

THE EMERGENCE OF SOUTHERN CAUCASUS AS THE CORNERSTONE IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

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Summary: INTRODUCTION, I. DIVORCE BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE U.S., II. WHY THE CAUCASUS IS SO ATTRACTIVE FOR THE U.S., III. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE THREE CAUCASIAN REPUBLICS, 1. GEORGIA, 2. ARMENIA, 3. AZERBAIJAN, IV. CONCLUSIONS V. REFERENCES

The Caucasus is really the sum of its parts, but also a mosaic of different cultures which share a common and convulsed history.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War meant, for Turkey, a Windows of opportunity. During more than 40 years, Turkey had been the American's closest ally in the Middle East. Though Turkey didn't share most of the basic NATO's values, such as democracy, freedom and human rights, its privileged position allowed Ankara to be a member of the Alliance. When Gorbachev stated/decreed the end of the Soviet Union, Turkey started to think that their dream was to be the leader of the Turkic World. Thus the creation of a Pan-Turkic community from the Adriatic Sea to China would be possible. Besides, The US encouraged their pretensions permitting and, overall supporting all the Turkish initiatives (TEPAV, TIKA, Turkic Summit etc...) However, Turkey has not been able to seize the historical opportunity and Ankara undertook these initiatives in vain.

I. DIVORCE BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE U.S.

Turkey is living a deep process of islamization¹ which pushes it away from the Western World. The Islamic identity is more important in Turkey than in Indonesia and a significant part of the population prefers Sharia-based rule to a secular one².

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The process in which Ankara is involved is not new. Other moderate Muslim countries suffered the same process some years ago. We can stress Persia in the 70s, Sudan in the 80s and Egypt in the 90s. With the only exception of Egypt, all these countries belonged to the Peripheral Alliance (Sudan, Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia)³ and for this reason Islamist forces decided to attack their domestic orders. The case of Egypt is quite similar. Although they did not sign the Peripheral Alliance, Cairo, signed a Peace Treaty with Israel. This process is aimed to radicalize the moderate Muslim countries and isolate Israel. Erdogan's party has adopted the same strategy followed by other countries before. There is an anti-American⁴ and anti-Israeli feeling on Turkey. Most of the Turkish, 72%, blame the Lebanon War on Israel⁵.

The rise of September 11th speeded up the regional imbalance in a new space, the Greater Middle East. During the 90's the US made public its dual containment strategy (Iraq-Iran). The new Turkish government has adopted a more and more ambiguous position towards the dual containment strategy. When the Turkish Parliament denied the American troops to invade Iraq from the North, some voices in Washington and Tel-Aviv started to announce that Turkey was not to be an optimal ally anymore. Let me give two examples: most of the Turks declare themselves as sympathetic to Hamas⁶ and 80% perceived the United States as a threat⁷.

This lack of confidence allows the Caucasus to improve its position and have a chance to become an alternative to Turkey in the Euro-Asian chessboard.

Up today, the Caucasus had been a forgotten region excepting for oil companies. Nevertheless the original economic interest has opened the door to the political and military ones. Although the new Caucasian republics are members of the *Partnership*

¹ "Fifty-One percent of Turks identify themselves with Islam first and only percent with Turkishness" Bekdil, Burak "Directionless Turkey: Quo Vadis?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Number 3, p. 47.

² "Although only 9 percent of Turks prefer Sharia rule in their country, from a reverse angle, only three in every four Turks oppose Sharia rule in their country" *Idem*, p. 48.

³ The Israeli government included Ethiopia in the Peripheral Alliance due to a small ancient group of Jews, the Beta Israel, live in northwestern Ethiopia. Most of them have immigrated to Israel. The Israeli government organized the Operation Moses and Operation Solomon to rescue them. Nowadays, Ethiopia is threaten by its Islamic neighbor, Somalia "L'Ethiopie lance "une contre-attaque" en Somalie contre les miliciens islamistes" *Le Monde*, 24 de decembre de 2006.

⁴ "80 per cent of the Turks view the West a security threat" Bekdil, Burak "Directionless Turkey: Quo Vadis?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Number 3, p. 47.

⁵ "According to pollster Taylor Nelson Sofres 72% percent of Turks blame the Lebanon War on Israel" Bekdil, Burak "Directionless Turkey: Quo Vadis?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Number 3, p. 47.

⁶ "They feel a kind of religious xenophobia, are sympathetic to HAMAS and blame the Middle East conflict – and violence, too- on Israel and the United States" Bekdil, Burak "Directionless Turkey: Quo Vadis?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Number 3, p. 47.

⁷ "Nearly eight in every ten Turks perceive a security threat from the United States" Bekdil, Burak "Directionless Turkey: Quo Vadis?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Number 3, p. 47.

For Peace program their importance for the United States and Israel was at least relative.

In the fall of 2002 the United States and some of its allies, decided to put pressure on the government of Saddam Hussein. Important countries like Germany, France⁸ and Russia looked disliked on the American position. The Turkish government was placed in a death situation. On one hand they felt threatened by the Hussein regime but on the other hand their Islamic ideology did not allow them to adopt a more pro-American position supporting the intervention.

