century-old Russian yoke or to grieve the passing away of their protector and benefactor, some regions and republics were already in the grip of ethnic violence (Shams-ud-Din 1997: 329). Soon after disintegration, multiple causes like border demarcation, economic and social instability, and inter-ethnic rivalries aggravated by newly emerged ethnic leaders, and political mobilization led to several conflicts. The Glasnost had already awakened historical memories (Chenoy 2001).

Alexander Bennigsen had identified three levels of identity for non-Russian communities of the Soviet Union. His classification is applicable to Central Asian: Kazak, Kirgiz, Turkmen and Tajik Sunni Muslims and Caucasian: Sunni Chechens, Shiite Turk Azerbaijanis, Christian Armenians, or Georgians; either Abkhaz, Ossetian or Ajar origin. (Due to the nature of this work, all above are discussed and placed in one geographical term of the CSR). Bennigsen classification which can be applied ethno-religiously is as follow:

- Subnational (or tribal), the oldest of the three, directed toward the extended family, the tribe or the territory,
- National, directed toward the union republics as they were created out of the 1924 delimitation in the territories of old Turkistan [or division of the Caucasus into several republics or autonomous regions]
- Supranational, a feeling of being a part of the Islamic community (Dar ul Islam) [or Christianity] or at least opposition to the alien world of the rest of the Soviet Union (Benningsen 1984: 10).

Of all above three levels of identity, since the collapse of the Soviet Union not much has changed for the Caspian region except a mounting feeling toward one's own nation, territory and tribe or clan. The question of subnational identity in and around the Caspian Sea is in fact not a simple issue and not as transparent as national or supranational identity. For instance, Uzbek may feel being a Uzbek, Muslim and, probably and contradictorily, Russian. Facing a Turkmen, he feels Uzbek. Facing a Tatar or an Ottoman Turk, he feels Turkistani but confronted to a Christian or a Jew, he feels Muslim. Though a Russian makes him feel all three (Uzbek, Turkistani, Muslim), the same Uzbek may introduce himself as a Russian when abroad (Rywkin 1984: 10-11).
Likewise an Armenian is bound to his homeland, has his own language and history, is the beholder of a unique ancient tradition. In front of an Azerbaijani Muslim, he would share the same historical anti-Turk feelings and Christian culture than Russians. It is the same with the rest of the region. No feature of a CSR individual is as complicated as his identity issue. In the CSR where cultures, languages, and societies are overlapping, identity picture is a mixed one and the meaning of ‘we and they’ is applicable in national and subnational and supranational levels of societies.

In the CSR, subnational identification of the ‘self’ and rising to national level marked the beginning of violent clashes which have been continuing till today. Identifying self within a larger supranational level ended up with fusion of national into supranational level thereby involving external states in ongoing conflicts which made the matter worse.

In the former capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty, in December 1986, some 3000 people took part in protest against the appointment of an ethnic Russian, Gennadii Kolbin’s appointment as first Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan in place of the popular Dinmukhamed Kunayev, an ethnic Kazakh. Four people died and Kolbin held his office till June 1989 when he was transferred to Moscow. Nursultan Nazarbayev was then appointed as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. The same year, riots took place in Andijan in Uzbekistan and were supposedly directed toward Jews. So far, it is the only religious riot (except Tajiks civil war) reported in Andijan. In the same year, Meshketian Turks were attacked by Uzbeks in Tashkent and Fargana valley, which led to 150 dead and many Meshketian Turks refugees. One year later, in mid-1990, inter-ethnic tension led to clashes in Osh (Kyrgyzstan) between the Uzbek and the Kyrgyz. Following the incident border crossings were closed to prevent 15000 armed Uzbek to join the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. Karimov declared a state of emergency in Andijan region that borders Osh (The Europe World yearbook 2004: 2411, 4615).

One can generalize with certainty that almost all clashes and riots in the east and west of the Caspian Sea rather had an ethnic and regional characteristic than a religious motivation. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict - the first conflict in Soviet Union between Muslim Azerbaijanis and Christian Armenians – was rather driven by historical and territorial causes than religion. Even the Tajik civil war was motivated by regional, political and economic competition, though the war was actually between the Islamist opposition and the
communist Russian-backed government. But the spark of the civil war had nothing to do with religion unlike the common belief.\textsuperscript{15}

With the exception of Turkmenistan, none of the Caspian republics and sub-regional states are homogeneous. Soviets employed this heterogeneity for efficient administration. In fact, most of the post-Soviet conflicts - at least in and around the Caspian Sea - were rooted in Stalin’s territorial division policy. By artificially dividing the CSR into several republics and autonomous regions and by making some clans superior to others, Stalin sowed the seeds of ethnic conflicts. For decades to come this would engulf the region with tension, civil war, and ethnic clashes. Stalin sought to enforce regional identities on the narrow basis of ethno-linguistic criteria. The separation of Turks and Tajiks in the oases settlements was particularly problematic, as the newly formed Tajik and Uzbek nations were in competition for the same territory where hitherto they had lived together peacefully. It was the same with Armenian dominated Nagorno-Karabakh by placing it within Azerbaijan and letting Azeri dominated Nakhchevan to be surrounded by Armenia. Stalin’s political objective in given divided ethnic identity was to destroy the pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic currents in the east and preventing formation of a greater Caucasus and emergence of nationalisms in the west of the Caspian Sea. Nonetheless beside territorial partition, his liquidation of political elites and autonomist campaigners or leaders of ideological currents in the purges of the 1930s marked the brutal climax of this ideological campaign. As Oliver Roy puts it, “Stalin’s great victory was that he made the intellectuals in Central Asia defend their own languages and ‘nations’ against their neighbors, and not against Moscow, who instead was called upon for mediation and settlement of conflicts” (Roy 2003: 23). Utilizing the same policy in accord with its national and international interests, post-Soviet Russia has taken certain measures in its approach of CSR conflicts. Employing regional ethnic differences for its own end, Russia is maintaining a balance of power in the CSR.

\textsuperscript{15} Tajikistan’s lack of a clear national center (which Bukhara or Samarkand might have served the purpose) was a major obstacle to the development of cohesive Tajik national identity. Instead of a nationalist consolidation, distinct regional identities were strengthened and reinforced. Such regionalism and diversities of clans and groups and struggle for power finally led to a civil war in Tajikistan which later on adopted an Islamic feature.
Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflict (Nagorno-Karabakh)\textsuperscript{16}

The geostrategic region including Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia have changed hands several times through the centuries. Persians, Arabs, Mongols and Turks have ruled it successively. From 18\textsuperscript{th} century till the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh had been ruled by Turko-Islamic administrations. It was in 1813 that the region was taken from Persia and came under the Tsarist Empire and became part of Baku Province. Beside hegemonic external influences the region has witnessed multiple inter-ethnic clashes. In our era and beginning in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the ethnic conflict between Azeris and Armenians lasted throughout the World War I and chaotic years of Bolshevik’s revolution.

\textbf{Figure 11. Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflict}

As Turkish power was diminishing at the end of the World War I, which was followed by its defeat and withdrawal from the region, British forces temporarily moved in and declared NK as part of the newly proclaimed independent Republic of Azerbaijan. The self proclaimed Azeri Republic was soon controlled by Bolsheviks in 1920. As the Commissar for Nationalities, Stalin was the one to decide on the fate of the NK. Signing a treaty with Turkey a year later, Bolsheviks, in need of secure borders, made a concession to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and put NK and Nikhichevan under the Azerbaijani rule. This served Stalin in two ways; first a concession had been made to Turkey vis-à-vis Armenia;

\textsuperscript{16} The autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh (as used in English) region is known in Russian as ‘Nagorny Karabakh’. ‘Karabakh’ comes from Turkish word \textit{Kara} = black and Persian word, \textit{bakh}, \textit{baq} or \textit{bagh} = garden. Therefore, it literary means ‘Black Garden’. Armenians sometimes use the older name ‘Artsakh’. (Tom de Waal 2003: ix, 8).
secondly he had succeeded to draw another line artificially dividing ethnic groups. This would serve him by reducing the possibility of uprising of the minorities and mass resistance to the Sovietization process to be carried soon. However, the final legal status of the NK and Nakhichevan was not finalized until 1923, when both regions were declared autonomous oblasts within the Republic of Azerbaijan. Therefore, the root of ongoing 'frozen war' in NK goes back to Stalin’s policy of division of the ethnic groups and definition of borders of republics not on the bases of ethnic realities but on the idea of 'divide and prevent uprisings against the communist rule'. Accordingly, the Azeri enclave of Nakhichevan was established in Armenia and Armenian populated NK was established within Azerbaijan.

