

Living with Security Dilemmas: Triggers of Ethnic Conflicts The Case of Georgia

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In today's contemporary world it is almost impossible to find an ethnically homogenous state. Relations between ethnic groups are also rarely harmonious and without any friction. However, it would equally be wrong to consider ethnic groups as living in a constant rivalry for physical survival overwhelmed by Hobbesian fear of mutual annihilation. Unlike biological realists' assumption that "[t]he ultimate sources of social conflicts and injustices are to be found in the ignorance and selfishness of men," (Niebuhr, 1932: 23) there are no mala in se nations with aggressive behavior whose sole *raison d'être* is constant war. Intergroup violence is not a vastly occurring phenomenon where groups are differentiated on the basis of their ethnic origins: while some are engaged in bloody conflicts, others continue peaceful coexistence. Fundamental questions in interethnic scholarship are, thus: what triggers groups to fight with each other? Why do some ethnic groups go to war while others remain peaceful? What triggers their bellicose behavior? Under what conditions does interethnic violence appear?

The objective of the present article is to further the empirical and theoretical knowledge of interethnic relationships by defining the factors that may catalyze or preclude the appearance of intrastate ethnic conflicts. Study of these causal variables will assist in understanding the causes of civil wars, thus shedding light on possible scenarios of future conflicts. I will start with an overview of security dilemma in interethnic relations. While the dilemma may exist in most ethnically divided societies living in a state of domestic anarchy, it needs a set of conditions, or "triggers" that would lead to conflicts. The assumption here is that although security dilemma is a necessary condition for ethnic mobilization, it is not a sufficient factor for civil wars.

Taking into consideration a wide array of country-specific peculiarities which influence interactions between ethnic groups, my strategy, would be, thus, to control those causal factors (such as domestic political regimes, group proximity to state borders, different historical backgrounds, geography and so on) that can possibly have intervening effects on intergroup violence. The way to study conflict triggers in a controlled environment would be to focus on the situation within a single country with several ethnic groups sharing same geo-political settings and experiencing the influences of same causal factors, had different binary outcomes – conflict/no conflict. A perfect case for such

analysis is Georgia with its four ethnic minorities – Abkhazians, South Ossetians, Armenians and Azeris – being under similar political conditions but showing different behavior. I will, then, continue with a discussion on triggers of interethnic violence from socio-anthropological, economic and political theories. This will help in finding common factors for the existence of “belligerent” and “peaceful” groups. Finally, I will re-conceptualize on the causes of interethnic violence and provide my own accounts of the conditions bringing security dilemmas to open conflict.

Security dilemma in a domestic context

Taken aside differences between actors on systemic and sub-systemic levels, intrastate ethnic conflicts are, in fact, quite analogous to intrastate wars. On a system level, “absence of “hierarchical” political order based on formal subordination and authority” (Donnelly, 2000: 10) is compensated by international security regimes, peace treaties, political and military alliances, and multinational political institutions. Although states still strive to achieve their best vital national interests acting at their own discretion, their international policy options are, nevertheless, limited by the international political climate.

Similarly ethnic groups within states with successfully functioning governments exercise their monopoly over legitimate violence. Social contract with its citizens binds a state to equally protect the rights of all groups, which, in its turn, as found by Ross (1986: 441), decreases the propensity for intrastate violence: “If the state is effective in controlling the overall level of violence as well as its targets, then political centralization will be associated with lower violence both internally and externally”. As a result, a two-tier system of state-citizens relations develops. Ethnic groups enjoy credible protection from the state and fear credible punishment by the state in case of their defection. On the contrary, under conditions of domestic anarchy, ethnic groups believe there is no authority to credibly limit options available to them. They resort to self-help and act like states in an international arena.

The similarity between the systemic and sub-systemic units of analysis brought the notion of “security dilemma” into a local context. As a mirror verbalization of systemic security dilemma, its domestic counterpart states that “the actions of one society, in trying to increase its societal security (strengthen its own identity), causes a reaction in a second society, which, in the end, decreases the first society’s own societal security (weakens its identity)” (Roe, 1999: 194). The mechanism of domestic security dilemma is essentially the same as the one on the system level. Caused by domestic anarchy – a situation where “...no central government exists to insure order, no police or judicial system remains to enforce contracts, and groups have divided into independent armed camps” (Walter, 1997: 338), security dilemma puts ethnic groups in “self-help” situations (Kaufman, 1996). Unable to rely on their government, groups are forced to provide security to their

own people: they, first, "...must calculate their power relative to each other... and [then] make a guess about their relative power in the future" (Posen, 1993: 110).

