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Module 7. Caucasus

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MODULE 7. CAUCASUS

Overview

Introduction

Contents This module on the Caucasus focuses on the work of the OSCE in:

- Chechnya (Russian Federation)
 - Georgia
 - Nagorno Karabakh (Azerbaijan)
 - Armenia
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-

The Landscape

Greater Caucasus divides Northern from Southern Caucasus

The Caucasus region is dominated by the massive Caucasus mountain range. This range, the crest of which roughly follows the line that divides the Northern Caucasus from the Southern Caucasus, is sometimes called the main or Greater Caucasus range to distinguish it from another range further south called the Lesser Caucasus.



Lowland strips

A narrow strip of lowland, at places barely half a mile wide, separates the Greater Caucasus from the Black Sea on the western side in Abkhazia and the Krasnodar Territory. A somewhat

wider strip lies between the Greater Caucasus and the Caspian Sea on the eastern side, in southern Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan.

Lesser Caucasus The Lesser Caucasus runs across the southern Caucasus, eastward through southern Georgia and then southeastward through northern Armenia and western Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh. Between the two ranges lie the marshy lowlands of western Georgia (on the western side) and of southeastern Azerbaijan (on the eastern side). The Greater and the Lesser Caucasus meet in the middle, in eastern Georgia.

Lake Sevan Both Caucasus ranges are threaded by the mountain valleys of numerous rivers. There is also a large body of inland water—Lake Sevan in eastern Armenia.

Ethnic Divisions

Complex ethnic mosaic The long and turbulent history of the Caucasus, with its frequent migrations of peoples, has left behind a complex ethnic mosaic. The ethnic groups of the region can be divided into three broad categories:

- Groups that have lived in the Caucasus throughout recorded history.
- Groups that are thought to have lived in the Caucasus for "only" a few hundred years
- Groups that arrived in modern times, as a result of the absorption of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union.



Three categories of ethnic groups**Groups that have lived in the Caucasus throughout recorded history**

This category includes the Armenians, the groups that eventually merged to form the Georgian nation, and several of the mountain peoples (Abkhaz, Adygs, Chechens, Ingush, Avars, etc.). Except for Armenian, the languages of all these groups belong to the Caucasian family. It is possible that some of these groups did migrate into the Caucasus in prehistoric times. For instance, there is archeological evidence suggesting that the mountain peoples of the northwestern Caucasus originally came from Asia Minor.

Newcomers: Groups that are thought to have lived in the Caucasus for "only" a few hundred years

Groups that are thought to have lived in the Caucasus for "only" a few hundred years, and are accordingly regarded by many members of the more ancient groups as newcomers. Linguistic evidence suggests that these groups formed as a result of migrations associated with the conquest of parts of the Caucasus by Turkic and Persian Empires.

Azerbaijani belongs to the Turkic family, as do the languages of the Karachays and Balkars (in the northwestern Caucasus) and the Nogais and Kumyks (in lowland Daghestan).

Languages of Persian origin include those spoken by the Talysh (in southeastern Azerbaijan), Tats (in the mountains of Daghestan), and Ossets (in the north-central Caucasus), although the precursors of the Ossets (the Alans) were native to the Caucasus.

Groups that arrived in modern times

The last group includes people who arrived in modern times as a result of the absorption of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. Russians are the largest group in this category, but it includes also various smaller groups, such as Ukrainians and European Jews (to be distinguished from Jews of Persian origin among the Tats).

Ethnic groups closely related in terms of culture, language, and descent

Even within one of these broad categories, some ethnic groups feel especially closely related to one another in terms of culture, language, and descent. Thus the Adygs, Cherkess, and Kabards of the northwestern Caucasus are all descended from related tribes that were known as Circassians, and are also closely related to the Abkhaz. The Chechens and Ingush are also very closely related: both refer to themselves by the single name Vainakh.

Religious Divisions**Religious divisions overlap with ethnic divisions**

Religious divisions in the Caucasus overlap with ethnic divisions, but do not coincide closely with them. For example, most Georgians and Ossets are Christian, but there are Georgian Muslims (in Ajaria) and also a minority of Muslim Ossets. Among the Tats, there are Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities.

Strong

Some Caucasian peoples have been strongly attached to a particular religion for many centuries. The Armenians and Georgians have been Christian ever since the 4th century while

attachment to religion

most of the inhabitants of Daghestan have been Muslim since the 9th century. Other ethnic groups have switched formal religious allegiance in response to changing external pressures. Thus the Abkhaz professed Christianity when Byzantium was the dominant power in the Black Sea region, but adopted Islam when Byzantium fell to the Ottomans -- all the while continuing to worship by their sacred mountains and copses. Further to the north, the Circassians remained Christian until the 17th and 18th centuries, when they converted to Islam largely with a view to securing Ottoman aid in the face of impending Russian conquest.

Can recent ethnic conflicts be explained in terms of religious differences?

To what extent can recent ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus be explained in terms of religious differences? Religious attitudes -- for instance, Armenia's traditional self-image as an outpost of Christianity in the Muslim East -- may have contributed to some conflicts. However, religion has not played a central role. In some conflicts it cannot have played any role at all, because the sides were not divided by religion -- as in the case of the Georgian-Osset conflict, in which both sides were mainly Orthodox Christian.

Chechnya (Russian Federation)

The Conflict in Chechnya (Russian Federation): Historical Background

Vainakh: Chechens and Ingush

The Vainakh (Chechens and Ingush) are believed to have lived in the north-central Caucasus since prehistoric times. According to their oral tradition, they once lived under Kabard overlords, but rose up and expelled them. To defend their lands against invaders they then erected stone towers that still dot the landscape. The Vainakh were organized on the basis of descent into clans called *teips*, and made decisions through a Council of Elders.

Chechens and Daghestanis fought the Russian army

Russians first settled in the Caucasus in the 16th century, but there was no conflict between them and the native people until Russia began to incorporate the Caucasus into its empire. The first armed clash occurred in 1722, when Peter the Great sent cavalry to occupy a Chechen village. In the late 18th century, intensifying Russian military encroachment provoked the first large-scale Chechen rebellion, led by Sheikh Mansur. Then between 1817 and 1864 Chechens and Daghestanis fought the Russian army under the leadership of Imam Shamil, a Daghestani cleric who created the first state that the Chechens had ever known.

Shamil surrendered in 1864

The war resulted in the destruction of many Chechen villages and the death or deportation—to the plains of European Russia, Siberia, or Turkey—of at least a third of the Chechen population. Even after Shamil surrendered in 1864, some Chechens fought on as guerrillas.

Oil

Under Russian rule, the city of Grozny grew up around the fort of that name. In the 1880s oil was discovered in the Grozny area, and an oil industry began to develop.

Under Soviet Rule

Chechen-Ingush ASSR was erased from the map

In the 1920s, the Chechens were allowed a measure of autonomy under the administration of Chechen communists. This policy was reversed by Stalin. Forcible collectivization was followed in 1932-33 by an uprising. Stalin's distrust of the Chechens was so great that in 1944 he deported them all (together with the Ingush) to Central Asia. Many died during the journey or soon after arrival. The Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was erased from the map, its territory divided among the neighboring republics.

Chechens return to homeland in late 1950s

In the late 1950s, Khrushchev allowed the Chechens to return to their homeland, and formally restored the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. The republic was ruled as a Russian colony, with Vainakh systematically excluded from positions of responsibility. Outside Grozny, the economy remained underdeveloped.

Chechnya: from Perestroika to Independence

Independent political organizations

Gorbachev's perestroika led to the appearance of independent political organizations in Chechnya in 1988. At first the main umbrella grouping was the Popular Front of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, which opposed corruption, ethnic discrimination, and the falsification of history and called for democratization and the revival of Chechen culture.

Chechen nationalist movement

A Chechen nationalist movement emerged in 1989, when the poet Zelimkhan Yandarbiev and other cultural figures formed the Bart [Concord] Society. In 1990, Bart was transformed into the Vainakh Democratic Party (VDP), which saw itself as a vanguard in the struggle for independence. Other parties combined nationalism with Islamism.

Fateyev, the Russian communist party boss in Chechnya, tried to suppress the new organizations, but his hand was weakened by the changes taking place in Moscow. The turning point came in June 1989, when Doku Zavgayev replaced Fateyev as Communist Party First Secretary, the first Vainakh ever to hold the post.

Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush Republic

Zavgayev fostered the formation of a Chechen political and intellectual elite, and tried to coopt the idea of Chechen self-determination while keeping Checheno-Ingushetia within the USSR. A Congress of the Chechen People was convened in Grozny with Zavgayev's consent in November 1990. The Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR (SSCIR), chaired by Zavgayev, adopted a Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush Republic.

Pan-National

Zavgayev's efforts came too late to stem the Chechen nationalist tide. Opposition

Congress of the Chechen People

demonstrations continued through the winter of 1990-91. At the end of 1990, nationalist groups united to form the Pan-National Congress of the Chechen People (PNCCP). They invited one of the most eminent Soviet Chechens, Air Force General [Jokhar Dudayev](#), to take over leadership of the new bloc.

PNCCP

The PNCCP organized its own "national guard," buying weapons on the black market or stealing them from local Soviet military bases.

The attempted hard-line coup in Moscow in August 1991 gave the Chechen nationalists their chance. A non-stop mass meeting on Grozny's Lenin Square demanded that Zavgayev resign and the SSCIR disband itself. Then the "national guard" seized the television station and put Dudayev on the air. The police were ordered to disperse the demonstrators by force, but refused. The "Chechen revolution" had begun.

On September 6, an armed crowd stormed the building where the SSCIR was in session. Many deputies were beaten and one was killed. Zavgayev was taken prisoner and forced to resign. Power was now effectively in Dudayev's hands. On October 8, the PNCCP declared itself the sole legitimate authority in the Chechen Republic, triggering a political confrontation between Moscow and Grozny.

On October 27, Dudayev was elected president in elections of dubious validity organized by the PNCCP. On November 1, he issued a decree declaring the Chechen Republic independent.

Relations Between Post-Soviet Russia and Chechnya

State of emergency

Yeltsin responded to the Chechen bid for independence by declaring a state of emergency in Checheno-Ingushetia and flying in new troops to restore Moscow's control. On landing, the troops found themselves surrounded. Buses evacuated them with Dudayev's consent, and the state of emergency was revoked. The main effect of the botched operation was to give Dudayev the opportunity to pose as a national hero and unite the Chechen people around him.

Russian forces withdrawn

By June 1992, all Russian forces deployed in Chechnya were withdrawn, leaving behind plenty of weapons and ammunition for Dudayev's men. At this time, the Russian government had no clear policy on Chechnya. Dudayev's regime was officially considered illegitimate, but accepted as a fact of life. Moscow cooperated with Grozny, for instance to keep the oil industry going, but refused to recognize Chechnya as an independent state. Dudayev rejected any settlement that did not recognize Chechen sovereignty, such as the draft treaty negotiated in 1992-93 by Russian and Chechen parliamentarians.

Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic (PCCR)

Dudayev was unstable and incompetent, and many of his associates were corrupt and linked to organized crime. He rapidly lost popular support. By early 1993 Dudayev and the Chechen parliament were in open confrontation. In April he proclaimed presidential rule, and in June he disbanded the parliament by force and crushed all legal opposition.

Nevertheless, Dudayev was unable to consolidate control over the whole of Chechnya. Some areas, especially in the north, slipped from his grasp and became bases for a new armed opposition, which in December 1993 united to form the Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic (PCCR). Moscow gave its support to the PCCR in its civil war with the Dudayev regime, providing money, arms, training, air support, and mercenaries.

Russian armies crossed into Chechnya from the north, east, and west

On November 26, 1994, PCCR fighters tried to capture Grozny, but were beaten back by Dudayev's men. The Russian mercenaries who had been driving the PCCR's tanks were taken prisoner and paraded before the television cameras. It was evidently this episode that prompted Yeltsin finally to decide in favor of direct military intervention. A last-ditch attempt at negotiation failed to avert hostilities. On December 11, Russian armies crossed into Chechnya from the north, east, and west.

December 1994 to August 1996: The First War

Grozny reduced to rubble

The first Russian troops to enter Grozny were unprepared for the intense resistance they would encounter, and suffered great losses. It took them over two months to occupy the city, at an estimated cost of 27,000 civilian lives (mainly those of ethnic Russians). Grozny was reduced to rubble. A Russian-supported "provisional government" was set up under former Soviet oil minister Salambek Khajiev.

