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Rational or reckless? Georgia's zugzwang in the Caucasus

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Although the 2008 Russian-Georgian war was a military defeat for Georgia, it has only reinforced Georgia's westward trajectory. One noteworthy difference from Georgia's pre-war policy is a new regional strategy – the North Caucasus Initiative – that seeks to create a soft power alternative to Russia's military dominance in the region. We suggest that this approach is rational rather than reckless, as some critics have claimed. It represents a carefully calculated strategy that is already benefiting Georgia and from which all concerned parties, including Russia, stand to gain. If the South and North Caucasus were more open and less divided – a direction in which this new initiative appears to point – the Caucasus could become more prosperous and more stable. That would serve Russia's long-term interest by significantly reducing the cost of subsidies to sustain and stabilize the volatile region.

Keywords: North Caucasus Initiative; Georgia; Russia; foreign policy; soft power; asymmetric strategies

Russia achieved a military victory in its 2008 war with Georgia, and also sent a strong signal to all post-Soviet states currently seeking closer ties with the West. Moldova, Ukraine and Azerbaijan were astute students and have adopted a more cautious political course going forward. Rather than causing Georgia to do an about face, however, the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia has only reinforced Georgia's westward trajectory, and has in fact shifted the battle from one over territory using military force to a regional competition using soft power – legislation, media marketing and economic opportunity – to compete for influence on the southern rim of the former Soviet Union.³

The fiery exchange between Georgia and Russia shortly before Russia's presidential elections in March 2012 exemplified this latest regional competition. On February 28, Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili, stated that Georgia was unilaterally and immediately lifting the visa requirement for all Russian citizens. On March 3rd, the Russian foreign ministry stated that Russia was also in favor of lifting the visa requirement for Georgians, provided that Georgia was willing to restore diplomatic ties with Russia, which it terminated after the August 2008 war. Tbilisi responded that Russia should withdraw its military forces from the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and "reciprocate without preconditions" ("Tbilisi to Russia").

Russia certainly won the war of weapons against Georgia, but whether it will win the war of ideas is less certain. Georgia's recent "North Caucasus initiatives" – including a new visa-free policy for residents of the North Caucasus (extended later to all Russians) to encourage travel and trade, providing a forum for discussion of North Caucasus peoples' grievances, such as the mass killings of Circassians at the hands of Russia's Tsar Alexander

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II and his predecessors, contemporary political violence in the region and programs designed to encourage more contact between the cultural and scientific communities of the North Caucasus and Georgia – have put Russia in an uncomfortable position.⁴ If successful, these initiatives will allow Tbilisi to establish an alternative to Moscow's center of gravity in the Caucasus. The more crude resistance Russia displays to this policy, the more Georgia benefits, which makes the strategy particularly effective. In effect, Georgia has put Russia in a *Zugzwang* – a position where it is at a disadvantage because it has to make a move when it would prefer to pass, since any action, even reinstating direct elections of republic heads, involves making a more or less significant concession.

The North Caucasus has been a thorn in Russia's side and a drain on its wallet. Many Russians have been flirting with the idea of abandoning the North Caucasus entirely.⁵ Russia could instead preserve its territorial hold on the region and claim an increasingly elusive victory by slowly reducing its own level of repression, thus facilitating Georgia's initiatives to create a more open Caucasus and also reducing frustrations in the region that feed the insurgency.

Democratization in the North and South Caucasus has been virtually non-existent in all but one place – Georgia, which is led by a Western-educated and democratically oriented elite, supported by the United States. The Rose Revolution of 2003 brought to power an energetic leader, Mikheil Saakashvili, and heralded drastic reforms to the country's political and economic systems, which have both admirers and critics (see Wheatley; Fairbanks; Bunce and Wolchik; Beissinger; Radnitz; Hale; George; Way; Siroky and Aprasidze). Georgian democracy is young, to be certain, and authoritarian backsliding remains a distinct possibility.⁶ Since its war with Russia in August 2008, Georgia has continued to liberalize its economy, to integrate into Western military and political structures, and to democratize its political system – possibly in that ranked order of priority. Realizing that it will need more allies in a Russian-dominated region of autocracies, Georgia's new initiatives have added a fourth component, focused less on distant allies and more on regional ones. These efforts are already bearing fruit. Even the North Caucasus volunteer combatants that fought against Georgia in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992–1993 now increasingly hail Georgia's regional policies and contrast them to Moscow's heavy-handed approach in the North Caucasus.⁷ Georgian flags are waved in parts of the North Caucasus where Georgia has long been considered an enemy. Even Moscow has begun to notice Georgia as a country with its own regional policy in the Caucasus. So what's so special about this New North Caucasus Initiative?

