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### Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States

Giorgi Gvalia<sup>a</sup>, David Siroky<sup>b</sup>, Bidzina Lebanidze<sup>c</sup> & Zurab Iashvili<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> International School for Caucasus Studies, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

<sup>b</sup> Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona

<sup>c</sup> Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies

<sup>d</sup> Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

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## **Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States**

GIORGI GVALIA, DAVID SIROKY, BIDZINA LEBANIDZE,  
AND ZURAB IASHVILI

*What explains change and continuity in the foreign policy behavior of small states? Given the proliferation of small states over the past century, this topic has received relatively little systematic attention. When researchers do focus on small states, the emphasis has been on external and international factors, and the primary conclusion has been that small states are more likely to bandwagon*

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Giorgi Gvalia is assistant professor of political science and international relations at the International School for Caucasus Studies at Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. His research interests include theories of international relations, foreign policy decision making, and post-Soviet politics.

David Siroky is assistant professor of political science at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. His research has appeared in journals such as *Comparative Sociology*, *Defence and Peace Economics*, *Democratization*, *Ethnopolitics*, *Nationalities Papers*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, and *Statistics Surveys*. His research is focused on ethnic conflict, collective action, democratization, and methodology.

Bidzina Lebanidze is a PhD candidate at the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies. His research interests include EU external relations, post-Soviet states, Russian foreign policy, and the South Caucasus.

Zurab Iashvili is a researcher in the College of Arts and Sciences and a lecturer in political science at Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. His research interests are elite-mass interaction and democratization processes in the post-Soviet space, political theory, and international relations.

David Siroky and Giorgi Gvalia contributed equally to the authorship of this article, and are the article's lead authors.

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*with threatening great powers than to balance against them. In this article, we suggest that state- and individual-level variables can play a greater role in explaining the foreign policy behavior of small states and that small states sometimes choose to balance rather than bandwagon, especially when elite ideology is deeply embedded in formulating foreign policy. We develop this claim in terms of elite ideas about the identity and purpose of the state and examine its plausibility using primary sources and exclusive interviews with the security and foreign policy elite in Georgia. We find that this approach offers a more plausible explanation for Georgia's otherwise puzzling foreign policy behavior than frameworks that focus on the international or regional system. Although Georgia may be the exception that proves the rule, it can advance an understanding of the conditions under which standard explanations of small-state foreign policy behavior may miss their predictive mark and when incorporating the role of elite ideas can provide additional explanatory leverage.*

What explains change and continuity in the foreign policy behavior of small states? Given the proliferation of small states over the past century, it is surprising that this topic has received relatively little systematic attention in international relations scholarship compared to the focus on great powers.<sup>1</sup> The conventional wisdom is that small states bandwagon with threatening great powers rather than balancing against them.<sup>2</sup> In this article, we suggest that this academic perspective on small states is insufficient because it overemphasizes structural and material factors at the expense of elite ideas

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent study of foreign policy in small states, see Fredrik Doeser, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Change in Small States: The Fall of the Danish Footnote Policy," *Cooperation and Conflict* 46, no. 2 (2011): 222.

<sup>2</sup> For the conventional wisdom on the foreign policy behavior of small states, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), 184–85, 195; Stephen M. Walt, *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 21–31; James Rosenau, "Pre-theories and Theories of International Politics," in *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, ed. R. Barry Farrell (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 47–48; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 172–73; Randall L. Schweller, "Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies more Pacific?" *World Politics* 44, no. 2 (January 1992): 253, 264–68; Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 3, 261–62; Robert O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1969): 291–310; Christine Ingebrtsen, Iver Neumann, Sieglind Gstöhl, and Jessica Beyer, eds., *Small States in International Relations* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Peter J. Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets: Industrial Policy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); David Vital, *The Inequality of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

and identities, which constitute the filter through which material and structural threats and opportunities are perceived. Elite ideas, identities, and preferences over social orders, we suggest, play a greater role in explaining the foreign policy behavior of small states than has been generally appreciated. We explore these theoretical claims using evidence from primary sources and interviews to understand the puzzling case of Georgia's balancing behavior against Russia in the face of clear economic costs and real military risks.

This particular case, we submit, falls into the category of least likely cases.<sup>3</sup> It should present an easy case for realist approaches but a hard one for ideational approaches. Because realists argue that ideational factors are even less important when national security (or "high politics") is at stake, ideational variables should exert little influence. In contrast to these expectations, we show that an emphasis on elite ideas, identities, and preferences provides significant leverage in understanding the foreign policy behavior of a critical case for realist approaches.

We focus on two types of elite ideas: (1) ideas about the *identity* of the state and (2) ideas about the *purpose* of the state. We develop the logic and discuss the content of these ideas and then investigate each one's role in explaining Georgia's foreign policy behavior, using primary source materials and interviews with over forty national security and foreign policy elite and experts in Georgia. We find that our approach offers a plausible explanation of otherwise puzzling behavior and provides a better account of the country's foreign policy dynamics than do frameworks that focus primarily on the international or regional balance of economic and military power. In order to increase the external validity of our study, we also examine the case of Azerbaijan's foreign policy behavior, particularly its alliance orientation. Despite similar positions in the regional power structure and comparable secessionist issues in which Russia is deeply involved (Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan and Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia in Georgia), Georgia and Azerbaijan pursue quite distinct alignment portfolios and foreign policy objectives. Although our study of Azerbaijan's foreign policy is not based on the same type of unique data as our study of Georgia's foreign policy, Azerbaijan acts as an ancillary check for our theory and increases external validity.

Whereas Azerbaijan and most of the other small post-Soviet states have pursued a cautious bandwagoning policy toward Russia, post-Soviet Georgia has been consistently edging westward since the "Rose Revolution," despite its contiguity with Russia and thus vulnerability to economic and military threats, to which we return later. In order to understand Georgia's foreign policy, we suggest that it is important to examine its geography,

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the use of most likely and least likely cases in international relations research, see: Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, "Case Study Methods," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 505.

the regional balance of power, and economic considerations, as well as the prevalent and salient elite ideas about the identity and purpose of the state. We develop our argument, unpacking exactly how elite ideas may matter in understanding Georgia's relations with Russia and the West. Elite ideas are arguably less important when high politics are at stake and when power is highly asymmetric, making the case of Georgia even more puzzling from the perspective of structural realism. Compared to Azerbaijan, Georgia is also significantly less energy independent. Prior to 2006, Georgia received 100 percent of its natural gas from Russia. In order to understand why and how a given small state will respond to changes in its external security environment, international relations scholars cannot always safely ignore how the foreign policy elite perceive and interpret external challenges and opportunities. Georgia is one such case. Israel might be a second. Cuba could be a third.

We utilize over forty new and exclusive interviews with Georgia's national security and foreign policy elite and foreign policy experts, conducted in their native language, as well as primary source materials to solicit and scrutinize elite ideas in Georgia. Despite strong economic and military pressures to bandwagon with Russia, especially after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war and the subsequent stationing of Russia's military forces and hardware within striking distance of the capital, Georgia's foreign policy has in fact become increasingly (some might argue aggressively) decoupled from Russia. The solution to this puzzle lies in the Rose Revolution of November 2003, which ushered in a new era for the state's foreign policy.

President Mikhail Saakashvili and his government have established a distinctly Western ideological reorientation that permeates both domestic reforms and foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Domestically, the government has launched ambitious reforms in the country's security, economic, and educational sectors, even firing the entire police force in one day to eradicate corruption.<sup>5</sup> Internationally, Georgia has consistently intensified relations with the United States, NATO, and the EU, while further distancing itself from Russia, its most proximate threat.

Most puzzling from a materialist perspective is that the military defeat in the August 2008 war with Russia and the loss of territory have not substantively affected the trajectory of Georgia's foreign policy. Although adverse changes in the country's external security environment over time have increased the systemic pressures to bandwagon with Russia, Georgia's foreign

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<sup>4</sup> Although Georgia's previous administration also claimed to pursue a pro-Western foreign policy, President Eduard Shevardnadze never pushed Georgia far from Russia's orbit. His behavior was compatible with the conventional wisdom on small states' bandwagoning orientation in regional politics.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Light, "Police Reform in the Republic of Georgia: The Convergence of Domestic and Foreign Policy in an Anti-Corruption Drive," *Policing and Society* (forthcoming, 2013), [http://criminology.utoronto.ca/home/matthew\\_light.html](http://criminology.utoronto.ca/home/matthew_light.html).

policy since the Rose Revolution has exhibited significant continuity in moving further from Russia's sphere of influence and interest.<sup>6</sup> This behavioral pattern is difficult to understand from both conventional realist logic and the perspective of liberal theories focused on economic incentives from trade or Marxist frames derived from economic and resource dependency. All these approaches point toward bandwagoning in the case of Georgia, but the empirics do not comply. To understand the country's foreign policy behavior, we suggest that elite ideas, identities, and preferences over alternative social orders are crucial. We show that in Georgia, just as in other states, elite ideas can influence the direction, speed, and scope of foreign policy just as much as regional balance of power, threat, and dyadic economic ties.

