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POLITICS, PARTIES AND PRESIDENTS IN TRANSCAUCASIA

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Introduction

Most commentators still assume that politics in Transcaucasia are dominated by nationalist issues; that the most successful politicians and political parties are those which can convince the electorate that they will be most effective in asserting the claims of their nationality against the claims of other nationalities, particularly as they affect control over territory and the resources located on that territory. Thus, images of Transcaucasia are dominated by the conflicts in NagornoKarabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This paper argues that an analytical framework based on nationalism is no longer sufficient for us understand the political processes taking place in Transcaucasia and will not help us understand the outcome of the elections which took place in the three Transcaucasian republics in 1995.

This paper will suggest a new framework for understanding the domestic political processes currently being experienced by the three Transcaucasian republics. As with many radical mass movements, the nationalist movements which arose in the three Transcaucasian republics at the end of the 1980s experienced a total change in character when they came to power. In the first phase such mass movements strive to mobilise support behind a programme promising an entirely new political and social order whilst in the second phase they become preoccupied with consolidating their hold on power which, besides involving compromises with the radical ideals of their original programme, also gives rise to struggles between groups in the leadership of the movement for control over coercive and material resources. (1) Only one of the Transcaucasian nationalist movements, the Armenian National Movement (ANM), has successfully navigated that transition but the current political leaderships in Georgia and Azerbaijan have come to power at least partly on the

promise of reviving the democratic and nationalist agendas of failed nationalist governments and have had to consolidate new political regimes to stay in power.

Political life in the three Transcaucasian republics now displays many of the features of this second phase of regime consolidation . In contrast to the first phase the mass public has become demobilised; attempts by nationalist groups (or even 'conservative' antinationalist groups like the refounded Communist parties) to organise the mass rallies, petitions and hunger strikes which dominated politics until a few years ago invariably end in failure. People are demoralised and apathetic; if previously there was a sharp polarisation between those who supported the nationalist movement and those who supported the status quo, now many cannot even be bothered to vote, as the turnout in parliamentary by elections indicates. This is not surprising. In Georgia and Azerbaijan the nationalist movements have failed in their central objective of resisting secessionist movements and in Armenia, whilst the struggle for NagornoKarabakh has ended in a remarkable victory, the population has been ground down by a catastrophic economic and social crisis. (2)

One of the most important elements of regime consolidation is the establishment of a state monopoly over the means of coercion on the territory of the country. This has proved to be a particularly complex process in the three Transcaucasian Republics because the salience of ethnic conflict in the first phase of their political development saw the dispersal of state authority to various informal groups typically paramilitary organisations with links to organised crime. The early part of the regime consolidation phase in Transcaucasia has been characterised by struggles between political leaderships and these 'mafias'.

The prize in this struggle is control of the state apparatus which gives access to most if not all of the economic resources of the Transcaucasian republics. First, the state is able to conclude contracts with foreign companies for the exploitation of natural resources on the territory of the country, to grant licences for foreign trade and also to act as the recipient of foreign financial and humanitarian assistance. Second, the state controls the taxation system and internal trade. Third, control over ministries and government agencies gives wide opportunities for the exercise of patronage. Typically, average monthly state salaries in all three Transcaucasian republics are around \$5, way below even the official living minimum, and it is tacitly understood that government officials will supplement their income from bribes. Therefore, instead of slimming down bureaucracies to create a situation where more realistic salaries can be paid, high government officials prefer to retain staff who are dependent on them and can be expected to support them against political opponents Thus, besides offering wide opportunities for personal enrichment, control over the state budget is a vital instrument for political groups which want to bolster their position visavis their rivals.

As the regime begins to consolidate itself, political groups tend to confine themselves to mobilising limited groups of supporters, usually already occupying influential political or economic positions in the regime, to take control of key branches of the state apparatus which either give access to coercive resources, typically the so-called 'power ministries' the

ministries of defence, internal affairs and national security, or to economic resources, such as those with control over privatisation state property committees, parliamentary commissions etc., those which give access to state credits the state bank, ministry of finance etc., those which involve contact with foreign organisations or those which control industry and trade the customs organisation, the tax inspectorate etc.

Superficially, such political struggles appear similar to those which take place in western democracies, but in Transcaucasia they are reinforcing a trend towards authoritarianism because of the weakness of civil society, the corruption of the legal system and especially the absence of a strong middle class. The main aim of this paper is to describe how political leaders and groups in Transcaucasia have taken control of the coercive and material resources described above and how that control gives them both the motive and means to remain in power but the impact of these processes on the prospects for democracy will be touched on in the conclusion. The comparative approach adopted for this paper highlights both similarities between the three Transcaucasian republics, especially a tendency towards authoritarianism, but also important differences, such as in the character of that authoritarianism, which allows us to make some predictions about future developments. There is one important omission from the analysis adopted and that is the impact of external factors, especially the role played by Russia, on internal developments in Transcaucasia. In mitigation, however, it could be suggested that although Russia's actions have dominated the political scene in the three Transcaucasian republics since independence, it now appears that they are, at least, becoming more predictable and so, even though Russia remains a crucial influence, they are more easy to factor out. We shall now turn to examine developments in the individual Transcaucasian republics.

Armenia

Political developments in Armenia since the late 1980s provide a particularly useful model against which to compare developments in the other two Transcaucasian republics because of the success with which the ANM has navigated the transition from being a radical mass movement to being a party of government. Compared with the other two Transcaucasian republics the domestic political scene in Armenia has been remarkably stable since independence and the same political party, the ANM, and the same leader, Levon TerPetrosian, have been continuously in power since 1990.