Armenia claimed NK and fought for it with Azerbaijan in 1905-1906, 1910 and 1920 before the occupation of both Armenia and Azerbaijan by Red Army and whenever opportunity offered itself, Armenians raised their voices against the decision made by Stalin. But under the heavy rule of communists, 1968 and 1977 clashes did not end with any changes on the status of NK autonomous oblast. Ten years later under the Secretary of the Communist party of USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, ethnic clashes in the NK were doomed to escalate at national level, initiating the first conflict and war while the Soviet Union was still in place. Nationalism rather than religion played the main role in this conflict. It is not a conflict between Muslims and Christians but mainly an opposition of Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalism.

Armenians got the opportunity to claim the enclave in 1988 when the Soviet of NK passed a resolution asking for transfer of the region to the Armenian SSR. Moscow refused the NK resolution and kept it within Azerbaijan. Articles 73 and 78 of 1977 USSR constitution stated clearly that changes of boarders of SSR's should only be decided by the 'Highest State Bodies' , the supreme Soviet (and later the Congress of the People’s Deputies) in Moscow. Consequently, NK remained under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan till the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, the 70 years-old suppressed 'nationalism' was given an opportunity to express itself and was doomed to escalate even before the declarations of independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, successively on 13th August and 23rd September 1991. Two days after the signature of the Azeri independence declaration, NK also declared itself as an independent republic. This declaration challenged both Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) and Armenian National Movement (ANM) by confronting...
them; the first defending its territorial integrity and the latter demanding self-determination for NK. This confrontation soon was to transform from scattered clashes to a full-scale war. Nonetheless, the conflict had already begun in 1988 when the enclave passed a transformation resolution in favor of Armenia, opposed and rejected by Azerbaijan. Though Gorbachev favored the idea of an autonomous NK republic, he deployed the Soviet troops to put an end to the instability and nationalistic movements (Gorbachev 1996: 333-340). On 12th January 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet took direct control of NK by setting up the Committee of Special Rule and putting down the nationalist movements severely. However, with diminishing central rule, ethnic-Armenians had found opportunity to claim their 'historical rights' over the Nagorno-Karabakh.

From Sporadic Conflicts to Full-Scale War

'Glasnost' and nationalism had already sparked ethnic tensions, however between 1988 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the conflict was not in its full-scale form. The worst clashes before the collapse of the Union however happened in Baku on January 1990 during the ‘Black January’ between Azeris and Armenians. For almost three years, the conflict remained in its low-scale form, mainly attacks of villages and expulsion of the population from both sides. Almost all 300,000 Armenian inhabitants of Azerbaijan were forced to flee, and 160,000 Azeris were forced out of Armenia (Zurcher 2007:164 and Panossian 1999). Soviet reacted to the conflict on its southern border by a deployment of troops in NK. Like in other clashes, Soviet troops were there not to protect the ethnic minorities but to preserve the integrity of the Soviet Union as a whole by punishing armed groups. Soviet troops first sided with Azeris to punish Armenians for raising the NK issue. Supports of Azeris continued till the Union’s disintegration and seizure of power by Yeltsin. From then onward, Russia sided with Armenians to punish the Azeri president Abulfaz Elchibey for his extreme pro-Turkey and pro-Western policies. Geopolitical calculation persuaded Moscow to take Armenian side to bypass Iran and Turkey.

The full-scale but undeclared war began in 1991 and continued till 1994. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan used modern heavy weapons in 1992. The same year, Azeris lost Shusha of NK to Armenians and ten days later Lachin, a very strategic corridor. However, on 12th May 1994, a ceasefire was signed in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan, under the mediation of the CIS and it is still in effect today. The instable cease-fire agreement can be
defined as ‘no war, no peace’. Azeris lost at least 15% per cent of their territory including their autonomous region, NK. 25,000 to 30,000 people died on both sides and some 750,000 Azeris became internal refugees (Hughes and Sasse 1999:146). Armenia emerged as the winner of the war but the economic deterioration, loss of life and displaced people on both sides doubled the burdens on the newly independent republics.

Obstacles to Permanent Peace

Patriotic nationalism leaves virtually no space for permanent achievement of a solution for the NK conflict. Presidents of both republics are under tremendous pressure from home whenever they meet to find a final settlement of the conflict. Any compromise from one side would be read as treason. This approach does exist not only among citizens but also among high rank officials. The resignation of Vafa Guluzade and Eldar Namazov, two presidential advisors and the resignation of Tofig Zulfugarov, Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister are good examples. These resignations took place when President Heidar Aliev was meeting his Armenian counterpart Robert Kocharian in Yalta. As officials were resigning in Baku, armed men broke into the Parliament in Yerevan and killed Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisian and some others.

The status of NK as an independent state is quite ambiguous, as far as international law and norms are concerned. While Armenian politicians are labeling the enclave movement as a ‘national liberation war’, Azeris are interpreting it as an Armenian aggression aimed at the creation of a ‘great Armenia’. However, NK remains a self-made independent state unrecognized by any other country including Armenia itself and with no formal diplomatic relation with any state. It informally became an Armenian region after the fall of Shusha and Lachin. NK is indeed heavily dependent on Armenia. The sole life-line of NK, a high way passing through Lachin corridor, connects Stepanakert to Armenian capital Yerevan and the world. Telecommunication and transport go through Armenia, salaries of university teachers and some other sections are paid by Yerevan and since 1998 Karabakh interior ministry is issuing Armenian passport for its citizens. Even though full support of Yerevan has been extended to Stapanakert, NK imposed itself on Armenia and Yerevan has hardly been able to dictate Stapanakert. Karabakh position strengthened in the Yerevan when Levon Ter-Petrosian former president of Armenia appointed Robert Kocharyan - the elected
The four most difficult issues in this conflict have been put by Razmik Panossian (March 1999) as follow:

1. Karabakh final status
2. The return of occupied territories, particularly lachin corridor
3. The status of Shusha
4. The return of refugees

Two ways of negotiation - 'Package' solution and 'step by step' solution along with three main practical solutions have been suggested and proposed on this issue; the first is postponing the definition of the final status of NK. This proposal has been accepted by Azerbaijan but has been rejected by Armenia. The second is declaring NK as part of a 'common state' which has been rejected by Azeris. The third solution is an exchange of two strips of lands between the two countries, which is suppose to connect Azeris to their Nakchivan exclave and to provide a corridor for Armenians to be connected to Karabakh. Armenians want NK to be independent according to the wish of its people. For Azeris, who consider that NK was part of their territory, it has unjustifiably been made autonomous. They can only grant it a 'highest level of autonomy' (EU Parliamentary Assembly, 29 November 2004).