OSCE

In April 1995, an [OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya](#) (Russian Federation) was established. The group helped to broker ceasefires and mediated in negotiations between the sides.

Summer of 1995

By the summer of 1995, Russian forces were in control of Chechnya's towns, though they remained vulnerable to guerrilla attack. A ceasefire in June was followed by new negotiations. These collapsed in October, when the general in charge of the Russian delegation was badly injured by a car bomb. Full-scale hostilities resumed in December.

Chechen separatists capture Grozny

Dudayev was killed by a Russian missile in April 1996. Then on August 6, the day of Yeltsin's inauguration for his second term as president, the separatists suddenly launched their largest offensive of the war, caught Russian commanders unprepared, and succeeded in capturing Grozny as well as other towns.

Both sides violated human rights. Many Chechen civilians were killed by Russian troops or tortured in "filtration camps." Chechen warlords Basayev and Raduyev conducted raids on neighboring towns outside Chechnya and took thousands of civilians hostage.

Unpopular war

The Russian government, finding that it was back to square one, lacked the will to continue fighting an unpopular war. Yeltsin sent the new chairman of the Security Council, General Alexander Lebed, to negotiate an end to the war with the Chechen military commander, General Aslan Maskhadov.

August 1996 to October 1999: Between the Wars

January 1997 presidential elections

The agreement reached by Lebed and Maskhadov was only the first step toward a settlement. Chechnya's constitutional status was left for further negotiations, to be completed within the next five years—that is, by 2001. Russia agreed to withdraw its forces from Chechnya before the presidential elections scheduled for the end of January 1997.

The OSCE played a leading role in organizing these elections, and declared them free and fair. Maskhadov won with 65 per cent of the vote.

May 1997 Maskhadov recognized as president of the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria"

In May 1997, Maskhadov and Yeltsin met in Moscow and signed an accord in which Maskhadov was recognized as the legally elected president of the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria." Agreement was also reached on some practical economic and infrastructure issues. But no further steps were taken toward a peace settlement.

The OSCE

The OSCE was the only international organization present in Chechnya at this time. The Assistance Group arranged exchanges of prisoners, facilitated the return of humanitarian agencies, promoted de-mining, and monitored the human rights situation.

December 1998 the OSCE Assistance Group was withdrawn to Moscow

However, hardly anything was done to rebuild Chechnya. Maskhadov was unable to crack down on crime as the country slipped into anarchy, as he lacked the resources to organize an effective government. Conditions became so dangerous in Grozny that in December 1998 the OSCE Assistance Group was withdrawn to Moscow.

Putin launched second war in Chechnya

Nor could Maskhadov control Chechen warlords like Basayev, who operated with the support and funding of foreign Islamists. In August 1999, Basayev and his men made an incursion into Daghestan, hoping to link up with Daghestani Islamic extremists and unite Chechnya and Daghestan into a single Islamic state. Although the Russian army repulsed the incursion, it resulted in Russian Prime Minister Putin launching a second war in Chechnya. Another rationale was provided by explosions of apartment buildings in Russian cities that were attributed to Chechen terrorists.

October 1999 to the present: the Second War

Russian forces take Grozny

The initial goal of the second war was to create a "security zone" in the traditionally loyal lowlands of Chechnya north of the Terek River. Then in November 1999 Russian forces crossed the Terek with a view to re-occupying the whole of Chechnya. Grozny was taken after a long siege. The Chechen fighters retreated into the mountains of southern Chechnya.

Chechen command reconsidered its strategy

The Chechen command reconsidered its strategy. Small groups of fighters made their way down from the mountains and infiltrated behind enemy lines, where they beefed up and linked together existing resistance cells. Hit-and-run attacks on the Russian forces grew bolder, more frequent, and better coordinated, undermining their morale and discipline. Retaliation was often directed against Chechen civilians, enabling the separatists to recruit people seeking to avenge friends and relatives. Meanwhile, the separatist command set up a few well-concealed bases in the mountains.

Refugee camps

As in the first war, a large proportion of the population took refuge outside Chechnya, mostly in neighboring Ingushetia. Many ended up in squalid refugee camps.

Civilian administration

In January 2001, President Putin announced a new Russian strategy in Chechnya. Greater reliance was placed on the civilian administration of the Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, a Moslem cleric and former secessionist who came over to the Russian side. Kadyrov was allowed to set up his own courts, and his militia was expanded to 15,000 men. The number of troops in Chechnya was to be reduced.

End of war -- or stalemate?

In April 2002 Putin declared that the military phase of the conflict could be considered closed. However, the number of Russian troops in Chechnya still exceeds 80,000. Secessionist violence continues. For example, in October 2002 Chechen terrorists took over 800 people hostage in a Moscow theater, while in May 2003 two suicide bombers blew up government office buildings in Grozny, killing over 70 people.

The current situation appears to be a stalemate. The secessionists are not strong enough to dislodge the Russian army, and the Russian army is not strong enough to consolidate its control of Chechnya.

Recent Political Developments

No negotiations with secessionists

The Russian government is determined not to negotiate with the secessionists, whom it regards as terrorists and untrustworthy negotiating partners. All attempts at mediation by third parties have been rejected.

Redefining Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation

Instead of negotiating a settlement, the Russian government is taking unilateral steps to redefine Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation.

A referendum was held in March 2003 to approve a draft constitution and electoral law for Chechnya as a special part of the Russian Federation. A two-chamber parliament with 61 seats will be created. Chechnya will also have an elected president.

A treaty is under preparation to define the division of powers between Chechnya and the federal government. It will give Chechnya considerable autonomy, especially in economic policy.

Refugee camps closing

Claiming that the situation in Chechnya is returning to normal, the Russian government is closing the refugee camps and putting pressure on the refugees to go back to Chechnya despite the continuing lack of security there.

The shifting international context

Russia continues to face international criticism of its conduct in Chechnya, for example from the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. However, since September 11, 2001, Western, and especially American, criticism has been muted because of alleged ties between the Chechen secessionists and Al Qaeda. Russia is therefore under much less pressure to take account of foreign opinion as it pursues its goals in Chechnya.

OSCE

In June 2001, the OSCE Assistance Group returned to Chechnya (not to Grozny but to the town of Znamenskoe) to implement its mandate. Subsequently, the OSCE and Russian government were unable to reach agreement on extending the mandate of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya, following Russian proposals involving serious changes to the mandate of the mission. The Group ceased its activities in January 2003, and the mission was closed by March.

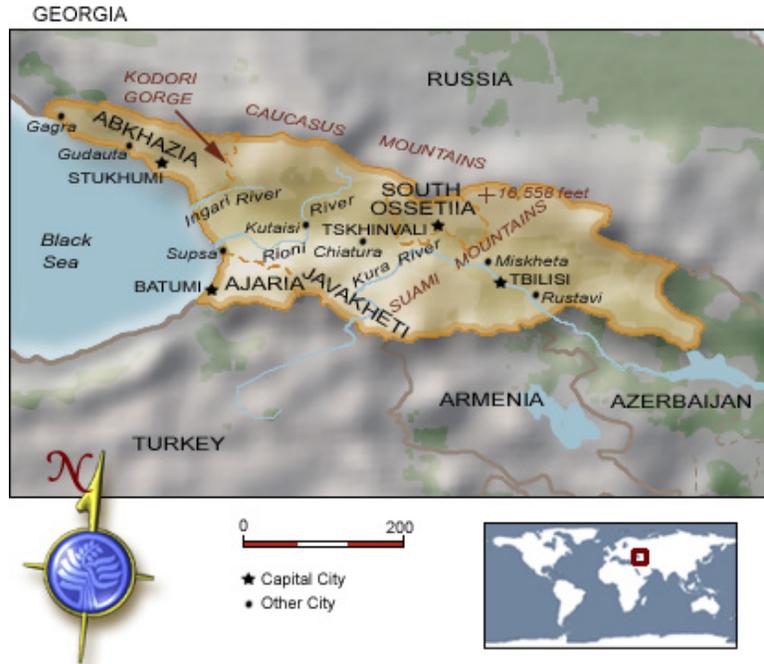
Mini-Quiz

The key issue in peace negotiations in Chechnya has been:

- reparations
- the official language
- defining the constitutional status
- mutually acceptable guarantors

Georgia

Georgia at a glance



Area	Georgia is about 27,000 square miles.
Location	<p>Georgia is located on the southern side of the main Caucasus mountain range, on the southeastern shore of the Black Sea. It borders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Russian northern Caucasus to the north and northeast • Azerbaijan to the southeast • Armenia and Turkey to the south
Climate, terrain, and natural resources	<p>Climate and terrain Eastern Georgia has a dry continental climate. Its hills and valleys are suitable for grain, vegetables, and livestock grazing. The main valley is that of the River Kura, which enters Georgia from Turkey and flows on through Azerbaijan to the Caspian Sea.</p> <p>Western Georgia has a quite different climate, humid and subtropical. The swampy lowlands along the Black Sea coast, drained by many rivers, provide ideal conditions for cultivating citrus fruits, tea, and tobacco.</p> <p>In northern Georgia, the terrain rises steeply toward the crest of the main Caucasus mountains.</p> <p>Natural Resources Mineral resources include manganese, copper, and silver.</p>
Capital	The capital of Georgia is Tbilisi.

Population	The population of Georgia is a little under 5 million. It has been declining due to emigration and a low birth rate.	
Ethnic composition of the population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgian 70--75% • Armenians 9% • Azerbaijanis 6% • Russians 6% • Ossets 3% • Abkhaz 2% 	<i>Georgians constitute 70--75 per cent of the population. They are divided into several subgroups with regional identities, such as Megrelians in western Georgia and Ajarians in the southwest, but members of these subgroups all consider themselves Georgians.</i>
Languages	<p>Georgian is the state language.</p> <p>According to the 1995 constitution, in Abkhazia, Abkhaz is also a state language.</p>	<p><i>Georgian belongs to the Caucasian family of languages and has its own ancient script.</i></p> <p><i>Some Georgian regional subgroups, such as Megrelians, have their own languages, distinct from though closely related to standard Georgian, but these languages are no longer widely used.</i></p>
System of government	Georgia has a mixed parliamentary-presidential system.	
President	<p>Georgia's first post-independence president was Zviad Gamsakhurdia (whose followers are known as Zviadistas).</p> <p>The current president is Eduard Shevardnadze.</p>	
Currency	The Georgian currency is the Lari.	
Standard of living	GDP per capita in Georgia is about \$600, roughly 2 per cent of the U.S. level.	

Historical Background of Georgia

The dawn of recorded history

Tribes who spoke languages belonging to the Caucasian family inhabited the territory now called Georgia. Most of these tribes spoke languages similar to modern Georgian. The exception was the Abkhaz of western Georgia, whose language belonged to another branch of the Caucasian family, reflecting their kinship with the Circassian tribes of the northwestern Caucasus.

Colchis and Kartli

In ancient times, Georgia was divided into a western part known as Colchis and an eastern part called Iberia (in Latin) or Kartli (in the local language). Colchis was colonized by the Greeks, became part of the Roman Empire, and was later under the influence of Byzantium. Kartli was an independent kingdom that adopted Christianity early in the 4th century, but later fell under Persian (and for a time Arab) domination.

Unified in 1008

The two parts of Georgia were first unified in 1008 when Bagrat III, son of a Kartlian prince and an Abkhazian princess, ascended the throne of the new Kingdom of the Abkhazians and Kartvelians. It was at this time that there first appeared a word for Georgia as a whole (Sakartvelo).

The monarchs belonging to the Bagrat dynasty ruled from Tbilisi, and the most illustrious were King David the Builder (1089-1125) and Queen Tamar (1184-1213) David expelled an invasion

by the Seljuk Turks, expanded the kingdom eastward to the shores of the Caspian Sea, and strengthened the monarchy by bringing the nobles under control. Under Tamar, Georgia held sway over most of the Caucasus and even part of Asia Minor. Her reign saw the flourishing of Georgian literary culture, the greatest product of which was the epic poem of Georgia's national poet [Shota Rustaveli](#), *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*.

Kingdom of the Abkhazians and Kartvelians destroyed

The Mongol invasions of the 1220s and 1230s destroyed the Kingdom of the Abkhazians and Kartvelians. Devastated and partly depopulated, Georgia fragmented into small principalities.

Taking advantage of the disarray, the Ossets, whose homeland was in the north-central Caucasus, started in the late 13th century to cross the main Caucasus range and settle in Kartli.

In the succeeding centuries, Georgia suffered repeated invasion by the Persians and the Ottoman Turks, as well as numerous wars among the local principalities.

