

U.S. Online Training Course for OSCE, including REACT

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Module 7. Caucasus

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Overview

Introduction

Contents

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

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

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.

LANDSCAPES OF THE 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.

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The landscape, Continued

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.



Clouds coming down on Lake Sevan, Armenia's largest lake and sweet-water reservoir.
OSCE/Alex Nitzsche

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.

PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS



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Ethnic divisions, Continued

Three categories of ethnic groups

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, 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.

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 attachment to religion

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 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.



A priest at Armenia's Christian spiritual and religious centre, Echmiadzin. OSCE

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. Stalin reversed this policy. Forcible collectivization was implemented in 1932-33. A Chechen uprising followed. 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.

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Chechnya: from Perestroika to independence, Continued

Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush Republic

Zavgayev fostered the formation of a Chechen political and intellectual elite, and tried to co-opt 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 Congress of the Chechen People

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

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Relations between post-Soviet Russia and Chechnya, Continued

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. This episode apparently prompted Yeltsin to decide on direct military intervention. A last-ditch attempt at negotiation failed to avert hostilities. On December 11, Russian forces 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.

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December 1994 to August 1996: The first war, Continued

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% of the vote.

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.

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August 1996 to October 1999: Between the Wars, Continued

OSCE Assistance Group withdrawn

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 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. The size and salience of the Russian troop presence in Chechnya was gradually reduced.

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October 1999 to the present: The second war, Continued

End of war -- or stalemate?

In April 2002 Putin declared that the military phase of the conflict could be considered closed. However, a large number of Russian troops remain in Chechnya and secessionist violence has continued. For example:

- Chechen terrorists took over 800 people hostage in a Moscow theater in October 2002; Russian Special Forces used knockout gas and killed the 40 terrorists, but 130 of the hostages died as well.
 - Suicide bombers blew up government office buildings in Grozny in May 2003.
 - Secessionist fighters carried out an attack on Nazran, capital of neighboring Ingushetia in June 2004.
 - Two Russian passenger planes crashed after explosions, killing 89 in August 2004.
 - A suicide bomb attack killed 10 in a Moscow subway in August 2004.
 - A school was seized in Beslan, North Ossetia, with 1,200 children and adults held hostage in September 2004. At least 335 were killed and hundreds wounded.
-

Recent developments

No negotiations with secessionists

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

Redefining Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation

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

A referendum 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 was created.

Chechnya held presidential elections on October 5, 2003. Several candidates challenged Kadyrov, the strongest of whom was the Moscow-based Chechen businessman Malik Saidullayev. The election took place in an atmosphere of intimidation: all candidates except Kadyrov were prevented from holding meetings and denied media coverage, and a hand grenade was thrown into Saidullayev's headquarters. Kadyrov was proclaimed victor with 80% of the vote.

Preparation of a treaty to define the division of powers between Chechnya and the federal government. The treaty gave Chechnya considerable autonomy, especially in economic policy.

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Recent developments, Continued

Refugee camps closing

The Russian government and the Kadyrov administration claimed that the situation in Chechnya was returning to normal and refugees should return to Chechnya. Many did not want to do so, however, realizing that the situation is still extremely dangerous. Nevertheless, refugee camps were closed and most refugees had to go back to Chechnya.

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 has therefore been under much less pressure to take account of foreign opinion as it pursues its goals in Chechnya.

Kadyrov assassinated

On May 9, 2004, a bomb planted by secessionists under the VIP box in Grozny's Dinamo stadium exploded during Victory Day celebrations, killing Kadyrov and six others. Prime Minister Sergei Abramov was appointed acting president.

Alkhanov elected president

The Kremlin-backed Police General Alu Alkhanov was elected president in elections held in August 2004. Western governments asserted that these elections did not meet international democratic standards, although no outside parties, including the OSCE, were invited to send formal observers.

In October 2004 Alkhanov declared that he would never negotiate with Maskhadov (killed by Russian forces in May 2005) or other leaders of the Chechen rebels, thereby effectively cutting off the possibility of a negotiated arrangement to the conflict.

After Maskhadov's death, the Chechen leadership became more radicalized, including rebel leaders Shamil Basayev and Movladi Udugov in its ranks. In July 2006, however, a truck bomb killed Basayev in a neighboring republic. The Russian security services claimed credit for the assassination, but others have suggested a rival separatist leader killed him.

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Recent developments, Continued

**Ramzan
Kadyrov also
exercises power**

After Kadyrov's assassination, Putin appointed Kadyrov's son Ramzan, as Deputy Prime Minister. Ramzan began a massive rebuilding program but he and his militia have been accused of brutality and corruption.

Ramzan also supports a greater role for religion in society. He has implemented several tenets of Shari'a law, including banning gambling and alcohol and decreeing that all women wear headscarves.

**Kadyrov
elected
president**

Alkhanov resigned the presidency in February 2007 and Putin appointed him Russian Federation Deputy Justice Minister. Ramzan Kadyrov was named Acting President. A joint session of Chechnyna's two-chamber parliament elected Kadyrov president in March, with 56 supporting votes, one against and one abstention.

OSCE

OSCE Assistance Group ceases activity

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 was closed by March.

Mini-quiz

Multiple choice The key issue in peace negotiations in Chechnya has been:

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

Georgia

Overview

At a glance

The following table describes geographic and demographic information for Georgia.

Item	Description
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</p> <p>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. In northern Georgia, the terrain rises steeply toward the crest of the main Caucasus mountains.</p> <p>Natural Resources</p> <p>Mineral resources include manganese, copper, and silver.</p>
Capital	The capital of Georgia is Tbilisi.
Population	<p>4.646 (2007 estimated) million.</p> <p>It has been declining due to emigration and a low birth rate.</p>

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Overview, Continued

At a glance (continued)

Item	Description
Ethnic composition of the population	<p>Georgians constitute 70 - 75% 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.</p> <p>Percentages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgian 70--75% • Armenians 9% • Azerbaijanis 6% • Russians 6% • Ossets 3% • Abkhaz 2% <p>In the 2002 census, which did not include Abkhazia and South Ossetia, ethnic Georgians were recorded as 84% of the population; Azerbaijanis, 7%; Armenians, 6%; and Russians, 2%.</p>
Languages	<p>Georgian belongs to the Caucasian family of languages and has its own ancient script. Some Georgian regional subgroups, such as Megrelians, have their own languages, distinct from though closely related to standard Georgian.</p> <p>Georgian is the state language. According to the 1995 constitution, in Abkhazia, Abkhaz is also a state language.</p>
System of government	Georgia has a mixed parliamentary-presidential system.
Head of state	Mikhail Saakashvili has been president since 2004.
Currency	The Georgian currency is the Lari.
Standard of living	Estimated per capita GDP (on a purchasing power parity basis) in 2006 was \$3,800, roughly 8% of the U.S. level. Real per capita GDP in 2001 was \$744.