In this difficult context, the Caucasus emerged as an alternative to Turkey. From 2002, Georgia has been cooperating with the U.S. Army, and today it can be considered a reliable ally. Azerbaijan also cooperates with the United States in military issues and some experts consider that Washington could install a military base in the Abseron Peninsula. The case of Armenia is the most complicated. Yerevan tries to maintain a balanced position between Russia and the United States. Nevertheless the threat of a Colour Revolution⁹ in Armenia and the Russian lack of effectiveness in the Caucasus have caused a rapprochement to the United States.

II. WHY THE CAUCASUS IS SO ATTRACTIVE FOR THE U.S.

Besides, the Caucasus itself has several appealing points to displace/oust Turkey as the most important American ally in the Greater Middle East:

1. **The strategic situation of the Caucasus** is even better than Turkish one. From the Caucasus, the United States can comfortably carry out the “dual containment”.

Iran: The Caucasus is the best position to contain Iran, now that Tehran is trying to become a nuclear power¹⁰. Azerbaijan has a very huge border with Iran, 322 km, the longest after the Armenia-Azerbaijan frontier. Indeed the possibility of installing a military base¹¹ in Azerbaijan has a clear objective:

⁸ “This has brought about the situation, also described by Donald Rumsfeld where a majority of tasks is carried out by a minority of Allies” Shea, Jamie “Reflections on Nato’s political and military transformation since 9/11” *Turkish Policy Quaterly*, Vol. 5, Number 3, p. 37.

⁹ “But within days of 9/11 President Bush declared a global War on Terror strategy was based on the assumption hat freedom is for everyone” Sharansky, Natan and Dermer, Ron (2004): *The case for democracy. The power of Freedom to overcome tyranny and terror*, New York, Public Affairs p. 20.

¹⁰ “Iran has reacted defiantly to the UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on the country’s nuclear program” Fathi, Nazila “Iran defiant after UN imposes nuclear sanctions” *International Herald Tribune*, 26-12-2006

¹¹ “Among the countries that could host US troops he cited Azerbaijan, Uganda and San Tome and Principe. He said the US troops stationed in Azerbaijan will patrol and secure the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline” *Azer News*, 1 April 2004.

Iran. Nevertheless, if the United States finally bet for a military base in Azerbaijan, the installation will not be a traditional base, let's say a Main Operation Base with permanently stationed personnel¹². The United States are transforming their military facilities and we should speak on Forward Operating Site¹³ (FOS) o Cooperative Security Location¹⁴ (CSL).

This new short of military bases has three advantages:

- Forward Operating Site (FOS) and Cooperative Security Location (CSL) are more flexible¹⁵ than the traditional military bases. This new facilities can give logistical support to the new *Stryker Brigade Combat Team*¹⁶ (SBCT). These new kind of brigades are more deployable than a heavy brigade and are more firepower than the light one. The *Stryker Brigade Combat Team* needs runaways with at least 7.500 feet. The Caucasus can offer 17 runaways with this characteristic: 8 in Georgia, 2 in Armenia and 7 in Azerbaijan).

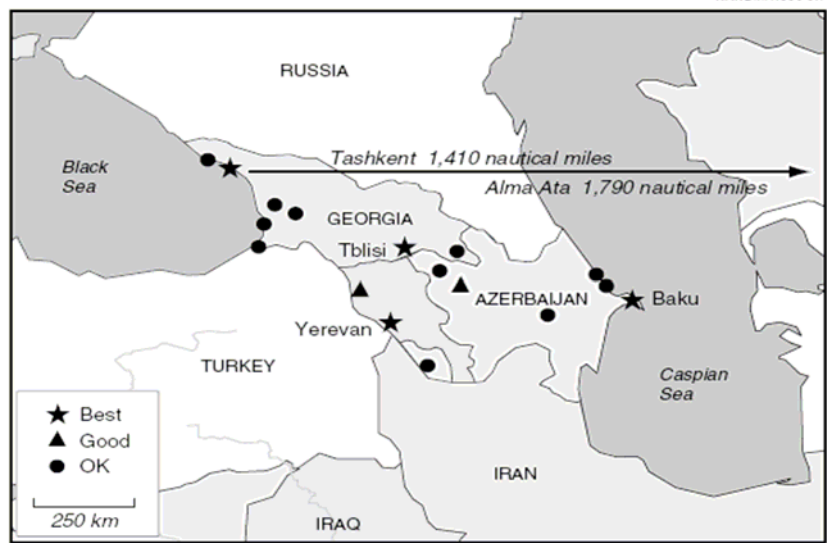
¹² "There is no intent to build any new Main Operating Bases with permanently stationed personnel" Jones, James, "Strategic Theatre Transformation" USMC Commanding, Ramstein, 14 January 2005, www.eucom.mil

¹³ "A FOS is a scalable, "warm" facility that can support sustained operations, but with only a small permanent presence of support or contractor personnel. A FOS will host occasional rotational forces and many contain pre-positioned equipment" Jones, James, "Strategic Theatre Transformation" USMC Commanding, Ramstein, 14 January 2005, www.eucom.mil

¹⁴ "A CSL is a host-nation facility with little or no permanent U.S. personnel presence, which may contain pre-positioned equipment and/or logistical arrangements and serve both for security cooperation activities and contingency access." Jones, James, "Strategic Theatre Transformation" USMC Commanding, Ramstein, 14 January 2005, www.eucom.mil

¹⁵ "Pentagon eyes new flexible network of military bases abroad" *Baku Today*, 12 June 2003.