The other necessary condition for appearance of ethnic security dilemmas are geographic and emotional barriers to information flows between ethnic groups. Even the little they know becomes distorted: customs and rituals of rival groups acquire fictitious images of hostility. The more separated people are from each other the fewer contacts they have on communal grounds and the less predictable their actions become. Increasing uncertainty of each other's future actions contributes to a fear of mutual intention, the true nature of which – evil or good – cannot be easily distinguished. Mutual misinterpretation of the real situations leads to an increase in reciprocal fear between ethnic groups, posing any actions by counterparts as *a priori* hostile and requiring unnecessary extra protection.

Reciprocal fear further leads to mutual mistrust. Groups tend to view incoming signals from others as false and, therefore, non trustworthy. In the situations described by Fearon (1998: 108) as credible commitment problems, "...two groups find themselves without a third party that can credibly guarantee agreements between them..." and became gradually entrapped in a vicious cycle of reciprocal mistrust. Without their interests and rights being effectively safeguarded by the state authorities, some groups (usually minorities) worry that others (usually majorities) may use their comparative advantage to oppress them. On their part, the inability of majorities to credibly "commit themselves not to exploit ethnic minorities" (Fearon, 1998: 108) stems out of their own fears that minorities might rise up against them when they feel a lack of effective control over the situation. Groups try to outrun each other in the building up of their defensive capabilities fearing that if they do not strike first, others will. Eventually, there is no one completely secure anymore.

Georgia: security dilemma in action

The problem of credible commitment which grows into the security dilemma were the forces that escalated to open and bloody conflicts between Georgia's titular majority and the Abkhazian and Ossetian minorities. All the minorities – Russians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Azeris – in Georgia have been living there for centuries. Three of them – Abkhazians Ossetians, and Adjarian, Muslim Georgians, had autonomous status within Georgia. Abkhazia and Adjara were republics while South Ossetia enjoyed a lesser degree of autonomy in the form of a separate District. Two remaining largest minorities - Armenians and Azeris – have mixed settlement patters, living both compactly in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region bordering Armenia and rural regions in Eastern Georgia, correspondingly, as well as elsewhere in the country. An important point about the minorities in Georgia is that nearly all of them had their external homelands:

Armenians and Azeris had their respectful Soviet Republics bordering Georgia, while there was North Ossetian Autonomous Republic inside the Russian Federation for the Ossetians living in Georgia.

Ethnic mobilization of Abkhazians and Ossetians started during the late 1980s and increased with the build-up of Georgian nationalism in early 1990s. Chauvinist and pejorative rhetoric of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, first President of Georgia, and his party "Round Table – Independent Georgia" equally threatened all ethnicities, whom it called as "newcomers" and "guests". Nationalist aspiration and statements gradually increased with the strengthening of political influence of the party, and many non-Georgians began leaving the country in large numbers out of fear of losing their jobs, houses and violence. In response to political mobilization of Georgians that continued after the end of the Soviet rule, Abkhazians and South Ossetians soon formed their own nationalist movements – Aidgilara and Adamon Nikhaz – and began pushing for separation from Georgia and becoming independent subjects within the Soviet Union.

Tensions started in August 1989 when the State Language Program was introduced by the Georgian authorities proclaiming the Georgian language as the only official language. This caused severe negative reaction from the minorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In less than two weeks the Georgian language law was followed by an Ossetian language program, which gave the same priorities to their language on their territory. A similar "language" scenario was also evident in Abkhazia. These autonomous language programs were promptly annulled by the Georgian central authorities. Language laws were then succeeded by the Elections Law of Georgia banning regional parties from participating in the Republican Supreme Soviet – a form of a parliament. This was a direct signal to Abkhazians and South Ossetians that they would be out of political life of the country and could not defend their interests. From that time on a political split was unavoidable.