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Overview, Continued

Map The following graphic is a map of Georgia.



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*.

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Historical background of Georgia, Continued

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 Revolution

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

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 incorporated into Georgia as an autonomous republic. In 1936, the TSFSR was abolished, and Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan became full union republics of the USSR.

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Under Russian and Soviet rule, Continued

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, nationalist movements appeared in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, organized in the Osset Popular Front 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% of the vote, against 29% for the Communist Party. Gamsakhurdia became Supreme Soviet chairman. In a referendum held in March 1991, 98% voted for independence. Georgia declared independence in April 1991. In May 1991, Gamsakhurdia was elected president with 87% 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.

Continued on next page

The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Continued

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. Besides 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). After Saakashvili became president in 2004, refugees that had been living in a hotel in central Tbilisi were vacated from the hotel and provided compensation to resettle.

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The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Continued

CIS force overshadows UNOMIG

Georgian-Abkhaz talks, held under Russian and United Nations auspices, led in May 1994 to an agreement on the deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force, to be monitored by a United Nations Observers' Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).

The CIS force consists solely of Russian troops and was unilaterally increased by Russia to about 3,000 in April 2008. UNOMIG currently has 133 observers. They are located in 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 Russian-controlled CIS force's removal. In January 2003, however, 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. In July 2003 Shevardnadze prolonged the peacekeepers' mandate for an indefinite period.

In October 2003, twenty civilian UN police officers were deployed in Gali district to protect returning refugees and train a local police force.

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The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Continued

Continued contention

The Georgian side stands for the reintegration of Abkhazia into a federal Georgia, while the Abkhaz side calls for independence.

In 2004, Georgian political and legal experts submitted a draft peace plan to Georgia's National Security Council, envisaging a Georgian-Abkhazian federation with broad autonomy for Abkhazia.

Meanwhile, Abkhazians elected a new president, Sergei Bagapsh, who defeated Russia's preferred candidate Raul Khajimba. Bagapsh was later compelled to run in a new election with Khajimba as his vice-president.

In 2006 the two sides resumed discussions within the framework of the UN-led Coordinating Council for the first time in five years. The Abkhaz pulled out of the dialogue, however, after Georgia sent forces into the Kodori Gorge region of Abkhazia. Subsequently, President Saakashvili made a proposal for the resolution of the Abkhazia conflict that included demilitarization, direct dialogue between the parties, establishment of an international police presence, pledges on the non-use of force, and economic rehabilitation.

In 2007 "parliamentary" elections were held in Abkhazia. Georgia rejected the election, which was also not accepted by most of the international community. In contrast, Russia termed the election a continuation of democratic tendencies.

Saakashvili March 2008 autonomy proposal

Prior to the March 2008 NATO Summit, President Saakashvili proposed unification of Abkhazia with the rest of Georgia on the basis of full autonomy and with the assistance of international guarantors. Abkhazia de facto leaders were negative, insisting on separation from Georgia rather than autonomy.

Continued on next page

The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Continued

Russia strengthens secessionist “governments”

In April 2008, Russian President Putin took new steps to strengthen the position of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia “governments” (and tighten their relationships with Russia). Putin’s decree instructed Russian ministries and other government bodies to:

- work directly with their counterparts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia on a full range of bilateral cooperation activities
- recognize the legal acts issued by Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities
- recognize entities registered under Abkhaz and South Ossetian laws, and
- provide legal assistance on matters of civil and criminal law directly to Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities and residents (most of whom have been given Russian passports).

The decree also pointed toward the drafting of further Russian government initiatives on the economic development of these two “republics” and protection of Russian citizens there.

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. Both sides committed atrocities.

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.

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The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Continued

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.



Mission members of the CSCE Mission to Georgia inspect areas of conflict in the region of South Ossetia. 1993 (OSCE)

Georgian-Osset 1996 negotiations

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.

Continued on next page

The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Continued

Return to confrontation

At the end of May 2004 there were armed confrontations as Georgia cracked down on smuggling from the region and vied for control of ethnically Georgian villages in the southern part of South Ossetia, leading to some exchanges of fire. In mid-July the Joint Control Commission (representing Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia, and Russia) reached a new provisional agreement to avert large-scale bloodshed.

Georgian South Ossetia proposals

President Saakashvili called on South Ossetia in 2005 to renounce the use of force in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and to accept a proposal for autonomous status within its previous borders.

In 2006, Saakashvili made a proposal for the resolution of the South Ossetia conflict that included demilitarization, direct dialogue between the parties, establishment of an international police presence, signing of pledges on the non-use of force, and economic rehabilitation.

In 2007, Saakashvili launched a new initiative proposing that South Ossetia be run by a new, interim administration pending a negotiated settlement of its status. South Ossetia's de facto authorities rejected the proposal.

2006 South Ossetia "elections"

South Ossetia leader Eduard Kokoity was reelected "president" in November 2006 in a poll not recognized by the international community. A referendum held at the same time expressed South Ossetian support for independence.

At about the same time, the Georgian government launched an alternative to the South Ossetia authorities. Georgia held an election in the Tbilisi-controlled part of South Ossetia (also not recognized by the international community) resulting in the election of Dmitry Sonakoyev as "president," and a referendum supporting this territory remaining part of Georgia. Sonakoyev is an ethnic South Ossetian who fought against Georgia in the 1990-92 conflict. His "temporary administrative unit" is located in the Georgian-controlled village of Kurta. Georgia is said to control about a third of South Ossetia's 30-80,000 people.

Georgia pulls out of JCC

In March 2008, Georgia notified Russia that it was no longer going to take part in the South Ossetia Joint Control Commission established by the 1992 ceasefire agreement and called for a new, more "international" mechanism.

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The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Continued

**Russia
strengthens
secessionist
governments**

In April 2008, as noted above, Russian President Putin took new steps to strengthen the position of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia “governments” (and tighten their relationships with Russia).

**Moscow rejects
May 2008
Georgian peace
proposal**

In May 2008, a Georgian delegation led by State Reintegration Minister Iakobashvili visited Moscow to present a Georgian peace plan that included an international conference in Moscow on Abkhazia, an agreement by all sides not to use armed force, a return of Georgian refugees, and an international force to police the peace that would include Russians and contingents from other nations. Russia found nothing in the proposal worth discussion.

**Russian-
Georgian
tensions rise**

In May 2008, after accusing Georgia of a military buildup in the Kodori Gorge, the Russian Defense Ministry warned Georgia that any attempts to use force against Russian peacekeepers or Russian citizens on the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be met with “a stringent and adequate response.”

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. Gamsakhurdia later died under mysterious circumstances in Chechnya.

Conflict averted in Ajaria

Ajaria an autonomous republic

The Ajars of Ajaria in southwestern Georgia are 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. During the Soviet period, Ajaria was an autonomous republic within Georgia.