The remainder of this article proceeds in four steps. After briefly reviewing the literature on small states' foreign policy behavior, we develop our argument about how and why elite ideas, identities, and social-order preferences influence foreign policy. In the third section, we examine this argument's applicability to the foreign policy behavior of Georgia using primary source materials and more than forty interviews.<sup>7</sup> In the fourth section, we provide a comparative analysis of Azerbaijan's foreign policy posture. Finally, we conclude with limitations and possible implications that may follow from our study.

## SMALL STATES AND FOREIGN POLICY

Most neo-realist approaches to studying the foreign policy behavior of small states make two crucial assumptions. The first is that the international system is the most relevant level of analysis, and implicit to this is that leaders and their ideas are largely inconsequential.<sup>8</sup> Second, as a result, small states are

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<sup>6</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Sphere of Interest, not Influence," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October 2009): 3–22.

<sup>7</sup> We are keenly aware that inferring a leader's intent from political statements and documents is problematic since leaders issue statements for a variety of audiences and thus often craft their messages strategically. Although this methodological challenge is not uncommon, we address it in three ways. First, we stratify political statements by the intended audience in order to investigate whether statements intended for international and domestic consumption are significantly different. Second, we assess whether a leader's public statements are consistent with subsequent policy adoptions. Third, to validate political statements and gain deeper insight into them, we conducted confidential interviews with Georgia's security and policy elite. We quote these interviewees in one of three ways, in accordance with the interviewee's preference: (1) completely anonymous; (2) anonymous, but identified by office, or (3) identified by name and office. Although these strategies do not fully surmount the inferential challenges, they provide confidence in the robustness of our results and reduce concerns about bias in our evidence.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (1959; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); J. David Singer, "International Conflict: Three Levels of Analysis," *World Politics* 12, no. 3 (April 1960); Barry Buzan, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem," in *International Relations Theory Today*, ed. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

more likely to bandwagon with threatening great powers than to balance against them.<sup>9</sup>

The first assumption is widespread. "The international system," writes one scholar, "leaves them [small states] less room for choice in the decision-making process. Their smaller margin of error and hence greater preoccupation with survival makes the essential interest of weak states less ambiguous. Kenneth Waltz's third image is therefore the most relevant level of analysis."<sup>10</sup> Although domestic pressures often outweigh international ones in the calculations of great power leaders, Jack Snyder also claims that the external environment is more constraining for small states.<sup>11</sup>

The second assumption—that small states are more likely to bandwagon with threatening great powers than to balance against them—is also widespread.<sup>12</sup> "The hypothesis regarding balancing behavior," writes Jack Levy, "refers to the great powers more than to other states. Great powers balance against potential hegemonies, whereas weaker states in the proximity of stronger states do what is necessary to survive . . . bandwagoning with the strong instead of balancing against them."<sup>13</sup> Stephen Walt takes a similar view.<sup>14</sup> "The weaker the state, the more likely it is to bandwagon . . . . Balancing may seem unwise because one's allies may not be able to provide assistance quickly enough . . . . States that are close to a

<sup>9</sup> For a critique of the conventional wisdom surrounding small states' foreign policy behavior, see Miriam Fendius Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in its Own Backyard," *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (April 1995): 171–217.

<sup>10</sup> Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, 3; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 194–95. David Skidmore takes a similar position in "Explaining States Responses to International Change: The Structural Sources of Foreign Policy Rigidity and Change," in *Foreign Policy Restructuring: How Governments Respond to Global Change*, ed. Jerel A. Rosati, Joe D. Hagan, and Martin W. Sampson III (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 50–56. See also Martin W. Sampson, "Exploiting the Seams: External Structure and Libyan Foreign Policy Changes," in *Foreign Policy Restructuring*, 90; Rosenau, "Pre-theories," 47–48.

<sup>11</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myth Of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 20. According to Bo Hultdt, "A small state is more vulnerable and has fewer alternatives than a major power. Bo Hultdt, cited in John Rogers, "The Foreign Policy of Small States: Sweden and the Mosul Crisis, 1924–1925," *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 3 (2007): 354; Jeanne A. K. Hey, "Introducing Small State Foreign Policy," in *Small States in World Politics*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Eric J. Labs, "Do Weak States Bandwagon?" *Security Studies* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 383–416.

<sup>13</sup> Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence," in *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, ed. Philip E Tetlock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 231; cf. Labs, "Do Weak States Bandwagon," 385.

<sup>14</sup> Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*. "Although strong neighbors of strong states are likely to balance, small and weak neighbors of great powers may be more inclined to bandwagon. Because they will be the first victims of expansion, because they lack the capabilities to stand alone, and because a defensive alliance may operate too slowly to do them much good, accommodating a threatening great power may be tempting" (ibid., 31, 25); cf. Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985); Stephen M. Walt, "Revolution and War," *World Politics* 44, no. 3 (April 1992); Stephen M. Walt, "Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia," *International Organization* 42, no. 2 (Spring 1988); Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009).

country with large offensive capabilities (and that are far from potential allies) may be forced to bandwagon because balancing alliances are simply not viable.”<sup>15</sup> The propensity of small states to bandwagon should increase with a threatening power’s proximity and offensive military capabilities and increase also with the distance of the small state’s defensive alliance partners.

How a small state will respond to changes in its external security environment cannot always be deduced from the characteristics of the external environment or its position in the regional balance of power system, however. Testing structural realist predictions on foreign policy behavior in the post-Soviet world, William Wohlforth concludes that “structural realism is of little utility in explaining much of the variation in local responses to Russia . . . . Even when we add conditional variables to the theory to derive more discrete hypotheses, it fails to add much.”<sup>16</sup>

Another group of scholars focuses on economic dependence in trying to understanding the foreign policy behavior of post-Soviet states vis-à-vis Russia. When economic dependence on the hegemon is high, balancing becomes both difficult and costly.<sup>17</sup> Eric Miller finds supportive evidence for this claim in his study of responses to Russia.<sup>18</sup> The argument that economic dependence impacts the foreign policy preferences of states has clear domestic implications—political and economic—as well. If states that are economically dependent on Russia attempt to pursue foreign policies that contradict Russia’s preferences, economic decay may result and, in turn, harm the ruling political elites’ chances of reelection. In the extreme, a politically induced economic crisis could cause a coup or regime change.<sup>19</sup>

Neither of these arguments takes the role of elite ideas, identities, and preferences seriously. In the next section, we first develop our argument in the context of small states and offer a framework that explicitly incorporates elite ideas, identities, and social-order preferences as potential drivers of foreign policy change and continuity in small states. Next we explore the implications of this framework through a detailed case study of Georgia’s

<sup>15</sup> Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 25, 29.

<sup>16</sup> William C. Wohlforth, “Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia,” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. T.V. Paul, James Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 232.

<sup>17</sup> Paul A. Papayoanou, “Economic Interdependence and the Balance of Power,” *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 113–40.

<sup>18</sup> Miller’s study represents one of the first attempts to apply general theories of international relations to the alignment patterns of post-Soviet international politics. Miller’s emphasis on internal threats to regime is derived from Steven David’s theory of “omnibalancing.” See, Steven R. David, *Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Steven R. David, “Explaining Third World Alignment,” *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991). For a similar argument, see Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, “Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962–73,” *International Organization* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 369–95.

<sup>19</sup> Eric A. Miller, *To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and Commonwealth of Independent States* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 22.



foreign policy behavior. We then contrast the case of Georgia with a comparative study of Azerbaijan's foreign policy orientation. In the course of developing this argument, we also show why explanations based on purely materialist and international logics cannot account for the empirical patterns we observe.