In September 1990 South Ossetia declared its independence following parliamentary elections. The results of these elections were immediately abolished and by December 1990 the Ossetian autonomy was annulled by Georgian authorities. This action ignited the conflict that lasted a year and a half and resulted in the de-facto separation of South Ossetia. In June 1992 Eduard Shevardnadze, ex-Foreign Minister of USSR, who replaced Gamsakhurdia in a short but bloody coup of December 1991, signed a cease-fire agreement not with South Ossetia but with Russia, who acted as the protector of South Ossetians. The region had the status of a self-proclaimed and unrecognized entity until 2008 when the conflict resumed with the large-scale Russian military intervention on behalf of South Ossetia.

Ethnic mobilization started in Abkhazia as early as in the 1970s. The region repeatedly demanded inclusion into the Soviet Union with a Soviet Republic status. For this purpose demonstrations and strikes were repeatedly held in 1931, 1957, 1965, 1967, and 1978 (Lezhava,

1997) but were all suppressed by Moscow. Central authorities feared that this "elevation of status" of Abkhazia from a republican autonomy to a republic would incite other autonomous entities to place equal demands, which would endanger the whole philosophy of "divide-and-rule" hierarchical national policies of the Soviet Union.

The war in 1992 began when Georgian troops entered Abkhazia in August 1992 and occupied Sokhumi, its capital. Soon, however, Abkhazians received assistance by mercenaries from Northern Caucasus, the Baltic States, Cossacks, and military aid from Russia and retook Sokhumi in September 1993. The Moscow Agreement on Ceasefire Separation of Forces, signed in 1994, officially ended the war resulting in de-facto separation of Abkhazia from Georgia.

Military activities resumed in South Ossetia in early August 2008. After nearly three months of sporadic cross-fire, as a response to the hostile actions from South Ossetia, supported by the Russian military, Georgian troops engaged in "Operations on Restoring Constitutional Order" in Ossetia and occupied the capital of the region, Tskhinvali. In less than two days 58th Russian Army, answering persistent calls from South Ossetian authorities, together with numerous "volunteers" from North Ossetia, forced the Georgian military to retreat. All this time Abkhazians forces, who were in full mobilization, seized the moment and launched an offensive on the Georgian troops located in Upper Kodori, the only Abkhazian land under Georgian control, and occupied the whole region. Soon after, Russia legally institutionalized the results of its intervention by officially recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazian as independent countries. Currently South Ossetia and Abkhazians are strengthening their political gains by seeking further military assistance from Russia with the establishment of military bases on their territories and aspiring to join the Commonwealth of Russia and Belorussia. So far, they have been recognized by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru.

Discussion

While Abkhazians and Ossetians decided to resist the majority rule, the remaining ethnic minorities, including the largest ones – Armenians and Azeris – never showed any sizable opposition to the Georgians and revealed no separatist intentions. Everything else being constant, Abkhazians and Ossetians had experienced an influence of certain causal variables that extended security dilemma into open conflicts. On the other hand, Armenians and Azeris had also a number of factors in common that kept the security dilemma latent for them. For the purpose of the research, these variables are presented by socio-anthropological, economic and political triggers.

Among the socio-anthropological explanations of ethnic violence, the most salient for the conflicts in Georgia were the ethnic chauvinism of the titular nation, ethnic nepotism, high-culture dominance and land claims. In early 1991, when Gamsakhurdia took power, the Georgian society represented a classical Barthian "stratified poly-ethnic system",

where "...all sectors of activities [were] organized by statuses opened to members of the majority group, while the status system of the minority has only relevance to relations within the minority and only to some sectors of the activity and does not provide a basis for action in other sectors..." (Barth, 1969: 31-32).

Ethnic nepotism, however, was not endemic to Georgia. It was present in all of the former Soviet republics. Much like for any other republic for its titular nation, "Georgia became a protected area of privilege for Georgians.... They received the bulk of the rewards of the society, the leading positions in the state and the largest subsidies for cultural projects while Armenians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Adjarians, Kurds, Jews and others were at a considerable disadvantage in the competition for the budgetary pie" (Suni, 1989: 290). Toft (2003: 90) similarly concludes that "minorities in Georgia resented the imposition of a Georgian high culture and the inaccessibility of the Georgian economy. Close kinship ties, combined with dominance of a distinctly Georgian caste within the republic's political elite, reinforced the exclusionary character of politics in the republic, the sense of superiority of titular nationality and inferiority of the non-Georgians" (Toft, 2003: 90).