Operates as an independent fiefdom

Gamsakhurdia came to an understanding with the chairman of the Ajarian Supreme Council, Aslan Abashidze, as did Shevardnadze.

Abashidze ran Ajaria as an independent fiefdom, and even had his own army. However, unlike the leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Abashidze never expressed any wish to secede from Georgia. On the contrary, he constantly emphasized that Ajars are Georgians, and 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.

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Conflict averted in Ajaria, Continued

Abashidze falls from power

When Shevardnadze fell from power on November 23, 2003, Abashidze sealed Ajaria's borders and declared a state of emergency. Although he reluctantly agreed to Ajarian participation in the presidential election of January 4, 2004, demonstrations by pro-Saakashvili activists from the Kmara youth movement led to arrests and a new state of emergency on January 7. However, protests against Abashidze continued.

In mid-March, Saakashvili imposed an economic blockade on Ajaria and placed the Georgian armed forces on high alert after he was barred from entering Ajaria. From mid-April, tension rose as the two sides vied for control of the upcoming elections to the Ajarian parliament.

The crisis reached a head at the beginning of May with big new anti-Abashidze rallies, the defection of Abashidze loyalists, and Georgian army maneuvers near Ajaria. A violent outcome was averted by Russian envoy Igor Ivanov, who persuaded Abashidze to resign on May 5 and fly to exile in Moscow. Ajaria was placed under direct presidential rule pending new elections to the Ajarian parliament and the population was disarmed. Elections took place on June 22 and were won by pro-Tbilisi parties.

Potential for conflict in Javakheti

Annexation fears

To the east of Ajaria lies the region of Javakheti, which is populated mainly by ethnic Armenians. Javakheti Armenians frequently complain of neglect by the central government and fear for their future economic and physical security after the local Russian military base, scheduled for closure by 2008, is shut down. Many Georgians fear that granting autonomy to Javakheti, as many of its residents have demanded, would lead to the region being 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. Anti-smuggling operations by the Georgian government in 2004 led to new tensions with local Azerbaijanis.

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.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Georgia, Continued

New 1995 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 maintained some independence under Shevardnadze because the pro-presidential CUG, though the strongest single party, did not command a majority of seats and therefore could not govern alone.

Parliamentary elections in October 1999

Parliamentary elections were held in October 1999. Many parties participated. The CUG won 42% of the vote, followed by Abashidze's Revival of Georgia Bloc with 26%, and "Industry Will Save Georgia" obtained 7%.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Georgia, Continued

Presidential elections in April 2000

Shevardnadze won the presidential elections of April 2000 with over 80% of the vote. Jumber Patiashvili, who had been Communist Party First Secretary in the late 1980s, received 17%. 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 appeared to be due to allegations of Shevardnadze's corrupt business connections, 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 Mikheil Saakashvili).

Realignment of the party system

In the run-up to the parliamentary elections of November 2003, parties lined up in two blocs. A loose alliance of (not all) opposition parties faced a pro-presidential bloc. Some parties and politicians changed sides. Former parliamentary speaker Zurab Zhvania, who broke away from the CUG in September 2001 to form the Christian Conservative Party, went over to the opposition, while the National-Democratic Party of Georgia switched to Shevardnadze's side.

Elections of November 2003

Parliamentary elections were held on November 2, 2003. The official results reflected the rise of the opposition parties and Shevardnadze's loss of support, but still enabled him to maintain a parliamentary majority with the backing of Abashidze's Revival bloc. However, widespread vote rigging was reported; the OSCE was strongly critical of the conduct of the elections. There followed three weeks of opposition protest rallies in Tbilisi, culminating in the resignation of Shevardnadze in what later became known as the Rose Revolution.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Georgia, Continued

The Rose Revolution

New presidential elections were held on January 4, 2004. Saakashvili was elected with 96% of the vote. The OSCE noted "frequent but not systematic irregularities." The new president was inaugurated on January 25.

The elections of November 2 were annulled and new parliamentary elections held on March 28, 2004. The National Movement-Democrats won with 67% of the vote and 135 seats. The only other electoral bloc that passed the 7% threshold for representation in parliament was the alliance of the Industrialists Party and the New Rights Party (8% of the vote and 15 seats). International observers praised the conduct of the elections, but the Labor Party questioned the accuracy of the returns.

While the new administration has engaged in many reforms in tax and customs, police, defense, and other government sectors, it has also come under criticism by opposition figures for exerting pressure on the independent media, passing restrictive amendments to the election code, and failing to reform the judiciary. The National Movement also lost some of its original allies, the Republican Party and the Conservative Party.

In the fall of 2005, a dispute between parliament and Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili resulted in her dismissal. Zourabichvili, formerly a French diplomat, subsequently entered Georgian politics.

In the spring of 2006, opposition parties continued to clash with Saakashvili. Following the expulsion of a Republican Party member from parliament, opposition deputies boycotted parliament for several weeks. A rally of several thousand in Tbilisi later called for Saakashvili's resignation.

Opposition's 2007 offensive

Former Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili's arrest in September spurred the opposition on. He had accused Saakashvili of a long list of crimes, as well as ordering the killing of oligarch (and opposition bankroller) Badri Patarkatishvili. The latter claimed he would spend all his fortune to oust Saakashvili. Opposition activity peaked with a November 2 mass demonstration of 50,000 in Tbilisi, representing the largest protest event since the 2003 Rose Revolution. Demonstrators continued to call for Saakashvili's resignation, an early parliamentary election, changes in the election rules, and the release of political prisoners. Patarkatishvili's television network, Imeldi TV, carried the opposition line on the airwaves.

Smaller peaceful protests continued for several days, until forcefully broken up by riot police on November 7. Hundreds were reported injured. Riot police also forcefully shut down the Imeldi and Caucasia TV networks. A state of emergency was declared in Tbilisi, banning all political activity and placing restrictions on the media. International criticism of these departures from democratic norms was sharp. The state of emergency was not ended until

November 16.

Saakashvili responded by calling a snap presidential election for January 5 to show that the people were with him, and not with the opposition. Curtailing his term of office by a year, he resigned in November to campaign for president. The opposition that had organized the demonstrations put forward Levan Gachechiladze, an independent parliamentarian and one-time Saakashvili supporter. Other opposition figures also contested the election: Patarkashvili, Shalva Natelashvili of the Labor Party, David Gramkelidze of the New Rights Party, and Gia Maisahvili of the Party of the Future. The opposition said that if its candidate won the election it would abolish the office of president.

In December, Georgian authorities released tapes showing Patarkashvili in London offering a senior Georgian police official \$100 million to assist him and eliminate the Georgian Minister of the Interior. Patarkashvili first said he was withdrawing from running in the presidential race, and then reversed himself and said he was still running. (Patarkashvili died of natural causes in London in February 2008.)