Peace-Process

On 7th May 1992, Ter-Petrosian, then president of Armenia, and Yakub Mamedov, then acting president of Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire agreement in Tehran. However, overwhelming Armenian forces captured Shusha the following day and then the very strategic Lachin corridor. Yakub Mamedov was removed from his office and Ayaz Mutalibove was once more reinstalled as president. On 7th June 1992, he was forcefully removed from his office too, giving way to the leader of APF, Abulfez Elchibey. Just a year later, Surat Huseinov leading an armed rebellion with his men marching from Ganje to Baku removed Elchibey and paved the way for the presidency of Heidar Aliev, former first secretary of Azerbaijan's communist Party, in June 1993. Repeated leadership changes in Baku weakened Azeri unity especially at the peak of war.
In April 1993, Russia, Turkey and USA intervened by formulating a cease-fire plan under the auspices of CSCE\(^\text{17}\). At the December 1994 CSCE meeting in Budapest, members favored the deployment of 3,000 peacekeepers which at the end did not happen. Later, a proposal of the Lisbon Summit of 1996 was rejected by Armenia since it favoured the territorial integrity of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia considered it as a pro-Azerbaijan proposal which had already predetermined the status of NK.

Peace proposals of 1997 (‘step by step’) and OSCE’s 1998 (‘Union State’) were both rejected by Azerbaijan. The first stage of the 1997 proposal emphasized on demilitarization in and around the conflict zone and on the return of refugees. Its second stage was to deal with the status of NK. For Azerbaijan, the first stage of this proposal was pro-Armenian as it was placing Armenia in a better bargaining position. Azeris rejected again the 1998 proposal as it was interpreted as undermining the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

‘Land Swap’ proposal for permanent solution to the NK conflict was rejected by Armenia. According to this plan, Lachin was supposed to remain in control of Armenia which would have kept NK connected to Armenia, in return for Meghri which would have connected Azerbaijan to its isolated Nakhichevan. Armenian rejection of the plan was not baseless. If Meghri was given to Azerbaijan, Armenia would have no border left with Iran, a next door neighbor with which Armenia maintains a friendly relationship and uses land-connection as a reliable mean of transportation and import or export of goods.

The legal status of NK and the return of refugees are two main issues which cannot be solved quickly and easily. On the other hand, interests of the neighboring counties in the conflict should not be ignored.

**External Influences**

NK conflict and Abulfaz Elchibay’s (Azeri president at that time) pan-Turkish statements and Turkey’s pan-Turkish approach to the conflict influenced and forced Iran to side with Armenia instead of trying to maintain a good neighborly relationship with Baku.

Azerbaijan’s ethno-lingual tie with Turkey and Iran’s Azeri population is indeed a major concern which ended up with the formation of the Tehran-Yerevan-Moscow axis. Turkey, being an historical rival of Iran, Russia and Armenia, contributed to this formation.

\(^{17}\text{UN under the Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali had decided that not UN but CSCE should act as a mediator in NK conflict: resolutions 822,853,874 and 884.}\)
more than Azerbaijan which was directly involved in the conflict. To counterbalance the Tehran-Yerevan-Moscow alliance, Ankara-Baku and Washington formed their own axis. Though Iranian support of Armenia was not as transparent as Russian support, both Iran and Russia supported Yerevan in some way or the other because of their worries on pan-Turkish activities and propagandas of Ankara and Baku. Iran fears that an Azerbaijani oil boom leading to a prosperous economy could influence Iranian-Azeris and spark Azeri nationalism and separatist movements.

Probably Azeris’ swift shift to the West, particularly to the USA, and their rigid stance on the legal regime of the Caspian Sea were the main factors which persuaded Russia to side with the Armenians. Moreover, agendas of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) party for human right, democracy and sovereignty under Abulfaz Elchibey were said to constitute other reasons for Russian involvement in the NK conflict, both before and after the Union’s Collapse. Nonetheless, any FSRs in Russian ‘near abroad’ willing to move away from Russian influence received Russian ire. Such approach was followed intensely by Moscow especially in the initial years after the Soviet Union’s Collapse. Russia treated Georgia’s more independent behavior in the same way as it did with Azerbaijan. Siding with secessionist movement of Abkhazians by getting directly involved in the conflict, Moscow punished Georgia. The coup against Abulfaz Elchibey, Azeri president and the assassination attempts on Edward Shevardnadze, Georgian president, was said to be masterminded by Russia (Croissant 1999: 279-281).

For Moscow, the CSR is Russian ‘back yard’ and the necessity of its presence there is more strategic than economic or psychological. Conflicts in NK, Abkhazia or South Ossetia are a pretext and an opportunity for Russia through which Moscow can keep its physical presence in Armenia (through 12,000-15,000 troops) and Georgia. Through military presence, Russia not only is acting as a protector of Armenians and Abkhazians and dictating Yerevan and Sukhumi but is also influencing Azerbaijan and Georgian politics. Moscow can not only prevent Turkey and Iran to get a foothold in the Caucasus, guard ‘Common CIS border’ but can also influence Azeri oil exploitation and export (Cornell: Online).

So far, Turkey has been the only country expressing its constant support to Azerbaijan. Ankara continuously supported the Azeri position in the conflict in all possible
international form thereby hampering strong Armenian lobbies’ efforts in the US Congress and in France. Avoiding normalization of its relation with Armenia as long as the latter holds the Azeri territory, Turkey has joined Azerbaijan to impose an embargo on Armenia. Probably and mostly because of being a NATO member, its quest for full membership of European Union, and because of economic ties and balancing its military might with those of Russia, Turkey could not directly furnish Azeris with weapons or send troops to support Azeris against Armenians (Cornell: Online).

When it comes to energy transport, the importance of the ‘frozen instability’ in NK becomes more evident as the BTC pipeline runs just 25-miles away from the conflict zone of NK. Paradoxically, the proximity of the BTC to the conflict zone imposes obligatory cooperation amongst the states involved in energy. The BTC is crucial for the economy of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia and is a strategic ‘line’ for USA as it promotes diversification of oil import to the West.

Multinational energy deals and collective pipeline constructions lead to more economic and political cooperation than conflict, nevertheless proximity of oil or gas pipelines to conflict zones can turn them to a possible target for groups involved in those conflicts. Any sabotage of the BTC can interrupt oil export and deprive oil consumers and beneficiary states from oil export.

It is hardly imaginable from military strategic point of view that Armenians could hold back NK forever without Russian backing, as NK is geographically located inside and engulfed by the Azerbaijan territory and connected to Armenia via the Lachin corridor only. Interestingly, Nakhchivan on other hand is surrounded by Armenian territory and being totally isolated from Azerbaijan virtually borders Iran only. Whether Azeri petro-dollars will enable Azerbaijan to rebuild and equip its military forces enough to reclaim NK, one has to wait and see.

Georgian Conflicts: Abkhazia

It would be wrong to observe Georgia as a totally sovereign state, since virtually the government is not in total command of its territory. Arm struggle and war in Abkhazia, secessionist movements in South Ossetia province and Adjaria province, non-existence of Tbilisi’s diktats, have already transformed them to de facto independent regions. Literally
Tbilisi’s territorial command in the republic has been reduced to the central Georgia around the capital. Georgia, according to some, is merely a ‘failed nation’ (Kleveman 2003: 33).

The fieriest conflict took place in Abkhazia where governmental troops fought with Abkhazian armed militia. Like other Caspian conflicts, here too, the historical memories and disputes of ethnic groups were the basis to the conflict. Distinction of culture and language, territorial claims and self-determination were driving forces for Abkhazians to secede from Tbilisi. Once again, in the aftermath of the USSR’s collapse, historical memories and domination of a minority by a majority fanned the flames of another conflict.

In any secessionist movement both ruled minorities and ruling majorities are using their historical, lingual, racial and cultural distinctions to justify their claims. In this conflict while Abkhazians were relying on Middle Ages and early Soviet time (1921-1931) to justify their claims for self determination, Georgians were relying on ancient, middle Ages and post-1931 years to reject such claims (Alusaniya 1998). So, since post-1920s events are recent, reliable and well documented compared with historical debates of ancient or middle
Ages, one can consider Soviet era events as the backbone of the ongoing Abkhazia-Georgia conflict. Once Bolsheviks consolidated the Soviet rule in the Caucasus, they bestowed Abkhazians with the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic in March 1921. Years later, in February 1931, and under Stalin, Abkhazia’s status was reduced to an autonomous region within Georgia which planted the seed for another conflict to emerge after Union’s collapse. From now onward confrontation of Georgians and Abkhazians became more evident by Georgian hegemonic lingual, relocation and liquidation plans and Abkhazians continuous protests and final secession.