The new North Caucasus initiative

Georgia's "regional reset" to increase political openness, transparency and trade with its neighbors, especially in the North Caucasus, has clearly satisfied the demand for an alternative to Moscow's approach. The "reset" picked up speed in October 2010, when the Georgian government unilaterally lifted the visa requirement for seven non-Russian republics of the North Caucasus, allowing several million inhabitants of the North Caucasian republics to travel to Georgia without visas, including residents of Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea. Previously, North Caucasians had to travel via Moscow, or through a third country, in order to receive a visa to Georgia. In the Caucasus, where borders have become increasingly rigid due to the proliferation of conflicts over the past two decades, this new policy represents nothing less than a quiet revolution.

It is connecting divided households, increasing interactions and encouraging trade between the North and South Caucasus, while simultaneously serving to establish Tbilisi as the most business-friendly hub in the region.⁸ Students and scholars from the North Caucasus have found a university system in Georgia that is rapidly reforming and developing important centers of research and teaching about the Caucasus, including the new International School for Caucasus Studies at Ilia State University. This program has already enrolled many students from the North Caucasus, and has hosted several international conferences on issues that are highly salient in both academic and political circles in the North Caucasus.

Although this puts Russia in an uncomfortable position, pitting unity in the Caucasus against Russia's pervasive influence in the region, Georgia is also feeling the squeeze. Its survival as a democratic state in this Russia-dominated region depends in part on its ability to meet the demand for greater openness among its immediate neighbors. The number of visitors from the North Caucasus to Georgia has dramatically increased from virtually zero to hundreds daily (Dvali). After lifting visa requirement for all Russian citizens, the number of visitors is expected to increase even more. Interestingly, Georgians are not allowed to cross into Russia via the same land border, which may further reinforce the shifting center of gravity for entrepreneurs, market liberals and democrats toward Tbilisi and away from Russia.⁹

Democratization from the bottom up?

Ten years after the disintegration of the USSR, Michael McFaul, a prominent American scholar (and now U.S. Ambassador to Russia) provided a blueprint for democratization in the region: "A consolidated democracy in Russia would destabilize the dictatorship in Belarus, undermine autocratic forces in Ukraine, and help to ensure the consolidation of Baltic democracy. A democratic Russia might also promote democracy in the Caucasus, and eventually even in Central Asia" (McFaul 91). Ten years later, a "consolidated democracy in Russia" has not materialized. Despite Russia's unquestionable political and economic weight in the region, smaller countries, such as Georgia, may end up becoming leading players in the region's eventual democratization, resulting in democratic change from the "bottom-up".

As the recent parliamentary elections in the Russian-bankrolled region of South Ossetia showcased, small players may not merely bandwagon with the strong. With an estimated population of 40,000 and total dependence on Moscow, South Ossetia overwhelmingly voted *against* the Kremlin's candidate on November 27, 2011. Moreover, voters took to the streets to protest when the current authorities sought to challenge the voting results. Even a conspicuous promotional meeting with president Medvedev one week prior to the elections did not help the Kremlin's candidate secure an electoral victory. Popular protest in South Ossetia became possible, in part, because of the international community's sudden interest in Russian protectorates following its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

According to the Carnegie expert on the Caucasus, Alexei Malashenko, "Why should we be worse off than Ossetians?" was the question that hovered over the Russian parliamentary elections in December 2011, which resulted in a surprise setback for the ruling United Russia party that narrowly missed receiving even 50% and lost a constitutional majority in the parliament (Malashenko). After the elections, tens of thousands of Muscovites took to streets to protest against what they saw as a rigged vote in the parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011. Unlike small groups of protesters that are regularly dispersed and detained by the police in Moscow, the Kremlin did not venture to crack

down on crowds numbering over 100,000 people, according to some reports (Barry and Schwirtz). If tiny South Ossetia had some impact on people in Russia, which anecdotal evidence would seem to suggest, then Georgia could have even more potential to do so, especially in the North Caucasus, but also in the South Caucasus where democratization has been spotty.