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Georgia, Continued

2008 presidential elections

Saakashvili was reelected in a first round victory with 53.5 percent of the vote, according to the Central Election Commission. The lead opposition coalition candidate, Levan Gacheechiladze, won 25.7 per cent, with all other candidates (including Patarkashili), receiving less than 10 percent. Nonetheless, the opposition claimed that the elections were rigged, including what it considered the one-sided and unfair treatment of the opposition candidates by the state media.

The International Election Observation Mission (including OSCE's ODHIR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament) reported that the process was in essence consistent with most OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards for democratic elections, but significant challenges were revealed which need to be addressed urgently. These challenges included widespread allegations of intimidation and pressure on public sector employees and opposition activists, lack of distinction between state activities and party campaigning, vote count and tabulation procedures, and the post-election complaint and appeals process. Notably, the IEOM noted that the vote count and completion of results protocols at 23 percent of the counts it observed were bad or very bad.



A man casts his ballot at a polling station in Tbilisi during the Georgian presidential election, 5 January 2008. (OSCE/Urdur Gunnarsdottir)

In addition to the presidential election, voters were asked in a non-binding referendum if they favored early elections in the spring (almost 80 per cent did), and whether Georgia should join NATO (77 per cent were in favor).

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Georgia, Continued

Saakashvili conciliatory

Saakashvili made overtures to the opposition following his reelection. In a first round of talks on January 14, he accepted an opposition demand to dissolve the perceived pro-government supervisory board of Georgian Public Television. He also reshuffled his cabinet, bringing in several non-party figures as ministers and dismissing some close allies. Meanwhile, the opposition has continued to call Saakashvili's election illegitimate.

Changes in election law

In March 2008, Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM), with its parliamentary majority, pushed through a change in the election code. Parliament replaced the form of proportional representation based on large constituencies adopted in 2005, with an earlier provision through which half the 150 seats would be filled by majority vote in 75 constituencies and the remainder by proportional representation. The opposition claimed the change was designed to tilt the outcome of the May 21 parliamentary elections in the UNM's favor.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Georgia, Continued

Saakashvili's United National Movement wins big in 2008 parliamentary elections

The United National Movement was the big winner in the May 21 parliamentary elections, with 59.37% of the vote (119 seats). The United Opposition came in a far second with 17.59% (17 seats), followed by the Christian Democratic Movement (which split from the United Opposition to run on its own) with 8.48% (6 seats), and the Labor Party with 7.53% (6 seats). Opposition parties accused the United National Movement of stealing the vote. The United Opposition and Labor said they would boycott the new parliament in protest, and establish an “alternative parliament.”

The International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) undertaken by OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly reported that overall, these elections clearly offered an opportunity for the Georgian people to choose their representatives from among a wide array of choices. The authorities and other political stakeholders made efforts to conduct these elections in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments. The IEOM noted that it had identified a number of problems that made this implementation uneven and incomplete. These included inconsistencies, gaps and ambiguities remaining in the Unified Election Code that left room for varying interpretations, affecting its consistent implementation. Parties were able to campaign around the country, although within a polarized and tense environment. The distinction between state activities and the United National Movement campaign was often blurred. Allegations of intimidation of candidates, party activists and state employees affected the campaign environment. The media generally offered a diverse range of views. Public TV offered voters the chance to compare parties and candidates, while most other broadcasters lacked balance and tended to give more attention to the United National Movement and the authorities.

Foreign relations in Georgia

Relations with Russia #1 foreign policy problem

Since independence, relations with Russia have been Georgia's number one foreign policy problem. Although there are economic reasons for Georgia to cultivate close relations with Russia, most Georgians prefer a 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 were both "strategic partners" of Georgia.

Shevardnadze was beholden to Russia

Shevardnadze was especially beholden to Russia. Russia decisively came to his rescue twice-- 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 Zviadist 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. The Georgian parliament refused to ratify the base agreement, however. By the late 1990s, Shevardnadze also began to seek greater security cooperation with Western states and the removal of Russia's military bases. At the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, Russia committed itself to removing two bases, near Tbilisi and in Abkhazia. The first base was subsequently closed and the second was formally closed, although Russian/CIS peacekeepers still reportedly operate out of it.

Continued on next page

Foreign relations in Georgia, Continued

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 also aggravated Russian-Georgian relations. Russia accused Georgia of allowing Chechen fighters to move freely across its mountain border with Chechnya. The Georgian government insisted that the 7,000 Chechens in Georgia were non-combatant refugees, and refused to allow Russia to deploy troops on the Georgian side of the border. Russian aircraft bombed the Pankisi Gorge area in 2001. Shevardnadze reacted by sending in 2,500 Georgian 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.

OSCE border monitoring mission closed down

In December 2004 Russia asserted at the OSCE Ministerial in Sofia that the mandate of the border patrol mission had been fulfilled. Over the strong objections of Georgia, the U.S., and other countries, Russia refused to vote for an extension of the mission's monitoring mandate.

Russia has opposed suggestions that the European Union deploy monitors to replace the closed OSCE monitoring mission.

New Friends of Georgia

During the 1990s, a caucus of the U.S., Germany, the UK, and France established itself in the UN. Once Russia joined the grouping, however, it lost its relevance as an advocate for Georgia.

In 2005, Georgia initiated a New Friends of Georgia to support its security, stability and integrity. It includes Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria the Czech Republic and Sweden. The EU Special Representative for the Caucasus has attended meeting of the grouping as an observer.

Continued on next page

Foreign relations in Georgia, Continued

Relations with Russia after the Rose Revolution

Although Saakashvili has stressed the need for Georgia to maintain good relations with Russia, he has a stronger pro-Western orientation than Shevardnadze.

The new Georgian leaders pushed for closure of the remaining two Russian bases, at Batumi in Ajaria and at Akhalkalaki in Javakhetia. An agreement was reached in May 2005 on the closure of the bases and the withdrawal of these Russian troops by 2008. These pullouts were completed.

Meanwhile, the situation deteriorated in 2006, as the Georgian Parliament called for Russia to speed up the pullout of its troops. In September, Georgia charged four Russian officers with espionage, and Russia responded by canceling its troop pullout, banning the import of Georgian produce and wines, suspending transport links with Georgia, and harassing and deporting Georgian citizens in Russia. The OSCE CiO, Belgian Foreign Minister De Gucht, successfully mediated the release of the Russian officers.

Russia also banned the import of Georgian wines, mineral water and vegetables in 2006 on health grounds. Georgian authorities claimed that the decision was political.

Continued on next page

Foreign relations in Georgia, Continued

Incidents keep tensions high

In March 2007, rockets landed in the Kodori Gorge, the only area in Abkhazia that is under Georgian government control. Russia denied any involvement, and a UN report on the incident was inconclusive.