**From Conflict to War**

With Stalin’s death in 1953 Abkhazian language, schools and administration was restored but not its independence from Georgia as Abkhaz wanted. Sukhumi remained under Tbilisi rule and in 1978 Abkhazians petitioned a letter of secession from Georgia to Leonid Brezhnev, which got Abkhazians nothing more than a State University of Abkhazia as compensation. A decade later, in 1988, another document known as ‘Abkhazian Letter’ was signed and sent to Moscow. Moscow’s silence to Abkhazian appeal raised a protest of 30,000 Abkhazians in a gathering known as ‘Lykhny Declaration’. Gorbachev’s Glasnost and Perestroika had already unleashed the suppressed ethnic nationalistic demands. In 9 April 1989, a month after the Lykhny Declaration of self-determination, to counter-balance the Abkhazian demand for independency, Georgians demonstrated to assert their sovereignty and independency from the Soviet Union. The same year, Tbilisi made Georgian language compulsory in all schools and entrance exams by law. For Abkhazians the law was the re-initiation and repetition of Beria’s (Chief of KGB) anti-Abkhazian campaign which had been carried out till Stalin’s death.

Georgia held a multiparty parliamentary election and declared its independence in October 1990 under Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the ultranationalist leader of the independence movement. Under Gamsakhurdia, the autonomous status of South Ossetia got abolished but Abkhazia was offered 28 seats out of total 56 parliamentary seats. Georgians and other minorities would be allotted the remaining seats; 26 for the first and 11 for the latter. However, the new parliament did not last for more than few months.
At the same time, Gamsakhurdia ordered the head of the National Guard to disband it. Tengiz Kitovani not only disobeyed but also in a coup in December 1991 removed Gamsakhurdia\textsuperscript{18} from power, set up a Military Council and invited Edward Shevardnadze, former Soviet Foreign Minister under Gorbachev as the leader of the newly established State Council who later became president of Georgia.\textsuperscript{19} 

On 23\textsuperscript{rd} July 1992, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia readopted its 1925 constitution which effectively announced Abkhazia’s independence from Georgia. Denouncing the statement, Georgian National Guard entered Abkhazia on 14\textsuperscript{th} August 1992. From then onward, occasional clashes transformed into a direct confrontation and into a war which lasted almost 13 months. Russian support put Abkhazians fighters in a superior position to poorly trained Georgian National Guard. Losing the civil war, Shevardnadze had no choice but to receive Russian troops in Georgia as peace-keepers and guarantor of a cease-fire. In return Georgia joined Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS) as Moscow had planned and wished.

**Peace-Process**

Russia mediated three cease-fires between Abkhazia and Georgia in September 1992, May 1993 and 27 July 1993, all broken shortly after negotiation. Finally, in May 1994 Georgia and Abkhazia signed the “Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces” under supervision of the United Nations, CSCE and Russian Federation. Series of agreements which were signed in 1994 are in force till this day. According to this agreement, the Inguri River was set as a dividing landmark between Abkhazia and Georgia. A land line of 12-km on each side of the river is now recognized as a security zone which must be kept free from any Abkhazian and Georgian armed forces or heavy military equipments. UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) focused on the implementation of the agreement and observing the peacekeeping force of the CIS. The main task of UNOMIG was to monitor the 12-km security zone and withdrawal of Georgian troops from the Kodori Valley (UNOMIG: Online).

\textsuperscript{18} Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a member of Helsinki Human Right group was arrested in 1977 and recanting his deeds on Soviet TV his prison term was cut short. Being toppled he escaped to Armenia on 6 January 1992 and from there to Chechnya. He died mysteriously in 31 December 1993.

\textsuperscript{19} Edward Shevardnadze had been the head of the Communist Party of Georgia from 1972 to1985.
Like Nagorno-Karabakh, the peace was hampered by Abkhazia's aspiration for independency and the return of 300,000 refugees. Like NK, Abkhazia is informally an independent entity but has not been recognized by any country as a sovereign state yet. On the question of 'status' of Abkhazia, Tbilisi has no choice but to grant a broad autonomy as Baku is ready to grant to NK. However while both Sukhumi and Stepanakert insisted on full independence, Tbilisi and Baku were not willing to compromise more than granting them broad autonomy.

Conflicts in Chechnya

Located in the mountains of Northern Caucasus, Chechnya - also referred to as Ichkeria - is a federal subject of Russia. It borders Stavropol Krai to the northwest, the republic of Dagestan to the northeast and east, Georgia to the south, and the republics of Ingushetia and North Ossetia to the west. Under Stalin in the late 1930s, Chechnya combined with Ingushetia to form the autonomous republic of Chechen-Ingushetia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR split into the Republic of Ingushetia and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and sought independence.

Ruling Chechens has not been an easy task for any foreign force. Before converting to the Sunni school of Islam (between 16th to 19th centuries) they had fought with the Ottoman Turks, then with Christian neighbors such as Georgians and Cossacks, as well as with the Buddhist Kalmyks. However their fights with Russians have shadowed their internal and regional conflicts with none-Russian inhabitants. Close to the end of the Second World War, Stalin's deportation of all Chechens from their land cemented their enmity with Russians which after generations is neither forgotten nor forgiven.

Signing the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783, the eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti received protection by Russia from Turkish and Persian invasions. However as part of Russian southward expansion campaign, the defeat of the regional resistance was inevitable and Caucasus resistance was the first to be broken. Therefore the current resistance to Russian rule goes back to late 18th century's fights (1785–1791) during which Russian faced the harsh resistance of the inhabitants, especially Chechens. The first known religious Chechen leader Mansur Ushurma - a Naqshbandi (Sufi) Sheikh - hoped to establish an Islamic state under Shari'a law throughout Transcaucuses but since by the time not many
Chechens had been converted to Islam he could not achieve his goal. After Mansur Ushurma’s capture and by the turn of the century, his banner was picked up by the Avar Imam Shamil – a symbol of Chechen resistance - who fought against the Russians from 1834 to 1858. Though over decades Russians consolidated their rule over Chechnya and Caucasus, whenever the central authority of Russia weakened, uprising Chechens fought Russians. Major uprisings occurred during the Russo-Turkish War, the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Russian Revolution of 1917, Russian Civil War, and Soviet Collectivization. But probably the penalty of none of those revolts has been as dreadful as their 1940s and post-1991 uprisings. Close to the end of World War II (Between 23 and 24 February 1944) and labeling them as ‘anti-Soviet’ and ‘enemies of workers’ by assisting German forces, Stalin systematically rounded up and herded nearly half a million Chechens and Ingush into freight trains. Then, they were sent to the dry plains of Kazakhstan, to Kyrgyzstan, and to the Siberian taiga. During deportation thousands of the population perished of hardships, cold, diseases and malnutrition. Also Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 de-Stalinization allowed Chechens to return to their homeland but their historical memory never forget to revenge (Bigg, 23 February, 2006).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was an historical moment for Chechens, which abolished Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of 1934 and proclaim independence. Communist leader Doku Zavgayev was overthrown and Dzhokhar Dudayev won the presidential poll and proclaimed Chechnya’s independence from Russia. The following year Chechnya adopted a constitution defining it as an independent, secular state governed by a president and parliament. However, Russian Federation under Boris Yeltsin had several solid reasons to prevent Chechnya’s sovereignty. While arguing that Chechnya had not been an independent entity within the Soviet Union -as the Baltic, Central Asian, and other Caucasian States were – Russia asserted that Chechnya cannot secede. Fear of other republics’ secessionist attempts was another main reason for Russia to do all in its power to prevent Chechnya’s independence. However, the most important factor besides being an oil rich region was Chechnya’s oil infrastructures and its hosting of major oil

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20 In June 1791, Sheikh Mansur was captured at the Turkish fortress of Anapa on the Black Sea, was brought to St. Petersburg and imprisoned for life and died there in 1794. He becomes a legend and hero to the Chechen people.