¹⁶ "The Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) is the first step in the Army's effort to improve the deployability time of its mechanized combat formations. The SBCT is being built around a new series of combat vehicles that are smaller and lighter than their counterpart in the Army's standard mechanized battalions and brigades" Olikier, O., and Szayna Thomas S. (2003): *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Implications for the US Army*, RAND Cooperation, Santa Mónica, p. 244.



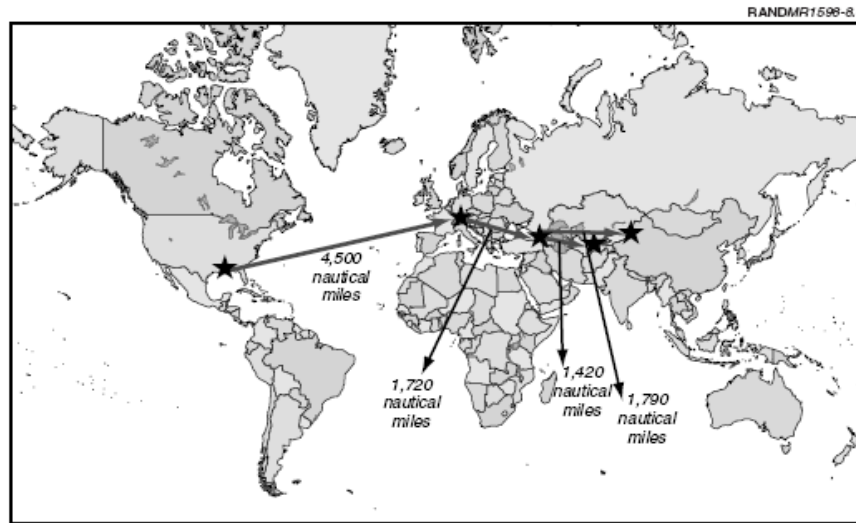
Fuente: Olikier, O., and Szayna Thomas S. (2003): *Faultiness of Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Implications for the US Army*, Santa Monica RAND Corporation , p. 255.

- The Forward Operation Site (FOS) only needs a small permanent presence of support or contractor personnel¹⁷ and the Cooperative Security Location (CSL) is a host-nation facility with little or no permanent U.S. personnel presence¹⁸. Using these new military facilities the U.S. will not provoke suspiciousness in Moscow.

- The Caucasus is very well situated for the dual containment policy (Iran, Iraq) but also allows controlling countries like Russia and Turkey. Besides, the *Stryker Brigade Combat Team* will permit the American troops to be deployed easily in almost any part of the Globe. The Caucasus is one of the optimal places to deploy this kind of Team turning the region in a very important and strategic back to the United States.

¹⁷ "A FOS is a scalable, "warm" facility that can support sustained operations, but with only a small permanent presence of support or contractor personnel. A FOS will host occasional rotational forces and many contain pre-positioned equipment" Jones, James, "Strategic Theatre Transformation" USMC Commanding, Ramstein, 14 January 2005, www.eucom.mil

¹⁸ "A CSL is a host-nation facility with little or no permanent U.S. personnel presence, which may contain pre-positioned equipment and/or logistical arrangements and serve both for security cooperation activities and contingency access." Jones, James, "Strategic Theatre Transformation" USMC Commanding, Ramstein, 14 January 2005, www.eucom.mil



Fuente: Olikier, O., and Szayna Thomas S. (2003): *Faultiness of Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Implications for the US Army*, Santa Monica RAND Corporation, p. 255.

Iraq: Regarding Iraq all three Caucasian republics are contributing with troops to the stabilization of the Arab country. Georgia is one of the most important American allies in Iraq. Due to the training programmes executed in Georgia by the U.S. Defence Department (GTEP), Tblisi has constantly deployed more than 600 soldiers.

Armenia has a little contingent deployed in Iraq. Although at the beginning Armenia did not want to send troops to the Arab country, the U.S. put pressure on Robert Kocharian and finally the Armenian government decided to send a little military contingent. It was a token gesture to keep on the American cooperation in order not to break the balance with Azerbaijan.

The role of Azerbaijan in Iraq is quite important. The population of Azerbaijan is ethnically Turkic but professes Shiite Islam¹⁹. This particularity is quite useful for the stabilization of Iraq as long as they are Muslims, they are Turkic and they are Shiite. This special condition allows them to be in the Turkic area (in the north) and be the guardian of the holy places for Shiites in Kerbala and Nayaf²⁰.

2. The Caucasus has **closer culture** to the Western World than the Erdogan's Turkey. One of the main problems existing between Turkey and the Western World is the Clash of Civilizations. On the contrary, Georgia and Armenia has a

¹⁹ "The Shi'ism in Azerbaijan is the religion of the majority" Priego, Alberto "The creation of the Azerbaijani identity and its influence on Foreign Policy" *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, Mayo 2005, p. 1.