## IDEAS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Although studies stressing the role of ideational factors in international relations theory were common during the late 1980s and early 1990s, they have since faded from prominence.<sup>20</sup> The resurgence of ideational approaches was principally a response to the indeterminacy of materialist theories.<sup>21</sup> Robert Keohane and Judith Goldstein, for example, argued that at least some of the empirical anomalies in international relations and foreign policy could be resolved once ideas were taken into account.<sup>22</sup> The same criticism of materialist logics applies today. We therefore build theoretically on these earlier efforts and show empirically that the "anomaly" examined here—Georgia's foreign policy behavior—becomes explicable, as do other cases, if we take the role of elite ideas, identities, and preferences more seriously.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> On the evolution of cultural theories in security studies, see Michael C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 141–70.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992); Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (Summer 1995); Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (June 1994): 384–96; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kapen, eds., *International Relations and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); John S. Duffield, "Political Culture and State Behavior: Why Germany Confounds Neorealism," *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 765–803; Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, eds., *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests and American Trade Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Vendulka Kubalkova, ed., *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Jeffrey W. Legro, "The Plasticity of Identity under Anarchy," *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 1 (March 2009): 37–65.

<sup>22</sup> "Although we concede that the rationalist approach is often a valuable starting point for analysis, we challenge its explanatory power by suggesting the existence of empirical anomalies that can be resolved only when ideas are taken into account." Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> On preferences in international relations, see Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 513–53. On ideas in international relations, see John M. Owen, IV, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mark Haas, *Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics* (Ithaca, NY:

Following Keohane and Goldstein, we define “ideas” as “beliefs held by individuals that affect foreign policy outcomes.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, ideas are independent or intervening variables that explain variation in outcomes.<sup>25</sup> Since the environment in which agents and states act is social as well as material, this social setting provides agents with an understanding of their interests.<sup>26</sup> Foreign policy choices are therefore not only determined by their external security environment, but also by the ideas and identities of relevant foreign policy actors who interpret the external security environment and their material interests.<sup>27</sup> “Whether the elite views its state as a democracy, a great power, an empire, a victim, or a carrier of civilization,” writes one scholar, “is key to its understanding of the state’s interests.”<sup>28</sup>

In an analysis of over two hundred cases of forcible regime promotion over the past five centuries, John Owen shows that a “state’s strategic preferences—the foreign alignments desired by their governments—are a function not only of their material power but also of ideology and relative influence of their elites.”<sup>29</sup> Consistent with this theoretical claim, David Skidmore argues, “As the composition of the ruling coalition changes, foreign policy goals will shift as well.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Mark Haas points to the influence of a state’s foundational principles of political legitimacy on foreign policy preferences.<sup>31</sup> These arguments imply that states placed similarly internationally may nonetheless behave very differently in foreign policy, if their elite hold different ideologies, identities, and preferred social orders.<sup>32</sup> Even

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Cornell University Press, 2005). On social orders, see David Skidmore, ed., *Contested Social Orders and International Politics* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Goldstein and Keohane criticize “reflectivist approaches” toward theorizing about ideas. Their most important concern is related to the anti-empiricist nature of most of the reflectivist works. Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, 6. On the comparison of rationalist and constructivist approaches to ideas, see Nina Tannenwald, “Ideas and Explanation: Advancing the Theoretical Agenda,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 17–20.

<sup>25</sup> On the review and criticism of Keohane and Goldstein’s conceptualization of the role of ideas, see Mark M. Blyth, “Any More Bright Ideas? The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy,” *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 2 (January 1997): 229–50.

<sup>26</sup> Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, “Introduction,” in *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, 2; Christian Thorun, *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Post-Soviet Russia’s Conduct Towards the West* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 22. On the role of ideas in classical realism, see Michael C. Williams, “Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 58, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 633–65.

<sup>27</sup> As Thorun wrote, “Social Constructivism offers solutions at a point where Realism fails: it specifies how a state defines its interests and how a state chooses among foreign policy alternatives.” See Thorun, *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia,” *International Security* 24, no. 3 (Winter 1999–2000): 140.

<sup>29</sup> John M. Owen, IV, “Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* 26, no. 3 (Winter 2001–2): 122–23.

<sup>30</sup> David Skidmore, “Introduction: Bringing Social Orders Back In,” in *Contested Social Orders*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Haas, *Ideological Origins*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Owen, “Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy,” 117–52.

when there is no significant or measureable change in a state's external security environment, balance of power, or economic balance sheet, we may still observe change (or continuity) in a state's foreign policy behavior as a consequence of change (or continuity) in one set of elite ideas for another.<sup>33</sup>

That ideas may matter in interpreting the world says little about whose ideas and which ideas matter most or how those ideas matter in a causal manner. Our focus here on elite ideas follows the argument that, in transitional states such as Georgia, political elites are usually more important and instrumental in defining foreign policy goals and priorities than the general public.<sup>34</sup> Although we do not wholly devalue the role of public opinion, we make the simplifying assumption that elite opinion largely shapes the foreign policy agenda, rather than the reverse, and that public opinion sets the bounds of what is deemed acceptable.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to black-box conceptualization of the state, we concur with Andrew Moravcsik that the state is a representative institution constantly subject to capture and recapture, construction and reconstruction by different societal groups. "No government rests on universal or unbiased political representation; every government represents some individuals and groups more fully than others."<sup>36</sup> In our analysis, we therefore emphasize the importance of ideas held by the coalition of ruling elites whose ideas, identities, and preferences matter most in interpreting the state's interests and best course.<sup>37</sup> In short, we reject the dichotomy between ideas and material interests and focus on how the two interact.<sup>38</sup>

Given the focus on elite ideas, we argue that it is critical to assess the degree of division and consensus among elite ideas on foreign policy. Both balance of power and balance of threat theories assert that states will balance emerging powers and threats, but only when there is a consensus among the policymaking elite.<sup>39</sup> To determine whether agreement exists, the analyst must specify precisely which ideas require consensus. In this article,

<sup>33</sup> Skidmore, "Introduction: Bringing Social Orders Back In," 9.

<sup>34</sup> Public opinion in Georgia is in fact largely constant on foreign policy since the Rose Revolution. An absolute majority of the population supports Western-oriented foreign policy. See Martin Muller, "Public Opinion toward the European Union in Georgia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2011): 64–92.

<sup>35</sup> Regarding this issue, see Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 61. On the role of public versus elite opinion in Georgia, see Muller, "Public Opinion toward the European Union in Georgia."

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 518.

<sup>37</sup> On the issue of relevant foreign policy actors, see: Norrin M. Ripsman, "Neoclassical Realism and Domestic Interest Groups," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffery W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 170–93; Robert D. Putnam, "Studying Elite Political Culture: The Case of 'Ideology,'" *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (1971): 651.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Schweller, "Unanswered Threats," 169–70.

we concentrate on two types of elite ideas: (1) ideas about the *identity* of the state and (2) ideas about the *purpose* of the state.

The first type includes ideas about the preferred social order for the state. It prescribes how the foreign policy leadership understands any given foreign policy challenge or threat and how it defines the state's national interests, thus determining with whom and against whom the state identifies and aligns itself.<sup>40</sup> The second set of elite ideas concerns the state's purpose, the *raison d'état*. We agree with scholars such as Skidmore who suggest that a state's preferences over international alliances are a function not solely of distribution of power, but also of variation in social orders. The core prediction from this alternative framework is that states will ally with other states that possess compatible social orders and balance against states with threatening social orders.<sup>41</sup> The social-orders approach would direct our attention, correctly, we believe, to how the Rose Revolution resulted in a change of the elite and in elite preferences over desirable social orders, which redefined the state's strategic preferences and thus its interpretation of threats and opportunities. The post-revolutionary elite possess fundamentally different ideas and preferences over the desirable social order than their predecessors. Using unique qualitative and quantitative data, we show that Georgia's current foreign policy is a direct result of this ideational transformation.

If states define threats according to the compatibility of social orders and their ideological affinities, then it is hardly surprising that Georgia and Russia see each other as threatening. "The rate at which B becomes A's enemy or friend," according to one scholar, "will vary with its degree of ideological affinity with A."<sup>42</sup> One of the core elements in Russia's strategy toward the post-Soviet space is to hamper democratization processes using economic sanctions, leveraging energy, inspiring social unrest in target countries, and even utilizing military force, thus fostering a set of compliant regimes in Russia's proximity and keeping the West out.<sup>43</sup> When states use force to promote their preferred ideology abroad, "they believe that they are shaping their foreign or domestic environment, or both, in their favor."<sup>44</sup> Haas makes

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<sup>40</sup> On the uses of "self" and "other" in world politics, see, Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: The East in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Self and Other in International Relations Theory: Learning From Russian Civilizational Debates," *International Studies Review* 10 (2008): 762–75; David J. Gilbert, Ainius Lasas, and Jeremy W. Lamoreaux, *Continuity and Change in the Baltic Sea Region: Comparing Foreign Policies* (New York: Rodopi, 2008), 18. On ideas in Russian foreign policy, see Thorun, *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy*, 22. On national interest, see Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interests," *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 3 (1996): 276. Regarding the critique of realist conceptualizations of national interest, see Michael C. Williams, "What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 3 (2005): 307–37.