Second half of the 18th century

Georgian princes sought the protection of the Czars, as fellow Christians, against Turkish and Persian invasion. Kartli, together with the neighboring principality of Kakheti, was annexed to Russia in 1800, followed over the next two decades by the principalities of western Georgia. The Georgian princes were deposed. Russia preferred to rule its new dominions directly. Even the Georgian Orthodox Church was stripped of its autonomy, and subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Under Russian and Soviet Rule

Abkhazia

Disillusionment with Russian rule sparked local rebellions, but in most parts of Georgia these were soon crushed. The exception was Abkhazia, where uprisings recurred until 1878. The Czarist government responded by deporting 100,000 Abkhaz to Turkey, leaving half of Abkhazia uninhabited.

People from all over the Russian Empire resettled the exiles' land, though mostly by land-hungry peasants from neighboring Megrelia in western Georgia. This gave rise to anti-Georgian feeling among the remaining Abkhaz.

Tbilisi: administrative center of Russian rule in the Caucasus

The Georgian capital Tbilisi—called Tiflis by the Russians—was the administrative center of Russian rule in the Caucasus. Toward the end of the 19th century, it had become an industrial and cultural center, and the hub of a network of railroads. There took shape a modern intelligentsia and working class with a sense of Georgian national identity that had been lacking in the centuries preceding annexation to Russia.

Following the Russian

Politicians in the southern Caucasus tried in early 1918 to set up a regional federation, but were unable to hold it together.

Revolution

In May 1918, Georgia declared independence. Independent Georgia, under a Menshevik government, lasted less than three years before being deposed by a Red Army invasion in February 1921. Nevertheless, it is today regarded as a precursor of the post-Soviet Georgian republic. The Georgian government of 1918-21 never managed to win the loyalty of the Abkhaz and Osset minorities, and had to deploy troops in Abkhazia in order to secure its control there.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Abkhazia

In 1922 the Soviet regime imposed a federal structure on the southern Caucasus, called the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (TSFSR), consisting of four Soviet republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Abkhazia. Georgia and Abkhazia had separate and equal status until 1931, when Abkhazia was forcibly incorporated into Georgia, although it retained some autonomy for another few years. In 1936, the TSFSR was abolished, and Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan became full union republics of the USSR.

Violent resistance to Soviet rule

Violent resistance to Soviet rule continued in Georgia until 1924. Soviet leader Stalin was himself an ethnic Georgian. Nonetheless, thousands of rebels were executed or imprisoned. Thousands more perished in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.

Abkhazia

In Abkhazia, Stalinist repression took on an ethnic dimension. Abkhaz leader Nestor Lakoba was poisoned in December 1936, and Abkhaz autonomy and Abkhaz-language education were abolished. Abkhaz interpreted the repression as an attempt to forcibly Georgianize them. After the death of Stalin, the anti-Abkhaz policy was abandoned, but it left behind a deep legacy of bitterness.

Eduard Shevardnadze appointed First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party

In 1972, Eduard Shevardnadze was appointed First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party. He experimented with economic reform, and responded to popular protest with concessions and dialogue instead of violent repression.

In 1978 demonstrators in Tbilisi got their way when they demanded that the authorities drop a plan to make Russian a second official language in Georgia alongside Georgian.

In the same year, mass protests by ethnic Abkhaz in Abkhazia resulted in the promotion of more Abkhaz to leading posts and in improved provision for Abkhaz culture, such as television broadcasting in Abkhaz and the opening of an Abkhaz State University. These concessions only partly placated the Abkhaz, while causing resentment among Georgians living in Abkhazia.

Shevardnadze left for Moscow in 1985 when Gorbachev made him Soviet Foreign Minister.

From Perestroika to Independence

Ethnic conflicts became more overt and organized

Gorbachev's liberalization opened the way for the development of numerous Georgian nationalist organizations, both political and paramilitary. From early 1989 there were frequent large nationalist demonstrations in Tbilisi and other cities. The independence movement gained further impetus on April 9, 1989, when demonstrators in Tbilisi were killed or wounded by Soviet troops.

Simultaneously there appeared in South Ossetia and Abkhazia Osset and Abkhaz nationalist movements, organized in the Osset Popular Front Adamon Nykhas and the Popular Forum of Abkhazia Aidgylara.

Georgia declared independence in April 1991

In elections to the Georgian Supreme Soviet in the fall of 1990, the Round Table--Free Georgia bloc led by the nationalist writer and former dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia won a majority of seats (with 64 per cent of the vote, as against 29 per cent for the Communist Party). Gamsakhurdia became Supreme Soviet chairman. In a referendum held in March 1991, 98 per cent voted for independence. Georgia declared independence in April 1991. In May 1991, Gamsakhurdia was elected president with 87 per cent of the vote.

Zviadistas and anti-Zviadistas

Georgian nationalists were less united than these figures may suggest. Although Gamsakhurdia was at first by far the most popular figure, he had many rivals. After he came to power, the division of the Georgian nationalist movement into his supporters and opponents grew increasingly deep and bitter.

The Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict

Ethnic tension in Abkhazia

Rival mass meetings of Georgian and Abkhaz nationalists brought ethnic tension in Abkhazia to boiling point in the spring of 1989. The first violent incident occurred in Gagra at the end of March 1989.

Larger-scale clashes in Abkhazia's main city, Sukhumi, were triggered in July 1989 by an attempt to establish a Sukhumi branch of Tbilisi State University, which Abkhaz saw as a threat to the Abkhaz State University.

Violence spread throughout Abkhazia, and armed Georgian nationalists from other parts of Georgia poured into the region to join the fighting. Order was restored only by the intervention of Soviet troops.

Georgia-Abkhazia reach temporary agreement

For awhile, the conflict reverted to the political level. In August 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia (SSA) declared Abkhazia a Soviet republic separate from Georgia—a declaration promptly ruled invalid by the Georgian Supreme Soviet in Tbilisi. In the fall of 1991, however, an understanding was reached between SSA chairman Vladislav Ardzinba and President Gamsakhurdia about new elections to the SSA, to be organized on the basis of ethnic quotas. One reason for the agreement was the war that had broken out in South Ossetia. Gamsakhurdia did not want to fight on two fronts at once.

Abkhazia aiming at complete secession

While efforts were underway to stop the fighting in South Ossetia, relations between the Georgian government and Abkhazia drifted toward war.

In February 1992 Georgia re-instated the constitution that it had adopted in 1921 shortly before

its invasion by the Red Army.

Abkhazia responded in July 1992 by re-instating the constitution that it had adopted in 1925, when it was separate from Georgia.

Georgian forces invade Abkhazia

In August 1992, a Georgian armored column crossed into Abkhazia from the south and made its way toward Sukhumi. At the same time, Georgian forces made a sea landing near Gagra in northern Abkhazia. Although it only took a few hours for the column from the south to reach Sukhumi, the landing force got stuck near Gagra. Abkhazian leaders escaped to Gudauta, where there was a Russian military base.

Abkhaz forces regain territory

In early September, a ceasefire was agreed, but soon broke down. For several months a war of attrition dragged on. Then in July 1993 Abkhaz forces suddenly broke through Georgian defensive lines and retook Sukhumi. Quickly pushing south, the Abkhaz militia reoccupied the whole of Abkhazia by the end of September 1993.

Why did Abkhaz militia eventually win the war?

Why was the Abkhaz militia, despite being outnumbered by the Georgian paramilitaries, able to hold its own and eventually win the war?

Chechen and Circassian volunteers from the northern Caucasus, as well as a few Russian Cossacks, were fighting by their side. Another reason is that they received assistance, including air support, from the Russian military, even though Russia was officially neutral in the conflict.

6,000 people died in the 13-month war

Both sides were responsible for massive human rights violations. Beside the usual atrocities against members of one or another ethnic group, many criminals who had been released from prison to fight in the war robbed and murdered people without regard to ethnic affiliation. While Georgian fighters destroyed irreplaceable Abkhaz cultural treasures during their occupation of Sukhumi, shelling from the Abkhaz side destroyed much of the city.

Refugees from Abkhazia

As the Abkhaz forces advanced in the final weeks of the war, virtually the entire Georgian population of Abkhazia—about 250,000 people—fled Abkhazia.

Refugees from Abkhazia still fill hotels and public buildings in Georgian towns. Some returned to the Gali district of southern Abkhazia under conditions negotiated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, only to be attacked and expelled by the Abkhaz militia. Some refugees have become guerrilla fighters (the Forest Brothers).

United Nations Observers' Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)

Georgian-Abkhaz talks, held under Russian and United Nations auspices, led in May 1994 to agreement on the deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force, to be monitored by a group called the United Nations Observers' Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). The peacekeeping force, formally under the control of the CIS but consisting solely of Russian troops, was initially 2,500 strong, though it is now much smaller, while UNOMIG has 150 observers. Together they patrol a 15-mile-wide security zone along the border between Georgia and southern Abkhazia.

Special arrangements for Gali district?

The Georgian government has repeatedly demanded the peacekeepers' removal. In January 2003, the Georgian National Security Council consented to extension of their mandate subject to certain conditions, including expansion of the security zone to cover the whole Gali district in order to protect returning Georgian refugees.

During talks with Russian president Putin in March 2003, Shevardnadze proposed a joint Georgian-Abkhaz-Russian police and administration in Gali district. The proposal points toward a possible eventual resolution of the conflict on the basis of a partition of Abkhazia.

Continued contention

Georgian-Abkhaz talks are currently suspended. The sides' official positions remain far apart. The Georgian side stands for the reintegration of Abkhazia into a federal Georgia, while the Abkhaz side envisages an equal confederation between Georgia and Abkhazia.

The Georgian-Osset Conflict

Confrontation between Georgian and Osset nationalists

The first confrontation between Georgian and Osset nationalists was set off in November 1989, when the Soviet of the South Ossetian Autonomous Province declared the province sovereign. Their intention was to secede from Georgia and unite with the neighboring North Ossetian Autonomous Republic within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

South Ossetian Soviet

The South Ossetian Soviet took the next step in September 1990. The province was declared the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic, within the USSR but separate from Georgia. Elections to a new South Ossetian Supreme Soviet were held in December 1990.

In response, the Georgian Supreme Soviet declared the changes introduced by the Osset leaders invalid, and withdrew recognition of the autonomy that South Ossetia had previously enjoyed. A state of emergency was imposed in the province, and police were sent in to assert Tbilisi's control, resulting in the first violent clashes.

The war continued through the rest of the year. Most of the fighting was done by irregular nationalist paramilitary formations. Atrocities were committed by both sides.

Ceasefire

The State Council decided in late March to open peace negotiations with South Ossetia. Representatives of North Ossetia also took part in the talks. Only in May was a ceasefire declared, and it broke down almost immediately. In late June, the sides met again under Russian auspices in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, and agreed on a new ceasefire to be enforced by joint peacekeeping forces.

**1,000 deaths,
over 100,000
refugees**

The war had resulted in about 1,000 deaths. Much of the South Ossetian city of Tskhinvali was in ruins. Over 100,000 people were refugees, mostly in other parts of Georgia and in North Ossetia.

**Security zone
patrolled by
Russian
peacekeepers**

The security zone between the Georgian and Osset sides established in 1992 is patrolled mainly by Russian peacekeepers, with some Georgian and Osset participation.

**OSCE has played
a central role in
mediating the
conflict**

In contrast to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the OSCE has played a central role in mediating the Georgian-Osset conflict. The OSCE [Mission to Georgia](#) started work from an office in Tbilisi in December 1992 with a mandate to promote negotiations to resolve the Georgian-Osset conflict. In March 1994, its mandate was expanded to include monitoring of the peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia, facilitating cooperation between the parties, promoting human rights, and assisting in the building of democratic institutions. The OSCE has been able to work closely with the Russian peacekeepers. In April 1997, an OSCE branch office was opened in Tskhinvali.

**Movement
toward Georgian-
Osset
reconciliation**

Again in contrast to the Georgian-Abkhaz case, there has been real movement toward Georgian-Osset reconciliation. Although there is still no agreement concerning the constitutional basis of relations between Georgia and South Ossetia, the atmosphere of their relations has markedly improved. In May 1996, the sides signed a memorandum in which they undertook to refrain from the threat or use of force, to continue negotiations, to facilitate the return of refugees, and gradually to demilitarize the area.