²⁰ "the Bush Administration is using this particular element to pacify Southern Iraq. The Azerbaijani troops deployed in Iraq are protecting the Shiite holy and historical places, Nayaf and Kerbala" Priego, Alberto "The creation..." *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Christian culture and Azerbaijan is probably the most secularized Muslim country of the World. For these reasons, the relations between the Western World and the Caucasus are easier than those with the Erdogan's Turkey.

In the past 5 years, Turkey has been an example of secularization for most of the Muslim countries. The Kelimalist heritage allowed Turkey to be a member of the Western Community. The U.S. wanted to pay Turkey for its services during the Cold War services. Washington encouraged Ankara to be the hegemonic leader in Eurasia. Nevertheless Turkey was not capable enough to play this role and Ankara gave up several internal issues provoking social and economic problems.

Turkish people started to distrust the Kemalist political parties and the Islamists emerged as a solution. While, the Islamists seemed the solution for some domestic issues they provoked several problems in the international sphere. Ergogan's party has created a schizophrenic foreign policy. Within more than 50 years, Turkey has belonged to NATO but most of the population considers the United States, NATO leader, as the main security threat. Indeed, while they say that Turkey shares the NATO's values they are closer to Muslim countries than to Western allies. That's why the Turkish Parliament did not allow the U.S. troops to invade Iraq from the North.

This schizophrenic foreign and security policy also affects their relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. On one hand Turkey competes with Iran for being the regional leader but on the other hand most of the Turkish population supports Iran in its nuclear ambitions²¹. Even some Turkish official voices, like the former head of the National Security Council, proposed the possibility of establishing a Turco-Persian Alliance based on the following postulates:

- *"A Common religion.*
- *A peaceful past as evinced by the fact that the Turkish-Iranian border has remained unchanged since the 1639 Treaty of Kars-I Sirin*
- *Iran's helping hand in Turkey's fight against the PKK.*
- *Increasing economic cooperation, including a major energy supply line from Iran²²".*

This pseudo-Alliance between Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran is more or less impossible. There are several unsolved problem like the competition for being the regional leader, the Kemalist heritage or the Turkic minority living in Northern Iran.

²¹ "53 per cent support Iran" Bekdil, Burak "Directionless Turkey: Quo Vadis?" *Turkish Policy Quaterly*, Vol. 5, Number 3, p. 52.

²² Bekdil, Burak "Directionless Turkey" *Turkish Daily News*, 12-9-2006. Available at <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=53958>

If Turkey keeps on defending this alignment in its foreign policy the Caucasus, as a region, will replace it as the most important American ally. There is no problem of clashing between the American culture and the Caucasian one. Georgia and Armenia, as I told before, are Christian countries whereas Azerbaijan follows a secularized model, the Kemalist one.

Regarding Georgia, it was one of the most ancient “states” that adopted the Christian religion. Georgia was in the way of the two most powerful Muslim Empires (the Ottomans and Persia). Georgia fought against them for centuries and had no choice but to integrate into the Russian Empire in order to survive. Today Georgia is one of the countries fighting against the spread of the radical Islam. That’s why Georgia supports the War on Terror proposed by the U.S.

Armenia has maintained its religion for centuries. Despite all the problems with the Ottoman Empire, the genocide, the prosecution etc..., Armenia today keeps its religion on. Armenian people consider themselves as the first “state” in adopting the Christian religion. Even they say that the Ark of the Covenant is still buried inside the Ararat Mount which is the most important Armenian National symbol. However, Armenian people do not consider themselves prosecuted by Muslims. They consider that they have a conflict with Turkic peoples. Indeed, Armenia has excellent relations with Iran, Syria, Lebanon etc...in these countries there are important Armenian communities. They shape the Armenian Diaspora.

Traditionally, Turkey has supported Azerbaijan and Iran Armenia in the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh. For this reason it is quite complicated to consider feasible a Turkic-Persian Alliance.

The Azeri nationalism is based on a famous poem that defined what an Azerbaijani is using three words: *Turklashntirmak*, *Islamilashtimak*, *Avrupalashtirmak*. We can translate these three words as: *Turkify*, *Islamicize*, *Europeanize*²³. After more than 80 years of Soviet repression, the religious element got less important for the Azeri Civil Society. That’s why Azerbaijan can be considered the most secularized Muslim country of the World. Today there are two important elements in the Azeri nationalism, Turkey and Europe. The most important pro-western party in Azerbaijan, the Musavat, has these two points as guidelines, Turkic-Kemalist heritage²⁴ and European identity. They had subordinated the Islamic element to the Western one because they fear the Iran influence²⁵.

²³ Shaffer, Brenda (2002): *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*. Washington, D.C., MIT, p. 24.

²⁴ “*The Musavat party preference for a Kemalist policy even if these values are in crisis in Turkey itself*” Priego, Alberto “The creation...” *op. cit.*, p. 6.

²⁵ “*Iran would increase its influence in Azerbaijan at the expense of the Turkish option*” Priego, Alberto “The creation...” *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Let us conclude by saying that cooperation between the U.S. and the Caucasian republics is easier than between U.S. and the Erdogan's Turkey. The Islamization of Turkey, at least, introduces an element of doubt in the Transatlantic Relations.