<sup>41</sup> Skidmore, "Introduction: Bringing Social Orders Back In," 10.

<sup>42</sup> Owen, "Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy," 128.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics*, 3.

a compatible claim when he suggests that “because increasing ideological similarities among states’ leaders will tend to benefit these individuals’ domestic and international interests, decision makers will confront powerful incentives to help their ideological allies come to power in other states. The means available to realize this objective vary significantly, from economic and diplomatic support of one’s international ideological allies all the way to forcible regime exportation by armed combat.”<sup>45</sup>

In addition to explaining why ideas influence foreign policy, we also would like to account for how ideas influence foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> Our framework suggests that ideas can influence foreign policy through three primary causal mechanisms. First, ideas affect elites’ perceptions of external threats.<sup>47</sup> Threat perception is not only a function of relative power, geographic proximity, and offensive military capabilities, but also of the distance between the target state’s and the threatening state’s preferred social orders.<sup>48</sup> Second, since ideas influence an actor’s perception of the external environment, they can determine the framing of options and the interpretation of outcomes.<sup>49</sup> Third, ideas serve as road maps for individuals that narrow the range of available policy options, acting as constraints on the decision-making process, and not only on preferences, since some of the possible policy options will ultimately be rejected because they contradict deeply entrenched ideas. Most important, ideas ensure consistency in decision making, despite observable changes in material conditions.<sup>50</sup> This is one reason that “culture promotes continuity in behavior . . . [because it] promises to be particularly useful for explaining cases of puzzling or unexpected constancy in foreign and security policy.”<sup>51</sup>

Although a state’s external environment is certainly important for understanding its foreign policy, variations in an external threat environment are filtered through elite ideas. States therefore choose international alliances according to the compatibility of their social orders and ideas about state identity and not solely in response to changes in the balance of power. Material factors matter, but ideas often determine how (and how much)

<sup>45</sup> Haas, *Ideological Origins*, 219.

<sup>46</sup> Tannenwald, “Ideas and Explanation,” 13–42.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Owen, “Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy,” 124; Haas, *Ideological Origins*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Skidmore, “Introduction: Bringing Social Orders Back In,” 3–34. Haas makes an analogous argument: “Leaders will judge threats that other states pose to their interests by examining how the latter organize their societies.” Haas, *Ideological Origins*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Tannenwald, “Ideas and Explanation,” 17; Donald A. Sylvan, “Introduction,” in *Problem Representation in Foreign Policy Decision Making*, ed. Donald A. Sylvan and James F. Voss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, 10–12. On this issue, see Desch, “Culture Clash,” 141–70; David J. Elkins and Richard E.B. Simeon, “A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain,” *Comparative Politics* 11, no. 2 (1979): 127–45; Albert S. Yee, “The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies,” *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 69–108; Stephen Saideman, “Thinking Theoretically About Identity and Foreign Policy,” in *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, 171.

<sup>51</sup> Duffield, “Political Culture and State Behavior,” 772.

they matter.<sup>52</sup> We now investigate this argument more closely using primary source evidence on Georgia's foreign policy behavior since 2003.

## ANALYZING GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Despite several changes in the external security environment, Georgia's foreign policy behavior has remained fundamentally unaltered since 2003. Even the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008; the loss of roughly 20 percent of the country's territory; and the recognition of these territories as independent states by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu, and Tuvalu did not bring about any significant modification in Georgia's foreign policy behavior toward Russia and did not persuade Georgia's political elite to alter its Western-oriented foreign policy to accommodate Russian interests. The explanation for this puzzling pattern lies in the influence of elite ideas on foreign policy.

Our analyses of primary source materials and over forty in-depth interviews with the political elite and foreign policy experts (summarized in Tables 1–2) point to three major ideas that Georgian political elite and experts view as incontrovertible.<sup>53</sup> First, Georgia is a European country and no longer a post-Soviet state. Second, the most important post-revolutionary project is modernization. Third, modernization is possible only through integration with the West and with Euro-Atlantic political-military institutions.<sup>54</sup> These three ideas define Georgia's foreign policy orientation and determine the tenor of Georgia's relations with Russia and the West. We unpack these

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<sup>52</sup> Regarding the argument that both material and ideational forces matter jointly in international relations, see Georg Sørensen, "The Case for Combining Material Forces and Ideas in the Study of IR," *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (2008): 5–31.

<sup>53</sup> Overall, we conducted forty-one in-depth interviews: twenty-three with political elites and eighteen with experts. All interviews took place in Georgia between January and May 2011 and were given in the interviewees' native language. For the group of foreign policy elites, we interviewed high-level and mid-level state officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Interior, and the Parliament of Georgia. For the foreign policy expert group, we interviewed foreign policy analysts and scholars. We used a standardized set of fifteen questions and then enumerated how many interviewees invoked the ideas of theoretical interest as well as alternative explanations. We also asked the interviewees to evaluate the importance of each factor they mentioned in discussing Georgia's foreign policy. This enabled us to corroborate and validate the sincerity of the answers given to earlier questions by comparing the attributed importance and the frequency with which the previous factor was invoked.

<sup>54</sup> Eduard Shevardnadze, Saakashvili's predecessor, also claimed to pursue a pro-Western foreign policy, but the "Silver Fox," as he was sometimes called, never veered far from Russia's orbit. Many foreign policy commentators argued that Shevardnadze's foreign policy was aimed primarily at achieving a balance of interests among different regional players. See Stephen Jones, "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy," in *Ideology and National Identity in Post-Communist Foreign Policies*, ed. Rick Fawn (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 103.

TABLE 1 Summary of Respondent Opinions

Idea 1 (European country)			Idea 2 (Modernization)			Idea 3 (NATO-EU Integration)			Balance of power considerations			Economic costs and opportunities		
Political Elites (23)	Experts (18)		Political Elites (23)	Experts (18)		Political Elites (23)	Experts (18)		Political Elites (23)	Experts (18)		Political Elites (23)	Experts (18)	
18 Invoked	13 Invoked		23 Invoked	16 Invoked		23 Invoked	18 Invoked		0 Invoked	4 Invoked		9 Invoked	3 Invoked	
Average 2.66	Average 2		Average 2.9	Average 1.94		Average 2.86	Average 2.8		Average 0	Average 2		Average 2	Average 2.33	
Mode 3	Mode 2		Mode 3	Mode 2		Mode 3	Mode 3		Mode 0	Mode -		Mode -	Mode -	
% Very	% Very		% Very	% Very		% Very	% Very		% Very	% Very		% Very	% Very	
Important	Important		Important	Important		Important	Important		Important	Important		Important	Important	
66.66	23.1		91.3	31.25		86.95	77.77		0	0		0	0	
% Important	% Important		% Important	% Important		% Important	% Important		% Important	% Important		% Important	% Important	
33.33	53.85		8.69	56.25		13.04	22.22		0	100		100	66.66	

n = 41, separated by elites and experts.

**TABLE 2** Ordinal Rank of Factors Explaining Georgia’s Foreign Policy

Political elites ideas and identity	International environment	Public opinion	Domestic politics
Average 3.5 Mode 4	Average 3.05 Mode 3	Average 1.66 Mode 1	Average 1.88 Mode 2

n = 18.

ideas one at a time, show how salient they are in the context of all our interviews and relative to alternative explanations, and discuss how they may influence Georgia’s foreign policy.

The idea that Georgia is a European country (and thus not a post-Soviet state) drives the elite’s understanding of Georgia’s place in the world. “Georgia,” said Saakashvili, “is not just a European country, but one of the most ancient European countries . . . . Our steady course is toward European integration. It is time that Europe finally saw and valued Georgia and took steps toward us.”<sup>55</sup> Although the European idea has long been present in Georgia, its prominence in political discourse has grown since the Rose Revolution, which ushered in the functional equivalent of a Velvet Revolution in the Caucasus to a region not widely renowned for its democratic or pacific credentials. The revolution brought to power a new elite comprised mainly of young and Western-educated politicians, including Columbia University graduate Mikhail Saakashvili.<sup>56</sup>

According to the new leadership, Georgia’s European identity implies that Georgia should strive to build the country in accordance with Western standards and values, including a robust democracy and market economy along with effective state institutions.<sup>57</sup> According to one high-level executive in Georgia’s National Security Council, “The European idea is based on the long-term development of the country. If we are with the West, Georgia

<sup>55</sup> Saakashvili, quoted in Muller, “Public Opinion toward the European Union in Georgia,” 64–65.