The manner in which the ANM consolidated its hold on power has been crucially affected by external factors, such as Armenia's generally unproblematic relationship with Russia and by its military successes in NagornoKarabakh, as well as by socioeconomic factors, such as the ethnic homogeneity of the population, the relative unimportance of regional, clan and other subethnic groups and its lack of natural resources, but, nonetheless, the effectiveness of the ANM's political strategy is still striking. There are three elements in the success of the ANM's political strategy: first, the striking of informal and formal pacts with leading personalities and groups from the Soviet-era elite, second, the early subordination of paramilitary groups to central political control and,

third, the creation of a powerful state apparatus which has a monopoly of the country's coercive and economic resources. The arrest of the Karabakh Committee in December 1988 suggested that relations between the nationalist movement and the Armenian Communist party leadership would be characterised by great antagonism. After the release of the Committee members from prison at the end of May 1989, however, and the holding of the founding conference of the ANM in June, a period of what Ronald Suny has called 'a kind of condominium between the Communists and the nationalists' was ushered in. Under this 'condominium' leading figures in the Karabakh Committee, such as Levon TerPetrosian, were invited to participate in sessions of the republic's Supreme Soviet.(3)

The relatively smooth transition from Communist party rule in Armenia was facilitated by the broad character of the ANM membership, which contained representatives of the old nonconformist nationalist intelligentsia, younger activists who had become politically active during the environmental and nationalist campaigns of the mid 1980s, as well as figures from the republican Communist party and Communist youth movement (Komsomol). In this respect the ANM was, in some ways, more reminiscent of the Baltic popular fronts than the nationalist movements in Georgia and Azerbaijan in which dissident nationalists and street activists were more prominent. In June 1990 the ANM decisively defeated the Communist Party in elections to the republican Supreme Soviet and formed the country's government but the ANM distributed the ministerial portfolios to include representatives of the old Communist elite. After the departure of Vasgen Manukian, a nationalist rival of TerPetrosian, in September 1991, the post of prime minister was occupied by former Communist technocrats until January 1993, for example.(4) In an interview in May 1995 Manukian noted that although the ANM had criticised the Communist regime, it had not criticised individual Communists and that once it came to power the new regime took on a 'mixed character'.(5)

There has been much debate about the economic merits of a crash programme of marketisation ('shock therapy') versus the merits of a more gradual approach but there has been much less discussion about the political merits of the rival strategies. Whilst in Georgia and Azerbaijan nationalist governments postponed radical economic reform for fear of its social impact, in Armenia a radical marketisation programme was initiated from a very early stage. Whether by luck or judgement, radical economic reform, particularly privatisation, played an important role in consolidating the new regime. In 1992 TerPetrosian announced that the government had rejected a privatisation scheme based on the mass distribution of vouchers to the public, on the Russian model, in favour of turning enterprises into 'open shareholding societies' which would be offered, in the first instance, to their employees. If the employees did not take up the offer of shares the enterprise would be offered for sale by auction. It was widely understood that this form of privatisation gave advantages to the old nomenklatura.(6) Karen Demirjian, the former Armenian Communist party boss, who could pose a threat similar to that posed by Eduard Shevardnadze and Heidar Aliiev to the nationalist movements in Georgia and Azerbaijan, has thus been able to secure the directorship of the large Yerevan Electric Machine Building Plant.(7)

The first major crisis faced by the ANM government was the so-called 'militia crisis' of July-August 1990. On 25 July Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet president issued a decree demanding that paramilitary groups in Armenia and other Soviet republics be disarmed in two weeks. At this time the main paramilitary group in Armenia was the Armenian National Army (ANA) which had up to 10,000 members. At first, the Armenian Parliament refused to enforce a decree issued by Ter-Petrosian ordering the ANA to hand in its weapons to the republican authorities but, after a member of parliament was shot by an ANA militant, it ordered its immediate dissolution and imposed a state of emergency. (8) By the beginning of September the crisis had begun to subside. The suppression of the Armenian National Army in the summer of 1990 did not end Armenia's militia problem. Much of the work in organising the 'self-defence' detachments in Nagorno-Karabakh had been undertaken by Diaspora Armenians associated with emigre political parties, particularly the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsiutun), which controlled the government of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). In the summer of 1992 Ter-Petrosian took measures to bring the NKR government under closer ANM control and succeeded in having his supporters appointed to key positions in it. In September 1993 he appointed Sergei Sarkisian as minister of defence. Previously, Sarkisian had been minister of defence of the NKR and his appointment ensured that the NKR military would adopt an approach more in line with Yerevan's wishes. (9) It seems that the various militias in Karabakh did not put up any real resistance to their incorporation into formal military structures, although deals must have been made with individual commanders, and, in stark contrast to the situation in Georgia and Azerbaijan, they have not subsequently played an independent role in Armenian political life. (10)

Standing at the head of a state apparatus with a monopoly of the means of coercion the ANM was able to mobilise the country's resources for the war effort in Nagorno-Karabakh very effectively. Until 1990 the organisation of 'self-defence' detachments in Nagorno-Karabakh had been very much a spontaneous affair with volunteers and contributions coming forward freely in the general nationalist upsurge. (11) The ANM government set about the organisation of the war effort in a more systematic manner through the agency of the 'power ministries'. In November 1992 the opposition in parliament complained that the ministry of internal affairs had been carrying out a fundraising campaign which had collected 142 million roubles for the defence forces by visiting enterprises and 'rich people' and asking for 'donations'. (12) In response to opposition charges Ter-Petrosian issued an order in the summer of 1994 to limit the power of the ministry of internal affairs to 'tax' business ventures. (13) In the summer of 1995, however, directors of large enterprises continued to complain that government officials were visiting them to demand that they hand over large sums of money and that they obtain weapons. (14)

The 'power ministries' rapidly acquired a central position in the ANM regime. Less than a year after it was set up, in the autumn of 1992, Ter-Petrosian was able to say that the ministry of defence was the 'largest ministry in Armenia in terms of budget, personnel and programmes'. (15) The appointment of Vazgen Manukian as minister of defence in