Within this environment, Gamsakhurdian ethnic entrepreneurship glued existing stratification with nationalistic sentiments. A former dissident and anti-Soviet activist, he came to power with extremely discriminative rhetoric. The "Round Table" became an ethnicity-based organization and used such slogans as "the Chosen Nation", "Newcomers" and "Guests", "Kremlin's agents", "Traitors of the nation", "End discrimination against Georgians in Georgia!" which institutionalized mobilization of the Georgian community.¹ As a part of this mobilization, they targeted possession of land by minority groups. In line with Varshney's argument (2003: 92) that "Those who came earlier to a land have often argued that they are more entitled to political privileges or to a preeminent place in the national culture than those who came later", Georgian nationalists viewed ethnic minorities "as "immigrants' or 'guests on Georgian territory'..." (Cornell, 2001: 163).

At the same time, no significant violent past characterized the relationship between the ethnic groups in Georgia. No large-scale and systematic atrocities inflicted by Georgians to their ethnic minorities had been recorded that might have worked as catalyst of present ethnic hatred. Although insignificant clashes happened between Georgians and Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti in the early 20th century during the period of active "Sovetization" of the Caucasus, these were mainly on ideological grounds between the Georgian communists and Armenian Dashnaks (a Menshevik party). Similarly, the purges of the Abkhazian elite in 1930s by Stalin's regime were conducted within the framework

1 A typical example of this negative stance to ethnic minorities was a famous interview given by Gamsakhurdia to a Russian newspaper describing the situation in Ossetia: "We wanted to persuade the Ossetians to give in. They took flight, which is quite logical since they are criminals. The Ossetians are an uncultured, wild people - clever people can handle them easily." See Gamsakhurdia, Z. (1990: 11).

of party cleansing by the communist authorities. Finally, no past violence or discrimination has been recorded between Georgians and Azeris.

Economic explanations of conflicts are usually associated with rationality of post-conflict outcome, which states that "...individuals have given goals, wants, tastes or utilities. Since all goals cannot be equally realized because of scarcity, individuals will choose between alternative sources of action so as to maximize these wants and utilities" (Hecter et al., 1982: 415-416). Groups calculate their current human, economic and military standings with those of their rivals. They "...evaluate their expected gains from war, given their grievances, and compare these expected gains with the expected losses, which include the opportunity costs of forgoing productive economic activity" (Sambanis, 2001: 264). Valuable land resources are also related to rivalry for their possession. As Le Billon (2005: 5) puts it, "Because of their territorization, resources generate more territorial stakes than many other economic sectors, centered on the definition of political boundaries and local representation or alliances with foreign powers." Any resource valued under specific country settings, especially their "...scarcity (e.g., land degradation, deforestation, fisheries depletion, food scarcity, and water scarcity) becomes an increasing motivation for political conflicts" (Reuveny & Maxwell, 2001: 720). Possession of "lootables" – natural resources, gold, valuable chemicals, gemstones – or larger production facilities can be an additional aspect of interethnic tensions (Ross, 2004). Ethnic groups that live on economically profitable land have strong incentives to maintain there in order to sustain their communities, and the groups that do not have such resources strive to possess them. In sum, if convinced that they have enough resources for a sustained conflict as a result of which they will be better-off than they currently are, groups fight.

From the economic perspective, Abkhazians had far greater incentives to fight than any other minority. The region is famous for its natural resources and agricultural production. It is also rich in water resources: 120 rivers cover its electricity demands and allow Abkhazia to export electricity to Georgia proper. However, the most significant factor for economic wealth in Abkhazia is its strategic geopolitical location along the Black Sea coast. Abkhazia offers cost-effective year round transit access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean for commercial trade due to its mild subtropical climate. Abkhazia has five marine outposts that can be used as marine ports (Sokhumi, Gagra, Gudauta, Pitsunda and Ochamchira). During the Soviet Union there were numerous sea resorts, which were major destination points for summer holidays. Even after more than a decade of no development, due to its exceptional location, Abkhazia remains a highly attractive to potential foreign investment.