<sup>56</sup> Some scholars and commentators have claimed that Saakashvili is actually more of an authoritarian than a liberal democrat. See, for instance, “Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism,” Europe Report no.189 (Moscow: International Crisis Group, 19 December 2007). We agree that Georgia is not a fully consolidated democracy and that it has serious shortcomings, especially since Saakashvili has emphasized the administrative dimension of democracy over the participatory aspects of democracy. What is key for our argument here regarding the influence of ideational factors on foreign policy orientation is that, despite these shortcomings, Georgia is clearly the most democratic country in the region and that its ideas and preferred social order (if not yet fully realized) influence its foreign policy orientation. On the uneven development of Georgia’s democracy, see David S. Siroky and David Aprasidze, “Guns, Roses and Democratization: Huntington’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus,” *Democratization* 18, no. 6 (December 2011): 1227–45; Julie A. George, “Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili’s Georgia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 7 (September 2008): 1151–75.

<sup>57</sup> Even former president Shevardnadze frequently used the European idea in his rhetoric, but there is a clear difference between the approaches of the former and new administrations. Under Shevardnadze, the European idea was understood mostly in historical and geographic terms.



will mature as a state and society.”<sup>58</sup> Vasil Chkoidze, a member of the Parliament of Georgia, regarded the country’s westward movement as inevitable. “Georgia’s Soviet past was an aberration from its normal way towards [the] West . . . . Now as the Soviet Union is gone, Georgia is returning to its natural place.”<sup>59</sup> Table 1 illustrates that this European idea is pervasive among both Georgia’s foreign policy elite and experts. Seventy-eight percent of the elite mentioned the idea, and 67% thought it was “very important.” Among foreign policy experts, 72% mentioned it, 23% thought it was “very important,” and another 54% thought it was “important.”<sup>60</sup>

The European idea is directly related to the second idea: modernization. For Georgia’s elite, foreign policy is the means to a domestic end: a modern state and society. The history of Georgia during the 1990s, when Georgia was one of the most corrupt and failed states, is associated in the elite mind with the “Russian model of development.” One senior-level foreign policymaker explained that although modernization is a domestic objective, it sets limits on the choice of foreign policy partners. In effect, he said, “Bandwagoning with Russia, or more generally a pro-Russian foreign policy, is not an alternative for Georgia, not because we think that Georgia will cease to exist as a state . . . but because bandwagoning with Russia means a return to the Georgia of the 1990s, when it was a failed, corrupt and criminal state, with no hopes of ever becoming a normal, modern and European state . . . ”<sup>61</sup> Independently, the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration made a similar argument:

Since the Rose Revolution, we started to think more seriously about *why* we need foreign policy. If our major aim is to build a modern state and society, we should be looking for strategic partners who will help us in achieving this end. This is the most important cause and objective of our foreign policy. As far as this is our choice, our objective is to distance ourselves from Russia, because the mental model practiced in Russia is modern feudalism. So if we agree to have a pro-Russian foreign policy, there will be no modernization in Georgia, and we will have the same model as in Moscow: corruption and organized crime.<sup>62</sup>

The modernization idea is perhaps the single most pervasive idea among both Georgia’s foreign policy elite and experts. One hundred percent of the elites interviewed mentioned modernization, and 91% thought it was “very

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<sup>58</sup> High-level official, National Security Council of Georgia, confidential interview with authors, 24 May 2011, Tbilisi.

<sup>59</sup> Vasil Chkoidze, Parliament of Georgia, interview with authors, 12 April 2011, Tbilisi.

<sup>60</sup> Responses were given on a three-point scale: “very important,” “important,” and “not important.”

<sup>61</sup> High-level Georgian policymaker, confidential interview with authors, 17 February 2011, Tbilisi.

<sup>62</sup> David Darchiashvili, chairman of the Committee on European Integration, Parliament of Georgia, interview with authors, 12 January 2011, Tbilisi.

important.” Among foreign policy experts, 89% pointed to this idea, 31% thought it was “very important,” and 56% deemed it “important.”

Table 2 shows the results from a comparison of elite ideas and identities with three alternative explanations: (1) public opinion, (2) the international environment, and (3) domestic politics. We asked all our foreign policy experts to rank the importance of these four factors on a four-point scale in which 4 was “very important,” 3 was “important,” 2 was “less important,” and 1 was “unimportant.” The modal ranking placed political elite ideas and identities as first, the international environment as second, domestic politics as third, and public opinion last.

We then asked each respondent to provide some explanation for his ranking. Ninety-five percent of our expert respondents thought that elite ideas and identities were “very important” or “important” in defining Georgia’s foreign policy priorities since the Rose Revolution. Most expert respondents emphasized elites’ Western education, and their socialization in the West. One of our respondents argued, “The fact that [the] majority of our elites cannot speak Russian also affects foreign policy.”<sup>63</sup> This directly relates to the Western education of current political elites compared to the previous Soviet-educated elite. Ghia Nodia, a professor at Ilia State University, also makes this point. “Most of the elite were socialized in the West and, in contrast to previous elites, believe that Georgia can be transformed into a Western state, because they perceive themselves to be part of [the] West.”<sup>64</sup>

Whatever one may think of the objectivity of these elite ideas about Georgia’s identity, belief in both the modernization project and the Western model of development persists at the highest levels. The 2008 war seems only to have reinforced and intensified this belief. As one seasoned observer of Georgia’s foreign policy stated: “The fact is that Georgia did not revisit its foreign policy orientation (and I would argue that it even strengthened it) after the war.”<sup>65</sup>

The new government’s “National Security Concept” and “Foreign Policy Strategy” underscore this fundamental reorientation in Georgia’s foreign policy. The focus on its European credentials and Western orientations has led Georgia to intensify its relations with NATO and the EU; this, in turn, has resulted in a noticeable deterioration in relations with Moscow. In 2006, Russia imposed an economic embargo on Georgia’s major agricultural products, including wine and mineral water. Russia also severed all transportation and postal links.<sup>66</sup> Although the Russian market was critical for Georgia and

<sup>63</sup> Levan Tsutskiridze, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, interview with authors, 15 March 2011, Tbilisi.

<sup>64</sup> Ghia Nodia, professor at Ilia State University, interview with authors, 12 April 2011, Tbilisi.

<sup>65</sup> Archil Gegeshidze, senior fellow at Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, interview with authors, 21 April 2011, Tbilisi.

<sup>66</sup> On how economic dependence determines the bandwagoning behavior of post-Soviet states toward Russia, see Miller, *To Balance or Not to Balance*.

its loss has resulted in an extreme imbalance between imports and exports, the economic embargo and costs have not swayed the political elite to change course.<sup>67</sup>

Even after the 2008 August war, which resulted in the stationing of Russian military forces only twenty-five miles from the capital, Georgia has continued to pursue a Western-oriented foreign policy and seek membership in the EU and NATO. When Saakashvili was invited to the White House on 31 January 2012, President Obama praised Georgia for achieving substantial progress in “building a sovereign and democratic country.”<sup>68</sup> The US president also expressed support for Georgia’s bid for NATO membership and a free trade agreement between the two countries, though the support expressed was more symbolic than concrete.<sup>69</sup>

For the young and Western-educated political elites, the Rose Revolution represented a cultural revolution in the Caucasus. The key idea behind the revolution was to transform “a post-Soviet society into a European one,” to make a clear break from “the old Soviet ways of doing political business,” and to turn as much as possible from the East to the West.<sup>70</sup> As Saakashvili said in his 2007 address to the United Nations, “This is not a new path for Georgia, but rather a return to our European home and our European vocation—which is deeply enshrined in our national identity and history.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> One-fifth of Georgia’s total trade was with Russia in 2005. Since losing access to the Russian market in 2006, Georgia has had a highly unbalanced import-export ratio. In 2003, Georgia’s imports were 2.4 times larger than its exports. In US currency equivalents (measured in thousands), Georgia exported US\$461, 310.0 and imported US\$1,139,039.2. In 2007, after the Russian embargo on Georgian imports, the export and import ratio changed significantly. Georgia imported 4.2 times more than it exported: US\$1,232,110.5 in exports and US\$5,212,158.3 in imports. This imbalance persists in 2012. Alternative markets have not yet compensated for the loss. In other words, since 2006 Western trade has not increased as much as Russian trade has decreased. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the share of foreign trade with the EU and the United States has remained almost constant since losing the Russian market, whereas the share of trade with the non-Russian CIS countries, both in terms of exports and imports, has increased. During the Shevardnadze administration, which pursued a more cautious and much less pro-Western foreign policy, the share of imports from the EU was in fact greater than during the post-revolutionary period. Further, between 2003 and 2006, trade with Russia actually increased. See Department of Statistics, Republic of Georgia, [www.statistics.ge](http://www.statistics.ge).