In his speech to the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2010, Georgia's flamboyant president, Mikhail Saakashvili, unveiled his grand vision for "a free, stable and united Caucasus" ("Saakashvili Speaks of 'United Caucasus'"). He called on Russia to be part of this "ongoing transformation" rather than to feel threatened by it. The vice-speaker of the Russian Federation Council, Aleksandr Torshin, responded by blasting Georgia for lifting visas for the North Caucasians, saying that it was an attempt to link up with North Caucasian insurgents. "The Georgian government must be really short of messengers, and so it needed to open as many holes as possible in its border that the suppliers of cash, explosives and arms can scurry back and forth from Russia to Georgia, while some go there [to Georgia] from the North Caucasus to lick their wounds," Torshin said, suggesting that Georgia would become a sanctuary for insurgents, rather than a beacon of democracy.¹⁰ On August 12, 2011, the Russian National Antiterrorist Committee explicitly accused Georgia of harboring and abetting terrorists in the North Caucasus ("Russia Accuses Georgia").

Soon thereafter, the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi was attacked. Several months later, in a suspicious sequence of events, the *Washington Times*, citing sources in the U.S. government, reported that Russian security services might have been behind the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia (Lake). If the American and Georgian intelligence services had not found out that Russian security services were the likely source of these attacks, it might have suggested that the new North Caucasus initiative was indeed allowing terrorist violence to spread from the North Caucasus to the South. Instead, the conclusion that both the Americans and Georgians seem to have drawn is that Russia feels profoundly threatened by a policy of openness in the Caucasus.

Violence and the North Caucasus

The astonishing and menacing spread of violence across the North Caucasus, and to an extent in Moscow, is a phenomenon that has now begun to garner more attention at the highest levels in the United States. On May 26, 2011, Secretary of State Clinton designated the North Caucasus-based Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz) as a terrorist organization.¹¹ To show that it is serious, the U.S. also announced a \$5 million USD bounty for the Caucasus Emirate leader, Doku Umarov ("Rewards for Justice").

Last year alone, 750 people were killed and over 600 received injuries in the insurgency-related violent attacks in the North Caucasus and Moscow.¹² In relative terms, the North Caucasus in fact suffered more casualties in 2011 than Afghanistan.¹³ Russia's capital city has also been attacked. In March 2010, a double suicide attack in the Moscow metro left 40 people dead. In January 2011, a suicide bomber from the North Caucasus attacked Moscow's international Domodedovo airport, killing 37 people. In 2011, Moscow added the entire Kabardino-Balkaria region, populated by Circassians (also known as Kabardians, Cherkess, Adygs), to its list of most volatile territories.

Moscow's strategy to reduce violence in and from the North Caucasus has three components: increase administrative and economic control, give law enforcement agencies a free hand to suppress dissenters, and prop up local regimes with disposable cash (Taylor).¹⁴ Human rights organizations, such as the Moscow-based Memorial Center,

have documented extensive human rights violations across the region, including extralegal killings, kidnappings, and torture. Most of these cases have strong signs of Russian law enforcement involvement.¹⁵