21 Shamil was born in 1796 or 1797 in Dagestan near Ashilta.
pipelines. Therefore, from an economic and strategic point of view, the loss of Chechnya was not only an internal but also as international loss. If Chechnya secedes, Russia would not only lose a source of income but also its grasp and control over oil resources and energy transport routes. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to state that one of the strongest Russian motives for the 1994 intervention in Chechnya was oil and pipeline security. Oil-rich Chechnya is close to the way of every shortest - either existing or planned - pipeline from the CSR toward the West. In fact, CPC and Baku-Novorossiysk pipelines both pass through Chechnya, though via laying a parallel pipeline, Russia changed the course of the latter pipeline thereby avoiding Chechnya.

First and Second Chechen Wars

To quash the independence movement, Russian troops entered Chechnya in December 1994, and fought with Chechen separatists till 1996. Successful Chechen guerrilla attacks and resistance ended with Russian inability to secure the country. Despite their overwhelming weaponry and air support, the Russian forces’ failure was visible by not being effectively able to expand their control over all of Chechnya. Consequently, Boris Yeltsin declared a ceasefire in 1996 and in May 1996 signed a peace treaty with President Zemlikhan Yandarbiyev who had succeeded Dzhokar Dudayev after he got killed in a Russian missile attack. “Up to 100,000 people - many of them civilians- are estimated to have been killed in the 20-month war” (BBC: Timeline-Chechnya, 3 May 2008).

In January 1997, parliamentary and presidential elections took place and Aslan Maskhadov was elected president and recognized by Russia. In May Maskhadov signed a formal peace treaty with Russia without resolving the issue of Chechen independence. Meanwhile stationing town brigades in Chechnya, Russia continued its financial aids for the

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22 In February 2004, Ze1imkhan Yandarbiyev killed in explosion in Qatar, where he had been living for three years. Two Russian intelligence agents were subsequently sentenced to life in jail by a Qatari court for the killing.

23 The war was disastrous for both sides. According to Chechen sources by August 2000, 21,000 Russian soldiers were dead while for Russian sources the recorded number was 2,585. For the same period and according to Russian sources 14,000 Chechen fighters were dead, while for same period Chechen sources said that 1,464 Chechen fighters and between 40,000 and 45,000 civilians were killed. (Prague Watchdog: 13 September 2000).
rehabilitation of the republic, even though the transferred funds were not spent rightly for the public (BBC News, 21 February 2000).

In August 1999, the Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB)\(^{24}\) began an unsuccessful incursion into the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan in an attempt to create an Islamic state. Meanwhile, in September, a series of apartment bombings took place in several Russian cities, including Moscow. Blaming Chechens and to retaliate, Russia started an air strikes against the Chechens which were followed by a ground offensive in October 1999 effectively starting the Second Chechen War. Unlike Boris Yeltsin and during the first Chechen war, Putin was determined to crush the Chechen resistance. After re-capturing Grozny in February 2000 and severely disabling the Chechen rebel movement the Russian Federal forces re-established control over most regions and installed a pro-Moscow Chechen regime. Separatist parties got barred in 2003 presidential election and Maskhadov, facing accusations of terrorist offences, left Grozny for the separatist-controlled areas. With Maskhadov barred from election and being away from Grozny Akhmad Kadyrov was elected president of the regional government on October 5\(^{th}\) 2003. Looked upon as a traitor by many separatists, he was assassinated on 9\(^{th}\) May 2004 and finally his son, Ramzan Kadyrov became the new president in 2007.

Beside the Russian backed government, a separatist Ichkeria/Chechnya government was recognized earlier by Georgia under Zviad Gamsakhurdia and by the Taliban in 1999. Following Maskhadov death in March 2005, Abdul Khalim Saidullayev was appointed as the leader of the separatists. Reportedly after assassination of Saidullayev by Russian Special Forces on June 17, 2006, Doku Umarov became his successor. Abolishing the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and its presidency on 31\(^{st}\) October 2007, Umarov created the Caucasian Emirate and declared himself as its Emir. His proclaim was of course rejected by many Chechen politicians and military leaders as it questions the existence of the republic of Chechnya.

\(^{24}\) IIPB, known as The Islamic International Brigade, the Islamic Peacekeeping Army, was the name of an international unit of Islamic militants founded in 1998, mostly composed of Dagestanis (mainly Avars and Darginians), as well as Chechens, Arabs, Turks and other foreign fighters. Its Emirs (leaders) were the Arab Mujahid Ibn al-Khattab and Chechen Shamil Basayev, many of IIPB members were killed or captured by Russian forces. Most of its remaining members fought in the Second Chechen War, in which its former leaders died (Khattab in March 2002 and Basayev in July 2006). In 2003, IIPB was placed on the United States list of terrorist organizations.
Though the most known separatist leaders including former President Aslan Maskhadov (killed by Russian forces in March 8, 2005) and radical warlord Shamil Basayev are by now dead, the country is stuck in an ongoing struggle between various factions and religious elements, the state of instability and war in Chechnya keeps on continuing. Ethnic conflicts, about 25,000 internally displaced people (out of about total 800,000 population), ruined economy, unemployment, poverty and kidnappings added to the outcomes of the war and worsened the situation (EU Parliamentary Assembly, 23 January 2001). The ongoing military and civil conflicts and struggle for power either within or without the separatist movements and pro-Russian authorities are derived by various complex motivations. Among different groups fighting the Russians within Chechnya, each even has different political and ideological motivations.

Islam and the Question of Instability Around the Caspian Sea

Among the three major expansionists Arabian, Mongolian and Russian invasions in Central Asia, Mongols did not touch the religious and ideological life of the Caspian but Arabs and Russians did. The religious soldiers of Arabs imposed Islam and the ideological army of Bolsheviks forced Marxism. While Tsarist Russia did not interfere in the religious life of the region, after October 1917 Revolution, the whole scenario changed. With completion of the annexation of the entire CSR by Soviets in 1924, the CSR became part of the vast territory of Soviet Union. From then onward, the Communist Party drew each and every line for the republics, including that of religious life.

Soviet Era Islam

As the region had resisted religious-Arab invasion, counterattacked the colonialist-Tsar and Marxist-Red armies of Russia with Jadidist (new school) movement originating in west and Basmachi (pan-Islamic) uprising in east of Caspian Sea. The most known Basmachi uprising had practically no ideology and was doomed to fail. As soon as the Russian civil war got over in 1920s, Bolsheviks strengthened their power and put an end to the Basmachi revolt. Almost none of the regional resistances and revolts against multiple invasions and occupations have succeeded probably due to indigenous ethnic diversity of the region which could never be fully unified.
Central Communist dominance was not shaken for almost 70 years and managed to implement Marxism in each and every part of the Soviet Union, including the CSR. After Lenin's death, the Soviet Union under Stalin made great efforts to reduce the influence of Islam in CSR by emphasizing on cultural, linguistic, and other differences of the ethnics and local communities. By territorial delimitation, Stalin not only succeeded to prevent the unification of the Caspian ethnic of whatever origin but also put down Caucasian nationalism, pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism. Russian conquest and Communists' ideological governing of the CSR not only changed the way of life, literature, language and religion but also brought industrialization, transportation, communication means, infrastructure and well-fare to the backward region.