<sup>68</sup> “Obama Meets Saakashvili,” *Civil.ge*, 31 January 2012, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24399>.

<sup>69</sup> Margaret Talev and Helena Bedwell, “Obama Says U.S. May Explore Georgia Trade Pact as Country Seeks NATO Entry,” *Bloomberg.com*, 30 January 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-30/obama-says-u-s-may-explore-free-trade-agreement-with-georgia.html>. On the origins and durability of single party rule, see Benjamin Smith, “Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule,” *World Politics* 57 (April 2005): 421–51. Though such an agreement would be immensely important for Georgia, it is not yet clear whether, and if so when, the contract will be drafted or what impact it would actually have on Georgia’s import-export balance.

<sup>70</sup> “Ask Georgia’s President,” *BBC News*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/3389757.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/3389757.stm) (accessed 15 March 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Mikheil Saakashvili, remarks at the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 24 September 2009, available at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/GE\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/GE_en.pdf).

Both the original National Security Concept (NSC), adopted in 2005, and the updated 2011 version highlight Euro-Atlantic integration as a fundamental element of Georgia's foreign policy, and each devotes an entire chapter to it.<sup>72</sup> The NSC represents a fundamental shift in Georgia's perception of Russia from being a "complicated but necessary partner" with Eduard Shevardnadze's administration, to an "unpredictable blackmailer," and finally to the "existential enemy" of the Saakashvili administration.<sup>73</sup> "The war did not frighten Georgia," noted a top-level advisor to the prime minister. "Now, Georgia has only one choice: it goes back to 1921, or it continues to pursue a Western-oriented foreign policy."<sup>74</sup> Saakashvili's speeches also emphasize these objectives and strategies. He depicts his government's main task as "turning a failed post-Soviet state into a modern European democracy" by pursuing what he calls "value-based politics and state building."<sup>75</sup> Although one should certainly be skeptical of the empirical value in self-serving statements from politicians, even if conveyed in confidence, these statements are in fact consistent with actual developments on the ground, though not everything is as rosy as Rose revolutionaries would have us believe.

Joining NATO and the EU are valued not only in terms of the security and prosperity they afford, but equally as an external affirmation of Georgia's European identity. "I am Georgian, therefore I am European," noted a senior parliamentarian.<sup>76</sup> According to Saakashvili, "Georgia will be a member of the North Atlantic alliance because that is our natural place. This is not conditioned by pragmatic considerations . . . . The European and Euro-Atlantic model are the major driving forces of social, economic and political transformation in Georgia. If our neighboring country gives us a chance to realize it, Georgia will be the best example of this model."<sup>77</sup> Saakashvili consistently characterizes Georgia as an active contributor to European and Euro-Atlantic security, not merely a consumer. After Britain and the United States, Georgia is the largest per capita contributor of troops to Iraq and

<sup>72</sup> For The National Security Concept of Georgia, 2005, see [http://www.parliament.ge/files/292\\_880\\_927746\\_concept\\_en.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/292_880_927746_concept_en.pdf). For The National Security Concept of Georgia, 2011, see <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> Mikheil Saakashvili, speech, 7 August 2009, available at <http://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2247&i=1..>

<sup>74</sup> Zurab Davitashvili, professor at Tbilisi State University and advisor on foreign affairs to the prime minister of Georgia, interview with authors, 14 March 2011, Tbilisi. The emphasis on 1921 clearly demonstrates the importance of historical analogies in foreign policy. In 1921 the Red Army occupied the first Georgian Republic (1918–1921).

<sup>75</sup> Mikheil Saakashvili, remarks, *Global Leaders: Conversations with Alon Ben-Meir*, New York University, New York, 23 September 2010, available at <http://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=5493&i=1>.

<sup>76</sup> Former chairman of the Georgian parliament, Zurab Zhvania, quoted in Jones, "The Role of Cultural Paradigms," 90.

<sup>77</sup> Mikheil Saakashvili, speech at Paris Institute of Political Science, 9 June 2010, available at <http://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=5262&i=1>

Afghanistan.<sup>78</sup> Material factors are not superfluous to understanding Georgia's foreign policy behavior, but elite ideas and identities are also important because they condition how Georgia interprets and reacts to changes in the structural environment and influence which strategies the elite seek to fulfill, those they see as the *raison d'état*.

The foreign policy elite view integration into Euro-Atlantic structures as an extension of domestic efforts to modernize the Georgian state. The focus at home on police reform is parallel with a focus abroad on revitalizing armed forces. NATO is conceived of as a "political system with the highest democratic values," not just a security institution or military alliance.<sup>79</sup> NATO integration requires domestic reforms associated with the security and defense sectors, which Georgia has already significantly reformed. New, Western-style traffic police in Georgia have transformed one of the most corrupt police forces in the whole former Soviet Union into an exemplary policing unit. "Instead of a Soviet-styled force having almost no public support and deeply marred in corruption some six years ago, now Georgia has a police trusted by 81% of the public," according to the Jamestown Foundation.<sup>80</sup> NATO integration efforts have also resulted in the reformation of Georgia's armed forces, including the participation of Georgian troops in international anti-terrorist operations and peacekeeping missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. These efforts are part of the state's pro-Western and anti-Russian identity. Table 1 illustrates that the "Western integration idea" was prevalent among Georgia's policy elite and its foreign policy experts. One hundred percent of the elites interviewed mentioned it, and 87% responded that it was "very important." Among foreign policy experts, 100% mentioned it, and 78% thought it was "very important."

In addition to these ideas, we recorded (and inquired further if appropriate) each time an interviewee mentioned the role of material factors as an explanation for Georgia's foreign policy behavior, namely the balance of power, threat, and economic considerations. During our interviews, however, very few interviewees invoked these ideas as possible explanations for Georgia's foreign policy behavior. In fact, not a single respondent from the political elite group mentioned balance of power or threat considerations, and only four of the experts noted these factors in their account of Georgia's foreign policy posture. One respondent from the expert group suggested that the country's foreign policy was an attempt to balance Russia regionally

<sup>78</sup> "Georgian Battalion Departs for Afghanistan," *Civil.ge*, 7 April 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22159>.

<sup>79</sup> Mikheil Saakashvili, "Annual Presidential Address to Parliament," 14 February 2006, available at <http://www.president.gov.ge/ge/PressOffice/Documents/AnnualReports?p=4951&i=1> (accessed 15 March 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Giorgi Kvelashvili, "Success of Georgia's Police Reform is a Function of Sovereignty," *Jamestown Foundation Blog*, 21 April 2010, <http://jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com/2010/04/success-of-georgias-police-reform-is.html>.

using soft power by portraying itself as a successful modernizer that has eradicated pervasive corruption.<sup>81</sup>

Although 40% of the political elites mentioned economic considerations, only 16% of the experts thought economic costs and benefits played a key role in Georgia's foreign policy posture. Here, it is important to note that economic considerations were most frequently raised in the context of the modernization idea and "integrating into Western economic structures" by distancing the country from Russia. In other words, the political elite in Georgia see the confrontation with Russia more in ideational terms than in either geo-political or strictly economic terms. As evidence, an absolute majority of our respondents thought that bandwagoning with Russia would also imply adopting the Russian modernization model associated with the failed Georgian state of the 1990s. The interviewees by and large see the ultimate objective of Georgia's foreign policy as the creation and consolidation of a Western-style democracy, even if that requires taking some immediate economic sacrifices and security risks.

## THE 2008 WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR FOREIGN POLICY

Until 2008, few of these developments in Georgia captured international headlines. In August 2008, however, the Russia-Georgia war erupted around the separatist enclave in South Ossetia. NATO countries stood by and uncomfortably jockeyed to react. The war even became an important issue during the US presidential campaign between John McCain and Barack Obama, at least for the month of August. Mikhail Gorbachev wrote an op-ed on the conflict for the *New York Times*, and John McCain wrote one for the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>82</sup> The United States sent humanitarian aid on the warship *USCGC Dallas*, which was intended to signal US naval presence in the Black Sea, even though NATO largely stood by and watched. Despite NATO's quiescence during the Russo-Georgian war, Georgia's president repeated his country's commitment to NATO-led operations and even increased the number of Georgian troops in Afghanistan after the August war. "Even though Georgia is not yet a NATO member," wrote Saakashvili in *The Telegraph*, "and while we know our path to membership may be long—we see ourselves as firmly allied in purpose and values with the transatlantic community. But this

<sup>81</sup> On Georgia's soft-power initiative in the region, see David S. Siroky and Valeriy Dzutsev, "Rational or Reckless? Georgia's Zugzwang in the Caucasus," *Nationalities Papers* (May 2012): 432–51.