The Intra-Georgian Civil War 1991-1993

**Civil war
between
supporters and
opponents of
Gamsakhurdia**

During the second half of 1991, Georgian President Gamsakhurdia's popular support began to wane. Finally, in December 1991, civil war between supporters and opponents broke out in Tbilisi. Physical traces of the fighting remain visible today in the Georgian capital. In January 1992 Gamsakhurdia conceded defeat and took refuge in Chechnya.

**Shevardnadze
shared power
with three other
State Council
members**

Power in Tbilisi passed into the hands of a Military Council dominated by the chiefs of the two main paramilitary forces that had defeated Gamsakhurdia—Tengiz Kitovani, commander of the National Guard, and Jaba Ioseliani, commander of the Mkhedrioni (Horsemen). A state of emergency was declared, and demonstrations by Gamsakhurdia's supporters suppressed. The new rulers decided to enhance the international credibility of their regime by inviting Eduard Shevardnadze back to Georgia. Upon his arrival in March 1992, the Military Council was

transformed into the State Council. Although Shevardnadze chaired the meetings of the State Council, he had to share power with three other leading members.

Gamsakhurdia killed

Gamsakhurdia's supporters continued to cause trouble, attempting a coup in Tbilisi in June 1992 and staging periodic uprisings in Megrelia in western Georgia. In January 1994, Gamsakhurdia was murdered in mysterious circumstances by one of his own guards.

Potential for Conflict in Ajaria

Ajaria an autonomous republic within Georgia during Soviet period

During the Soviet period, Ajaria was an autonomous republic within Georgia. Gamsakhurdia came to an understanding with the chairman of the Ajarian Supreme Council, Aslan Abashidze. Shevardnadze and Abashidze have likewise established satisfactory relations.

The Ajars of Ajaria in southwestern Georgia are generally considered a Georgian sub-group. While other Georgian sub-groups are traditionally Christian Orthodox, the Ajars are mostly Muslim, having adopted Islam when the area was under Ottoman Turkish rule.

Operates as an independent fiefdom

And yet Abashidze runs Ajaria as an independent fiefdom, and even has his own army. The main thing that distinguishes the regime in Ajaria from those in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is that Ajaria has never expressed any wish to secede from Georgia.

On the contrary, Abashidze constantly emphasizes that Ajars are Georgians, and has demonstrated his loyalty to Georgia by becoming a major player in Georgian politics at the national level, with a party of his own called the All-Georgia Revival Union.

Potential for Conflict in Javakheti

Annexation fears

To the east of Ajaria lies the region of Javakheti, which is populated mainly by ethnic Armenians. Like Ajaria, Javakheti is outside the effective control of the central government in Tbilisi. Many Georgians fear that it may be taken over by Armenia.

Homeland of the Meskhetian Turks

Javakheti was also the homeland of the Meskhetian Turks, before Stalin deported them to Uzbekistan. The Meskhetian Turks have been trying to return, but the Georgian government is very reluctant to allow them to do so, fearing that it would only exacerbate the situation in Javakheti.

Potential for Conflict in Southeastern Georgia

Large Azerbaijani population

The provinces of southeastern Georgia, to the east of Javakheti, have a large Azerbaijani population. There were clashes between Georgians and Azerbaijanis here in the summer of 1989.

Domestic Politics in Georgia

Shevardnadze consolidates his position

Shevardnadze gradually consolidated his position, building up the state machinery and creating his own power base. In fall 1992 he was elected chairman of parliament and founded his own party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG). In May 1993 the State Council was suspended and Kitovani removed as defense minister. In January 1995, Kitovani was arrested after setting off with 1,000 supporters to "liberate" Abkhazia. Kitovani's National Guard would no longer pose a threat. The other big paramilitary force, Ioseliani's Mkhedrioni, was suppressed in summer 1995. Shevardnadze was elected president in fall 1995. Ioseliani was arrested in November 1995 following an attempt on Shevardnadze's life.

New constitution

Parliament adopted a new constitution in August 1995. It provided for a strong, but not an all-powerful, presidency. The president appoints government ministers subject to parliamentary approval, which is not always given. He does not control the constitutional court.

Parliament consists of a lower house of 150 members called the Council of the Republic, elected by proportional representation, and an upper house of 85 members, the Senate, elected from single-mandate constituencies (except for 5 members appointed by the president).

In practice, the parliament has been able to maintain some independence because the pro-presidential CUG, though the strongest single party, has not commanded a majority of seats and therefore cannot govern alone.

Parliamentary elections in October 1999

Parliamentary elections were held in October 1999. Many parties participated. The CUG won 42 per cent of the vote, followed by Abashidze's Revival of Georgia Bloc with 26 per cent. "Industry Will Save Georgia" and the Labor Party of Georgia each obtained 7 per cent. The nationalist National-Democratic Party of Georgia got 5 per cent., and the Christian-Democratic People's Party 4 per cent.

Presidential elections in April 2000

Presidential elections in April 2000 were won by Shevardnadze with over 80 per cent of the vote. Jumber Patiashvili, who had been Communist Party First Secretary in the late 1980s, received 17 per cent. The OSCE expressed concern at many irregularities noted by international observers.

Shevardnadze loses support

The local elections of June 2002 revealed that Shevardnadze had lost much of his support. His CUG failed to win any representation on the Tbilisi city council. This is due primarily to allegations of corrupt business connections and his failure to improve the economic situation or regain Abkhazia.

The victors of the local elections were the Labor Party of Georgia (led by Shalva Natelashvili) and the National Movement--Democratic Forum or "New Nationalists" (led by Mikhail Saakashvili).

Realignment of the party system

In the run-up to parliamentary elections in fall 2003 (and presidential elections in 2005, when Shevardnadze has to step down after two terms in office), parties have lined up in two blocs. A loose alliance of opposition parties was formed in July 2002. A pro-presidential bloc "For A New Georgia" was being put together in spring 2003.

Some parties and politicians have changed sides. Former parliamentary speaker Zurab Zhvania, who broke away from the CUG in September 2001 to form the Christian Conservative Party, is now in opposition, while the National-Democratic Party of Georgia has joined the pro-presidential bloc.

Mixed human rights situation

The human rights situation in Georgia is mixed. Shevardnadze has promoted an ethnically inclusive concept of citizenship. A law passed in March 1993 gave citizenship to all residents of Georgia. Shevardnadze's approach to some of his political opponents is less inclusive. The Zviadistas are not allowed to take part in political life.

Georgia has a lively pluralistic press. Most Georgians get their news from television and radio, and there is an independent television station, Rustavi-2, that provides an alternative to the state-run network. However, some journalists investigating corruption have been threatened.

A disturbing recent development is an outbreak of assaults by Christian Orthodox extremists on religious minority groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, Pentecostals, and a breakaway Orthodox congregation. In 2002 there were at least seven such assaults.

Foreign Relations in Georgia

Relations with Russia

Since independence, relations with Russia have been Georgia's number one foreign policy problem. Although it makes sense in economic terms for Georgia to cultivate close relations with Russia, most Georgians prefer a strong pro-Western orientation. At first Georgia refused to join the CIS. In October 2002, Shevardnadze formulated a foreign policy concept according to which Russia and the United States are both "strategic partners" of Georgia.

Shevardnadze beholden to Russia

Shevardnadze is especially beholden to Russia. Russia twice came to his rescue-- once in July 1993, when Sukhumi fell to Abkhaz forces and he was evacuated on board a Russian ship, and then again in November 1993, when Russian troops put down the Zviadista rebellion in Megrelia.

Georgia subsequently joined the CIS in October 1993, and signed an agreement allowing Russia to keep its four military bases in Georgia, use Georgian ports and airfields, and station guards on Georgia's southern border. Two of the bases, those at Gudauta in Abkhazia and at Vaziani near Tbilisi, are now being closed. Russia insists on retaining the other two—at Batumi in Ajaria and at Akhalkalaki in Javakhetia-- until 2015.

Georgia-Russia tensions and the Chechnya conflict

Georgians resent the support Russia has given to the Osset and Abkhaz secessionists, whom they tend to see merely as pawns in Russia's imperialist designs.

The conflict in Chechnya has also aggravated Russian-Georgian relations. Russia has accused Georgia of allowing Chechen fighters to move freely across its mountain border with Chechnya. The Georgian government insists that the 7,000 Chechens now in Georgia are all non-combatant refugees, and refuses to allow Russia to deploy troops on the Georgian side of the border. Russian aircraft bombed the Pankisi Gorge area in fall 2001. Shevardnadze reacted by sending in 2,500 Georgian security troops to restore control over Pankisi. By the end of 2002, under Russian pressure, Georgia had ceased to give sanctuary to Chechen fighters and closed Maskhadov's office in Tbilisi.

In December 1999, the OSCE expanded the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia to include monitoring and reporting on movement across the 82-kilometer mountainous border between Georgia and the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation. In December 2001, the OSCE expanded the operation to include the border between Georgia and the Ingush Republic to the west of Chechnya.

The expansion took the total number of OSCE personnel engaged in the border monitoring operation up to 42 during the winter period and to a maximum of 54 in the summer. They operated from four bases: Shatili, Girevi, Omala and Sno.

The monitors were unarmed and had no enforcement responsibilities, but act with full respect for the sovereignty of the Georgian authorities over their own borders. Georgia has given assurances that it will provide security for the monitors and ensure their freedom of movement to observe movement across the Georgian-Chechen border, but this measure has proven insufficient to defuse the situation.

In January 2002, Russian paratrooper units were deployed without warning to the Kodori gorge, the only area of Abkhazia still controlled by Tbilisi. An armed clash with local Georgian militia units was narrowly averted.

Georgia closer to Azerbaijan and Turkey than to Armenia

Georgia's official position on the Karabakh conflict is that of a neutral would-be conciliator. Unofficially Georgia is much closer to Azerbaijan and Turkey than it is to Armenia. Reasons include Georgian anxiety over Armenia's potential claim to Javakheti, and the enormous importance to Georgia of its trade with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Georgia shares with Azerbaijan a strong desire to become fully independent of Russia and reduce Russian predominance in the Caucasus and in the post-Soviet region as a whole. Armenia, by contrast, cooperates willingly with Russia and relies for its security on Russia's military presence in the south Caucasus. Thus Georgia and Azerbaijan but not Armenia belong to GUAM, the association of CIS member states opposed to Russian domination.

Georgia's relations with the United States and the West are very friendly

Western and international institutions and humanitarian agencies have a strong presence in Georgia, and the country is among the top recipients of American aid—about a billion dollars in all over the past decade. Georgia is also an enthusiastic participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

In Spring 2002, the U.S. launched a train and equip program for Georgian military forces to improve their capability to deal with terrorists that might be operating in the Pankisi Gorge area.

Georgia Culture

Tbilisi

The capital city, Tbilisi, home to almost one in four of the country's inhabitants, spreads out from the valley of the River Kura into the surrounding hills. Above the city looms the enormous statue of the Mother of Georgia, holding a sword for her enemies in one hand and a cup of wine for her guests in the other. Tbilisi, means "warm city" and was founded in the 5th century.

One of the city's attractions is the hot baths fed by underground sulfur springs. The entrance is below the mosque on the river bank. The old city, though partly destroyed by war and fire, has low red-roofed houses and narrow winding alleyways. Other sights include the ancient Narikhala fortress, the Sioni cathedral, and the theaters on Rustaveli Avenue.

On some buildings in the city center you can see signs of the damage caused by the civil war in the winter of 1991-92, while some hotels are still filled with refugees from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of 1992-93. The outer residential districts are connected to the center by underground, bus, trolley-bus, and cable-car.

Festival of Tbilisi

The festival of Tbilisi, *Tbilisoba*, is celebrated every year on the last Sunday of October with traditional music and dancing concerts in the open air. This is the season of harvest and wine-making, and many Georgian weddings are held at this time.

East Georgia

The broad rolling hills and valleys of the East Georgian countryside are dry, but grain and vegetables can be grown and livestock grazed. Just outside of the capital city there is a fascinating outdoors museum of life-scale model homesteads constructed to demonstrate the

traditional way of life of peasants in different parts of Georgia. Nearby stands the old capital Mskheti, still the seat of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Further north, the terrain rises steeply toward the crest of the Caucasus mountain range, which looms across the skyline.

West Georgia

Western Georgia, by contrast, is humid and subtropical. The swampy coastal lowlands, drained by many rivers, provide ideal conditions for cultivating citrus fruits, tea, and tobacco. Northwards along the Black Sea coast into and through Abkhazia, the mountains approach closer and closer to the shore, until near the Russian border the strip of flat land is only a few hundred yards wide.