In August 2007, Georgia asserted that a Russian aircraft entered its airspace and fired a missile that landed near Tsitelbani, 30 miles from Tbilisi. No casualties resulted. Russia denied any role, despite radar evidence provided by Georgian authorities.

In April 2008, an unmanned Georgian military reconnaissance drone was shot down over Abkhazia. Georgia claimed that a Russian fighter had shot down the aircraft, and Georgian President Saakashvili telephoned Russian President Putin to complain. Russia claimed that the drone flight violated ceasefire agreements and that Abkhaz forces had shot down the drone. A UN Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) investigation completed in May concluded that a Russian aircraft had shot down the drone. UNOMIG also noted that under the Moscow Ceasefire Agreement, only CIS peacekeeping forces were permitted to keep Georgian and Abkhaz forces apart. Russian Federation enforcement actions were therefore inconsistent with the Ceasefire Agreement. At the same time, Georgian drone overflights of the zone of conflict were also deemed a breach of the Agreement.

Meanwhile, there have been reports that Russia has significantly reinforced its 2,000 troops in Abkhazia and 1,000 troops in South Ossetia. In addition, at the end of May 2008, Russia sent 400 troops of its Railway Forces - part of the Ministry of Defense - to Abkhazia to help repair railway infrastructure.

Georgia suspended bilateral talks with Moscow on Russian entry into the World Trade Organization and threatened to block Russian entry, in response to Russian steps to strengthen its ties with South Ossetia and Abkhazia in April 2008.

Georgia has also responded to the rise in tensions by withdrawing from defense agreements with Russia and the CIS. Georgia pulled out of a bilateral air defense agreement with Russia in May 2008. Later in May, Georgia withdrew from a CIS Air Defense Agreement. Georgia had previously withdrawn from the CIS Defense Ministers' Council.

Continued on next page

Foreign relations in Georgia, Continued

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 on Russia's military presence in the south Caucasus for its security. Thus, Georgia and Azerbaijan but not Armenia belongs 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 and committed to NATO membership.

The U.S. launched a train and equip program for Georgian military forces in 2002 to improve their capability to deal with terrorists that might be operating in the Pankisi Gorge area. A successor military assistance program was launched in 2005. Georgia has several hundred troops serving in Iraq.

The US strongly backs the new Georgian government and has bolstered aid, including provision of \$295 million via the new Millennium Challenge Account.

Despite strong U.S. backing, the March 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit failed to offer Georgia a Membership Action Plan. The Summit did pledge, however, that Georgia would eventually be offered a path to membership.

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.



Mother of Georgia Statue, Tbilisi, 2008. (Ted Feifer, USIP)

Rustaveli Avenue, in addition to being the site of government buildings, is the address for new hotels and fancy shops. The old city, with its low red-roofed houses and narrow winding alleyways, is being renovated and becoming a fashionable entertainment area. One of the city's traditional attractions is the hot baths fed by underground sulfur springs. The entrance is below the mosque on the riverbank. Other sights include the ancient Narikhala fortress, the Sioni cathedral, and the theaters on Rustaveli Avenue.

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Georgia culture, Continued

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 winemaking, 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, which includes 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.

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Georgia culture, Continued

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

Multiple choice 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
 - Closing Russian bases
-

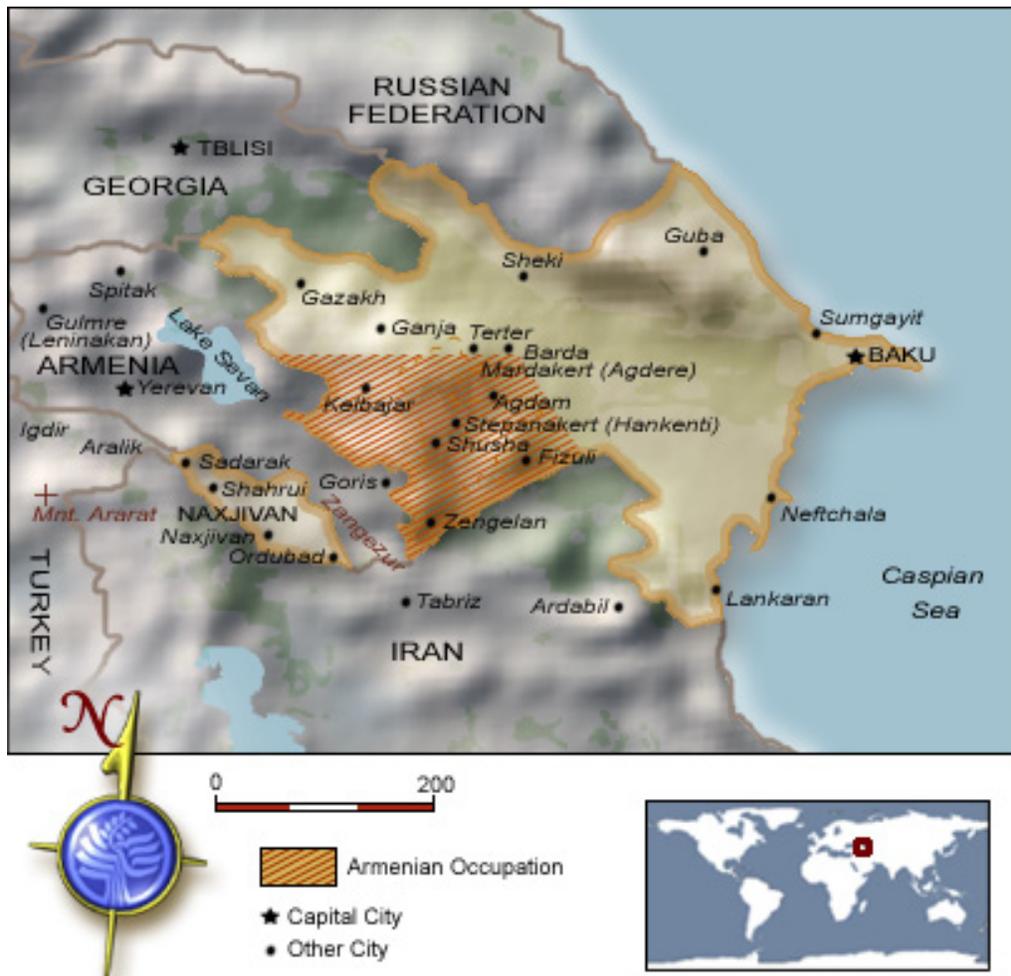
Nagorno-Karabakh

Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The Karabakh conflict

The recent histories 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.



Overview

At a glance

The following table describes geographic and demographic information for Nagorno-Karabakh.

Item	Description
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.

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Overview, Continued

At a glance (continued)

Item	Description
Ethnic composition of the population	Armenian 95% The remaining 5% are mainly Assyrians, Greeks, and Kurds. Before the conflict, some 25% of the population was Azerbaijani. Now these 150,000 are internally displaced persons living in other parts of Azerbaijan.
System of government	The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh is formally a presidential democracy.
Head of state	The first president of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh was Robert Kocharian, subsequently president of Armenia. Nagorno-Karabakh's current president is Bako Sahakyan .