<sup>82</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, "Russia Never Wanted a War," *New York Times*, 19 August 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/20/opinion/20gorbachev.html>; John McCain, "We are all Georgians," *Wall Street Journal*, 14 August 2008, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121867081398238807.html>.

cannot just be rhetoric or an empty affiliation. Being part of such a community, even as a small country, we feel obliged and honored to contribute to our common security.”<sup>83</sup>

Georgia became the first country to sign the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with North-Atlantic Alliance in 2004.<sup>84</sup> Two years later, in 2006, after successfully completing the IPAP, Georgia was granted Intensified Dialogue, the final step before receiving the Membership Action Plan (MAP). The crucial moment for Georgia’s NATO aspirations came in spring 2008 at the NATO Summit in Bucharest. Due to internal differences within NATO, the alliance failed to grant Georgia the MAP and instead issued vague promises that Georgia would one day become a NATO member. Even after the short but extremely destructive 2008 war with Russia, Georgia continues to vigorously pursue NATO membership.

Russia has reacted to every step in Georgia’s pursuit of NATO membership. In 2006, after completing the IPAP, Russia imposed economic and energy sanctions on Georgia: it doubled gas prices, was implicated in the suspicious explosion of gas pipelines and electricity lines, and banned Georgian wines and mineral waters from the Russian market.<sup>85</sup> Georgia responded to Russian pressures by pursuing even more reforms, especially in its economic and energy sectors, and was subsequently named the world’s top reformer in “doing business” by the World Bank and International Financial Corporation.<sup>86</sup> The Georgian government called Russia’s doubling of gas prices a “political decision” and interpreted it as the “price for freedom” that the country would have to pay in order to reduce Russian influence.<sup>87</sup> President

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<sup>83</sup> Mikhail Saakashvili, “Why Georgia sends troops to Afghanistan,” *The Telegraph*, 14 December 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/6809222/Why-Georgia-sends-troops-to-Afghanistan.html> (accessed 17 April 2011). Saakashvili’s emphasis on the longevity of NATO accession process clearly demonstrates that in contrast to the previous euphoria that NATO membership was forthcoming, the August war resulted in realization that, for Georgia, the membership process is hard and would not be realized in the short term.

<sup>84</sup> For more information, see <http://www.nato.int/issues/ipap/index.html> (accessed 17 April 2011).

<sup>85</sup> Vladimir Socor, “Russia Bans Georgian, Moldovan Wines and Other Products,” *Jamestown Foundation Blog*, 28 March 2006, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=31523](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31523).

<sup>86</sup> World Bank, “Doing Business: Georgia is this year’s top reformer,” 6 September 2006, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/GEORGIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21042336~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:301746,00.html> (accessed 15 April 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Gela Bezhuashvili and Anatoly Lieven, “Democratic Transformation in Georgia” (Washington, DC: Carnegie Moscow Center, 16 December 2005), available at <http://www.carnegie.ru/events/?fa=842> (accessed 14 April 2011). According to Georgia’s former foreign minister, Gela Bezhuashvili, Russia punished Georgia because of “ideological incompatibility” between the two countries and because of Georgia’s “democratic choice.” Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili, press conference, Georgian Foreign Ministry, 26 December 2006, available at [http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=58&info\\_id=208](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=58&info_id=208) (accessed 14 April 2011).

Saakashvili personally thanked Vladimir Putin “for improving the quality of Georgian wine” by banning the import of it.<sup>88</sup>

In 2008, just prior to the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Russia intensified its engagement with the two separatist enclaves in Georgia—Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After the August war, Russia recognized the two break-away regions as independent states and called on others to follow. The war placed Russia’s military forces within striking distance of all major Georgian ports, yet Georgia’s foreign policy position has since remained constant in its westward orientation.<sup>89</sup> Russia has deployed ballistic missile and air defense systems that cover all major airports and seaports in Georgia. In addition, roughly ten thousand Russian troops are now stationed in Georgia, providing the ability to wage a swift, full-scale military operation against Georgia and to reach the capital in less than hour.<sup>90</sup>

The government of Georgia is clearly aware of the risk of renewed military confrontation with Russia, and the subject receives an entire chapter in Georgia’s revised National Security Concept.<sup>91</sup> Most analysts agree that

<sup>88</sup> Mzia Kupunia, “Saakashvili thanks Putin for ‘improving’ Georgian wines quality,” *The Messenger Online*, 20 September 2010, [http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/2196\\_september\\_20\\_2010/2196\\_mzia.html](http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/2196_september_20_2010/2196_mzia.html) (accessed 15 April 2011).

<sup>89</sup> “Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence,” Europe Report no. 202 (Moscow: International Crisis Group, 26 February 2010); “South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition,” Europe Report no. 205 (Moscow: International Crisis Group, 7 June 2010). Strategically, Russia is in a much better position today than it was before the 2008 August war. Russia’s military forces and hardware stationed in Georgia provide the ability to wage a swift, full-scale military operation against Georgia and to reach the capital in less than hour.

<sup>90</sup> Russian officials frequently make reference to military action plans involving Georgia and often in connection to US plans for Iran. Bits of information have appeared. In December 2011, it was disclosed that the families of servicemen from the Russian base in Armenia were evacuated to Russia, while the troops were moved from the capital to a northern location in Gumri—closer to the borders of Georgia and Turkey. The preparation of Russian forces in Armenia for action in the event of military conflict with Iran began “two years ago.” Russia’s forces can help guarantee a direct land contact to Russian military bases in Armenia, which is only possible through Georgia. Since the 2008 war, Tbilisi closed military transit over Georgian territory for Russian troops in landlocked Armenia. The only current link to Russia is by air, and fuel and other essentials reportedly come over the Iran-Armenia border. Moscow believes the Armenia-Iran border may be closed in the event of war. According to Lt. General (retired) Yuri Netkachev, former deputy commander of Russian forces in Transcaucasia, “It will be necessary to use military means to breach the Georgian transport blockade and establish transport corridors, leading into Armenia.” The geography of the region implies that any such “transport corridor” may go through the Georgian territory. Although the large-scale “strategic” military exercises Kavkaz-2012 are planned for next September, it is reported that the preparations and deployments of assets have begun already because of the threat of a possible war with Iran. New command and control equipment has been deployed in the region capable of using GLONASS (Russian GPS) targeting information. The air force in the South Military District (SMD) is reported to have been rearmed “almost 100 percent” with new jets and helicopters. In 2008, Kavkaz-2008 maneuvers allowed the Russian military to covertly deploy forces that successfully invaded Georgia. See *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 15 December 2011. For more on this issue, see Pavel Felgenhauer, “The Russian Military Has an Action Plan Involving Georgia if Iran Is Attacked,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 68 (April 2012).

<sup>91</sup> “The ruling political elite of the Russian Federation view an independent and democratic Georgia as an important threat. Therefore, the Russian Federation aims to turn Georgia into a failed state, to hinder the realization of Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic choice, and to forcibly return Georgia to the Russian political orbit. The presence of Russian military forces in the occupied Georgian territories



the August war represented a clear sign of Russia's resurgence in its "near abroad" and plainly demonstrated the self-help nature of Georgia's external security environment. Georgia's NATO membership is not realistic in the short term, especially given the Russia-Georgia war and the remaining territorial disputes. Even if the ruling political elite believed that NATO membership might be realized in the short term, the August war corrected any misunderstanding about how long the NATO accession process would take. Nonetheless, NATO integration remains one of the country's primary foreign policy objectives. Rather than bandwagoning with Russia, Georgia has instead intensified its Western-oriented foreign policy with each escalation of a threat. This behavior is somewhat puzzling from the perspective of materialist logics based on relative military and economic power. Despite losing most of its global influence as a result of the Soviet Union's disintegration, Russia still remains the most influential political, military, and economic player in the South Caucasus and in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) generally. In this regional setting, most IR theorists would expect small states to bandwagon and accommodate the regional great power's preferences, and most of the CIS states do. However, Georgia's foreign policy since the Rose Revolution has illustrated quite a different behavioral pattern: asymmetric balancing.