Cuisine

Georgian cuisine makes much use of cheese. Slices of goat's cheese seem to be served at every meal, and *khachapuri*-- a yogurt pastry filled with cheese and egg -- is a popular dish. Many dishes also contain walnuts, a product of Ajaria in the country's southwest -- beets with walnuts, cabbage salad with walnuts, fried eggplant with walnuts, fried chicken in hot walnut sauce (*satsivi*). Other dishes are *chakhokhbili* (chicken stewed with onion, tomato, butter, herbs and pepper) and khinkali (meat dumplings). And no feast is complete without wine and eloquent toasts orchestrated by the tamada (toast-master). Most Georgians find it hard enough just to survive under current economic conditions, however, and can only rarely afford many of these delicacies.

Mini-quiz

The OSCE has been involved in which of the following issues in Georgia:

- Georgian - Abkhaz talks
- Georgian - Osset negotiations
- border monitoring between Georgia and Turkey
- counter-terrorism assistance

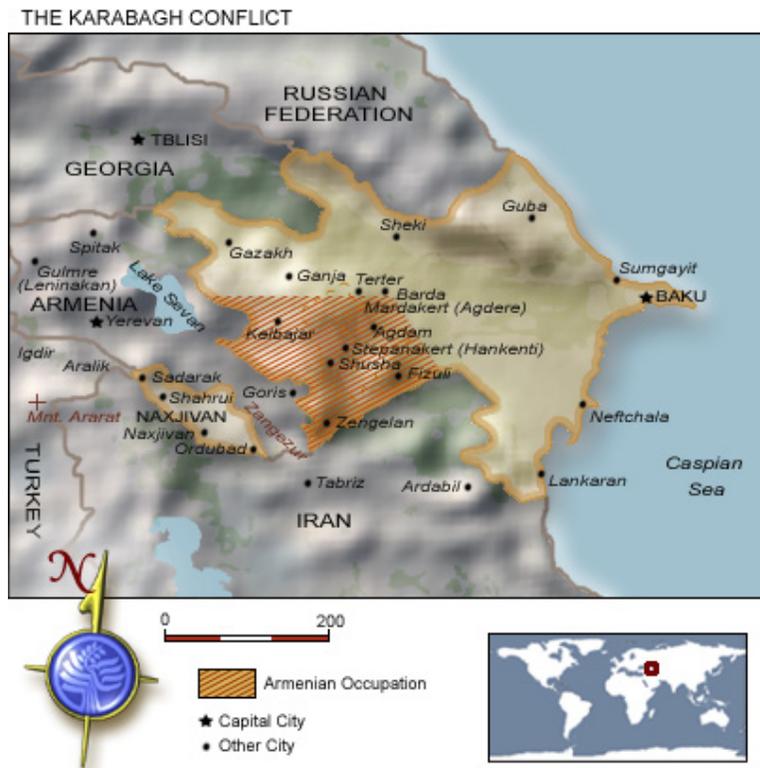
Nagorno-Karabakh

Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The Karabakh conflict is central to discussion of Armenia and Azerbaijan

The recent history of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the domestic politics and foreign relations of both countries, are inextricably bound up with the conflict between them over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (Karabakh for short). During the Soviet period, this territory was an autonomous province within the Azerbaijan SSR with a predominantly ethnic Armenian population.

The Karabakh conflict plays a central role in the current affairs of both Armenia and Azerbaijan.



Nagorno-Karabakh at a glance

Status	Formerly the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province within the Azerbaijan SSR, the territory known as Nagorno-Karabakh (Mountainous Karabakh) now claims to be an independent republic, although in practice it is completely dependent upon Armenia. It is not recognized by the international community, or even by Armenia itself. Azerbaijan claims Nagorno-Karabakh as part of its territory.
Area	Nagorno-Karabakh has an area of about 1,900 square miles.
Location	Nagorno-Karabakh is completely surrounded by territory belonging to Azerbaijan, though currently under occupation by Armenian forces.
Climate and terrain	Like other parts of western Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh has mountainous terrain and a cold and wet climate.
Capital	The capital of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh is Stepanakert. (This is the city's Armenian name. Its Azerbaijani name is Khankendi.)
Population	The current population of Nagorno-Karabakh is about 200,000. It is increasing with the influx of new Armenian settlers. The government of the republic aim to achieve a population of 300,000 by 2010.
Ethnic	Armenian 95 %

composition of the population	The remaining 5 % are mainly Assyrians, Greeks, and Kurds. Before the conflict, some 25 per cent of the population were Azerbaijanis. Now they are refugees in other parts of Azerbaijan.
System of government	The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh is formally a presidential democracy.
President	The first president of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh was Robert Kocharian, currently president of Armenia. Its current president is Arkady Gukasian.

Historical Background to the Karabakh Conflict

Background Violent clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis occurred in Baku in 1905 and again in 1918. A more direct precursor of the current conflict was the fighting between the independent Armenian and Azerbaijani republics of 1918-20 over three disputed border areas—Nakhichevan and Zangezur as well as Karabakh.

Karabakh incorporated into Soviet Azerbaijan in July 1921 Karabakh was incorporated into Soviet Azerbaijan in July 1921. The issue of Karabakh remained alive throughout the Soviet period. At various times Karabakh Armenians addressed petitions to the Soviet authorities pleading for transfer of the territory to Armenia. They complained that their cultural and economic needs were neglected, that they were cut off from contact with their fellow Armenians in the Armenian SSR, and that the leadership of the Azerbaijan SSR was encouraging Azerbaijanis to settle in Karabakh with a view to shifting the demographic balance against them.

Political Confrontation

Request that Nagorno-Karabakh province be made part of Armenia In February 1988, the Armenian majority of the Soviet (council) of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province passed a resolution requesting that the province be made part of Armenia. The resolution sparked massive demonstrations and strikes of support in Yerevan. Another response was a pogrom against Armenians in the Azerbaijani industrial city of Sumgayit, organized with the apparent complicity (if not at the instigation) of the city authorities.

Compromise position The Soviet leadership tried to defuse the confrontation by deploying troops to Yerevan and by adopting a compromise position. Change in republican borders was ruled out, but demands were made of Baku to take steps to satisfy the grievances of the Karabakh Armenians.

Confrontation Confrontation moved to a higher level in June 1988 when Armenia's Supreme Soviet voted unanimously in favor of the unification of Karabakh with Armenia. followed a couple of days

later by a contrary unanimous vote of Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet.

Special administration followed by military rule

In January 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet placed Karabakh provisionally under a special form of administration. While remaining formally within Azerbaijan, the province was to be run by an official answering directly to Moscow.

In November 1989, the special administration was abolished and the province put under military rule. In the same month, the congress of the Armenian Pan-National Movement was organized. It would come to power nine months later.

Renewed violence

In January 1990, another pogrom against Armenians took place, this time in Baku. The city's remaining Armenians were evacuated from Azerbaijan by the Soviet army. All but 10,000 of Azerbaijan's quarter million Armenians outside Karabakh now fled to Russia or Armenia, while 200,000 Azerbaijanis and Kurds from Armenia (mainly Zangezur) became refugees in Azerbaijan.

Transition to War

Low-intensity armed conflict

The confrontation began to take the form of low-intensity armed conflict by early 1990. Soviet army units acting in support of the Azerbaijan authorities exchanged fire with militias defending Armenian villages on the outskirts of Karabakh. In and around Karabakh, local Armenian and Azerbaijani paramilitary groups began to form and clash with one another. Azerbaijan instituted a blockade of road, rail, and energy links with Armenia that still continues. Nakhichevan was blockaded by Armenia.

Escalation to all-out war

Escalation to all-out war took place in 1991. Between April and August, troops of the Soviet army and the Azerbaijan interior ministry, overcoming the resistance of local militias, deported the inhabitants of a score or so of Armenian villages round the edges of Karabakh. This operation prompted Armenians to expand their paramilitary forces and improve coordination among them.

Course of the War

War

Winter of 1991-92

In the winter of 1991-92 Stepanakert was besieged and under heavy bombardment from Shusha, an Azerbaijani town situated on high ground overlooking Stepanakert.

February-May 1992

The tide of battle turned when Armenian forces captured Khojali, an Azerbaijani town on Karabakh's eastern edge, massacring several hundred refugees. In May 1992 they captured Shusha, and proceeded to take control of the Lachin area, which lies between Karabakh and Armenia. With the "Lachin corridor" as a supply route, Karabakh was no longer isolated from

Armenia. Lachin's Azerbaijani and Kurdish population fled, as did those Azerbaijanis still remaining in Karabakh itself.

June-September 1992

In June 1992, the Azerbaijanis counter-attacked. They recaptured several villages, but failed to make any decisive strategic gains. In September 1992, the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh declared itself an independent state, a move dictated by Armenia's reluctance, out of diplomatic considerations, formally to annex the territory.

Spring of 1993

In the spring of 1993, the allied armed forces of Karabakh and Armenia made further dramatic advances. In addition to securing control of the whole of Karabakh, they occupied surrounding territory to the east, west, north, and south. The whole of southwestern Azerbaijan down to the border with Iran-- eight provinces covering a sixth of the country's territory—was now in their hands. The roughly 600,000 Azerbaijanis who lived in the newly conquered areas fled to other parts of Azerbaijan or over the border into Iran, bringing the total number of refugees generated by the conflict well over the million mark.

Fighting also spread along the whole border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the border between Armenia and Nakhichevan.

ceasefire

A ceasefire was finally arranged through Russian mediation in May 1994. The ceasefire has on the whole held since that time, although there have been frequent minor violations.

It is estimated that about 20,000 people were killed in the war. There were numerous human rights violations by both sides.

The Minsk Process

Azerbaijan distrusts Russian intentions

Russia has made active efforts to broker a ceasefire and mediate the conflict, especially in 1993-94. These efforts have, however, been in vain because Azerbaijan distrusts Russian intentions. Nor is Azerbaijan willing to accept Russian or CIS peacekeeping forces like those that have been deployed in Abkhazia.

OSCE mediating a settlement

Under these circumstances and with the consent of the United Nations, the OSCE has taken on the main role in mediating a settlement. The OSCE has been involved in the Karabakh issue since early 1992, when it decided to convene "as soon as possible" a conference that would provide a forum for negotiations to settle the conflict. Though the conference, to be held in Minsk (Belarus), has still to take place, the OSCE effort to resolve the conflict came to be called "the Minsk process." The Minsk process is supervised by the Minsk Group, which consists of representatives of 13 OSCE participating states, including Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Minsk Group

In December 1994, representatives of France, Russia, and the United States were appointed co-chairmen of the Minsk Group. Their main job was to make visits to the region to talk with

the parties, and then report back to the rest of the Minsk Group and the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. In this way it was hoped to bring any Russian initiatives under the OSCE umbrella, so that they would contribute to the Minsk process.

Multinational peacekeepers under OSCE auspices

At this time, OSCE participating states expressed themselves willing to deploy multinational peacekeeping forces in the context of a settlement. These forces, should they ever be deployed, will be the first peacekeepers ever to operate under OSCE auspices. A High Level Planning Group, consisting mainly of military officers and located in Vienna, is responsible for working out recommendations concerning how to conduct the operation.

OSCE

In January 1997, a [Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for the Conflict Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Process](#) was appointed. The representative has an office in Tbilisi (Georgia) and field assistants in Baku, Yerevan, and Stepanakert / Khankendi. The representative's task is to promote humanitarian and confidence-building measures and encourage direct contact between the parties.

The conflict dealt with by the Minsk process

The Minsk process, with its many would-be mediators, has not proven effective in advancing a settlement. Agreement has not been reached concerning the identity of the parties to the conflict. Azerbaijan regards the conflict as being between Armenia and Azerbaijan, while Armenia claims not to be a party to the conflict, which supposedly involves only Azerbaijan and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. For this reason it has not been possible to agree on a name for the conflict, which is referred to in OSCE documents as "the conflict dealt with by the Minsk process."

Substantive Course of the Negotiations

December 1996 OSCE summit in Lisbon

In December 1996, an OSCE summit in Lisbon (Portugal) adopted a statement of principles for resolving the Karabakh conflict. This document did little to advance a settlement because Armenia was not prepared to accept one of the key principles, the preservation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, fearing that it might predetermine the status of Karabakh.

Two-phase settlement

Nevertheless, by the fall of 1997 the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan accepted Minsk Group proposals for a two-phase settlement. In the first stage, Armenian forces would withdraw from occupied territories outside Karabakh, Azerbaijani refugees would return to their homes in those territories, the peacekeeping force would deploy, and borders would re-open (that is, blockades would be lifted). Only in the second stage would the final status of Karabakh be determined, though it was understood that it would remain essentially self-governing and that Azerbaijan's territorial integrity would be formally preserved within the framework of a confederal "common state."