No political reforms were on Moscow's to-do list until recently. Previous promises of speedy economic development in the North Caucasus as a means to overcome high unemployment rates that presumably fuel the insurgency have proven empty. The protests in Moscow in December 2011 have produced some new promises, especially a promise by the outgoing President Medvedev to amend Russia's electoral law and allow Russian regions, including the North Caucasian republics, to elect regional governors in direct elections (Ivanov and Solovyov). For the past eight years, the North Caucasians had no legal way to change their regional governments, as the direct elections of governors were abolished throughout the country in 2004. As democratic participation decreased, people in this remote corner of Russia have become increasingly alienated from their government and, it seems, more prone to engage in rebellion and join the insurgency. According to unofficial sources, the turnout in the latest local parliamentary elections in Dagestan in the spring 2011 was less than 10% (Magomedov). Anecdotal evidence provided by people from Kabardino-Balkaria suggests that, in the Russian parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011, voter turnout was 5–10%.¹⁶

In September 2010, the Russian government unveiled a long-term plan for socio-economic development of the North Caucasus. Russia plans to focus heavily on the tourism sector in the region, promising to deliver 400,000 new jobs and cut the unemployment rate. However, in February 2011, following attacks in Kabardino-Balkaria, one of the most likely tourist destinations in the North Caucasus, the region was officially designated as off-limits to all tourists for almost the entire year, which runs against Russia's stated goals.¹⁷

Russia has banned non-CIS citizens from crossing the Great Caucasus mountain range from Georgia or Azerbaijan into Russia. Westerners invariably encounter hurdles in obtaining business visas to visit the North Caucasus. The FSB, Russia's security service, has officially designated many areas in the North Caucasus, including some major cities, as "borderlands" that require special permission to visit. Moscow's intentional isolation of the North Caucasus from the outside world has not served Moscow well, but it has provided Georgia with an opportunity and has created a receptive audience for its North Caucasus initiative.¹⁸

Georgia's motives

Given the economic and military punishment that Russia is willing and capable of inflicting, many analysts wonder why Georgia does not reverse course to avoid antagonizing Russia (Markedonov). What are its motives? Georgia's policy has been accused of being reckless but we would submit that Georgia's overtures to its neighbors, especially to the North Caucasus, are far from irrational; instead, they form a carefully calculated strategy to increase Georgia's bargaining leverage in its relationship with Russia. In time, Georgia may trade its support to the North Caucasus *quid pro quo* for Russia's cooperation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. If this were to work, Georgia would have achieved its political ends through non-military means and with minimal economic cost. If not, Georgia can also benefit from Moscow's attention and resources being partly diverted away from Abkhazia and South Ossetia and toward the North Caucasus. This may compel Moscow to take Georgia's political interests more seriously. While Russia's initial reaction to Georgia's initiatives was defensive and somewhat hostile, it

has lately tried to reciprocate, acknowledging that the regional competition has shifted from hard to soft power politics. For Georgia, either scenario is probably better than the *status quo*. Some in the North Caucasus are of course wary of Georgia's intentions, given its past behavior in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but the new policy would not work if it did not somehow meet a demand and serve their interests. The new visa-free travel regime stands in stark contrast to additional restrictions that Russia is imposing on the internal movement of North Caucasians *within* Russia. "North Caucasian" often implies additional obstacles from governmental authorities in Russia, such as routine, indiscriminate document checking of the region's residents by the police, but now it means visa-free travel to Georgia. As a Dagestani historian, Khadzhi-Murad Donogo, said with some irony: "For the first time, the stamp in our passports [reflecting the North Caucasus as a person's dwelling place] serves us well" (Donogo). Russia may now be forced to compete with Georgia in terms of providing equal treatment for all of its citizens, including the North Caucasians. Georgia's North Caucasus initiative is unlikely to worsen an already dire situation in the region, where kidnappings, the abuse of power by the police and extralegal killings by government agents have been routine for the past two decades.¹⁹

Georgia has historically had close relations with all ethnicities across the Caucasus and there is a pervasive belief among Georgians that they are ethnically and linguistically related to North Caucasians (Nodia).²⁰ In this view, which admittedly overlooks many of the conflicts that pitted Georgia *against* peoples from the North and South Caucasus, Georgia is the champion of the Caucasus cause against what is viewed by some as "Russian imperialism". Saakashvili argued at the United Nations in September 2010 that: "We might belong to different states and live on different sides of the mountains, but in terms of human and cultural space, there is no North and South Caucasus; there is one Caucasus, that belongs to Europe and will one day join the European family of free nations, following the Georgian path" ("Saakashvili Speaks of 'United Caucasus'").