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 during Soviet period

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.

Continued on next page

Political confrontation, Continued

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 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

Armed clashes began in 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 around the edges of Karabakh. This operation prompted Armenians to expand their paramilitary forces and improve coordination among them.

Independent Azerbaijan deprives Nagorno-Karabakh of its autonomous status

In the fall of 1991, the breakup of the USSR and political confusion in Moscow left the Soviet army in limbo. It ceased to act as a coherent participant in the conflict, although individual soldiers and even units continued to fight on one side or the other on their own initiative. At the same time, the heavy weaponry of the Soviet army found its way into the arsenals of the Armenian and Azerbaijani paramilitaries, facilitating a transition from low-intensity to high-intensity warfare.

In October 1991, the Supreme Soviet of now independent Azerbaijan voted to deprive Nagorno-Karabakh of its autonomous status within Azerbaijan.

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 to well over the million mark.

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

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Course of the war, Continued

Ceasefire

A ceasefire arranged through Russian mediation in May 1994 has, on the whole, held since that time. There have been frequent, but mostly minor, violations. However, many casualties were reported in border clashes in June 2004.

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.

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The Minsk Process, Continued

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 maintain contact with the parties, encourage direct contacts between them, and promote humanitarian and confidence-building measures.



Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the OSCE CiO on the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, pointing at Nagorno-Karabakh on the map. Alexander Nitzsche/OSCE

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."

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Substantive course of the negotiations, Continued

Conceptual framework

This was a real advance, as Armenia had previously insisted that Karabakh must not be 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 Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh rejected the new approach. 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 Aliyev also retreated from compromises to which he had given his tentative approval.

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Substantive course of the negotiations, Continued

2001 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.



Negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh, Key West, April 2001. Andy Newman/Florida Keys Tourism Council, OSCE.

2006 foreign ministers meet

In October 2006, following Azerbaijan's threat to bring the Karabakh matter before the UN General Assembly, the foreign ministers met in Moscow to resume peace talks.

2008 heads of government meet

High-level meetings between Armenia and Azerbaijan have continued. The Minsk Group Co-Chairman brought Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Sargsian together for a meeting on the margins of the March 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. While the event maintained high-level contacts between the two sides, it did not move the negotiations forward. They are to meet again in June 2008 on the margins of a CIS Summit in St. Petersburg.

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Substantive course of the negotiations, Continued

Azerbaijan increases military budget

Azerbaijan, underlining that its patience with a frozen negotiating process is not endless, stated that it had increased its military spending by 53% over 2007-08.

Ceasefire violation in March 2008 leaves several dead

A ceasefire violation in March 2008 reportedly left 4 Azeri soldiers dead and several Armenian troops wounded. Azerbaijan and Armenia each blamed the other for the outbreak. This was the worst ceasefire violation in more than a decade.

Azerbaijan dissatisfied with Minsk Group

Azerbaijan has taken several steps to show its unhappiness with the Minsk Group's inability to break the deadlock on Karabakh. In May 2008, it raised with the OSCE Secretary General replacing or changing the Minsk Group format. Azerbaijan then sponsored a resolution in the UN General Assembly reaffirming Azerbaijan's territorial integrity (including Karabakh), and demanding immediate, complete and unconditional Armenian withdrawal. The resolution passed by 39-7, with 100 abstentions. The main countries in the Minsk Group voted against the resolution, saying that it was weighted in favor of Azerbaijan, diverging from the balance sought by the Group.

Mini-quiz

Multiple choice

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

Overview

At a glance

The following table describes geographic and demographic information for Armenia.

Item	Description
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	Climate and Terrain Armenia has a dry continental climate and high mountainous terrain. 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.
Capital	The capital of Armenia is Yerevan.
Population	2.971 million(2007 estimated) The population has been dropping due to emigration, employment out of the country, and a low birth rate.

Continued on next page

Overview, Continued

At a glance (continued)

Item	Description
Ethnic composition of the population	<p>Armenia is overwhelmingly (over 95%) ethnic Armenian. Moreover, Armenians live outside Armenia in Georgia, Russia, Iran, the Middle East, France, and North America.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Before the Karabakh conflict:• 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	<p>Armenia is a presidential democracy.</p>
Head of state	<p>The current president is Serzh Sargsian..</p>
Currency	<p>Armenia's currency is the Dram.</p>
Standard of living	<p>In Armenia estimated per capita GDP (on a purchasing power parity basis) in 2006 was \$5,400, 12% of the U.S. level. Real per capita GDP in 2003 was \$880. After a period of sharp decline, the standard of living in Armenia is starting to rise.</p>

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Overview, Continued

Map The following graphic is a map of Armenia.



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.

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Historical background of Armenia, Continued

**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 their own.

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

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Historical background of Armenia, Continued

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).

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The Armenians, Ottoman Turkey, and Russia, Continued

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

Armenian Pan-National Movement (APNM)

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.

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."

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Armenia, Continued

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 would 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% of the vote.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Armenia, Continued

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 prime minister Aram Sarkisian with Andranik Markarian.

Hostility increased between the Kocharian government and a fragmented opposition made up of 16 different parties. Kocharian became increasingly authoritarian. Independent media were harassed and intimidated.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Armenia, Continued

**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% of the vote. There were accusations of widespread fraud, and OSCE observers noted blatant irregularities in the conduct of the elections.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Armenia, Continued

Constitutional reforms

Despite continued tight political control by the government, as well as high levels of corruption, Kocharian agreed in 2005 to introduce a number of constitutional reforms that would devolve certain powers to the parliament and prime minister. While the reforms gained the approval of Western governments, the opposition refused to support their passage in a referendum at the end of November, insisting that the reforms did not go far enough toward liberalizing Armenia's political system.

2007 parliamentary elections

Prime Minister Serzh Sargsian's ruling Republican Party of Armenia won about 40 percent of the vote, while coalition partners Prosperous Armenia Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Front won about 35 percent of the vote. The opposition Country of Law Party cleared the 5 percent hurdle and won 6 percent of the vote.

The May 2007 parliamentary elections were largely in accordance with international commitments (in contrast to the 2003 election), according to the international Election Observation Mission made up of OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, COE Parliamentary Assembly and European Parliament monitors.



An ODIHR election observer speaks with an official at a polling station in Yerevan during parliamentary elections in Armenia, 12 May 2007. (OSCE/Urdur Gunnarsdottir)

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Armenia, Continued

2008 Presidential election

Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan won the February 19 presidential election with 52.8 per cent of the vote, according to the Central Elections Commission. Former President Levon Ter-Petrosian won 21.5 per cent, and Arthur Baghdasaryan 16.7 per cent. Ter-Petrosian claimed widespread election rigging and claimed he had won the election.