Stalin's forceful collectivization with the aim of transforming feudal societies to a communist system along with eradication of religiosity transformed Muslims way of life, tradition, language, and belief. Stalin's enforcements were a big blow for the region as it deprived it from self-introduced movements which could have had the capability of counter-balancing fundamental regional movements and forces. Jadidist movement for instance could homogenize the CSR. Developed by Tatar Muslim thinkers, the initial success of Jadidism was to equip Muslims with modern thoughts, western technology and new educational methods. Unfortunately, the expectation that Islamic culture, values, and heritage would unify Turks through a single common language did not work and Jadidism's successful journey to modernism was first cut off by Bolshevik Revolution and then completely destroyed by Stalin. Development plans of the Soviet Union mixed with cultural and religious oppression of Caspian Muslims. Though many people perished during disastrous collectivization but, at the end, the economy of the region bloomed, putting them ahead of most of the non-Soviet Asian Muslim states. The standard of the living, education, communication, public health, and productivity rose considerably but during the 'assault' period (1927-41) Soviet Union's intensified anti-religious policies targeting Muslim societies of the Caspian Sea region, closing down the mosques, religious organizations, press, and places leaving only a few registered mosques open. This created an Official Islam and Muftiates with limited rights and activities and forced Unofficial Islam underground. All Islamic festivals, rituals, and ceremonies got banned and the observers punished (Plakoudas,
Part A: 131-133). However, Muslims continued to observe their rituals by different ways in their localities, keeping their Islamic tradition and heritage alive.

With the outbreak of World War II, anti-religious policies of the Union softened and Stalin called upon support and participation of the Muslim republics for war against Nazi Germany. The Soviet Union offered freedom of religion to Muslims but in return for this concession expected them to defend the ‘Motherland’. Following Stalin’s death and de-Stalinization program of Khurushchev, an open hostility toward Islam did not occur. Beginning with Khurushchev’s and continuing with Brezhnev’s, Andropav’s, Chernenko’s and Gorbachev’s leaderships, the Soviet Union’s policy toward Islam remained relatively liberal compared with Stalin’s authoritarian leadership.

**Post-Soviet Islam**

Assuming leadership, Gorbachev began his radical reforms in 1985. Undoubtedly his economic restructuring and reform (*Perestroika*) and policy of openness (*glasnost*) released aspirations for freedom. Six years after the launching of his reforms in December 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics collapsed and CSR republics bestowed with unexpected independences.

In the search of national identity, religion provided the elements to satiate the people’s passion for self-expression. Thus, Caspian Muslims re-converted to Islam, and Islamic revivalism soon captured the region in all possible ways. Koran published in huge numbers, marriages were performed according to the *shari'a* and Islamic enthusiasm spread. Open practice and performance of *Namaz*, *Roza*, religious festivals such as *kichik Bayram*, *Qurban Bayram* and *Mavlud*, as well as pilgrimages to Mecca for *hajj* revived Islam. Numerical increase of mosques, *madrasas* and religious places drew people to a newly resurged Islam and at the same time created concerns for new nationalist presidents, most of whom were communist leaders before independence. However, before various nationalities of the region could celebrate their independence, ‘historical memories’ had dragged them back into ethnic clashes.

Close to the end of 1980s, Islam was fascinating Caspian Muslims, and in the 1990s they massively got fascinated by Islam and in away ‘reconverted’ to it which was then short-lived. 70 years of Soviet socialistic ideology had distanced them considerably from the sort of Islam as it could be experienced in some Middle East countries. Today, the majority of
Caspian Muslims prefer to be secular than religious, with the majority lacking the basic knowledge, ideas and practices of Islam. The immediate debate and dilemma in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union was whether Muslim population of the CSR will rather opt for Middle Eastern Islam of Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Taliban. After almost two decades and in the process of discovering two realities of their independence and identity, they have chosen none. The reality is that neither highly politicized Shiite Iranian Islam nor conservative Talibanian or Saudi Arabian Wahhabi Islam could penetrate the CSR. Nonetheless, with the exception of Christian Georgia and Armenia, Islam in both east and west sides of the Caspian Sea is well rooted and has regulated the religious life for centuries.

To a large extend, anti-Islam policies have not changed after the collapse of Soviet Union. Actually, the old system was revived into a new system. Anti-Islam policies under the communists and subsequent nationalist leaders do not differ much; only the form and frame of those policies changed. Though Islam and religion were under tremendous pressure and control under Soviets, they obtained a degree of space and freedom after independence. But they couldn’t exceed beyond the state prescribed red line. All presidents of the republics welcomed a soft version of Islam, not an ‘interfering’ one. As long as Islam is not criticizing and questioning the system, the state leaders can tolerate it. In a simple word, they prefer a neutral Islam that must not be incorporated into the state organism. However unsuccessful economic reform and development, the absence of democracy or free expression, the centralized control of a bureaucracy, growing corruption and public cynicism make the social situation in the Caspian republics fragile with Islam playing a major role.

Although ‘war on terrorism’ removed Taliban from power in Afghanistan, Russian assertion of control in Chechnya and Uzbek regime’s cracking down of Islamists (Andijan incident), etc., have considerably eliminated imported radical Islamists, elites and leaders of the CSR cannot yet find themselves safe. For that reason, they often use ‘war on terrorism’ to guarantee their survival and intensified their attempts to suppress political opposition.

**Present Day Caspian Islam**

A clear distinction must be made between Caspian Islamic revivalism and Islamic radicalism. Generally speaking, Islam has revitalized in the region but did not frame itself with fundamentalism. Central Asian societies with tribal traditions and origins have not
showed a strong affinity with Islam and preferred their ancestral customary norms and *adats*. For them, Middle Eastern Islam of Saudi Arabia, Iran, or Afghanistan, which contains laws for each and every aspect of the life, is a strict religion that they have not showed inclination to. A Central Asian hardly knows the basics of his inherited religion, Islam. He knows Allah, Muhammad and identifies himself as a Muslim. Russified and Sovietized for a century and half a Caspian Muslim prefers Islam just as a regulator and supplement to his public life and performance of ceremonies like marriage, death, festivals but not beyond. The majority prefers an *Epicurean* Islam and a secular state rather than a strict Islam or a religious state. However, if the bulk of the population prefer moderate Islam and a secular state then where do the Islamic militants and series of bombs blast which have shook cities stretching from Tashkent to Grozny and Moscow come from?

Undeniably, *Wahhabi* cells, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islamia* (HuT) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) are active in the region, particularly in Fergana valley. But the question is; did they gather enough followers which to be able to threaten the states and how much is the probability of their success?

Following the American war on terrorism and apparent elimination of Taliban and militants from Caspian neighborhood, the serious threat from Afghanistan faded away. The remaining threat lies in the unwisely anti-religious policies opted by the regional regimes that have pushed Islamic activists underground. Regional regimes have left neither a place for people’s free expression nor a free media to reflect the increasing dissatisfied voice of the opponents. All the Islamic parties (except in Tajikistan) are banned and presidential rivals have been driven out. With increasing inflation, unemployment, social disorders, and leaders’ inabilitys to solve those problems, dissatisfaction of the people with the governments is mounting.

In such a restrictive environment, non-religious forces that could compete with the leaders, come up with new political, social and economical progressive agendas, demand for changes and freedom, have no chance. Considering the suppressive and politicized atmosphere, only Islamists’ disproval voice had been audible. Thus, for a bulk of suppressed population, Islamists may be the sole alternative who could challenge the ruling elites. Though they neither have a popular base nor a military might to emerge as victors, they may at least turn to be a protest voice of the people. This trend has been seen in Andijan of
Uzbekistan or in Chechnya where Islam has been utilized as a unifying factor in the war against Chechnya’s official government and Russian presence.