Conceptual

This was a real advance, as Armenia had previously insisted that Karabakh must not be

framework

subordinate to Azerbaijan in any way, while Azerbaijan had been willing only to speak in vague terms about autonomy for Karabakh within Azerbaijan. An agreed conceptual framework seemed to be within grasp. Within this framework outstanding issues could be tackled—security guarantees for Karabakh, guaranteed access between Karabakh and Armenia along the Lachin corridor, the return of former Azerbaijani inhabitants of Karabakh to their homes, and the future of Shusha.

Continued conflict

The new approach was rejected by the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. The new president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, previously president of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, initially took a hard-line stance. Under pressure from the nationalist opposition in Azerbaijan, President Aliiev also retreated from compromises to which he had given his tentative approval.

Key West talks

The OSCE sponsored a round of negotiations between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in April 2001. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell opened the talks, and negotiations continued with mediators from the U.S., Russia, and France. Some progress was made, but no breakthrough was achieved.

Dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan continues at the ministerial level. The Minsk Group co-chairs continue to work with the Presidents to reach a peaceful solution.

Mini-quiz**Which is a correct statement regarding Nagorno-Karabakh?**

- It has never had a predominantly ethnic Armenian population.
- CIS peacekeepers have been deployed.
- It has never been a part of Azerbaijan.
- The OSCE, through the Minsk Group, seeks to mediate this conflict.

Armenia

Armenia at a glance



Area	The area of Armenia is about 11,500 square miles, not counting Armenian-occupied territories in southwestern Azerbaijan.
Location	Armenia is landlocked. It borders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Georgia to the north · Azerbaijan to the east · Iran and Azerbaijan's exclave of Nakhichevan to the south · Turkey to the southwest and west
Climate, terrain, and natural resources	<p>Climate and Terrain Armenia has a dry continental climate and high mountainous terrain.</p> <p>Natural Resources Its water system is dominated by Lake Sevan, the biggest lake in the Caucasus. Armenia is poor in natural resources, though there are some gold, copper, and other metal deposits.</p>
Capital	The capital of Armenia is Yerevan.
Population	The population of Armenia is about 3 million. It has been declining due to emigration and a low birth rate.
Ethnic composition of the population	Armenia is overwhelmingly (over 95 per cent) ethnic Armenian. Moreover, Armenians live outside Armenia in Georgia, Russia, Iran, the Middle East, France, and North America. Before the Karabakh conflict:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Many Armenians lived in Azerbaijan. They are now refugees, mainly in Armenia and Russia. · Many Azerbaijanis lived in the Zangezur region of southern Armenia. They are now refugees in Azerbaijan.
Language	<p>The state language of Armenia is Armenian. Armenian belongs to the Indo-European family, though not to any of the main branches of that family. It has its own ancient script.</p> <p>Origins of the Armenian alphabet.</p>
System of government	Armenia is a presidential democracy.
President	The first post-independence president of Armenia was Levon Ter-Petrosian. The current president is Robert Kocharian.
Currency	Armenia's currency is the Dram.
Standard of living	In Armenia GDP per capita is about \$600, below 2 per cent of the U.S. level. After a period of sharp decline, the standard of living in Armenia is starting to rise.

Historical Background of Armenia

Armenian ancestry

The original homeland of the Armenian people lies not on the territory of the post-Soviet republic of Armenia, but to its south, on the plateau of eastern Anatolia in what is now Turkey. Here, visible on the horizon from the southern part of the post-Soviet republic, is Mount Ararat—the Armenians' spiritual symbol and the place where Noah's ark is believed to have come aground.

Armenian ancestry

The Armenians took shape as an ethnic group between the 6th and the 2nd century B.C. It is thought that their ancestors were partly people indigenous to eastern Anatolia, and partly migrants from the ancient empire of Urartu to the south. During their formative period, the Armenians came under Persian domination. Later they also came into close contact with Greece and Rome. Thus the society, culture, and religion of ancient Armenia reflected both Persian and Greek influences.

[Photographs of the sole surviving Pagan Armenian Temple located at Garni, near Yerevan.](#)

Armenian king, Tigran the Great

The first famous Armenian king, Tigran the Great (95-55 BC), conquered a multi-ethnic empire that stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and included lands that now make up southern Georgia and southern Azerbaijan. But westward expansion brought the Armenian kings into conflict with the Roman Empire, and forced them to retreat to their ethnic homeland.

First country in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion

Armenia was the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion, by proclamation of King Trdat (Tiridates III) in 314 AD. The Armenian Church became the center of a new Armenian literary culture after the monk Mashtots devised an Armenian alphabet at the beginning of the 5th century. The Church was to play a crucial role in preserving Armenian identity, especially during the long periods when the Armenians lacked a state of

state religion Armenian identity, especially during the long periods when the Armenians lacked a state of their own.

[Photographs and a discussion of traditional Armenian architecture.](#)

Buffer state between Byzantium in the west and Persia in the east From the late 4th century, Armenia survived as a weak buffer state between Byzantium in the west and Persia in the east. From the 7th to the 9th century, the Arab Caliphate took the place of Persia. Then the Turkmen of the Seljuk Empire invaded from across the Caspian.

Historic Armenia fell in the 11th century The last Armenian kingdom in historic Armenia fell in the 11th century. Many Armenians sought refuge further south—in the region of Cilicia, on Anatolia's Mediterranean coast, where they established another Armenian kingdom that lasted until the 14th century.

16th century-most Armenian lands under Ottoman rule During the 16th century, most Armenian lands came under the rule of Ottoman Turkey, except for a part of eastern Armenia that remained within Persia.

The Armenians, Ottoman Turkey and Russia

Russia's conquest of the Caucasus Russia's conquest of the Caucasus brought the northern fringe of historic Armenia into the Russian Empire. At that time, the population of this area was predominantly Azerbaijani. But in the first half of the 19th century the Russian government encouraged a massive migration of Armenians from Ottoman Turkey into Russian-held territory. As a result, there emerged the area of predominantly Armenian population in the Southern Caucasus that in the 20th century would become Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia.

Two nationalist parties In the late 19th century, Armenians seeking to improve the position of their people in Ottoman Turkey created two nationalist parties.

- One was the Hunchaks, who were socialist as well as nationalist.
- The other was the Dashnaks, who are still active in Armenian politics today.

Both Hunchaks and Dashnaks resorted to terrorism against the Ottomans. The result was a series of massacres in 1894-96, in which many Armenians were killed.

Armenian Tragedy

During World War One, Ottoman Turkey was allied with Germany against Russia, France, and Britain. The Ottoman government accused Armenians of being in league with the Russian enemy, and in 1915 ordered that they be deported from their native places. Deportees were marched until they died of hunger, thirst, and exhaustion—or were killed outright by police, soldiers, or bandits. It is estimated that 1,500,000 Armenians perished. Armenians consider the "deportation" as genocide. Even today the memory of this collective trauma marks the psychology of Armenians.

Independent Armenian republic declared in 1918

By the end of 1916 most of Turkish Armenia was under Russian occupation. Following the fall of the Czarist regime war-weary Russian soldiers abandoned the front. Armenian volunteer militias replaced the Russian soldiers, enabling the Dashnaks to proclaim an independent Armenian republic in the spring of 1918 (initially as part of the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation).

Armenia attacked in 1920

At the end of 1920, Armenia was attacked from the south and west by forces of the new post-Ottoman Turkish government. At the same time, the Red Army attacked Armenia from the north and east, and Soviet rule was proclaimed in the part of Armenia formerly under Czarist rule. A Dashnak rising in February 1921 was temporarily successful, but Soviet rule was re-imposed by the summer of 1921. Soviet Russia and Turkey negotiated an agreement that (among other things) confirmed the borders of the Soviet republic set up in "Russian" Armenia.

Soviet Armenia

Appearance of Armenian sovereignty

Soviet Armenia preserved the symbols and appearance of Armenian sovereignty, although the reality was communist rule.

Gorbachev's perestroika opened the gates to independent political activity

In Armenia as elsewhere in the USSR, Gorbachev's perestroika in the mid-1980s opened the gates to independent political activity. At first, protestors were concerned mainly by environmental issues—a dangerous chemical factory in Yerevan, the falling level of Lake Sevan, and the Medzamor nuclear power station, located in an area at high risk of earthquakes. (Medzamor was closed down, but shortage of energy later forced it to be put back into operation.) From 1987, however, protest focused increasingly on the issue of Karabakh.

Domestic Politics in Armenia

Levon Ter-Petrosian and his colleagues in the Armenian

Levon Ter-Petrosian and his colleagues in the Armenian Pan-National Movement (APNM) were swept to power on the wave of the Karabakh movement. Once in government, however, and especially after the Karabakh war ceasefire, they lost much of their earlier popularity. They were widely seen as corrupt and inept in managing the severe economic crisis into which the Soviet collapse, war, and blockade had plunged the country.

Pan-National Movement (APNM)

Current system of government

The constitution, adopted by referendum in July 1995, vests great power in the hands of the president. He appoints the prime minister and other members of the government, the chief prosecutor, ambassadors, and even the president and members of the constitutional court.

A National Assembly consists of 190 deputies, of whom 150 are elected by majority voting in single-mandate constituencies and 40 by proportional representation (PR) from party lists.

Parliamentary elections of July 1995

In the July 1995 elections, the APNM and its allies won about three-quarters of the parliamentary seats. OSCE observers noted reports of the intimidation of opposition candidates, media bias, and the exclusion of the Dashnaks, and concluded that the elections were "free but not fair."

Presidential elections of September 1996

Ter-Petrosian declared victory in the September 1996 presidential elections, but the opposition refused to accept the result, claiming that massive fraud had taken place. An initially peaceful protest turned into a riot inside the parliament building, in response to which Ter-Petrosian deployed troops throughout Yerevan.

Ter-Petrosian falls from power

Ter-Petrosian attempted to regain public confidence by appointing several popular figures as ministers in his government. In March 1997, Robert Kocharian, at that time president of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, was made prime minister.

But Kocharian could not accept the compromises that Ter-Petrosian made in the Karabakh negotiations. The government was paralyzed by internal discord over the issue, and Ter-Petrosian was forced to resign. New presidential elections in March 1998 were won by Kocharian with 59 per cent of the vote.

Parliamentary elections of May 1999

The May 1999 parliamentary elections were won by an alliance of the Republican Party of Armenia (led by Vazgen Sarkisian) and the People's Party of Armenia (led by Karen Demirchian). Sarkisian became prime minister and Demirchian parliamentary speaker.

OSCE observers reported shortcomings in the conduct of the elections, but no major violations. The elections took place in an atmosphere free of intimidation, marking a big improvement over previous elections.

Gunmen stormed the parliament chamber In October 1999, unidentified gunmen stormed the parliament chamber and shot dead several politicians, including Sarkisian and Demirchian. The military were again put on alert, and Vazgen Sarkisian's brother Aram was chosen to replace him as prime minister.

Growing authoritarianism In May 2000, President Kocharian replaced Aram Sarkisian as prime minister by Andranik Markarian.

There has been increasing hostility between the Kocharian government and a fragmented opposition made up of 16 different parties. Kocharian has become increasingly authoritarian. Independent media have been harassed and intimidated.

February--March 2003: presidential elections Presidential elections were held in February and March 2003. In the run-off, Kocharian stood against Stepan Demirchian, chairman of the People's Party of Armenia, and won with 67.5 per cent of the vote. There were accusations of widespread fraud, and OSCE observers noted blatant irregularities in the conduct of the elections.

May 2003: parliamentary elections Parliamentary elections followed in late May 2003. The ruling Republican Party of Armenia, led by prime minister Andranik Markarian, won over a quarter of the votes and about 40 seats. Two other pro-presidential parties, the Country of Law Party and the Dashnaks, won 21 and 12 seats respectively. The opposition Justice Bloc won only 14 per cent of the vote and 17 seats. The National Unity Party got 9 seats, while the new United Labor Party of businessman Gourgen Arsenian got 6 seats. Several dozen businessmen without party affiliation also won seats. Neither the APNM nor the Communist Party has any representation.

There were many reports of vote-buying and other irregularities. The OSCE issued two reports on the elections, both critical.

The Republican Party has the largest single faction, but needs wider support to form a parliamentary majority. Negotiations for a coalition government are underway.