Whatever one might say of Saakashvili's forecasting of a united Caucasus, Georgia's advances toward the North Caucasus have left Russia flustered and stymied. The new Georgian policy of openness has potential to catch on and change affairs in the North Caucasus in a less violent direction. This would benefit all interested parties and, if successful, would probably contribute to improved relations between the West and Russia, which continues to scapegoat the United States as the "discreet sponsor" of the insurgency in the North Caucasus rather than acknowledge that its own heavy-handed policies have enabled the growth of a robust and largely home-grown insurgency.

Russia's response

Russia's response has been to dismiss Georgia's new policies as "provocative," "hypocritical" and "dangerous for regional stability".²¹ Yet once Georgia abolished the visa requirement for all Russian citizens in February 2012, Moscow began to reciprocate. President Dmitry Medvedev previously avowed that Russia would not negotiate with Georgia until Mikhail Saakashvili is out of power ("Medvedev: Saakashvili dlya Rossii"). It is unlikely, however, that a leadership change will alter the basic conflict of interests between Tbilisi and Moscow. The Soviet-era bureaucrat Eduard Shevardnadze, once minister of foreign affairs in the last years of the USSR and Georgia's president from 1995–2003, spoke a language that Moscow could understand, yet Russian–Georgian relations were seldom warm during his administration. Georgia's openness to the North Caucasus has sent a strong signal to aggrieved groups that they have credible alternatives to Russia

for business, education and simply to voice grievances openly. In 2010, representatives of the Dagestani ethnic group, the Didoi, addressed the Georgian government to receive the “Didoi people into the jurisdiction of Georgia,” citing “cultural oppression” by the Russian government as the primary reason (“Ciklauri”). The group’s leader died soon afterward under suspicious circumstances in Dagestan (“Glava dagestanskikh”).

Comparing Georgia to strict western standards, Georgia falls short. In the Caucasus and the former Soviet space, however, Georgia stands out. A strong indicator of Georgia’s leadership recognition is the already large number of students from across the Caucasus that now study in public and private Georgian universities. If people in the North Caucasus begin to look toward Tbilisi for trade, investment, vacation, and education, the effects of Georgia’s policy might compel Moscow to reevaluate its approach.

The muted reaction of the North Caucasus republic-level leaders to the Georgian announcement on lifting visas in October 2010 was itself a very loud signal. Only the then president of Karachay-Cherkessia, Boris Ebzeev, expressed his doubts about Georgia’s sincerity in opening itself to the North Caucasus (“Ebzeev”).²² Even the leaders of the Georgian breakaway territories – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – were largely silent following the announcement of a free-visa regime for the North Caucasians. The subdued reaction could be interpreted as a vocal endorsement for Georgia’s initiatives from the Kremlin’s loyalists in the North Caucasus.

Whereas Russia has moved rapidly from a federation to a unitary state, abolishing governors’ elections in 2004 and issuing more and more restrictions on regional activism, Tbilisi’s policy toward the North Caucasus represents a different direction. To the extent that more freedom and access to information will help prevent more radicalism in this region, Georgia’s actions may actually be more in line with Russia’s national interests than Moscow is willing or ready to admit, especially since the messenger, Mr. Saakashvili, is so detested in the Kremlin. To promote its new policy, Georgia has established a Russian-language TV channel broadcasting news to the North Caucasus that provides a Tbilisi-centric alternative to standard Russian accounts. If Georgia manages to establish itself as an alternative political, economic and cultural center in the Caucasus through its soft power emphasis on economic and political freedom, it is likely to attract human capital from across the Caucasus.

Although most officials and analysts in Russia perceive Georgia’s policy as a threat, and few Western analysts have endorsed it, we believe that it is an unrecognized opportunity. Moscow recently launched an open-ended dialogue with elites from Circassian national minority groups in the North Caucasus – the first time Moscow has made such a conciliatory move toward minorities in the North Caucasus, and this may indicate that Georgia’s policy of openness is beginning to bear some small fruit, although it is unlikely that anyone in the Kremlin would admit it.