September 1992 gave the building up of the army a new impetus. By December 1993 Vazgen Sarkisian, the state minister of defence, boasted that the draft was over one hundred per cent fulfilled. (16) Various figures can be found for the size of the Armenian army ranging from 30,000 to 50,000, presumably depending on whether internal ministry forces and border guards are included, but, whatever the figure, it is clear that Armenia has mobilised a much greater proportion of its resources for war than Azerbaijan, its potentially much more powerful adversary. (17) TerPetrosian and his loyalists have emerged from successive crises with their political hold on the state apparatus strengthened as a series of his rivals and critics have left the government. (18) With control over the state apparatus increasingly concentrated in a small group of TerPetrosian loyalists it is not surprising that the 'power ministries' increasingly became the target of opposition attacks on abuses of power and corruption. Before 1994 opposition rallies tended to coincide with setbacks in the war in NagornoKarabakh and to criticise the government's failure to conduct the war effectively and recognise the independence of the NKR. When the opposition launched a series of rallies in the spring and summer of 1994 Armenia had confirmed its military predominance by beating back Azerbaijan's winter offensive and the main theme of its attacks was now that of abuse of power and corruption. In the spring of 1994 Ashot Manucharian, TerPetrosian's former national security advisor, and Hambartsum Galstian, the former mayor of Yerevan, (both were former leading members of the Karabakh Committee) made a series of attacks on government corruption centred on Vano Siradegian, the minister of internal affairs. Parliament established a commission to investigate these accusations and, at the beginning of June, it recommended that Siradegian be suspended from his duties. (19) At the end of June Galstian made a further series of allegations suggesting that the ministry of internal affairs had been involved in assassinations and that it had a special unit of racketeers who extorted money from Armenian businessmen in Moscow. (20)

Much of the opposition criticism was self-serving (21) , and it is very difficult to obtain accurate information, but it is clear that the ANM leadership had managed to obtain not only a monopoly of the country's coercive resources but also a monopoly of its economic resources. With Armenia's economy in tatters, and especially because it is subject to an external blockade from Azerbaijan and Turkey and has practically no exploitable natural resources, the state budget has become the only source of income for the population. The ANM leadership made use of this economic power to build up its stock of political patronage by appointing its supporters to lucrative government jobs. It was also able to buy off potential political opponents. Between December 1994 and March 1995 almost the entire Communist parliamentary fraction was expelled from the party by the Central Committee for consistently voting with the government; it was generally believed that the ANM had been buying off the Communist deputies. (22)

As the 1995 parliamentary elections approached the political atmosphere in Armenia became increasingly tense and came to a head after the assassination of Galstian at the beginning of December 1994. (23) If for no other reason, the fate of ruling parties in other postSoviet republics made the ANM fear for the outcome of the electoral contest. This anxiety

was heightened by opposition promises to prosecute those who had made illegal profits from the division of state property. On 28 December TerPetrosian issued a decree banning the opposition Dashnaktsiutiun, six months before the scheduled date for parliamentary elections, accusing it of participation in political assassinations, drug trafficking and running a secret military organization (24). The decision to target the Dashnaktsiutiun requires some explanation.

Longstanding links between the Dashnaktsiutiun and political violence gave it an unsavoury reputation, but the evidence for the government's charges on these counts has yet to be presented and the fact that it received the bulk of its finances from the Diaspora and was therefore impervious to ANM economic pressure must have been a factor in ANM thinking. Armenian parliamentary elections took place at the beginning of July 1995 and results indicate that the new assembly is dominated by the ANM and its supporters. A referendum was held at the same time and saw the approval of a new constitution according to which the president will have wide powers, particularly over the judiciary. There had been some element of genuine party competition involved but it was very much a question of competition within limits: a leading opposition political party had been banned, hundreds of opposition candidates had been refused registration on spurious grounds, the media had been far from impartial and a mysteriously high number of ballots were discarded as 'spoilt'. International observers expressed strong reservations about the democratic character of the elections. Whilst a team from the OSCE confined itself to the cryptic comment that the elections had been 'free but not fair' an American group 'observed an alarming trend to suppress political competition and consolidate the position of the ruling regime' and a British group found the elections neither free nor fair.(25)

Georgia

The process of regime consolidation in Georgia has been the most difficult of that in all the three Transcaucasian republics and, as presidential and parliamentary elections approached in November 1995, was still far from complete. Whilst in Armenia the nationalist movement took control of the state apparatus and established a clear monopoly of the means of coercion on the territory of the country from an early stage, in Georgia the state apparatus quickly fragmented and 'mafia' groups, with their own means of coercion and with large economic resources at their disposal, arose which struggled with successive political leaderships for control of the state.

The contrast with Azerbaijan was not only in terms of the greater extent of state fragmentation but also of the greater room for political competition, which was a product both of Shevardnadze's leadership style and the more restricted opportunities for the Georgian political elite to bolster its position through patronage. The combination of a weak state and a relatively open political system has made the Georgian political scene exceptionally unpredictable. Georgia's internal political development has been clearly shaped by constant confrontation with the Russian leadership, which, from the end of 1992, identified Georgia as a key element in its strategy for containing secessionist pressures in the north Caucasus and the expansion of Turkish influence in the aftermath of

the breakup of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the poor progress that successive Georgian political leaderships made with consolidating their regimes has made Russia's task of obtaining a decisive say in Georgia's affairs much easier.