Foreign Relations in Armenia

Foreign relations dominated by the Karabakh conflict Armenia's foreign relations are dominated by the Karabakh conflict. In exchange for Russian military support, Armenia cooperates with Russia in the southern Caucasus. Armenia and Karabakh are integrated into the Russian air defense system, and Russian troops are stationed on Armenia's border with Turkey.

In July 2002, Armenia transferred a number of strategic enterprises to Russian control in exchange for cancellation of some \$100 million of its debt to Russia. At the same time

Armenia receives substantial U.S. aid.

Relations between Armenia and Turkey remain tense

Relations between Armenia and Turkey remain tense. Turkey backs Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict, and participates in a joint blockade of Armenia.

Armenian-Turkish relations are also poisoned by the legacy of the 1915 genocide, the occurrence of which Turkey refuses to acknowledge. Ter-Petrosian refrained from raising the issue, but Kocharian insists on doing so. In addition, Turkey is concerned at the ecological risk entailed by the resumed operation of the Medzamor nuclear power station in an earthquake zone not far from its borders.

Armenia and Iran

Armenia has another friend in the region -- Iran. While officially neutral with respect to the Karabakh conflict, Iran's ruling Islamist regime sides with Armenia. This stems mainly from Iranian fear of Azerbaijani aspirations to unite northern with southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan. Economic relations with Iran are also very important for blockaded Armenia. Besides cross-border trade, the two countries plan to harness hydroelectric power on the stretch of the River Aras that forms their border.

Armenia's relations with Georgia are ambiguous

Armenia's relations with its other neighbor in the southern Caucasus, Georgia, are ambiguous. Ter-Petrosian took care to keep relations on an even keel, but Kocharian has raised tension by bringing up the issue of the position of Armenians in the region of Javakheti in southern Georgia.

OSCE

An OSCE office was established in Yerevan in 2000 to promote implementation of OSCE principles and commitments, and maintains contact with local authorities and groups to contribute to the development of democratic institutions in the country. The OSCE office works independently from the Minsk Group seeking to mediate a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

[OSCE office in Yerevan.](#)

COE

Armenia is a member of the Council of Europe.

Armenian Culture

Yerevan

The capital city Yerevan is home to over a third of Armenia's population. The city's architecture is mostly utilitarian and Soviet. Specifically Armenian features are the numerous summer cafes and the pervasive pink of the locally quarried stone.

The heart of the city is Republic Square, which despite its name has a circular layout. Notable sights include the 16th-century Turkish fort, the 18th-century mosque, the cylindrical Soviet Youth Palace, the memorial to the victims of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, and the Matenadaran -- a depository of nearly 15,000 very rare ancient Armenian and foreign manuscripts. Public works repairs are limited, so watch out for the pot-holes.

Mount Ararat

Across the border in Turkey but clearly visible against the horizon -- at least on a day when not obscured by the haze -- one can see snow-topped Mount Ararat, the spiritual symbol of the Armenian people and the place where Noah's ark is believed to have come aground.

Echmiadzin

Not far from Yerevan stands Echmiadzin, the ancient capital and still the seat of the Armenian Orthodox Church. Throughout the country you can see old churches with their characteristic conical roofs.

Climate and seismic activity

Armenia is very mountainous country with a dry continental climate. It has the largest lake in the Caucasus, Lake Sevan, which is 6,000 feet above sea level.

The country has suffered greatly from intense earthquakes. The area around the city of Spitak in northern Armenia still shows the signs of damage from the quake of 1988. An even greater disaster would result if an earthquake were to strike the nuclear power station at Medzamor, which is built on a seismic fault line.

Economics

The economic situation remains very difficult. Many people survive thanks to aid from relatives living and working abroad.

Cuisine

Traditional Armenian cuisine reflects Middle Eastern influence. Popular dishes are *churek* (flat unleavened bread with sesame seeds), *spas* (yogurt soup with barley and herbs), *kharput kiufa* (ground and minced lamb with pine nuts and cracked wheat), *kashlama* (shoulder of lamb boiled with vegetables), *yarpakh dolmasy* (grape leaves stuffed with lamb and rice), and *khorovadz* (meat or vegetable kebab). The country is also famous for its pastries -- and for its wines, brandies, and cognacs.

Mini-quiz

The OSCE Office in Yerevan:

- is focused on mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict
 - monitors the situation in Javakheti
 - contributes to the development of the democratic institutions in the country
 - has helped negotiate the withdrawal of Russian military forces
-

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan at a glance



Area	The area of Azerbaijan is about 33,000 square miles.	
Location	<p>Azerbaijan lies on the western shore of the Caspian Sea. It borders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The Republic of Daghestan in the Russian Northern Caucasus to the north · Georgia to the northwest · Armenia to the west · Iran to the south <p>Azerbaijan's exclave of Nakhichevan is sandwiched between Armenia to the north and Turkey and Iran to the south.</p>	<p><i>Historically Azerbaijan comprised not only the territory of post-Soviet Azerbaijan, but also the neighboring region of northwestern Iran, the main city of which is Tabriz. This part of Iran is often referred to as Iranian or Southern Azerbaijan, and post-Soviet Azerbaijan as Northern Azerbaijan (Such usage is not intended to convey any political stance.)</i></p>
Climate, terrain, and natural resources	<p>Climate In the lowlands the climate is mild and fairly dry. In the mountains it is cold and wet.</p> <p>Terrain The terrain in Azerbaijan rises from the lowlands along the coast and in the valleys of the Kura and Aras Rivers to high mountains in the north and west.</p> <p>Natural Resources Azerbaijan's most valuable natural resource is oil. There is also copper, iron ore, and salt.</p>	
Capital	The capital of Azerbaijan is Baku.	
Population	The population of Azerbaijan now approaches 8 million and is increasing.	
Ethnic composition of the population	<p>Azerbaijanis constitute about 80 per cent of the population of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis are also a majority of the population of Iranian Azerbaijan. In fact, more Azerbaijanis live in Iran than in Azerbaijan—perhaps as many as 20 million.</p> <p>The largest ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan are Talysh, Russians, and Lezgins (4 per cent). The Talysh are concentrated in the southeast, near the border with Iran, and the Lezgins in the northeast, near the border with Daghestan in the Northern Caucasus. Many Lezgins also live across the border in southern Daghestan.</p> <p>Before the Karabakh war many Armenians lived in Baku, Sumgayit, and other cities. They are now refugees.</p>	
Language	Azerbaijani is the state language. It belongs to the Turkic family. The Latin script is now used.	
System of government	In form, Azerbaijan is a presidential democracy. However, democratic institutions are not firmly established.	
President	The current president of Azerbaijan is Geidar Aliev.	
Currency	Azerbaijan's currency is the Manat.	
Standard of living	In Azerbaijan GDP per capita is about \$700, roughly 2 per cent of the U.S. level. The standard of living in Azerbaijan has been rising in recent years.	

Historical Background of Azerbaijan

Apsheron Peninsula on the

The ancient world knew of a mysterious place where flames would suddenly burst through the surface of the earth. This place was the Apsheron Peninsula on the Caspian coast—the peninsula on which now stands Baku. The source of the flames was oil that welled below the

Caspian coast ground. The Persian name for the country was Azerbaijan, which means "land of fire."

Azerbaijan has been inhabited for at least 10,000 years The first organized state in the area, the principality of Zamoia, appeared in the 9th century BC, only to be conquered soon thereafter by the Assyrians. The decline of Assyria led to the formation in southern Azerbaijan of the kingdom of Media, and in northern Azerbaijan of the kingdom of Albania, which by 600 BC ruled most of the southern Caucasus. Most historians believe that the Albanians were of Caucasian origin.

Late 4th century BC to 3rd century In the late 4th century BC, a Hellenic kingdom called Atropatena was set up in Azerbaijan by one of the commanders of Alexander the Great. From the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD, except for an interval of Armenian supremacy in the 1st century BC, Azerbaijan was a battleground between the empires of Rome and Parthia. In the 3rd century, Parthia broke up. Persia then became the nearest great power, and the Albanians its vassals. The Persian Shah appointed local nobles as governors over parts of Albania—an arrangement that gave rise to autonomous local khanates.

Persia and Byzantium struggle for control of the region In the centuries that followed, Persia and Byzantium waged a struggle for control of the region. This struggle had a religious dimension. The Persian state religion, Zoroastrianism, was based on the teachings of the prophet Zarathustra. Christianity reached Albania from Byzantium in the 3rd century, but had to compete for influence with Zoroastrianism.

Arab invasions of the 7th and 8th centuries A third religion, Islam, came with the Arab invasions of the 7th and 8th centuries. The Albanian khans eventually accepted Arab rule, and some of them adopted Islam. When the Arab caliphate broke up in the 9th century, Albania was dominated by the two rival khanates of Shirvan and Arran.

Between Persia, Ottoman Turkey and Russia

Fifth century onward From the fifth century onward, Turkic tribes had begun to settle in northern Albania. In 1025, one of these tribes, the Oghuz, took control of the whole country. In the second half of the 12th century, under the rule of a descendant of the Oghuz, Shams al-Din, Azerbaijan reached the height of its power.

12th century - period of classical Azerbaijani literature. This was also the period of classical Azerbaijani literature, science, and philosophy. Although an Azerbaijani literary language would eventually arise from the Oghuz vernacular, at this time Persian remained the language of culture and Arabic the language of religion and science. Nizami, who is considered the first great Azerbaijani poet, wrote his epics in Persian. Only in the 16th century would the other great classical Azerbaijani poet, Fizuli, write in Azerbaijani as well as Persian and Arabic.

science, and philosophy

Azerbaijani as well as Persian and Arabic.

The Persian Empire

In the early 13th century, Azerbaijan came under attack from the Georgia of Queen Tamar. Then the Mongol invaders swept through the region, leaving chaos and devastation in their wake in both Azerbaijan and Georgia. Internecine conflict among the local khanates ended only with the re-emergence of a strong Persia in the 15th century. The Persian Empire was, in fact, rebuilt by some of the Azerbaijani lords, who established its capital in Tabriz.

Era of war between Persia and Ottoman Turkey

There followed an era of war between Persia and Ottoman Turkey. The Ottomans conquered Azerbaijan in the late 16th century, but were routed by Persia in 1605—the first time that they had been defeated anywhere. Azerbaijan was reincorporated into Persia.

End of the 17th century

Despite the Azerbaijani roots of the Persian dynasty, the Azerbaijani lords were discontented with their subordinate position. Toward the end of the 17th century they rose up and threw off Persian rule, but failed to unite the khanates into a single Azerbaijani state.

1722-1747

In 1722 Czar Peter the Great invaded northern Azerbaijan, but a few years later was repelled by Persian troops. In 1747 the Azerbaijani lords again rebelled against Persia, and then started to fight one another.

1804-1828

The khanates of Northern Azerbaijan fell to Russia between 1804 and 1806. Baku resisted and was reduced to ruins. By the 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchai, the border between Russia and Persia was set along the River Aras, where it stayed until the end of the Soviet period. northern Azerbaijan belonged to Russia, southern Azerbaijan to Persia (later Iran).

Under Russian and Soviet Rule

Russification

The Czarist government initially governed Azerbaijan through the existing khanates, but later switched to direct rule. Toward the end of the 19th century, Russification intensified with an influx of Russian settlers, mainly in connection with the oil boom that took off in the Baku area. Baku was connected to the Russian railway network. The great majority of Azerbaijanis remained peasants and unskilled laborers.

Azerbaijani

The two main mid-19th-century figures were the poet and historian Abbasgulu Bakikhanov and Mirza Akhundov, the first modern Azerbaijani novelist and playwright.

culture

developed under the Czars

Later in the century, some Azerbaijani newspapers and political organizations made their appearance. The political organizations were mainly nationalist in orientation—in particular, Hummet [Endeavor] and Musavat [Equality]. The communist movement became active in Azerbaijan in the first years of the 20th century, but its supporters were mostly Russians and Armenians.

Independent Azerbaijani Democratic Republic proclaimed May 1918

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was followed in Azerbaijan, and especially Baku, by a confused mixture of political and ethnic conflict. The collapse of the Transcaucasian Federation led in May 1918 to the proclamation of an independent Azerbaijani Democratic Republic under a Musavat government. The republic lasted less than two years before falling to the Red Army. Armed resistance to Soviet rule continued until 1924.

Azerbaijan incorporated into the USSR in 1922

Azerbaijan was incorporated into the USSR in 1922 as part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. When this entity was eliminated in 1936, Azerbaijan became a union republic, the Azerbaijan SSR.