The International Election Observation Mission (including OSCE's ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament) reported that the election was administered mostly in accordance with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards. Shortcomings noted were the lack of a clear separation between State and party functions; lack of public confidence in the electoral process and ensuring equal treatment of candidates; and complaints about the vote count.

Election violence

Demonstrations protesting the conduct of the elections turned violent on March 1, when police dispersed the demonstrators. Clashes involving demonstrators, police and military resulted in at least 8 deaths and over a hundred injured. President Kocharian subsequently declared a state of emergency, which was lifted on March 21. Protests have continued, as have the arrests of about 100 opposition supporters. Many are to be tried for attempting to overthrow the government. Legislation to bar political gatherings has been approved by parliament. The media continues to be heavily controlled. Ter-Petrosian has vowed to keep his supporters on the street until the election is overturned.



President-Elect Saerz Sargsyan during a meeting with the OSCE Chairperson-in- Office in Yerevan, February 26, 2008 (OSCE)

Sargysan formed a government in April 2008 made up of his Republican Party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaks), the Prosperous Armenia Party, and the Country of Law Party. Country of Law Party leader

Artur Baghdasarian, who had come in third in the presidential election, recognized the outcome and accepted portfolios for his party in the new government.

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, including Millennium Challenge Account assistance. It also participates in NATO's Partnership for Peace Program, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and has an Individual Partnership Action Plan. Armenia sent a 46-man unit to Iraq in July 2005.

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Foreign relations in Armenia, Continued

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.

Recently the Armenian government has sought rapprochement with Turkey in the hope of reopening the Armenian-Turkish border.

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. Iran completed construction of a gas pipeline to Armenia in April 2007 that will provide Armenia natural gas in exchange for electric power.

Armenia's relations with Georgia are improving

Armenia's relations with its other neighbor in the southern Caucasus, Georgia, have traditionally been ambiguous but have improved since Georgia's Rose Revolution. The Armenian government seeks to protect the interests of the ethnic Armenians in Javakheti but is sensitive to Georgia's fears about rising political tensions.

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Foreign relations in Armenia, Continued

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 potholes.

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.

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Armenian culture, Continued

Climate and seismic activity

Armenia is very mountainous 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

Multiple choice 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

Overview

At a glance

The following table describes geographic and demographic information for Azerbaijan.

Item	Description
Area	The area of Azerbaijan is about 33,000 square miles.
Location	<p>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.) 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• Azerbaijan's exclave of Nakhichevan is sandwiched between Armenia to the north and Turkey and Iran to the south.
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>

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Overview, Continued

At a glance (continued)

Item	Description
Capital	Baku
Population	8.120 million (2007 estimated)
Ethnic composition of the population	<p>According to the 1999 census, Azerbaijanis constituted about 90% of the population. The largest ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan are Talysh, Russians, and Lezgins. 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>
Religion	<p>Muslim 93.4% (about 2/3 Shia, 1/3 Sunni) Russian Orthodox 2.5% Armenian Orthodox 2.3% Other 1.8% (Estimated 1995)</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.
Head of state	The current president of Azerbaijan is Ilham Aliyev.
Currency	Azerbaijan's currency is the Manat.
Standard of living	In Azerbaijan, estimated per capita GDP (on a purchasing power parity basis) in 2006 was \$7,300. The standard of living in Azerbaijan has been rising in recent years.

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Overview, Continued

Map The following graphic is a map of Azerbaijan.



Historical background of Azerbaijan

Apsheron Peninsula on the Caspian coast

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 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.

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Historical background of Azerbaijan, Continued

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 Azerbaijani literature, science, and philosophy

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.



The Yusif Kuseyir Mausoleum in Azerbaijan's exclave Nakhichevan, built in 1162 by the famous Azeri architect Ajemi. OSCE/Ulvi Akhundli

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Between Persia, Ottoman Turkey, and Russia, Continued

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 culture developed under the Czars

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

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.

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 declared independence August 1991

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 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

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 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.

Aliyev sees Elchibei off into retirement

Heydar Aliyev, the former Communist Party boss in Azerbaijan, had been biding his time in his native Nakhichevan and awaiting a suitable moment to return to the capital. The parliament offered Aliyev the position of speaker, and he took it up shortly before Husseinov's men reached Baku. Aliyev then escorted Elchibei into retirement.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Azerbaijan, Continued

Aliyev consolidates his control

Aliyev 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. Aliyev won by a large majority. Husseinov was rewarded for propelling Aliyev back into power with the positions of prime minister and defense minister. Subsequently, Aliyev cultivated the establishment of a pro-presidential ruling party, the New Azerbaijan Party

Opposition parties

The most important opposition parties are the Azerbaijan Popular Front, the Musavat Party, and the National Independence Party. The first two 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 Isa Gambar, 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 led by Elchibei's followers, both before and after his death in 2000, and a more liberal democratic wing led by Ali Kerimli.
- Etibar Mamedov, a former presidential candidate who was earlier considered to be a “loyal” opposition, leads the National Independence Party, also a legacy of the late Soviet nationalist movement.

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

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Domestic politics in Azerbaijan, Continued

Constitution endorsed

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%, later reduced to 6% -- are represented in parliament.

A referendum held in August 2002 approved 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% of the vote and 54 seats. Three other parties surmounted the 8% barrier, two of which were "loyal" parties: the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (9% and 4 seats) and the Motherland Party (8% and 1 seat). The only opposition party to get into parliament was the Azerbaijan Popular Front (9% and 4 seats). OSCE observers noted numerous irregularities, and concluded that the elections were "neither free nor fair."

Presidential elections of October 1998

Heydar Aliyev was re-elected with 78% 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% respectively. Firudin Hassanov of the Azerbaijan Communist Party got 1%.

Parliamentary elections of November 2000

According to the official results, the New Azerbaijan Party won 71% of the vote, while no other party surmounted the barrier to entry into parliament, even though the barrier was now only 6%. Pre-election polls had indicated that the opposition Musavat Party enjoyed more electoral support than the New Azerbaijan Party. The OSCE concluded that the conduct of the elections fell short of international standards.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Azerbaijan, Continued

Presidential elections of October 2003

Heydar Aliyev's son, Ilham Aliyev, stood against several opposition candidates, the strongest of who was Isa Gambar of the Musavat Party. According to the official results, Ilham Aliyev received 76% of the vote and Gambar 14%. OSCE observers judged the elections to have "fallen short of OSCE commitments and international standards," while one third of the observers published a more sharply worded dissenting opinion.

The election results led to rioting and violence in several Azeri cities. The government responded with arrests of opposition officials and supporters throughout the country, including areas where no violence had occurred. There were also arrests of election officials who had refused to ratify the results in their polling districts.