Partly as a consequence of the killing of peaceful demonstrators by Soviet troops on 9 April 1989 it was the radical wing of the Georgian nationalist movement, the Round Table-Free Georgia bloc headed by the former dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia, which came to power as a result of parliamentary elections in October 1990. In May 1991 Gamsakhurdia was elected president by an overwhelming majority but the new regime was soon beset by internal enemies just as it was heading for confrontation with Moscow. First, the nationalist movement had become very fractured and a number of key groups, such as the National Democrats who were deeply hostile to Gamsakhurdia, were excluded from the new parliament. Gamsakhurdia also faced hostile militias, most notably the Mkhedrioni (Knights), which was led by Jaba Ioseliani.

Second, the nationalist movement also alienated much of the old so-viet elite; Communist party deputies were expelled from parliament after the failed coup in Moscow in August 1991. Third, and most crucially, Gamsakhurdia also quickly lost control of the government's armed forces. In February 1991 the Georgian police in co-operation with the Soviet military, suppressed the Mkhedrioni and Ioseliani was arrested.⁽²⁶⁾ The previous month the government had set up its own armed force, the National Guard, partly to act against groups like the Mkhedrioni.⁽²⁷⁾ It soon became clear, however, that the bulk of the guardsmen were loyal to Tengiz Kitovani, their commander, rather than the government, and, when Gamsakhurdia moved to put the National Guard firmly under the control of the ministry of internal affairs during the August 1991 coup, they rebelled. In December 1991 the National Guard headed the armed coup which overthrew Gamsakhurdia. Although the Military Council which assumed power at the beginning of January 1992 was formally headed by Tengiz Sigua, Gamsakhurdia's former prime minister, real power lay with Kitovani and Ioseliani, who had been freed from prison during the coup.⁽²⁸⁾ The return of Eduard Shevardnadze to his native republic to head the government in March did not change this reality as the peremptory sacking of Lieutenant-General Levan Sharashenidze as minister of defence by Kitovani in May demonstrated.⁽²⁹⁾ The outbreak of war in Abkhazia in August, before the government had had the chance to establish a proper army, propelled the militias to even greater prominence and, in October, Shevardnadze established a National Security and Defence Council with Kitovani and Ioseliani as joint co-chairmen to organise the war effort.⁽³⁰⁾

With the state apparatus paralysed by constant political turmoil and in conditions of military emergency the militias played a leading role in mobilising the country for war. The first consequence of this delegation of authority from the state was the disastrous military performance by the Georgian side in the Abkhazian war. Shevardnadze admitted to a western correspondent in April 1993, 'It is too early to talk about an army. We've just got armed units... Mostly they are patriots and volunteers. The level of training is very low. It is difficult to talk about discipline, it is so very weak'.⁽³¹⁾ For much of the Abkhazian war many Georgian fighters

seemed to be as interested in looting as pursuing military objectives. In an effort to root out such behaviour summary courts marshal were introduced and field executions carried out. The second consequence was the development of powerful groups ('mafias') outside the state apparatus with considerable coercive and economic resources at their disposal, the latter frequently deriving from criminal activities. Militants from the National Guard and the Mkhedrioni took upon themselves the role that had come to be played in Armenia by the 'power ministries' to extort funds from enterprises and businessmen for the war effort. It frequently fell to them to obtain weap-ons, often by striking deals with local Russian military commanders. (32) Not surprisingly, this activity, supposedly carried out under the banner of patriotism, soon turned into a simple 'business' with much of the militias' economic activity degenerating into protection rackets, arms and narcotics trafficking and control over vital commodities, such as petrol.(33)

Georgian politics since 1991 has been as much determined by the struggle between the country's current political elite and these 'mafias' as nationalism.(34) In the spring of 1993 Shevardnadze made a new effort to rein in the militias and, in May, he abolished the National Security and Defence Council (35) and replaced Kitovani as minister of defence with Giorgi Karkarashvili, another leading figure in the National Guard. These moves were undermined by military emergencies over the summer as the Georgian government sought unsuccessfully to resist the final Abkhazian offensive in September and successfully (with Russian help) fought off an insurgency launched by supporters of Gamsakhurdia in the western regions of the country in October. By the end of 1993 it seemed that Georgia might cease to exist as a state; the government had effectively ceded control of two important provinces, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to ethnic separatists and had even largely given up the streets of its capital to bandits. Subsequently, however, the Georgian government did slowly manage to reconsolidate its authority. In the winter of 1993-94 an intensive campaign against crime was launched which did bring a degree of security back into the lives of most Georgian citizens. In the autumn of 1993 two of the 'power ministries' were revamped. A ministry of state security was created with Igor Giorgadze, a former KGB officer, at its head.

The ministry of internal affairs was also bolstered by the appointment of Givi Kviraia, another former KGB officer, as minister.(36) The appointment of Giorgadze was particularly controversial because of his links with hardline Communists (his father is head of the stalinist United Communist Party) and with the Russian security services. Thus, whilst the strengthened ministries proved to be an effective counterweight to the militias, in the longer term they potentially represented another source of political threat to Shevardnadze. The National Guard was eliminated as a serious force by the beginning of 1995. Although Karkarashvili had been appointed minister of defence partly because he was perceived to be less of a political threat than Kitovani, he was suspected of involvement in shady arms deals.(37) In February 1994 he was sacked and replaced a couple of months later by LieutenantGeneral Vardiko Nadibaidze a career military officer.(38) In January 1995 Kitovani was arrested after attempting to launch a crusade to recapture Abkhazia (39) . The Mkhedrioni proved to be a much more difficult nut to crack. Bizarrely, in