In contrast, South Ossetia's self-sustainability and economic growth is limited by its location. The region does not have fertile land due to its severe continental climate and is not suitable for large-scale and

efficient agricultural production. Its underdeveloped natural resources are limited to tufa, construction marble, drywall and stucco. There had been no industrialization in the region during the Soviet times and the region lived almost exclusively on the transfers from the centralized Soviet and regional Georgian budgets. This tendency continues and the population of South Ossetia lives largely on the monetary remittances from their kin from Russia. Another significant source of income, although secretive until recently, was the illegal transit of goods between Russia and Georgia. This ended when Saakashvili stopped all illegal trade in 2004, which essentially marked a rebirth of the conflict. Similar to South Ossetia was the situation with other ethnic minorities including the Armenian enclave in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Although both Shevardnadze and Saakashvili promised the economic development of the region, with the aim of avoiding any possible future tensions with the local population, no tangible steps have been taken so far. The same low level of economic development was in the territories dominated by predominantly Azeri population. Although the areas they occupy are famous for their agricultural production, arable land accounts for almost all of their family incomes. The main types of production are vegetables and fruits that are sold in major cities.

In sum, domestic economic wealth with the future prospects of its complete possession while being salient for Abkhazians, was less important for South Ossetians, and was nearly absent for Armenian and Azeri minorities. If Sokhumi had possible economic motivation to break away from Tbilisi and to completely control its natural resources, geostrategic location and existing production and service facilities, the remaining nationalities were deprived of such incentives. Also, if compared, economic capacities of the belligerent ethnic groups – wealth, land, subterranean or marine resources – could sustain longer military activities of Abkhazians, but were not applicable in case of South Ossetians, whose economic level as well as propensity for a protracted conflict with Georgians was solely dependent on the economic aid they received from outside.

Geographically, Abkhazians and South Ossetians have different ethnic habitats. The former resided mainly in their Autonomous Republic. Their separation into "defensive enclave" created strong grounds for the worsening of security dilemma because Abkhazians did not fear persecution of their ethnic kin elsewhere in Georgia and, thus, could effectively mobilize. If the factor of encapsulated settlement patterns would give additional impetus for Abkhazia to fight, it was absent for South Ossetians, who populated the whole country. Even those residing in their defensive autonomy, during their ethnic mobilization, would have been faced with the issue of protection of their kin living in Georgia proper. The fear of losing their ethnic brethren as a result of their actions against Georgia was not a significantly decisive factor in abstaining from confrontation.

Another argument against contribution of the factor of physical separation to security dilemma lies in the character of information flows

between ethnic groups. Lack of information about each other's actions augments fear and uncertainty of mutual intentions and obliterates the distinction between offensive and defensive actions. From this viewpoint, security dilemma might have arisen between Georgians and Abkhazians, who were already physically separated from each other. Contrary to this, Georgians had always been in close contacts with Ossetians. This made information channels open and quick and signs of ethnic mobilization evident. The fact that conflict started in both circumstances – closed and open settlement patterns – denotes no strict causal link between geographic separation of ethnic minorities and provoking security dilemmas. Additionally, South Ossetian's diffuse settlement pattern is similar to that of Armenians and Azeris. In a case of confrontation with Georgians, these minorities would have the same fears for persecution of their kin living outside their defensive strongholds.

Another geographic factor related to propensity for conflict lies in specific locations of ethnic groups. The territories occupied by all four ethnic minorities have borders with Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, due to which each of these ethnic groups, in case of conflict, could receive prompt military and economic support from outside. Closeness to borders would also alert the central Georgian authorities against three groups, Armenians, Azeris and Ossetians, who border their ethnic kin. Although external homeland alone may be an important denominator in shaping modes of disputes between ethnic groups, the evidence that two out of four minorities bordering their ethnic kin resorted to conflict but the other abstained from making belligerent claims, makes border proximity factor insignificant for transforming security dilemmas into open warfare.

What was significant to bringing security dilemma to conflict were the administrative autonomies of the two conflicting ethnic groups, which were absent in the remaining minorities. Georgia's administrative composition resembled the "patch-work quilt" of the Soviet Union, whose thoughtless ethnic policies "...actively institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as constitutive elements of state and its citizenry ... [through] sponsoring, codifying, institutionalizing ... [and] inventing nationhood and nationality on sub-state level" (Brubaker, 1994: 52). Such a visionary nature of ethnic autonomies present from the very moment of creation of the Soviet Union strengthened the division into "in-group" versus "outer-group" (Theiler, 2003) and was an important condition for future unrest. As Suni claims (1993: 128), "[n]ational self-determination to the point of separatism had been enshrined in a constitutional guarantee of a right of secession from the union, a time bomb that lay dormant though the years of Stalinism, only to explode with the Gorbachev reforms". This way Soviet autonomies represented "...a perceived and essential relationship to a real, i.e. historically recognized, territory or to a homeland to which they can only aspire" (Donnan & Wilson, 1999: 6).