3. The Caucasian powers are less powerful than Turkey and the U.S. can influence them more it did before in Ankara. The three Caucasian Republics need a big brother, a protector, somebody to help them to survive. Russia is not able to develop this role. For these reason, all the three Caucasian Republics are nearing the U.S, adopting a process of *bandwagoning*. They follow somebody that they consider a leader adopting their goals and their values. They loose some independence in their foreign policy but they obtain other goals like *survival*. That's why they accept to have an asymmetric relation with the United States²⁶.

The United States gets three unconditional allies: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Washington offers them the possibility of *balancing*²⁷ Moscow.

In the case of Georgia it clearly needs a *big brother* to balance Russia. Everybody knows that Georgia has important the territorial problems. Russia is helping the insurgents providing weapons, as well as political and economic support. On its turn, Washington is trying to counterbalance the Russian influence in Georgia with funds, military trainers and international support. Up to the moment Tblisi has a more independent position in the International Community.

Armenia is probably the most complicated case. Armenia suffered the 1915 Genocide although some experts deny it. In my opinion it is proved but this question cannot hijack their foreign policy. The Armenian lobby in the United States is very powerful. They put pressure in favour of the Armenian interests in the World. Up to the moment, the U.S. has not officially recognized the Armenian Genocide, though every year the President of the United States goes to the Armenian Genocide Memorial to pay respect²⁸.

In any case, Armenia wants to maintain a diversified foreign policy so they try to combine the American and Russian influences in order to be more independent. The question is whether Moscow and Washington want to share Armenia.

²⁶ "*the vulnerable state makes asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power and accepts a subordinate role*" " Schweller, Randall L. "Bandwagoning for profit" *International Security*, Vol. 19, No.1, p. 80.

²⁷ "*balancing is driven the desire to avoid losses; bandwagoning by the opportunity for gain*" Schweller, Randall L. "Bandwagoning...*op.cit.*...p. 80.

²⁸ "*On this solemn day of remembrance, Laura and I Express our deepest condolences to the Armenian people*" U.S. Department of State, 26-4-2006.

The case of Azerbaijan is completely different to the aforementioned two. The Azerbaijanis main asset is oil. Although, Azerbaijan tries to maintain a diversified foreign policy, like Armenia, Baku needs to keep Russia out. At the beginning of the 90s, Azerbaijan attracted foreign investment to end the Russian energy control up. The only option they had was the American investment the Azeri Alliance.

All the three cases are examples of *bandwaggoning*. They needed some profits for their loyalty. The United States got a better position in the region to *balance* Russia.

The Caucasian Republics have better strategic situation, a closer culture and less powerful position than Turkey. Taking into account the decline of the Turkish-American relation and the appealing of the three Caucasian Republics let's examine the relation between Washington and Tblisi, Yerevan and Baku.

III. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE THREE CAUCASIAN REPUBLICS

1. Georgia.

Geographically and culturally Georgia is the Caucasian closer country to the Western World (Europe and the U.S.). Georgia is on the border between Europe and Asia, it is a bridge between the Caucasus and Europe, between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea etc... Precisely for this reason, for being a crossroad, Georgia suffers several internal problems, including unsolved conflicts like Abkhazia, Adzharia or South Ossetia.

Georgia is the keypoint of several ambitious projects like the Wider Black Sea or the Greater Middle East. NATO decision to enlarge and transform itself, absorbing countries from former Central and Eastern Europe encourages countries like Georgia to adapt itself to NATO requirements. Besides, the United States is helping Georgia to become one of its most important allies in this new space: the Greater Middle East.

The United States has two ways of cooperation: the bilateral way and the multilateral one. As far as the bilateral cooperation is concerned, Washington started its cooperation with Tblisi several years ago when the Department of Defence created several military training programs like GTEP. Several thousand of Georgian soldiers have been trained thanks to this initiative. The Soviet Union denied Georgia the possibility of attending the military academies for decades creating an anarchic situation in the country. For this reason the GTEP program is creating a serious and trained army in Georgia.

In the multilateral way Georgia is working very hard to become a member of NATO. In 1999, Eduard Shevardnadze stated that Georgia wanted to be a member of the Alliance. Nobody believed him but he would confirm this aspiration three years later in Prague. The new president of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, maintains the same policy towards NATO and will be remembered as the President who got the membership of Georgia into the Alliance. He has signed the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), he is working now in the Intensified Dialogue and which is most important, Saakashvili has got the support of the United States in its way to the membership.

Why does Georgia want to be a member of NATO? Georgia shares all the values of NATO. Georgia is a Christian religion nation²⁹, Georgia believes in democracy and probably it is the only possibility they have to live in peace, dissuading Russia from interfering their internal affairs³⁰.

Georgia is the Caucasian candidate closer to NATO. Georgia's membership in NATO will inevitably help other Caucasian countries in their path to the integration. This would be the case of Azerbaijan but not so much the case of Armenia, because Armenia, at least at the moment, is not interested in being a member of NATO. For this reason Georgia can be considered the most important American bet in the Caucasus.