August 1994, the Mkhedrioni was able to force the government to give it the legal status of the Georgian Rescuers Corps, ostensibly a sort of civil defence organisation, which allowed them to retain their weapons.(40) For much of 1994 Ioseliani headed the Georgian delegation in negotiations with the Abkhazians. By the beginning of 1995 the Georgian regime was much less effectively consolidated than the Armenian. The Georgian state still did not have a monopoly of coercive resources. The most dramatic manifestation of this was a string of political assassinations (41) culminating in an attempt on the life of Shevardnadze himself in August.(42) In the aftermath Giorgadze was sacked and Shevardnadze took personal command of the ministry of state security's brigade of paratroops and commando units.(43) Meanwhile, a campaign had been launched to suppress the Mkhedrioni once and for all. At the beginning of May 1995 Shevardnadze revoked his decree allowing them to retain their weapons and operations were carried out in the eastern regions of the country by internal ministry forces to confiscate military equipment and arrest Mkhedrioni militants. By the summer of 1995, however, it was clear that far from all the Mkhedrioni's weapons had been handed over to the government and relations between Shevardnadze and Ioseliani remained tense.(44)

In July it was announced that parliamentary and presidential elections had been set for 5 November.(45) The Georgian elections were a much more open affair than their counterparts in the other two Transcaucasian republics. This was for three reasons. First, despite experiencing a coup and severe civil strife, in contrast to Azerbaijan, Georgia had managed to retain a lively political life. This was not only because the media remained relatively free but, most importantly, because the successful holding of parliamentary elections in September 1992 meant that opposition politicians and political parties retained a forum from which to appeal to the public. Second, Shevardnadze did not occupy the post of president. Since one of the reasons for overthrowing Gamsakhurdia had been accusations that he had abused his presidential powers Shevardnadze had only been elected as 'head of state'. Thus, he had to rely on constructing political coalitions amongst parliamentary fractions and interest groups to a much greater extent than TerPetrosian, for example, who had managed to obtain wide powers to appoint ministers without reference to the parliament (46) .

Third, not only had the Georgian political leadership failed to obtain a monopoly of the forces of coercion in the country, in contrast to Armenia and Azerbaijan, it had also failed to obtain a monopoly over the country's economic resources. Unlike Azerbaijan the Georgian political leadership could not rely on income from the exploitation of natural resources to grease the wheels of patronage and, unlike Armenia, the privatisation programme only got under way in the autumn of 1994, which was too late for it to be useful in constructing a clear constituency of clients who owed a political debt to the regime. In the autumn of 1993 Shevardnadze had set up his own political party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), but it has failed to secure the sort of political predominance achieved by the ANM, for example. Whilst a large number of provincial governors and other state officials are CUG members the government is far from being composed exclusively of CUG ministers. For this reason, state patronage can potentially be exerted on behalf of a variety of political

groups. More importantly, the political leadership is open to challenge by hostile 'mafia' parties. Shevardnadze moved quickly to exploit the attempt on his life politically. Temur Khachishvili, the deputy minister of national security, was arrested shortly afterwards. Khachishvili was also a leading member of the Mkhedrioni and, not long after, a search of Jaba Ioseliani's parliamentary offices revealed stocks of weapons and narcotics.

At the end of September Ioseliani announced that he would not be standing for president.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The Georgian authorities also accused Igor Giorgadze of planning the assassination attempt in his father's flat. Igor Giorgadze fled to Moscow whilst his father, Panteleimon, head of the United Communist Party, found himself implicated in terrorism. Subsequently, attempts were made to associate Jumber Patiashvili, another presidential candidate with the Giorgadzes.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Thus, as the Georgian parliamentary elections approached, Shevardnadze was still engaged in a desperate struggle to retain control of the political process. Whilst there was little prospect of him facing a serious challenge for the presidency or of his supporters not winning a dominant position in the new parliament, his attempts to eliminate or discredit his political opponents were as much a sign of weakness as strength.

Azerbaijan

The current Azerbaijani regime has gone further down the road to authoritarianism than the regimes in the other two Transcaucasian republics. This has been partly a result of the vagaries of Azerbaijan's political development since the late 1980s, which was characterised by a highly antagonistic relationship between the local Communist regime and the nationalist movement, the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF). As a result, Azerbaijani democracy was stillborn; parliamentary elections in which it could be said there was free competition between political parties have not taken place and are unlikely to take place in the foreseeable future. Neither is the authoritarian character of the Azerbaijani regime simply a product of its success in establishing a monopoly of coercive resources on the territory of the country.

In this respect Azerbaijan stands somewhere between the two extremes of Armenia and Georgia. Rather, authoritarianism in Azerbaijan stems from the vast opportunities for patronage provided by the country's natural resources, principally its offshore oil reserves. Heidar Aliiev, the current president, has mobilised these economic resources extremely efficiently to create a powerful political machine which no other political group in the country can match. The rise of the APF, which grew out of mass rallies at the end of 1988 held to protest at the failure of the Communist government to resist the Armenian secessionist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh, was extended and violent. The APF failed to force the local Communist party to accede to a period of 'condominium' on the Armenian model or make a strategic retreat on the Georgian model and, on the eve of elections to the republican Supreme Soviet which the APF was poised to win, an operation headed by the Soviet army was carried out in January 1990, in which hundreds of people were killed, to suppress it.⁽⁴⁹⁾

After January 1990 the APF led a semiclandestine existence whilst Aiaz

Mutalibov, the new Communist party first secretary, tried to resolve the NagornoKarabakh conflict with Soviet military help and so neutralise the nationalist appeal of the APF.(50) The attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, which Mutalibov was one of the few republican leaders to support openly, marked the collapse of this strategy and, in the autumn of 1991, the APF began to reemerge as a powerful political force. Although Mutalibov was elected unopposed as president in September 1991, not long after he was forced to replace the Supreme Soviet with a new fifty-member National Assembly (Mili Mejlis) in which the opposition was given half the deputies.(51) This appointed body did not have the legitimacy on which a constitutional regime could be consolidated and over the following three years Azerbaijani politics was characterised by a series of coups and, between 1991 and 1993, the country had four presidents.(52)