By definition, specific statuses of Abkhazians and South Ossetia nurtured what Greenfeld (1992: 8) called the feelings of "a unique, sovereign people", and contributed to increasing the feeling of alienation and creation of sovereign-like mentality. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the ethnic groups living in autonomies suddenly appeared in the vacuum of central authority, and used their former autonomous statuses as tools for their alleged future sovereignty supported by reminiscence of "...independence or statehood ... [having] an important role in stimulating national historical consciousness and ethnic solidarity" (Hroch, 1993: 9).

The fact of existence of autonomies gave enough grounds for the central Georgian authorities to view these ethnic minorities as a threat to their own statehood via making possible self-determination claims. Abkhazian and Ossetian autonomies were perceived by the central Georgian authorities as "...the first step toward the eventual secession of the region" (Cornell, 2002: 246). Although political decisions of newly independent Georgia, including the language and election laws, concerned all its citizens, but the intended targets and true recipients of the messages were Abkhazians and South Ossetia because of their respectful autonomies. For them, these hostile actions hit the heart of the minorities' emotions and directly intimidated their *raison d'être*.

The geographic location of ethnic groups also influences the possibility for receiving outside support. From the point of view of third party interventions, Georgia is "well suited" geopolitically. At first glance it seems that the neighboring states through their ethnic linkages with minorities would have considered intervening in domestic affairs to support their ethnic kin. However, this accounts only for South Ossetians, and even here there was no *de-jure* external homeland *per se* (Northern Ossetia is a member of Russia).

Abkhazia and South Ossetia both share borders with Russia, which, however, had different rationales for supporting each of these groups. Russia represents an "external homeland" in the form of North Ossetia and as a "surrogate lobby state" (Jenne, 2004) and clear part of the "triadic nexus" (Brubaker, 1994) for Abkhazians. Majority of the population in the breakaway regions have Russian citizenship, which, in a way, institutionalizes Russian interests in protecting the rights and freedoms of its subjects. Russia's role in the Georgian conflicts until 2008 was less publicized. On the one hand, there was no hard documentary evidence of any regular Russian troops participating on either side of the conflicts in Georgia in early 90s. Right after independence of Georgia, both the Georgian majority and Abkhazian and Ossetian minorities appeared to keep neutrality with Russia. But both the minorities and the majority appeared to have more than adequate quantities of arms. The only place they could get these arms were the Soviet military bases located in Georgia.

The situation changed dramatically in 2003 when Mikheil Saakashvili came to power after the bloodless "Rose Revolution". He launched major peacemaking initiatives both in Abkhazian and Ossetia by

establishing their Temporary Administrations and increasing public diplomacy. Simultaneously, Georgia started putting economic pressure over South Ossetia by closing down a black market close to its border. The frozen conflict was resumed in August 2008 triggering Russia's direct military intervention.

In addition to helping Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia also followed its own interests when intervening and subsequently supporting de-jure independence of the break-away regions. Two main factors account for the economic component of the Russian involvement: the need to secure its access to the Black Sea region marine transit capacities and control over the transit of energy carriers from the Caspia Sea to its destination points, thus remaining the major supplier of energy to Europe and beyond.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lacked marine connections with the rest of the world. Marine foreign trade of Russia is costly and somewhat limited due to the nature of its sea ports, located mainly in the north of the country and only operating a few months out of the year, with the only exception of St. Petersburg by the Baltic Sea and Novorossiysk by the Black Sea. Thus, Abkhazia could offer Russia year-round access to the Mediterranean. Whilst attempts to incite Russian influence in the port of Sebastopol had proved unsuccessful due to the substantial opposition potential of Ukraine, the internal weakness of Georgia in the beginning of 90s provided Russian with a unique opportunity for spreading its economic influence southward.

Apart from ports, all major Soviet summer resorts also ended up outside of Russia's borders (i.e. Ukraine & Georgia) after its collapse. Although reconstruction of the facilities had been underway for years with some support from the Russian investors, they were not massive, sometimes hidden and lacked legislative basis typical for an independent state. Now, having officially recognized Abkhazian, Russia would be able to legalize its business presence and further develop its investments.