Islamists threat (if ever any) is neither from Saudi supported of Wahhabies nor from Islamic Republic of the Iran or from Afghanistan, they rather lie within the governments of Berdymukhamedov, Karimov, Nazarbayev, Elham Aliyev and Ramzan Kadyrov. Two outstanding commonality of all Caspian states, ‘corruption and oligarchy’ are more threatening than Islam. Wealth, funds and power are accumulating in the hands of presidents, their relatives and elites, while opposition media, and Islamic parties are suppressed and banned. Human right violation, imprisonment, selective employment policy is common. Moreover, in most of Caspian states there is no linkage between the people at large and their governments. “The lack of elite-mass linkage and socio-political dialogue not only retards socio-economic development, but also encourages traditional conservative formations.” Yet, for R.R. Sharma, “[s]trangely, the overwhelming bulk of the population is not outwardly opposed to the political regimes in power. The public, it appears, values political stability over political plurality and personal security above all” (Sharma 2007: 90). However, the possibility of an Islamic threat could be attributed to above disorders and socio-political problems in the surrounding Caspian Sea states. Growing unemployment, increasing dissatisfaction of people with the leaders and elites, corruption and economic problems could grant Islamists a base and a chance to propagate Islamism as the only way to get rid of those socio-political disorders and sufferings. It is also worth to remind that the region is witnessing a vacuum of ideology that has yet not fully been filled with democracy and liberal values. The failures of statesmen can give an opportunity to Islamists to present themselves as the last and potent option able to solve and change the disappointing situation.

The CSR Islam, according to Akiner, is “an essential component of a new national ideology” and for a large majority, it is “more of a cultural identity than an active commitment”, but it contains the potentiality to cause changes if utilized (Akiner 2000: 80). Moreover, the Western implicit or explicit support to the existing leadership in the CSR can undoubtedly have an adverse effect on the perception of not only the Islamic forces but also the nascent democratic forces in the republics. Any alternative other than a democratic system may transform Caspian Islam into yet another ‘ism’ more divisive and powerful in essence than the Cold War Communism, argue Haghayeghi (Haghayeghi 1994: 253-263).
Brief Islamic profile of Littoral States

Kazakhstan

Among littoral Caspian states and as one goes north and eastward, the intensity of Islamic practices fades. With a majority of ethnic Russians, Northern Kazakhstan is less Islamized compared with its southern territory and neighbors. Kazakhs like Turkmen and a bulk of Chechens adhere rather loosely to Islam. Reasons for this include the Kazaks' location on the fringe of the Muslim world and their traditionally nomadic lifestyle, which is unsuited to central religious authority. Like Chechens, their earliest contacts with the religion, from the 16th century onward, came with the courtesy of wandering Sufi dervishes or ascetics. Many in Kazakhstan as well as in Chechnya were not converted till the 19th century, and in case of Kazaks, Shamanism apparently coexisted with Islam even after convention.

Unlike Southerners bordering Uzbekistan, Northerners culturally and geographically are more Russified and have less sympathy with Islam. For Kazakhs, religious ceremonies are a traditional and national heritage. Though Islam is treated as an important part of Republic's ethno-national tradition, no Islamic holiday has been recognized by the constitution and no religious political parties have been allowed to register. Kazak leadership is strongly denouncing Islamism and promoting instead moderate religious practices (Rashid 2002: 13).25

The endorsement of a document stressing on principles of inter-religious dialogue based on “honesty, tolerance, humanity and mutual-respect” during the ‘Second Congress of Leaders of the World and Traditional Religions’ in Astana in 2006 can be read as the drawn line of the republic for religion and Islam (Modern Kazakhstan 2006: 137-141).

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25 In 2001, for the first time Kazakh police arrested HuT activists in the south of the country. On July 6, the birthday of President Nazarbayev, HuT leaflets appeared in thousands in mailboxes of Almaty, the biggest city, and former capital of the nation. This shocking event made the president to address the nation on the danger of the radical groups. In an interview on TV he asserted, “some people cherish the hope that the Muslim population of our states will support radicals, that the clergy will take us back to the Middle Ages, put the veil on Women’s faces and make men grow beards to the waist. This radicalism may start to advance triumphantly in an individual country like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. But this will be just the beginning” (Rashid 2002: 13).
Turkmenistan

Like Kazakhs, Turkmens are also less orthodox in their practice of Islam. They are more bounded to their culture and history than to Islam. Personas like Makhtumquli (18th century poet) are the symbol of Turkmen history and national consciousness.26 “In the absence of a clear political doctrine” the tendency is to take “history and culture for defining feature” (Akiner 2000: 80). Although Turkmens also identify themselves as Muslims, many are non-believers and Turkmen Islam does not go beyond being a cultural heritage and a catalyst for national revival.

The fear of Islamic radicalism has forced leaderships in around the Caspian Sea to assume full control. Like in other republics, Saparmurod Niyazov did not set religious organizations free. Forming a religious party is illegal too. According to its constitution (Art.11) “religious organizations shall be separated from the state and must not interfere with state's affairs, neither must the state interfere with religious affairs” (The Turkmenistan Constitution, Articles 1-56). Despite the the secularity of the state which constitution assert on, the president “proposed the teaching of Islamic history in schools, permitted the decriminalization of traditional marriage practices (Polygamy and kalym) and allowed morning radio broadcasts to begin with verses from the Koran” (Tazmini 2001:72).

Uzbekistan27

After independence, the leadership appeared to view official Islam as a useful tool in building national identity, thereby solidifying and legitimizing its monopoly on power. The Muslim board of Uzbekistan assumed the same functions that the Soviet board had performed (Tazmini 2001: 72). In 1998, the strict control of Islamists and government campaign went so far as to order the Institute of Oriental Studies to close its Islamic studies department and to expel some Muslim students wearing beards or veils in 1999 (Human Rights Watch World Report: 1999).

The Karimov regime is determined to preserve secularism and to eliminate politicized Islam, even at the expense of individuals’ rights to religious expression. Claiming and being a Muslim with Islamic appearance such as keeping a long-beard in Uzbekistan today can lead to arrest, beating, and disappearance. Though Karimov has asserted full

26 Makhtumquli's poem for Turkmens is like epic Manas for Kyrgyz or as verses in Korkut Ata for Kazaks.
27 Though not a littoral to Caspian but since is an immediate country to Caspian littoral states it has the potential of leaving its Islamic impact on neighboring countries and therefore has been discussed here.
control over the republic’s executive, legislative and judicial but so far forceful elimination of Islamists had not been successful. When it comes to Islamics, Uzbeks the inheritors of Islamic cities like Bukhara-i-Sharif (holy Bukhara) and successors of known Islamic scholars are religiously the most suppressed people by the state. Historic and Islamic heritage of Uzbekistan provides a base for underground parties like Hizb ut-Tahrir to be more active and to enjoy a broadest base of support than in any other Republics.

Interestingly there are some similarities between present day Uzbekistan under Karimov and Iran of the 1970s under Reza Shah. Deliberately or not, denouncing and suppressing mullahs, Shah of Iran in his quest to fast-modernization of the country attempted to de-religionize it. Armed and backed by the U.S.A, being the gendarme of the Persian Gulf, the Iranian regime was not threatened and felt secure. Uzbekistan enjoys more or less the same self-felt geostrategic importance and security with the backing by big powers (first USA and now Russia). In 1970s, Iran’s urban and rural areas were suffering from inequalities in terms of infrastructure, education and employment, etc. Similarly, like all other Central Asian Capital cities and the rest of the countries, the contrasts between Tashkent and other towns, cities and rural areas of Uzbekistan are visible. Scarcity of jobs and dedicating and spending fewer budgets on the rest of the country is evident by visiting some Uzbek towns. Corruption, misuse of power and state’s wealth, investing on capital and big cities and ignoring the rural areas was what Shah and his elites were accused of and what is happening in Uzbekistan today.