For the first six months of its existence as an independent state Azerbaijan was enveloped in political turmoil. At the beginning of March 1992 Mutalibov was forced to resign as president following the massacre of Azerbaijani civilians at Khojali in NagornoKarabakh. Iagub Mamedov, who served as the interim president, refused to make political concessions to the APF and include its nominees in the government and, after the failure of an attempt by Mutalibov to seize power at the beginning of May, the APF took over the government. Abulfaz Elchibei, the leader of the APF and, like Gamsakhurdia, a former dissident, then won new presidential elections at the beginning of June.(53)

Since Mutalibov's political strategy had counted on the continuing existence of the Soviet Union very little progress had been made with establishing a state apparatus by the time Elchibei became president. Although an Azerbaijani National Army had formally been set up in October 1991, in mid-March 1992 the total strength of the army was only about 500 men.(54) Azerbaijan faced an additional problem in setting up an army; the very small number of ethnic Azerbaijani officers in the Soviet army. Thus, as in Georgia, it was informal paramilitary groups which played the main role in the Azerbaijani war effort. The most prominent of the Azerbaijani militia commanders was 'Colonel' Suret Husseinov. Husseinov first achieved fame in 1992 as the leader of a unit in the Azerbaijani 'army' which he claimed to have equipped from his personal fortune. The original source of his wealth was a wool-processing factory, of which he was director, in Azerbaijan's second city of Ganja. Subsequently, he made much larger sums by earning 'commission' as a middleman in arms deals between the Azerbaijani government and the Russian military. He also widely reputed to be involved in narcotics trafficking.(55)

The role played by Husseinov in Azerbaijani politics is very reminiscent of that played by Kitovani or Ioseliani in Georgia. Like them he was originally favoured by the nationalist movement because he was perceived to be a genuine patriot who was more trustworthy than professional military men who had made their careers in the Soviet army and because he appeared able to achieve rapid results. Like Ioseliani, in particular, having played a central role in his country's war effort Husseinov sought to convert his control over coercive resources into political power in order to safeguard his economic interests and gain

access to the much wider opportunities for patronage which control of the state apparatus offered. In the summer of 1992 Elchibei appointed Husseinov to be his personal representative in NagornoKarabakh with wide powers but, in February 1993, he ordered his recall after the loss of a strategic road to the Armenians in NagornoKarabakh.(56)

Husseinov refused to obey and holed up in Gianje with his supporters. After a botched attempt by the government to suppress his revolt at the beginning of June, Husseinov launched a march on Baku.(57) Husseinov met practically no resistance and, on 18 June, Elchibei fled the capital 'to avoid bloodshed' and Aliiev, the Brezhnevera Communist party boss, took control.(58) Even without the prominence of militias in the Azerbaijani army, the distractions of political infighting allowed the Armenians to score sweeping victories in NagornoKarabakh in 199293 and occupy about twenty per cent of Azerbaijan's territory. In the summer of 1993 it seemed as if the Azerbaijani state was about to disintegrate. Not only were the Armenians making dramatic advances, separatist movements began to appear in other parts of the country.(59) The fragmentation of state authority in Azerbaijan did not go as far as it did in Georgia, however. First, although Elchibei refused to accept the legitimacy of the new government, he had originally invited Aliiev back to Baku in an attempt to foil a comeback by the much more overtly proRussian Mutalibov. Second, although in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of Elchibei Aliiev agreed to allow Husseinov to appoint his people to head the 'power ministries', over the summer he outmanoeuvred him and left him only with the relatively unimportant post of prime minister. By the autumn Aliiev was already carrying out a purge of APF and Husseinov supporters from the army in an attempt to establish a unified command structure.(60)

In the autumn of 1994 Aliiev moved to remove Husseinov who still had effective control of Gianje and a number of the country's western regions. In October he turned a conflict with Rovshan Javadov, the deputy minister of internal affairs, against his patron, Husseinov, by accusing the latter of preparing a coup. Shortly after, Husseinov fled the country.(61) In March 1995 Aliiev accused Javadov, in his turn, of being involved in the smuggling of strategic materials and government forces stormed barracks where a police unit loyal to him was based, killing him in the process.(62) By the spring of 1995 Aliiev had eliminated the last vestiges of the militias which had arisen with the APF. The main victim of the numerous political upheavals which had afflicted Azerbaijan since 1988 was any prospect of a democratic regime being established.

Parliamentary elections had been held in September 1990 and presidential elections annually in each of the three subsequent years, November 1991, June 1992 and October 1993. In all cases, these elections had been held simply to confer legitimacy on violent actions taken earlier by the country's leaders and, in all cases, had been subject to greater or lesser degrees of gerrymandering. The inability of Elchibei to put up any resistance to Husseinov's coup was a graphic illustration of his failure to secure a monopoly of the means of coercion on the territory of the country; it was also a result of his failure to democratise the Azerbaijani political system. When he came to power in June 1992 parliamentary elections were scheduled to follow quickly.

If parliamentary elections had been held in the autumn it is more than likely that the APF would have secured a good majority. Instead, the elections were continually postponed and, with the APF's popularity steadily falling, they became a less and less inviting prospect for the government. Aliev behaved in an overtly authoritarian manner. Sovietstyle press censorship was established soon after he came to power and has not subsequently been relaxed. Both the APF and the Communist party were prevented from registering to take part in the 1995 elections. There is another set of reasons why both Elchibei and Aliev failed to press ahead with the democratisation of the Azerbaijani political system. Alone of the three Transcaucasian republics Azerbaijani possessed valuable natural resources; vast offshore oil reserves. A political group which was able to conclude a deal with western companies to exploit this oil would have a formidable economic resource at its disposal in bolstering its political position. The Elchibei government was wellaware of this fact and set up SOCAR (the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijani Republic) headed by Sabit Bagirov, a longstanding member of the APF. To further ensure that the governing regime would benefit from the oil deal with western companies an Oil Directorate was set up on which senior politicians, public figures and SOCAR officials were represented to approve all deals with foreign companies.(63)