Concerning the relations between Israel and Georgia the election of Mikhail Saakashvili has entitled an improvement. Eduard Shevardnadze got some deals with Iran in the fields of energy and weapons³¹. Nevertheless, Mikhail Saakashvili has reinforced relations with the United States and with Israel³² in order to be stronger *vis à vis* with Russia. For this reason, Georgia accepted to contribute to the Iraqi operation with troops, playing its asymmetric role assigned by the U.S. Tbilisi adopted a bandwagoning behaviour to assure its survival.

2. Armenia.

²⁹ "A further reason for Georgia's aspiration is the value system on which the nation is based. The Christian religion, which was adopted in ancient times is the basis upon which Georgians identify their cultural, emotional and most importantly model identity with the West" Yakobashvili, Temuri "Georgia's path to NATO" in Asmus, Ronald (2006): *Next Steps...* op. cit., p. 187.

³⁰ "Georgia's membership in NATO will destroy the hegemony of the Russian military in this area" *Idem*, p. 189.

³¹ "Sin embargo, ha habido algunos asuntos que han enturbiado las relaciones entre ambos países. En concreto, me estoy refiriendo a los acuerdos en el campo militar entre Georgia e Irán. En 1994, Shevardnadze comenzó a vender aviones de combate SU-25 a la República Islámica de Irán, algo que no agradaba a Israel" Priego, Alberto "Mikhail Saakashvili en Tel-Aviv" *Safe Democracy Foundation*, November 2006. Available at <http://spanish.safe-democracy.org/2006/11/08/mikhail-saakashvili-en-tel-aviv>

³² "La buena relación se ha cristalizado en una sucesión de visitas oficiales. Por parte de Israel, importantes personalidades como Benjamín Netanyahu, Ariel Sharon (1999) o Silvan Shalom (2004) han visitado Georgia" *Idem*.

Historically, Armenia has been the Russian's closest ally. Armenians have trusted Russia to protect them from Turkey³³. For this reason, Armenia has considered NATO and the Transatlantic Relation as a process mastered by their enemy, Turkey. Nevertheless, the current rapprochement between Russia and Turkey has eroded the Armenian confidence in Moscow.

For this reason, thanks to the important Armenian Diaspora living in the U.S. Yerevan and Washington are solving their misunderstandings. One clear example of this change is the attendance of President Robert Kocharian to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation³⁴ Summit in the summer of 2006³⁵. Even, in June 2006, Armenia hosted the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of this organization³⁶. This Armenian attitude contrasts with others like the maintained by Robert Kocharian during the Istanbul NATO Summit when he decided not to attend it³⁷.

Another indicator of this change is the Armenian relation with NATO. Yerevan has moved from absolute rejection to kind cooperation. Armenia with Russia and Belarus used to be very reluctant to some NATO initiatives such as the PfP or EAPC. By the contrary, today Armenia has a more cooperative attitude towards NATO, signing the Individual Partnership Action Plan³⁸ (IPAP) or participating at the NATO Cooperative Best Effort in 2003³⁹.

Even we have to say that Armenia has sent troops to Kosovo under the direction of the Greek supervision⁴⁰. This is an important step for Armenia in the line of the

³³ "All too often Western observers view Armenia as a country whose close ties to Moscow make it uninterested in Euroatlantic integration and, therefore, also less interested in the kind of strategy this tool calls for" Tadevosyan, Ara "Armenia- Between the Wider Black Sea Region and the Greater Middle East" in Asmus, Ronald (2006): *Next Steps... op. cit.*, p. 157

³⁴ The Black Sea Economic Cooperation is an organization in which Turkey has an important role. The in Istanbul the Summit Declaration and the Bosphorus Statement gave birth to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. More information at <http://www.bsec-organization.org/>

³⁵ "On June 5, Armenian President Robert Kocharian took part in the Summit of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership in Bucharest, and two days later Yerevan hosted the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PA BSEC) Tadevosyan, Ara "Armenia-Between..." in Asmus, Ronald (Ed) (2006): *Next Steps... op. cit.*, p. 157

³⁶ "27th Meeting of BSEC PA finishes in Armenia" *Arka*, 9-7-2006.

³⁷ "President Robert Kocharian will not attend a NATO summit in Istanbul next month" *Armenia Liberty*, 10-5-2004. Available at <http://www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2004/05/4BBE3F2B-6AE0-4A54-8386-7BA79AF0FFF0.ASP>

³⁸ "Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian visited NATO HQ on 16 June to present a proposal for deeper cooperation between his country and NATO, in the form of an Individual Partnership Action Plan" *NATO Topics*, 16-12-2006. Available <http://www.nato.int/issues/ipap/index.html>

³⁹ "NATO Cooperative Best Effort NATO exercise was conducted in Armenia in 2003" www.panarmenian.net. Available at <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=17003>

⁴⁰ *Asbarez*, 14-2-2006. Available at <http://www.asbarez.com/aol/2004/040212.htm>

normalization of its international relations with the United States and NATO⁴¹. Nevertheless, this is not the most important step. The most important decision adopted by Armenia is the cooperation with the U.S. in its mission in Iraq. Armenia has sent a little but significant number of troops to the Arab country⁴². These troops had been trained by American trainers sent to Armenia for this task. Although the Armenian population rejected the sending of Armenian troops to Iraq, Robert Kocharian could not refuse to the American request for being in Iraq. This is an example of the asymmetric relations between Armenia and the U.S. stressed before.