Recognizing the Circassian genocide and 2014 Winter Olympics

On May 20, 2011, the Georgian parliament unanimously recognized the “genocide of the Circassian people” at the hands of the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century (“Georgia Recognizes ‘Circassian Genocide’”). The Circassian people – Kabardins, Cherkess and Adygs – occupied the western part of the North Caucasus, including the Black Sea coastal area. As the Russian empire advanced into the region in the second half of the 19th century, they killed or expelled the majority of the indigenous population to the Ottoman Empire. Currently it is estimated that 80–90% of Circassians live outside of their historical homeland in the North Caucasus, predominantly in modern Turkey, but also in

the Middle Eastern countries, Europe and the U.S.²³ This historical tragedy was revived when Russia successfully won the right to hold 2014 Winter Olympics in the Black Sea coastal town of Sochi, the same town where Imperial Russian troops paraded after their military victory in 1864.²⁴ Georgia's recognition of the Circassians' suffering has a clear foreign policy dimension which, although it may involve some negative externalities for the peoples of the North Caucasus, is largely perceived in the Caucasus as adding to its clout as "defender of the small North Caucasian peoples." Even the most pro-Russian Circassian activists in the North Caucasus supported Georgia's decision ("Kak cherkesy vosprinyali reshenie").

Why we have nothing to fear

Although its critics include both Hillary Clinton and Vladimir Putin, Georgia's new North Caucasus initiative is likely to have benefits far greater than its modest cost. In the short term, it may encourage commercial, political and cultural interaction between the North and South Caucasus. In the longer term, it has the potential to alter the regional balance of power in the Caucasus, encourage a democratic transformation of the region and reduce the nearly daily incidence of insurgent violence in some areas. Georgia's new North Caucasus initiative suggests that smaller regional actors can use soft power effectively even under highly asymmetric arrangements to influence the internal affairs of regional hegemon, such as Russia.

If the South and North Caucasus were more open and less divided – Georgia's policy clearly points in this direction – the Caucasus could become more stable, more democratic and more prosperous. These developments would benefit not only the friends of an open society in the North and South Caucasus, but would also serve the strategic interests of both the US and Russia. If Georgia and Russia compete with each other in the Caucasus for soft power, this would also clearly benefit the war-weary peoples of the North Caucasus. While any observer will recognize the vast power disparity between Russian and Georgian power, which can hardly be ignored in policymaking, there is also a need to recognize that compared to an overtly revanchist stance or degenerating surrender – the common ways states have historically responded to the loss of territory – Georgia's regional policy represents a rational and bold path forward.

Notes

1. David S. Siroky is Assistant Professor of Political Science in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University, and faculty affiliate of the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict as well as the Melikian Center for Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science and M.A. in Economics from Duke University and was then Henry Hart Rice Fellow at Yale University before arriving at ASU. His work has appeared in *Comparative Sociology, Defence and Peace Economics, Democratization, Ethnopolitics, and Statistics Surveys*.
2. Valeriy Dzutsev is a doctoral student in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University, and North Caucasus analyst for the Jamestown Foundation. He previously worked for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting as director for the North Caucasus, based in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia.
3. On soft power, see Nye.
4. The Circassian people occupied the entire western part of the North Caucasus, up to the Black Sea, before the Russian conquest of the region in the nineteenth century. Most of the Circassian population was killed by the Russian army or deported to the Ottoman Empire. The majority of the Circassians now reside in Turkey and in the Middle East (see Bullough).
5. On July 5, 2011 at a meeting with president of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, Emil Pain, a Russian academic specializing in the study of ethnicities, cited undisclosed polls showing for the first