President Ilham Aliyev strengthens position

Aliyev has worked to clear out the old guard that had served his late father (Heydar Aliyev died in December 2003), including the firing of Minister of National Security Namik Abbasov, a veteran of the KGB and later head of its Azeri successor. But his government is still dominated, as it was before, by ethnic Azerbaijanis whose ancestors came from Armenia, and elites from the region of Nakhichevan.

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Azerbaijan, Continued

Pressure on opposition continues

The electronic media tends to reflect the government line, while the opposition and independent print media are subject to direct and indirect pressures from the authorities.

The murder of opposition journalist Elmar Hussein, editor of the weekly Monitor magazine, in March 2005 has not been solved.

In May 2005, authorities beat and arrested participants in a peaceful opposition rally in Baku. At least 30 opposition and youth movement activists were arrested and detained for five days. Journalists were also beaten.

In the run-up to the November 2005 parliamentary elections, protestors that gathered illegally to demonstrate support for free and fair elections were forcibly dispersed on a number of occasions. A student activist was arrested on charges of plotting a coup with the assistance of Armenian special services and the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute, and accused of being linked to Ali Kerimli's Popular Front. Aliyev fired several leading government officials, some widely recognized for corruption, accusing them of conspiring with the opposition and plotting a coup attempt.

Reported harassment of the media and opposition parties continues in 2007. A Baku court sentenced two journalists to prison terms in January for slandering the Minister of the Interior and Head of the State Diaspora Committee. Two journalists were sentenced to prison terms in May for "inciting hatred" in an article allegedly criticizing Islam. Einulla Fatullayev, the founder and editor of two newspapers, was sentenced to 2 ½ years in prison for libeling Nagorno-Karabakh refugees. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mikos Haraszti, visiting Baku at the time, termed Azerbaijan "the champion in the number of cases against journalists."

Continued on next page

Domestic politics in Azerbaijan, Continued

2005 parliamentary elections

The November parliamentary elections were the first in which all seats were contested on a single-mandate basis. The New Azerbaijan Party competed mainly against two unified opposition blocs. The Azadlig (Freedom) bloc comprised Ali Kerimli's Popular Front, Musavat, and the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (headed by Rasul Galiyev, a former government official living in Washington and wanted by the Azerbaijani government on embezzlement charges). The Yeni Siyaset (New Policy), or YeS, bloc, is made up of the National Independence Party, former Communists, and others. Far more candidates ran as independents, many of who were presumed to be linked to the ruling party.

In the voting, marked "by significant deficiencies" according to the OSCE, the New Azerbaijan Party initially won 64 of 125 seats, with Azadlig winning 5 seats, and independent candidates winning most of the rest. Subsequent adjustments by the CEC resulted in the ruling party winning 58 seats and opposition parties 11 seats, including 7 for Azadlig and 2 for YeS. While the opposition held protests to demand new elections, Aliyev fired several regional election commission heads, claiming they were responsible for the alleged manipulation of election results.

The OSCE/ODIHR final report on these elections noted that overall they did not meet a number of OSCE commitments and other relevant standards for democratic elections.

October 2008 presidential elections ahead

Ilham Aliyev is running for a second term. Opposition parliamentarians oppose proposed new legislation amending the law on the holding of rallies that they say would undermine the chances of a fair election

Religion and politics

Largely secular Azerbaijan is a largely secular state. Religious affiliation is nominal. Practicing adherents of Islam are far smaller than the estimated 93.4% Muslim part of the population.

Government controls Since the break-up of the Soviet Union and independence in the 1990s, independent Shi and Sunni groups have developed that do not accept the authority of the official religious bodies. The government has been suspicious of such independent groups, seeing them as possible sources of Islamic extremism. The authorities have used such official organizations as The State Committee for Work with Religious Institutions and the Caucasus Board of Muslims to control them.

Islamic extremism Azerbaijan has been the target of violent Islamic extremist cells since the 1990s. Dozens of arrests were made in late 2007 reportedly preventing a large-scale plot to attack embassies and government buildings.

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.

Poor relations with Russia

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 were further strained when Russia doubled the price of natural gas to Azerbaijan (equaling what Western European countries pay) in January 2007, while gas prices to adversary Armenia did not change led to a further souring of relations, leading Azerbaijan to halt the export of crude oil to Russia. In turn, Azerbaijan started to supply gas to Georgia, also in conflict with Russia on energy as well as other issues. Azerbaijan also said it would stop broadcasting Russian television channels in July 2007. President Aliyev has publicly termed the CIS as “useless” for Azerbaijan.

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Foreign relations in Azerbaijan, Continued

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.

Foreign policy oriented mainly toward the West

While Russia and Azerbaijan have limited security cooperation, the foreign policy of Azerbaijan is oriented mainly toward the West. In part, this is a consequence of Azerbaijan's orientation toward Turkey, which it sees 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 Aliyev regime, by contrast, concern for democracy and human rights has typically been an irritant threatening to spoil relations that are otherwise profitable to both parties.

Aliyev visited the White House in April 2006, where President Bush sought his support for U.S. policies on Iran and the war on terror. Azerbaijan has sent troops to serve with the NATO-based coalition in Afghanistan.

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Foreign relations in Azerbaijan, Continued

East and West and 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 2001, the U.S. Senate repealed Section 907 in recognition of Azerbaijan's contribution to the post-September 11 war on terrorism. (Azerbaijan had provided intelligence and allowed the U.S. to use its airspace.) As a result, Azerbaijan has strengthened its relations with the U.S. and received 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 has moved away from an exclusively pro-Armenian orientation, enabling Russian-Azerbaijan relations to improve.

The Minsk Group co-chairs (Russia, the U.S. and France) damaged their image with Azerbaijan in March 2008 by voting against a Baku-sponsored resolution at the UN General Assembly. While the Minsk group countries may have been seeking to prevent the involvement of other players in the mediation process, Azeris perceived their votes as favoring Armenia in the Karabakh conflict.

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Foreign relations in Azerbaijan, Continued

OSCE

An [OSCE office was established in Baku](#) in 2000. Its priorities include:

- helping the Government of Azerbaijan implement its commitments to the Council of Europe
- carrying out legislative reforms in the fields of elections, mass media, and civil society
- training police and prison officers
- strengthening freedom and responsibility of the media, and
- raising gender and youth issues



The Baku conference on religious freedom and combating terrorism was organized by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Azerbaijan State Committee for the Work with Religious Associations, October 2002. OSCE/Alex Nitzsche

COE

In 2002 Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe.

Mini-quiz

Multiple choice 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.



Baku's skyline is dominated by the Maiden Tower (centre), whose purpose and origins are unknown. OSCE/Alex Nitzsche

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.

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Azerbaijan culture, Continued

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.



The Xizi-Rayon region in the north of Azerbaijan is one of the poorest of the country. OSCE/Ulvi Akhundli

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.

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Azerbaijan culture, Continued

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.