In South Ossetia, economic stimulus for the Russian involvement was provided by the possibility to control transportation of the Caspian Sea energy carriers. Oil and gas deposits of the Caspian are quite significant. According to the January 2007 Report of the US Energy Information Administration, the volumes of proven oil reserves vary from 17 to 49 billion barrels (comparable to those of Qatar and Libya) and proven gas deposits amount to 232 trillion cubic feet (comparable to the Nigerian gas).² The Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum gas pipeline, operated by the British Petroleum with strong European and US lobby, connected the Caspian Sea with Europe via Turkey bypassing Russia. This caused increased

2 The US Energy Information Administration report on the Caspian Sea Region (available at <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Caspian/Background.html>)

dissatisfaction of the latter who does not want to be outside of the oil game.³

A competitor of these transit facilities is the Baku-Grozni-Novorossisk pipeline passing in the North Caucasus through the recent conflict territory of Chechnya. According to some experts, the existence of the pipelines in Georgia causes Russia to lose around 10 million tons of oil annually that would have otherwise been pumped via its own pipeline: the turnover of the Baku-Supsa pipeline alone is three times more than its northern counterpart (Kharitonova, 2006). With given benefits of oil and gas to its countries, the Caucasus is gradually becoming a battlefield for the right of the transportation of energy resources, where control over the pipelines brings even more significant strategic and political advantages. Indeed, as O'Hara points out, "Who controls the export routes, controls the oil and gas; who controls the oil and gas, controls the Heartland" (O'Hara, 2005: 148), the Heartland being Europe. The power to turn on and off the pipelines' valves at will became a matter of increased competition in the Caucasian and Caspian region.

Hot spots in the Caucasus and high susceptibility of the failure of pipelines as a result of any successful insurgencies was causing serious concern for the owners and lobbyists of the pipelines from the very beginning of their construction. The renewed hostilities in Georgia revealed how vulnerable the oil transit is. British Petroleum's leadership decreased the volumes of oil passing through Georgia two times before the conflict and even shut down its pipelines during the August 2008 war. As a result of the war in South Ossetia and having been seriously concerned with the fate of its own oil revenues, Azerbaijan started negotiations with Russia to double the volumes of oil transit from the Caspian via the northern route. According to some estimates, complete transfer of the current oil to the Baku-Novorossiysk would bring Russia 1.3 million USD per months (Hanson, 2008). Worth rather a small amount, this rerouting coupled with the transit of other energy carriers, would leave the control over oil flows within the hands of Moscow and almost completely out of the reach of the West.

Unlike Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan representing external homelands for the remaining two minorities showed rather a "benevolent" attitude towards the early 1990s developments in Georgia by keeping nationalistic sentiments (if any) of their kin to a minimum in order to avoid confrontation with their next door neighbor. The reasons for peaceful relations between these countries and Georgia are, however, quite different.

Azerbaijan and Georgia are emotionally united due to a common national problem – existence of secessionist conflicts in their territories – and share the same fate of dismembered states. Moreover, Armenia, which, by Azeri claims, is an aggressor, continues to hold a portion of

3 One of the recent Russian successes in the oil field was signature of a major agreement with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in December 2007 to transit their oil and gas through the Russian territory by a future pipeline.

the territory of Azerbaijan proper in addition to Nagorno-Karabakh. Economically, Azerbaijan and Georgia benefit from large international projects of energy carriers, originating in the former and passing through the latter. Finally, it is important to mention that Azerbaijan and Georgia had been headed for more than two decades by Communist party friends – Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze. Notwithstanding the change of the leaderships, closeness of the Georgian and Azeri people continues with a path-dependency of friendship between their current presidents – Aliyev and Saakashvili – backed-up by common economic interests and mutual political concern. Armenia, on the other hand, cannot claim such strong personal linkages with the Georgian leadership. Armenia also enjoys strong economic, political and military support from Russia, acting as its outpost confronting NATO-member Turkey. It hosts a Russian military base which was moved from Georgia in 2006. Economically, there are not that many joint projects apart from the import of electricity from Armenia to Georgia and transit of Armenian cargo through the Georgian ports. Politically, Armenia could have a lukewarm attitude towards Georgia taking into account their early 20th century confrontation, the events of 2005 in the Samtskhe-Javakheti⁴ and the political closeness of Georgia with Azerbaijan.