- time that the majority of Russians, over 60%, favor cutting off the North Caucasus from the Russian Federation (“Zasedanie Soveta”). A number of online polls also showed that Russia’s population strongly favors leaving the North Caucasus, e.g. the popular Novy Region website’s audience indicated 73% support for the withdrawal from Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan. In Russian (“Kak vy otnosites k idee”).
6. See the extensive report on Georgia by Thomas de Waal; also Levitsky and Way.
 7. Interview with the former Kabardin field commander Ibragim Yaganov. *Live Journal*. 27 Dec. 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2012. <<http://avrom-caucasus.livejournal.com/143413.html>>.
 8. See Transparency International report on Georgia (*Transparency International*)
 9. Having renounced membership in the Russia-led CIS club, Georgian citizens lost their right to enter Russia by land, while both Armenians and Azeris have retained that right.
 10. Russian news agency Interfax, October 12, 2010, (in Russian). On rebel sanctuaries see Saleyhan.
 11. Under Presidential Executive Order 13224.
 12. Open source monitoring results of the specialized website of *Caucasian Knot*. 12 Jan. 2012. On violence between rebels and government forces in the North Caucasus, in Chechnya specifically, see Lyall.
 13. Comparing the situation in the North Caucasus to Afghanistan, the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* noted the casualty statistics for 2011. Over 700 people were killed in the North Caucasus in 2011, including government forces, insurgents and civilians, January 12. In Afghanistan, the total number of fatalities in 2011 was 2,500, including US-led coalition forces. The paper concludes that the difference between the officially “peaceful” North Caucasus and Afghanistan, which is in state of war, is not large (“Region, kotoryi nelzya poterjyat”). However, if we compare Afghanistan’s population of 30 million to the North Caucasus’s population of 6.5 million, it appears that, in relative terms, the “peaceful” North Caucasus suffered proportionally more casualties in 2011 than Afghanistan (Dzutsev).
 14. On the conditions under which the ruling political elites of a state target minorities with assimilationist policies instead of granting them minority rights or excluding them, see Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*. Mylonas’s theory would have predicted that Georgia’s policy would lead to more exclusionary policies pursued by Russia toward the ethnic groups that enjoy external support.
 15. On February 18, head of Ingushetia Yunus-Bek Yevkurov officially admitted that the security services are involved in kidnappings of civilians in this small, volatile republic in the North Caucasus. Rights activists had pointed to this phenomenon for years. *Lenta.ru*. 18 Feb. 2012. Web. 18 Feb. 2012. <<http://lenta.ru/news/2012/02/18/suspect/>>.
 16. Yaganov, Ibragim. Interview with Avraam Shmulevich (Yaganov).
 17. Prielbrusye resorts are closed to tourists because of the counterterrorism operation regime introduction in Kabardino-Balkaria (“Kurorty Prielbrusya zakryty dlya turistov”).
 18. Russia unilaterally introduced a visa regime with Georgia as early as 2000, well before Mikheil Saakashvili came to power, whereas South Ossetia and Abkhazia enjoyed visa-free entry into Russia, regardless of whether they held Russian citizenship.
 19. On how minority empowerment from abroad can have negative and arguably unintended consequences, see Jenne; Mylonas “External Involvement”.
 20. On the role of ethnic ties in foreign policy, see Saideman.
 21. Russian news agency *Interfax*, 12 Oct. 2010. <www.interfax.ru>.
 22. Karachay-Cherkessia is dominated by the Turkic-speaking Karachays, traditional rivals of the Circassians. Since it is farthest away from Georgia, it also has relatively less to gain economically.
 23. Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization puts the figure of the Circassians, living outside of their homeland at 3.5 million (*Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*). Circassian activist websites assert that “nearly 90%” of the Circassians currently live outside of their homeland, or approximately 6 million people in absolute terms. Reportedly, 1.5 million Circassians were slaughtered during the Russian army’s conquest of the Caucasus (“14 Reasons for Opposing Sochi 2014”). Official Russian estimates do not fall much behind the Circassian data (see Russian Federation Council).
 24. Circassian activists across the globe set up numerous websites trying to coordinate their actions. One major Circassian diaspora is located in Turkey, but significant diasporas are reported in several Middle Eastern countries, the E.U. and the U.S. See: <http://nosochi2014.com/>

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