A Jonathan Aves 22 deal with a western oil consortium was being finalised in the spring of 1993 and it was surely the prospect of being excluded from this which was one of the reasons prompting Husseinov to mount his rebellion. When Aliev returned to Baku in June he suspended the negotiations with the western oil consortium but they were resumed in the autumn and in September 1994 'the deal of the century' was finally signed.(64) Aliev has skilfully made use of oil income to consolidate a formidable regime based on patronage.(65) The most naked example of such patronage was the placing of his family members in key positions, most notably the appointment of his son, Ilkhan Aliev, as deputy president of SOCAR. In the autumn of 1992 the secretary of state, Lala Gadzhieva, was forced to resign after she had criticised nepotism in the Aliev regime.(66)

In general, Aliev has sought to place his clients from the province of Nakhichevan in key positions in the regime. This has sometimes provoked hostility from the local population, especially the Baku elite, but, arguably, their social isolation makes them even more dependent on him. With power concentrated around the person of the president, Azerbaijani politics has more and more come to resemble a form of 'court politics' where different politicians and interest groups seek to obtain the ear of Aliev in order to promote their careers. Against this background he is able to reward and punish his clients by appointing them or removing them from lucrative incomegenerating official positions. The results of the November 1995 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan are a foregone conclusion. In 1992 Aliev set up his own political party, New Azerbaijan, but this is essentially a mask for the patronage networks on which his regime is really based. With a firm monopoly of the means of coercion on the territory of the country and, as a guarantee against upsets, the main opposition parties out of the running, Aliev is assured a comfortable majority. Barring Russian intervention (which cannot be ruled out) and with income from 'early oil' from the Caspian due to come on stream in

1996 to fuel his patronage networks, Aliev's strategy for consolidating his regime seems to have been successful.

Conclusion

This paper raises interesting questions about the relationship between the problem of regime consolidation, economic power and democratisation in the postSoviet republics. On the one hand, regime consolidation is a necessary condition for democracy; if a regime cannot provide basic guarantees of personal security for its citizens and establish a bureaucracy which operates according to consistent rules there can be no question of democratic elections. But, in Transcaucasia, those politicians and political movements which have been most successful in consolidating a new regime have been the least successful in maintaining a clear policy of democratisation.

In the case of Georgia, it seems more likely that the democratic features of the 1995 elections owe more to the weakness of Shevardnadze's regime than to an adherence to democratic principles. Of course, the military emergencies that all three Transcaucasian republics faced even before they became independent states and the struggles all have faced to suppress paramilitary organisations could be said to have marked them out as fundamentally different from other postSoviet republics. Certainly, apart from the case of Central Asia, in no other Soviet republics have incumbent political leaderships been able to secure reelection so easily.

However, as this paper has shown, regime consolidation in Transcaucasia had not only involved the establishment of a monopoly of the means of coercion on its territory, but also a tendency towards a monopoly over economic resources. As postSoviet regimes in Transcaucasia have consolidated their hold over coercive resources they have also acquired control over lucrative natural resources and the implementation of privatisation programmes. This provides incumbent political leaderships with both a powerful incentive (it is feared that loss of political power will be accompanied by a loss of economic assets and sources of income) and powerful means (through patronage) to manipulate the democratic process to remain in power.

Perhaps we should turn once again to those political theorists who posit a strong connection between levels of economic development and especially the emergence of an independent middle class and democratisation rather than those who focus on transition strategies and institutional design.

Notes:

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1. The Bolshevik party in Russia in 1917, for example, had a real mass base amongst industrial workers but very soon after coming to power in October it adopted policies which contradicted the aspirations of those workers as exemplified by the