This approach, however, would be incorrect due to several aspects thereby limiting the chances for enforcing security dilemma between the Georgians and their Armenian counterparts. Apart from a long history of cohabitation in Georgia, a high level of assimilation, including frequent intermarriages and sharing a common past of oppression from various invaders, the most important factor in keeping Armenia away from its involvement in Georgia is rational calculus of its possible outcomes of actions. Armenia allocates considerable economic and military resources on supporting the secessionist regime of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The other essential external variable for the Armenian “calmness” in Georgia is their Diaspora, which is an important player in domestic Armenian politics. The Diaspora has two causes that it is currently pursuing: forcing Turkey to acknowledge the mass murder of Armenians in 1915 as “genocide”, and bringing the Mountainous Karabakh region into de-jure independence or unification with Armenia. Supporting Armenia both politically and economically in its actions against Georgia would be associated with higher costs to the Diaspora. Also, strong ties with American and European governments supporting Georgia would also make the Diaspora push on the Armenian authorities to have restraining policies in the events of possible ethnic pressure to their kin in Georgia. Thus, destabilization in Georgia and opening of a third front would bring neither sizable economic benefits nor serve as a political asset for Armenia and its Diaspora.

4 In October 2005 the Georgian police used force in Samtskhe-Javakheti against the representatives of the Armenian business communities protesting against the supposed illegal actions of the Georgian tax inspectorate.

The list of triggers of interethnic violence resulting from the analysis of the conflicts in Georgia are summarized in the table below.

Conflict Triggers	Ethnic groups			
	Abkhazians	Ossetians	Armenians	Azeris
Social triggers				
Majority nepotism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Majority stereotypes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnic grievances	Yes	No	No	No
Institutional mobilization	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Religion	Muslim	Orthodox	Gregorian	Muslim
Economic triggers				
Economic development	High	Low	Low	Low
Strategic location	Yes	No	No	No
Economic incentives	Yes	No	No	No
Political triggers				
Settlement pattern	Compact	Diffused	Diffused	Diffused
Closeness to border	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
External homeland	No/Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Autonomy	Yes	Yes	No	No
Third parties	Malevolent	Malevolent	Benevolent	Benevolent

None of the socio-political explanations of development of the security dilemmas into open warfare listed above were applicable to the Georgian case. All the ethnic groups experienced the influence of disastrous ethnic policies of the early Georgian leadership. Negative stereotyping was directed indiscriminately against all of these societies, suffering from the majority's ethnic nepotism. Religious differences between all ethnic minorities did not seem to play any substantial role in the case of ethnic mobilization and subsequently giving rise to mutual fear. Major ethnic grievances were characteristic for only one group – Abkhazians – which also cannot be considered as a decisive factor for the conflict in South Ossetia. Finally, institutionalized mobilization in the form of ethnic organizations was evident in the two conflict cases and the peaceful case of the Armenian minority, thus decreasing the importance of this variable as a factor in ethnic mobilization.

Domestic economic factors of security dilemmas did not have a significant relevance in the case of conflicting groups. Among the ethnic minorities only Abkhazians, having the highest indicators of pre-conflict wealth, had clearly visible economic benefits from their possible secession. Also, only Abkhazian autonomy was strategically well-suited for post-conflict independent economic development. South Ossetians, like Armenians and Azeris, had quite low economic capabilities before the conflict from the point of view of exploitation of own land or industrial resources. Even if the process of their international

recognition may end successfully, South Ossetia would still depend solely on financial support from Russia.

Majority of political triggers identified in previous research on the topic of ethnic security dilemma, mobilization and conflict were also not applicable in case of the Georgian conflicts. Only Abkhazians had compact settlement patterns that would guarantee them defensive capabilities in case of military activities. This was absent in South Ossetians as well as in other ethnic minorities. Also, all of the ethnic groups shared borders with their external homeland, which would have equally increased the propensity for pre-war ethnic mobilization via the supply of arms plus economic and human resource during any possible conflict.

The only two common factors salient for bringing security dilemmas into conflict were the former autonomies of Abkhazians and South Ossetia, and the malevolent interests of a third party. Coupled with strategic location in the outskirts of Georgia and along its borders, these autonomies institutionalized the feeling of ethno-political difference of their ethnic groups from the Georgian titular nation, instilled in the ethnic groups sovereign-like mentality and attracted foreign interventions.

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