Iranian pre-1979 regime’s incapability and push of Islamic activities underground offered an opportunity for mullahs of Iran to mobilize people against the Shah’s regime and to hijack the state’s power. Similar causes could give an opportunity for Uzbek Wahhabies or any other Islamic movement to prescribe a radical and immediate therapy to cure the ill system, as it happened in Iran. Uzbek government’s campaign against alleged Islamist fundamentalism intensified from early1998 by Oly Majlis’ adaptation of a new law on religion which severely limited the activities of Uzbek religious organizations (Pottenger 2004: 55-77). Under Karimov’s increasingly authoritarian leadership, there is widespread repression of the opposition and Islamic groups, prompting strong criticism from international human right organizations. In order to justify his oppressive measures,
Karimov has used the example of neighboring Tajikistan, where religious, ethnic, and ideological conflicts had combined to provoke a violent civil war.

The expectations of Islamic elements could not be satisfied by Uzbek President who took his presidential oath on holy Koran and in the summer of 1992 made the hajj to Mecca (Everett-Heath 2003:193) Uzbek leadership, it seems, has exchanged ‘short-term control at the expense of long-term stability’.

Iran

Being a Shiite Islamic Republic and unlike its Middle Eastern approach, Iran’s Caspian Sea foreign policy has been a de-ideologized one. Though Iran which possesses enough capital, capacity, arm, human skills and resources has the potential to interfere in the CSR by utilizing the Islamic factor, it pragmatically avoided such intentions. A realistic assessment of the might of the Northern neighbor, Russia, understanding the religious life of the CSR, and evaluating its losses and gains, Iran, has preferred cultural and economical approach than an Islamic one vis-à-vis its Caspian neighbors. In none of the regions’ ethno-religious riots or wars did Iran interfere religiously. Neither in Tajik civil nor in NK or in Chechnya did Iran get directly involved. Tehran rather played mediatory roles in Caspian conflicts.

Iran’s religious depart from its Caspian neighbors goes back to the beginning of 16th century, at the time when Safavid dynasty erected Shiism and thereby not only quit the rest of Sunni Muslim world but also cut-off the physical contact with Sunni Caspian Muslims. All other Caspian littoral Muslim republics being Sunni majority with the exception of Shiite Azerbaijan, Iran, even if it wanted could not maneuver much in terms of religious influence.

Azerbaijan

Though overwhelmingly a Shiite state, its religious life is not much different from other Former Soviet Muslim republics. Whatever is applicable to other FSRs can be applied to Azerbaijan too. The most important factor about Azeri Islam is its impact on NK conflict. Azeris, losing the battle to Armenians had hired Afghan Muslim fighters which in fact for a while tilted the outcome of the war for their good, gaining back some occupied territories (Semerdjian 5 Aug 2005). NK conflict can elevate Azeri moderate Islam into an extreme one, if necessary. For badly hurt Azeris jihad against Armenians could in fact be utilized as
an efficient means by religious leaders to motivate the people to fight and to get their occupied territories back.

Moreover, the Azeri regime might be reserving the right of harming Russian interest in Chechnya by supporting the Chechen Muslim fighters. Since they see Moscow and Russian weapons as the sole reason behind their 20% loss of territory, they might be willing to harm Russia in Chechnya by providing capital and arm to Chechen fighters. Though they are not in a position of antagonizing the former 'big brother', such probability remains open.

**Russian Muslim Federal Republics**

Majority of the Russian Sunni Muslims—with the exceptions of Tatars and few Volga-Basin Muslim communities in northern Caspian—are scattered into multiethnic communities in the east of the Caspian Sea and in the west of the Black Sea. Dagestani Muslims are embodied into 30 multiethno-linguistic groups and thus form a very dense ethno-Islamic map in the Caucasus which could never be fully unified under the banner of Islam (Respublika Dagestan, 2004).²⁸

Of above ethnics, Chechens and Dagestanis have been in the center of attentions due to Chechen wars and the tactical employment of Islam by the Chechen fighters against Russians. The Caucasus Mountains, specially Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Adygea “became heavens for promulgators of Pan-Islamism...owing to the fact that they had been stained by the massacres of the Imperial Army during the Great War and had been stigmatized by the machinations of the Imperial Court who slated the denomination of the Muslim ideology and savaged the doctrine of the Caucasian national identity”²⁹ (Plakoudas, Part A: 108).

Dagestani capital Makhachkala has seen occasional but fierce gun battles and blasts since the Soviet collapse and Chechen fighters are still carrying sporadic attacks against Russian forces in Grozny or in the mountainous areas. Initially fighting for Chechen

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²⁸ The 15 principal Dagestan’s ethno-linguistic are as follows (Ethno-Linguistic Group %, Population, Total Population): Avar 27.5% - 495,600, Dargin 15.6% - 281,100, Kumyk 12.9% - 232,500, Lezgin 11.3% - 203,700, Russian 9.2% - 165,800, Lak 5.1% - 91,900, Tabasaran 4.3% - 77,500, Azerbaijani 4.2% - 75,700, Chechen 3.2% - 57,700, Nogay 1.6% - 28,800, Rutul 0.8% - 14,400, Agul 0.8% - 14,400, Mountain Jew 0.7% - 12,600, Tat 0.7% - 12,600, Tsakhur 0.3% - 5,400, Other 1.8% - 32,400 (Respublika Dagestan, 2004).
²⁹ Muslim religious board of the North Caucasus was located in Dagestani Capital Makhachkala during Soviet time.
independence and utilizing Islamic motives, several militant groups have distanced from their early objectives and turned into terrorist gangs. Bombing apartments in Russian capital (1999), Moscow theater hostage crisis (2002) and Beslan school siege (2004) were said to be launched by Chechen separatists. Ongoing conflicts and clashes in Chechnya and Dagestan are a destabilizing trend which apparently is not going to end in near future.

In sum, the current chapter’s aim was to discuss the various issues regarding the safe exploitation and transportation of the CSR’s oil and gas reserves as well as the energy impact on the intra-state and inter-State levels. Regional and external challenges to stability and cooperation are diverse in nature. However, this chapter identifies the most destabilizing factors as geographical, external and ethnic. Being landlocked with no access to the high seas is the prime obstacle which not only makes the CSR’s energy transit a difficult one but also reduces the maneuverability of the Caspian republics while increasing the interference possibilities of the regional powers and external big players who possess both the capital and the technology.

External powers interferences, namely the US, and the hegemonic Russian approach to the CSR is the second element that are manipulating the regional states’ independent decisions and are handicapping the regional market forces, balance of power and security which otherwise could have been shaped freely and acted naturally. However, the fact of big powers’ contributions to the development of the republics via their capitals, technologies and donations should not be overlooked, though each and every capitalization and donation does carry a purpose which at the end does serve the donating or capitalizing states’ interests.

Clashes of the native ethnic groups’ interests which originated from their historical memories and local states’ biased policies towards ethnic minorities is the third main issue. By siding opposite ethnic groups to the conflicts and disputes, big powers are adding to instability.

Till the social and economic difficulties and problems of the region are not tackled and improved and a democratic regime has not prevailed, the entire CSR will continue to move toward conflict. In other words, sporadic conflicts won’t disappear from the region, as a democratic governing system is not likely to be introduced to the CSR in the near future. It is the nature of undemocratic communities and states (but less likely otherwise) to go for
conflicts and wars. It is for the same reason that the three major CSR conflicts have failed to be solved peacefully and their extensions can reach as far as the Moscow. With Chechnya conflict remaining as a fire under the ash, unfinished war over the NK and Georgia being a torn state engulfed in conflict, the prospect of finding resolutions for these conflicts is very dim.

Iran's stances on ethnic conflicts of the CSR have been outstandingly and unlike the common expectations, deideologised and remarkable. Iran was expected to take sides of the Chechen against Russians and support Azeris against Armenians in their fight for NK, all in the name of Islam and Iran's constitutionally stated ideology of supporting such movements and Muslims. But actual Iranian stances revealed that Iran has pragmatically distanced from 1979 revolutionary moves and its policies toward CSR conflicts are realistic and void of ideology.