Geidar Aliev

The Communist Party First Secretary in Azerbaijan under Brezhnev, Geidar Aliev, is now the country's president. Aliev belongs to a powerful "clan" of politicians from the exclave of Nakhichevan.

From Perestroika to Independence

Independent political organizations sought to restore an independent Azerbaijan

Independent political organizations emerged in Azerbaijan in 1988. One of them, the National Democratic Party, regarded itself as the successor to Musavat. Although groups had different general political orientations, they all sought to restore an independent Azerbaijan that would include Karabakh. Some hoped for eventual reunification with Southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) provided a broad umbrella organization for all nationalist groups.

"Black January"

Gorbachev sent troops into Baku in January 1990 ("Black January") out of concern that Azerbaijan was about to fall into the hands of the APF nationalists. Many people were killed or injured.

Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet

After the collapse of the hard-line coup in Moscow in August 1991, Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet declared independence. The declaration was confirmed by referendum the following

**declared
independence
August 1991**

month, while Communist Party First Secretary Mutalibov won the presidency in elections of doubtful validity. Mutalibov was forced to resign in March 1992. When he tried to reclaim his position in May, the APF pulled off a bloodless coup. In June 1992, historian and APF chairman Abulfaz Elchibei was elected president.

Domestic Politics in Azerbaijan

**Elchibei
government did
not survive long**

Abulfaz Elchibei formed a government consisting of other leading members of the Azerbaijan Popular Front. But the Elchibei government did not survive long. The serious defeats that the Azerbaijani forces suffered in the Karabakh war during the winter of 1992-93 and the spring of 1993 jeopardized its position.

**Surat Husseinov
launched a
rebellion**

In April 1993, Elchibei removed several military commanders whom he considered responsible for the reverses. One of the removed commanders, Surat Husseinov, then gathered his supporters and launched a rebellion against the government from his stronghold in the city of Ganja. In June 1993, Husseinov called for the resignation of Elchibei and of parliamentary speaker Issa Gambarov, and set off for Baku at the head of his troops. Gambarov resigned.

**Aliev sees
Elchibei off into
retirement**

At this point—Geidar Aliev, the former Communist Party boss in Azerbaijan —reentered Azerbaijani politics. He had been biding his time in his native Nakhichevan, awaiting a suitable moment to return to the capital. That moment had now arrived. The parliament offered Aliev the position of speaker, and he took it up shortly before Husseinov's men reached Baku. Aliev then escorted Elchibei into retirement.

**Aliev legitimizes
his position and
consolidates his
control**

Aliev next set about the task of legitimizing his position and consolidating his control. In August 1993, a referendum endorsed the removal of Elchibei from the presidency. Presidential elections followed in October 1993. Aliev won by a large majority. Husseinov was rewarded for propelling Aliev back into power with the positions of prime minister and defense minister.

**Three categories
of political
parties**

Since 1993, a multi-party system has emerged in Azerbaijan. Political parties fall into three categories depending on their relationship with the Aliev regime:

- First, there is a pro-presidential ruling party called the New Azerbaijan Party under Aliev's direct control.
 - Second, there are various non-ruling parties that are considered loyal to the regime, such as Etibar Mamedov's Azerbaijan National Independence Party and Nizami Suleimanov's Azerbaijan Independence Party. These are allowed broad freedom of action.
 - Third, there are real opposition parties of different political orientations, which operate under severe constraints and are often subjected to repressive police measures.
-

Opposition

The most important opposition parties are the Azerbaijan Popular Front and its smaller ally,

parties

the Musavat Party. These are both nationalist parties with a general pro-Western and pro-Turkish orientation.

- The Musavat Party claims the legacy of the old Musavat. Its chairman is Issa Gambarov, who was parliamentary speaker during Elchibei's presidency, and many former ministers and diplomats of the Elchibei administration are among its members.
- The Azerbaijan Popular Front has split in recent years into two wings—a more nationalist wing still led by Elchibei, and a more liberal democratic wing led by Ali Kerimov.

There are in addition a considerable number of less important opposition parties, including communists, social democrats, environmentalists, pro-Iranian Islamists, and extreme pan-Turkic nationalists.

Current constitution was endorsed by referendum in November 1995

The current constitution was endorsed by referendum in November 1995. It concentrates extensive powers in the hands of the president. The parliament or national assembly consists of 125 deputies, of whom 100 are elected in single-mandate constituencies and 25 by proportional representation (PR) from party lists. Only parties receiving a minimum proportion of the vote -- initially 8 per cent, later reduced to 6 per cent -- are represented in parliament.

A new referendum was held in August 2002 to approve 39 amendments to the constitution.

Parliamentary elections of 1995

In the parliamentary elections that followed the adoption of the constitution, the New Azerbaijan Party won 62 per cent of the vote and 54 seats. Three other parties surmounted the 8 per cent barrier, two of which were "loyal" parties: the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (9 per cent and 4 seats) and the Motherland Party (8 per cent and 1 seat). The only opposition party to get into parliament was the Azerbaijan Popular Front (9 per cent and 4 seats). OSCE observers noted numerous irregularities, and concluded that the elections were "neither free nor fair."

Presidential elections of October 1998

During the most recent presidential elections in October 1998, Aliev was re-elected with 78 per cent of the vote. Etibar Mamedov and Nizami Suleimanov, leaders of the "loyal" Azerbaijan National Independence Party and Azerbaijan Independence Party, came in second and third with 12 and 8 per cent respectively. Firudin Hassanov of the Azerbaijan Communist Party got 1 per cent.

Parliamentary elections of November 2000

New parliamentary elections were held in November 2000. According to the official results, the New Azerbaijan Party won 71 per cent of the vote, while no other party surmounted the barrier to entry into parliament, even though the barrier was now only 6 per cent. Pre-election polls, however, had indicated that the opposition Musavat Party enjoyed more electoral support than the New Azerbaijan Party. The OSCE came to the conclusion that there was progress by comparison with previous elections, although the conduct of the elections still fell short of international standards.

Aliev regime: nepotistic, authoritarian and

The Aliev regime is authoritarian and corrupt. Nevertheless, there were positive developments in 2002, such as an improvement in conditions for the independent media.

corrupt

The Aliev regime is also nepotistic. The leadership of the New Azerbaijan Party includes Aliev's son, two of his brothers, his nephew, and his sister's son-in-law. Aliev, who is 80 and in poor health, is grooming his son Ilham, vice-chairman of Azerbaijan's state oil company, to succeed him. However, even within the ruling party many important figures are reportedly opposed to the planned succession.

Foreign Relations in Azerbaijan

Strongly influenced by the Karabakh conflict

Azerbaijan's foreign relations, like those of Armenia, are strongly influenced by the Karabakh conflict, though they are also affected by a number of other factors.

Turkey is main ally

Azerbaijan's main ally in the region is Turkey. Azerbaijan also has friendly relations with Georgia. Like Georgia, Azerbaijan seeks to reduce Russia's strategic presence in the Southern Caucasus.

The Azerbaijani government does not want Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh or Russian troops guarding the Azerbaijan-Iran border. Nor will Azerbaijan allow Russian forces on to its territory to intercept Chechen insurgents, although Russia has accused Azerbaijan of giving them free passage and Russian planes have bombed the Zakatala area in northwestern Azerbaijan.

Relations between Azerbaijan and Iran

Most Azerbaijanis acknowledge the historical, cultural, and religious links between Azerbaijan and Iran. However, there are sources of tension between the two countries, including a territorial dispute over the control of offshore oilfields and the long-term possibility of Iran losing southern Azerbaijan to a united Azerbaijani state. In 2002 Aliev visited Tehran and relations improved somewhat.

Foreign policy oriented toward the West

The foreign policy of Azerbaijan is oriented toward the West. In part, this is a consequence of Azerbaijan's orientation toward Turkey, which it perceives as part of the West.

Azerbaijani democrats wish that the West would integrate Azerbaijan more rapidly into Western institutions, and act more effectively in defense of democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan. From the perspective of the Aliev regime, by contrast, concern for democracy and human rights is an irritant threatening to spoil relations that are otherwise profitable to both parties.

Western policy toward the Karabakh conflict

In the 1990s, Azerbaijanis complained that both Russia and the West were biased toward the Armenian side of the Karabakh conflict. One reason for this perception was Section 907 of the U.S. Freedom Support Act, which banned aid to Azerbaijan so long as it maintained its blockade of Armenia.

In fall 2001, the U.S. Senate agreed to repeal Section 907 in recognition of Azerbaijan's contribution to the post-September 11, 2001 anti-terrorism campaign. (Azerbaijan had provided intelligence and allowed the U.S. to use its airspace.) As a result, Azerbaijan has been able to strengthen its relations with the U.S. and receive substantial U.S. economic and military aid, including assistance in building up its maritime defenses against Iran. However, disagreements have arisen with the IMF over economic and fiscal policy.

Under Putin, Russia too has moved away from an exclusively pro-Armenian orientation, enabling Azerbaijan to improve its relations with Russia as well.

OSCE

An OSCE office was established in Baku in 2000 to promote implementation of OSCE principles and commitments, and maintain contacts with local authorities and groups.

[OSCE office in Baku](#)

COE

In 2002 Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe.

Mini-quiz

The OSCE Office in Baku:

- works closely with the Council of Europe
 - works with Turkish Peacekeepers on the Azerbaijan-Iranian border
 - works independently of the Minsk Group
 - monitors the border between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan
-

Azerbaijan Culture

Baku

The capital Baku stands on a bay of the Caspian Sea. It is home to one-seventh of the country's inhabitants. The core of the city is the old town or fortress -- a maze of narrow alleys and ancient buildings. Dating to the 11th century are the palace of the Shirvan-Shahs (rulers of the old

principality of Shirvan), now a museum, and the Synyk-Kala Minaret and Mosque. The 90-foot Maiden's Tower was erected in the 12th century.

Beyond the fortress walls, most of which still stand, the straight streets of modern 19th and 20th century Baku rise, in a regular criss-cross pattern, up the slopes of the hills surrounding the bay. Along the waterfront stretches a park.

Most industrial plants are located at the eastern and southwestern ends of the city. Between the city and the surrounding countryside lies a wasteland of long-abandoned oil derricks. Almost all of the oil wells currently in use are offshore. There is even a township of Greater Baku built on stilts 60 miles out in the sea.

Historical sites

A few miles outside the capital are other impressive historical sites. The Ateshgyakh Fire-Worshippers' Temple was built by Indian traders in the late 17th century. At Gobustan, on the slope of a stony mountain, over 4,000 Neolithic rock drawings have been discovered. They vividly depict hunting, dancing, and other scenes from daily life in the Stone Age. Near Mount Beyukshad there is a large ring of stones set around an altar.

Terrain

The terrain in Azerbaijan rises from the lowlands along the coast and in the valleys of the Kura and Aras Rivers to high mountains in the north and west. In the lowlands the climate is mild and fairly dry. In the mountains it is cold and wet. There are a few small lakes. About a quarter of the land area is suitable for growing crops, and about another quarter is pastureland.

Holidays

Some of the holidays celebrated in Azerbaijan, like *Kurban Bayram* (the Feast of the Sacrifice), are Muslim in origin. Others predate Islam. In rural areas, many holidays are of agricultural origin and are devoted to various crops. The most popular holiday, *Novruz* (meaning New Day), occurs at the spring equinox (March 20-21) and celebrates the renewal of nature.

Ritual foods are eaten, such as eggs and malt. On the last Wednesday before Novruz, people purify themselves by jumping over streams and sprinkling one another with water. Another Novruz rite is to place 7 things -- 7 being a magic number -- on a copper tray and leave it on the holiday table for 12 days as a gift to the sun. When Novruz eve arrives, relatives gather round the holiday table, and family graves are visited and tended. On this day people pay no visits and receive no guests. The holiday continues for several days, and ends with festive public dancing, music, and sports contests.

Cuisine

Azerbaijani cuisine resembles that of Georgia and Armenia while at the same time reflecting Central Asian influence. Popular dishes include *kebab*, rice pilaf with almonds and sesame seeds, *plov* (steamed rice with onions, prunes, spices, and lamb chunks fried in butter), *dovga* (yogurt boiled with rice, peas, onion, cress, fennel, and spinach), and *dolma* (grape leaves stuffed with minced lamb, rice, onion, and chopped greens). Tea is served with cardamom, ginger, and other spices. There are also various special pastries and candies. At Novruz it is customary to fry wheat with nuts and raisins.

CONGRATULATIONS!

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