- decision to employ 'bourgeois' specialists. I am grateful to Marine Kurkchian of the Sociology Department of Yerevan University for the insights which provoked this line of thought.
2. The turnout in the parliamentary elections in Armenia (July 1995) was in fact rather respectable and tends to undermine this point but it is also true that the turnout for election rallies organised by the opposition parties was small and the ANM did not even bother to try and organise such events even though they had been its political forte in the late 1980s.
 3. Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking towards Ararat. Armenia in Modern History*, Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 23436.
 4. Gagik Harutunian until July 1992 and Khosrov Arutunian until January 1993. *Armenian International Magazine*, AugustSeptember 1992, pp. 1621.
 5. Interview with author, 25 May 1995
 6. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 22 April 1992.
 7. *Russia Briefing*, Vol. 2, No 2, (25 February 1994).
 8. *Independent*, 6 August, 9 August, 13 August and 31 August 1990.
 9. *Armenian International Magazine*, February 1994.
 10. One of the reasons given by TerPetrosian for banning the Dashnaktsiutiun at the end of December 1994 was that it was running an underground terrorist organization called Dro but the evidence for the existence of such an organization has yet to be produced and on the information which is available it does not appear to be related to the militias which took part in the NagornoKarabakh conflict. *Armenian International Magazine*, NovemberDecember 1994.
 11. Monte Melkonian, one of the best known diaspora fighters, levied a tax on wine in the area of NagornoKarabakh where he was active to be paid in the form of diesel and ammunition. Edited by Markar Melkonian, *The Right to Struggle. Selected Writings of Monte Melkonian on the Armenian National Question*, The Sarbarabad Collective, second edition, 1993, p. xvi.
 12. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 20 November 1992.
 13. *Armenian International Magazine*, AugustSeptember, 1994.
 14. Interviews with author, MayJune 1995.
 15. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts citing Armenian radio, 31 October 1992
 16. *Armenian International Magazine*, AugustSeptember, 1994
 17. In the autumn of 1993 Sarkisian claimed that the Armenian army numbered 50,000 but the most accurate figures for the size of the Armenian army put it between 30,000 and 35,000, see BBC Summary of World Broadcasts citing Russian radio 3 November 1993 and citing Georgian press, 25 June 1994 and *Jane's Sentinel. Global Security Assessment*, 1994. Estimates of the size of the Azerbaijani army range from 40,000 to 50,000, but if Azerbaijan were to mobilize its population to the same level as the Armenian it would produce an army of 65,000 to 70,000, see BBC Summary of World Broadcasts citing Georgian Press, 25 June 1994, *Jane's Sentinel. Global Security Assessment*, 1994 and Roy Allison, *Military Forces in the Soviet Successor States*, IISS, 1993, p. 68
 18. Raffi Hovanasian (minister for foreign affairs) October 1992; Vazgen Manukian (prime minister and minister of defence) July 1993; Ashot Manucharian (presidential national security advisor) August 1994.
 19. COVCAS Bulletin, Vol. 4, No 8, 20 April 1994 and Vol. 4 No12, 22 June 1994.
 20. COVCAS Bulletin, Vol. 4, No13, 13 July 1994.
 21. Siradegian made a number of accusations about the allegedly corrupt activities of Manucharian and Galstian in reply which there is no reason to believe are any less likely to be true than the accusations levelled against him.
 22. Interview with Sergei Badalian, leader of the Armenian Communist Party, conducted by the author, 23 May 1995.
 23. COVCAS Bulletin, Vol. 4, No 24, 21 December 1994.
 24. COVCAS Bulletin, Vol. 5, No 1, 4 January 1995.
 25. COVCAS Bulletin, Vol. 5, No 14, 12 July 1995; National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *Report of the Survey Mission to Armenia*, March 1531 1995; and *Armenia 1995: Democracy and Human Rights, A Report by the British Helsinki Human Rights*
 26. *Financial Times*, 21 February 1991.
 27. *Independent*, 30 January and 31 January 1991.
 28. *Economist*, 11 January 1992.
 29. *Jane's Sentinel. Global Security Assessment*, 1994.
 30. *Financial Times*, 15 October 1992.
 31. *Independent*, 23 April 1993.

32. Often the deal would be masked by a staged attack by the militia on a Russian military base so that the Russian commander could pretend that he had been forced to hand over weapons.
33. For example, Mkhedrioni thugs forced the manager of the Austrian-owned luxury Metechi Palace Hotel in 'Tbilisi to flee the country at the end of 1994'. *Guardian*, 8 November 1994.
34. With their participation in looting and arms trafficking the militias also had an important economic interest in the continuation of ethnic conflicts, for example Karkarashvili was accused of selling military secrets to the Abkhazians. *COVCAS Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No 4, 23 February 1994.
35. *Georgian Chronicle*, April 1993.
36. *Georgian Chronicle*, October 1993.
37. *Georgian Chronicle*, February-March 1994.
38. *Georgian Chronicle*, April 1994.
39. *Georgian Chronicle*, January 1995.
40. *Georgian Chronicle*, August 1994.
41. Giorgi Chanturia, leader of the National Democratic party (December 1994); Attempt on the life of Giorgi Karkarashvili (January 1995); Soliko Khabeishvili, political advisor to Shevardnadze (June 1995).
42. *Guardian*, 30 August 1995.
43. *Reuters*, 2 September 1995; *TASS*, 3 September 1995.
44. *Georgian Chronicle*, May 1995.
45. A new constitution establishing a presidency was approved by parliament in August. *Reuters*, 24 August 1995.
46. Stephen F. Jones, 'Georgia's Power Structures' in *RL/RFE Research Report*, Vol. 2, No 39, 1 October 1993, pp 59.
47. *Reuters*, 5 October 1995.
48. *Reuters*, 4 October 1995; and *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 17 October 1995.
49. Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks. Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, Hoover Institution Press, 1992, pp 204-219.
50. *Independent*, 29 September 1990; and *Guardian*, 12 September 1991.
51. Elizabeth Fuller, *Azerbaijan at the Crossroads*, RIIA, 1994, p 5.
52. Aiaz Mutalibov (September 1991 to March 1992); Iagub Mamedov (March 1992 to May 1992); Abulfaz Elchibei (June 1992 to July 1993); and Heidar Aliev (October 1993 onwards).
53. Elizabeth Fuller, *Azerbaijan at the Crossroads* RIIA, 1994, pp 57. The June 1992 presidential elections were the most open of any held in Azerbaijan's recent history although Aliev was prevented from standing by the setting of an age limit of 65 for candidates just before the elections. In 1992 Aliev was aged 69. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 23 April 1992 and 28 April 1992.
54. Richard Woff, 'The Armed Forces of Azerbaijan' in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol 5, No10, October 1993, p 460.
55. Thomas Goltz, 'Letter From Eurasia: The Hidden Russian Hand' in *Foreign Policy*, Fall, 1993, pp 110-11.
56. *Turkey Confidential*, No 37, March 1993, pp 267.
57. *Guardian*, 8 June 1993.
58. *Financial Times*, 19 June 1993.
59. Most dramatically with the declaration of a Talysh-Mugan Republic in the southern town of Lenkoran in August.
60. *Russia Briefing*, 25 January 1994, p. 8.
61. Laura le Cornu, *Azerbaijan's September Crisis: An Analysis of the Causes and Implications*, RIIA, 1995.
62. *Financial Times*, 16 March 1995; *Guardian*, 18 March 1995.
63. *Central European*, April 1993.
64. *Financial Times*, 2 July 1993; *Financial Times*, 21 September 1993.
65. This had been his political forte in Soviet times. See John P. Willerton, *Patronage and Politics in the USSR*, Cambridge, 1992, Chapter 6, for more details.
66. *Moskovskie Novosti*, 1926 February 1995.