Nevertheless, we cannot say that Armenia is following the Georgian model. Armenia does not conceive the relations with Russia and the U.S. as a zero-sum game. President Kocharian is trying to improve its relations with NATO and the U.S. but he does not want to ruin the strategic relation with Russia.

Armenia wants to have a diversified foreign policy. Robert Kocharian's foreign policy is inspired in Heydar Aliyev's one. The former President of Azerbaijan changed the Pan-Turkic foreign policy for a more diversified one. He did not want to concentrate all his options in Turkey. That's why he started to improve its relations with Russia and Iran. The case of Armenia is quite similar. After the 11-S Kocharian saw that Armenia could have a better position in the region by means of diversifying its foreign policy. The President of Armenia did not want to depend exclusively on Russia but he did not want to end up the strategic relation.

The diversification of the Armenian foreign policy does not mean its integration in NATO. Armenia wants to establish a deep relation with the Alliance and the U.S. For this reason, Armenia signed the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) where we can read that Armenia does not want to be a member of NATO⁴³.

⁴¹ *"The Armenian government's decision to commit troops for the Kosovo mission, reflecting its desire to forge closer ties with the U.S.-dominated alliance, drew no objections from parliament deputies, including those representing the opposition minority"* Armenia Liberty, 12-12-2005. Available at <http://www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2003/12/65AA8086-AAF7-423D-8369-1E12AE887F53.ASP>

⁴² *"Forty-six troops including 30 truck drivers, 10 bomb detonation experts, three doctors and three officers will serve under Polish command in the Shiite city of Karbala and the nearby town of al-Hila"* Martirosyan, Samvel "Armenian Troops deploys to Iraq" EurasiaNet, 21-1-2005. Available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav012105a.shtml>

⁴³ *"In summer 2006, the Defence Ministry of Armenia Publisher the text of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO on its website. The content of the document proves that even if Armenia does not raise the issue of its possible membership in the Alliance today, it wants to meet all the standards applied by the Alliance in the coming seven to eight years"* Tadevosyan, Ara "Armenia-Between the Wider Black Sea Region and the Greater Middle East" in Asmus, Ronald (2006): *Next Steps in forging a Euroatlantic Strategy for the Wider Black Sea*. Brussels, German Marshall Fund of the United States, p. 162.

Another important field where we can see the change in the Armenian foreign policy is relations with Israel. The islamization of Turkey has forced Israel to look for others allies and Armenia might be a good candidate.

Armenia and Israel have several points in common. For instance, both lived under the Ottoman Empire, both have been persecuted and both maintain important Diasporas living abroad. Nevertheless, Armenia and Israel have some problems, some obstacles in their way towards the establishment a firm relation. We can stress the following ones:

1. The lack of recognition of the 1915 Armenian Genocide by Israel. The State of Israel has not recognized it officially although the Hebrew Civil Society is pressing the government to do it.

We have to take into account that Israel will never recognize the Armenian Genocide before the United States. They will wait for the American recognition to do the same.

2. The Armenian relation with Iran has contributed to the misunderstanding between Yerevan and Tel-Aviv. The special relation between Armenia and Iran creates difficulties to the relation between Yerevan and Tel-Aviv. Israel considers that Armenia should not have this relation with Iran, a terrorist supporter State.

For this reason, the Jewish lobby in Washington tries to isolate Armenia favouring Azerbaijan instead of Armenia in several questions like Nagorno-Karabakh, the BTC or the 907 Section of the Freedom Support Act.

3. For this reason, Israel has maintained a strategic relation with Turkey. Thus, taking into account that Turkey and Azerbaijan have a very close foreign policy, Israel has supported Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia for the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh.

Nevertheless, the islamization of Turkey has changed the Alliances in the Middle East. Israel has trusted Turkey for the past forty years and now Tel-Aviv needs to look for new allies in the region. Armenia and Israel now are closer than before. The right-wing Israeli parties want to improve Israeli-Armenian relations. *Our Home is Israel* Party, several members of *Likud* (including Sharansky) and *Meretz Party* (including Liberman, Bayli and Stern) could be in favour of recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

By its own, Israel could be the mediator between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the conflict of Nagorno Karabakh. Turkey, Russia and even France have interest in this conflict. If one day, Iran becomes a normal country, Armenia could play an intermediary role between Tel-Aviv and Tehran.

The improvement of Israeli-Armenian relations will be parallel to the rapprochement between Armenia and the United States. Washington and Tel-Aviv need new allies in the Greater Middle East Region and Armenia has all the requirements.

3. Azerbaijan.

With NATO's eastward expansion and the 11-S terrorist attacks (New York and Pennsylvania) the Caspian Sea region emerged as a vital area for the transatlantic security. The cornerstone of this area should have been Ankara but the spread of radical Islam in Turkey and Erdogan's electoral victory provoked the reconfiguration of the Alliances in the Greater Middle East Region.

In this context, Azerbaijan plays an important role as a functioning state with special characteristics⁴⁴ that makes of Azerbaijan an interesting ally:

- Azerbaijan is the most secularized Muslim state of the World. Azerbaijan is the loyalist follower of the Kemalist model in the Turkic community. Although, Turkey has given the Kemalist model up, Azerbaijan considers itself as a secular state.
- Ethnically, Azerbaijan is a Turkic State but in the field of religion Azeri people follow the Shiite faith. This dual condition turns Azerbaijan into an important trick for the future of the Greater Middle East region. The first example is Iraq where Azerbaijani troops are protecting Turkic population in the North and Shiite population in the South.
- The Azerbaijani coast has the most profitable oil fields of the Caspian Sea. For this reason, the United States and other Western countries developed the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Azerbaijan is a non-OPEC oil supplier with a NATO harbour, Ceyhan. This aspect is extremely important in the diversification energy policy of the United States.

Azerbaijan is located between two of the most powerful states of the region, Russia and Iran. Although, the Aliyevs try to maintain a diversified foreign policy, the United States is developing the greater influence. At the beginning of the 90s, President Elchibey based his foreign policy on the Panturkist theory. There was a **coup** and President Elchibey was replaced by Heydar Aliyev. At the beginning, the new President adopted a more diversified policy though, as I told above, the most important partner was the United States.

⁴⁴ "Today, Azerbaijan has emerged as a functioning state that is able to take on leadership in the region and that is moving towards addressing some of its most pressing daily concerns" Suleymanov, Elin "Azerbaijan: The Wider Black Sea's Caspian Keystone" in Asmus, Ronald (2006): *Next Steps...op. cit.*, pp. 175-176

Azerbaijan has followed the Turkish model of foreign policy based on privileged relations with the United States, Europe and Israel. The relation between Baku and Ankara was very fluent till the emergence of Islamism in Turkey. Erdogan's victory in 2004 and the denial of assistance to the U.S. in the Iraqi invasion ruled out Turkey as an ally and gave a new opportunity to Azerbaijan.

However, Azerbaijan has several problems to solve if Baku wants to become one of the main American allies in the region. The first one and probably the most important is the lack of democracy and respect for human rights. Azerbaijan is the most authoritarian country of the Caucasus. Opposition parties rarely have any option to win the elections and the human rights abuses are quite common. Two years ago, The U.S. *threat* to organize a Colour Revolution in Azerbaijan, the called *Watermelon Revolution*. Nevertheless, the stability in the Caucasus and the problems in Iraq dissuaded the US from organizing any kind of riot. However, Ilham Aliyev got the message and he started a new strategy in the relation with the United States. Thought he is still playing a dangerous game trying to balance the U.S. influence with the Iranian one.

The relations between Israel and Azerbaijan are apparently very fluent. In favour of Azerbaijan we have to say that the government deals with the Jewish Community living in the Caucasian country respectfully. Azeri Jews called Heydar Aliyev Tats which means father and every synagogue has an Aliyev's portrait. Nevertheless, the ambivalent relation with Iran is causing some problems to them. For instance, Israel has an important Embassy in Baku whereas Azerbaijan in exchange does not have one in Tel-Aviv. Azerbaijan does not want to have problems with his Southern neighbour. If Azerbaijan keeps on its rapprochement to Iran, the Caucasian country will have problems soon.

Concluding, for the special characteristics of Azerbaijan the Caucasian country could be one of the most important allies of the U.S. in the Greater Middle East. Nevertheless, it will depend on the direction of its foreign policy. If Aliyev decides to go against the American interests he could find a Revolution promoted by external forces. The right way is to take advantage of its Turkic heritage to occupy the place of Turkey. The first test might be the rapprochement to Turkmenistan after the unexpected death of Niyazov⁴⁵. If Azerbaijan gets to obtain a good position for itself and the U.S., nobody will interfere in its domestic affairs. If Aliyev decides to be closer to Russia and/or Iran we can assist to a sudden change in the government of Azerbaijan in the coming years.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

⁴⁵ Ismailzade, Fariz "Political changes in Turkmenistan open new opportunities for Azerbaijan" *Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 12-1-2007.

Security in the Caucasus is connected among all the three states. The emergence of security problems in Armenia also affects Georgia and Azerbaijan. We can obtain an explanation using the *regional security complex* theory. For this reason, the United States has chosen the whole Southern Caucasus to replace Turkey as key ally in the region.

Nevertheless, it is neither a speedy nor easy process because Turkey has been the main NATO and American ally in the Middle East. For this reason the islamization of Turkey has forced the U.S. to change the balance of power in the region. President Erdogan has created a hostility climate in Turkey against Europe, the United States and Israel. The war in Iraq has been the last step in a process marked by the lack of confidence with Washington, Brussels and Tel-Aviv.

In this context, the region of Southern Caucasus emerged as the most attractive alternative to Turkey due to several reasons I explained before. Washington considers that is easier to deal with smaller and weaker countries, like Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, than stronger countries like Turkey. The main example is the Armenian cooperation in Iraq. Neither the population nor the government wanted to send troops to Iraq. However the American pressure on Armenia got its goals and Yerevan has sent troops to the Arab country.

Indeed the strategic position of Southern Caucasus is better than Turkish one. From Azerbaijan the United States can control Iran easily. From Georgia, Washington can put pressure on Russia and why not, also in Turkey.

All these reasons explain us why the United States, NATO and Europe prefer Southern Caucasus as strategic allies

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