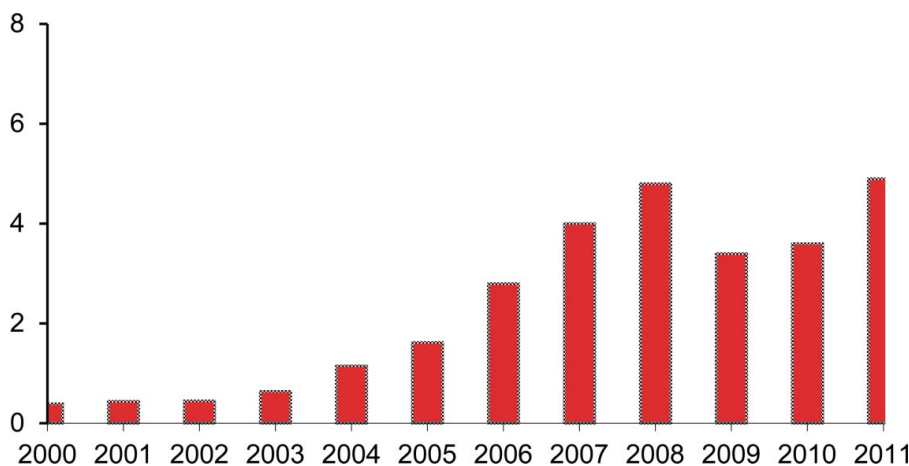
Georgia's economic dependence on Russia actually increased from 2003 to 2006 before Russia imposed an embargo on Georgian imports in mid-2006.<sup>92</sup> Russia was Georgia's number one trading partner before 2006, accounting for almost 20 percent of Georgia's total trade.<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that the proximate cause of Russia's embargo on trade with Georgia was Georgia's intensification of its pro-Western foreign policy. Arguably, if the post-revolutionary elite had behaved more in-line with the previous Eduard Shevardnadze administration, which did not push too far westward, then Georgia could have had access to both the Russian and Western markets, rather than only to Western markets, which is the situation Georgia finds itself in today. Russia was also the single largest supplier of strategic energy resources, including electricity and natural gas. Until 2006, 100 percent

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and the construction and strengthening of military bases there create a staging-ground for provocations and a bridgehead for possible renewed military aggression. The Russian Federation is in breach of the fundamental norms of international law, fails to fulfill the Russian-Georgian cease-fire agreement of 12 August 2008, and refuses to pledge not to attack Georgia. It blocks the work of the UN and OSCE missions in Georgia, resists the implementation of the European Union Monitoring Mission's mandate in the occupied territories, and opposes the idea of creating an international peacekeeping/police mechanism. Considering all this, there is a risk of renewed Russian aggression." From the National Security Concept of Georgia, 2011, available at <http://nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>, 8.

<sup>92</sup> On the different stages of Russia-Georgia relations, see Andrei P. Tsygankov and Tarver Wahlquist, "Dueling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5 (2009): 307–26.

<sup>93</sup> See Department of Statistics of Georgia, [www.statistics.ge](http://www.statistics.ge).

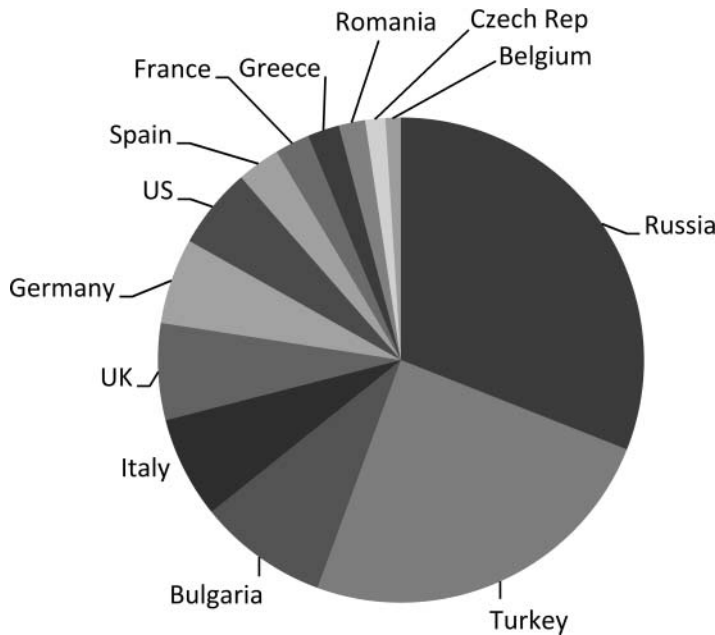


**FIGURE 1** Trade deficit (Color figure available online).

of Georgia's natural gas imports came from Russia.<sup>94</sup> Russia cut off natural gas supplies completely during the winter of 2005–6. The loss of trade with Russia also had an especially adverse effect on Georgia's export-import balance (see Figure 1). Rather than reversing course or curbing its enthusiasm, Georgia has responded to Russia's pressure by (1) pursuing new trade partners, mostly among its neighbors, though these do not fully compensate for the loss of the Russian market; and (2) distancing itself even further from Russia.<sup>95</sup> Trade data clearly show that the loss of the Russian market was

<sup>94</sup> Bernard A. Gelb, "Russian Natural Gas: Regional Dependence," CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2007), 4.

<sup>95</sup> When Georgia lost access to Russian gas, there were extreme shortages for several months before it found alternatives. Given that 100 percent of its gas supply was from Russia, Georgia immediately sought alternative sources of energy. It was not clear, however, whether the government would succeed. Energy shortages were common for several months after Georgia lost access to Russian energy and prior to gaining access to alternative sources from Azerbaijan (as well as partially and temporarily from Iran) and through domestic hydroelectric resources. See "Georgia claims energy crisis 'over,'" *International Relations and Security Network*, 19 December 2006, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch-Archive/Detail/?ots783=4888caa0-b3db-1461-98b9-e20e7b9c13d4&lng=en&id=51849>; Mikheil Saakashvili, "Iran, Georgia agree on gas supply," *Civil.ge*, 27 January 2006, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11637>; "Deal with Iran to Partially Ease Gas Shortage," *Civil.ge*, 28 January 2006, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11638>; "Iranian Gas Flows to Georgia," *Civil.ge*, 30 January 2006, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11651>; "Georgia seeks energy independence from Russia," *Eurasianet.org*, 8 June 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav060906.shtml>; "Georgia Wins Energy Independence from Russia," *Kommersant.ru*, 4 August 2006, [http://www.kommersant.com/p695086/r\\_500/Georgia\\_Wins\\_Energy\\_Independence\\_from\\_Russia/](http://www.kommersant.com/p695086/r_500/Georgia_Wins_Energy_Independence_from_Russia/); "Saakashvili: Georgia 'should never leave path' of EU integration," *Euractiv.com*, 8 November 2011, <http://www.euractiv.com/europes-east/saakashvili-georgia-leave-path-eu-integration-interview-508800>; "Mikheil Saakashvili Visited Larsi and Dariali Hydropower Plants Construction Works," Ministry of Energy and National Resources of Georgia, 14 April 2012, <http://www.menr.gov.ge/en/News/2307>; "Georgia Says China to Construct \$630 Million Hydropower Plant," *Bloomberg.com*, 17 April 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-17/georgia-says-china-to-construct-630-million-hydropower-plant.html>; "Construction of major



**FIGURE 2** Georgian exports by country in 2005. Source: Department of Statistics, Republic of Georgia, [www.statistics.ge](http://www.statistics.ge).

not compensated for by an increase in trade with Western countries. Georgia's trade was supplemented by deeper economic relations with states other than Russia; other CIS countries, especially neighboring countries, account for most of the new trade since 2006. Thus, it seems fair to infer that intensified political relations with the West, post-Rose Revolution, are neither the result nor a side effect of economic benefits from trade with the West, but rather the reason for Georgia's greater economic engagement with the West.

We conclude that Georgia's foreign policy since the Rose Revolution has been driven less by objective changes in Georgia's external security environment and more by a set of ideas about Georgia's identity and purpose that are distinctly post-revolution. When Georgia did not experience a change in its external security environment in 2003, it embarked on a major shift in its foreign policy orientation. And when it did experience such a change—in 2006 and 2008—its foreign policy remained largely unaffected. Where purely materialist theories predict change, we observed continuity; where they predict continuity, we observed change.

Georgia's deputy minister of foreign affairs explained that there is elite consensus on the country's foreign policy posture. "The current political elite [are] crystallized, and its course towards the West is well-understood. All of

hydropower station starts in Georgia," *News.az*, 24 April 2012, <http://www.news.az/articles/georgia/58835>.

the political elite agree on the overall importance and necessity of a pro-Western foreign policy.”<sup>96</sup> The political elites also agree regarding the greatest external threat (Russia) and concur on which policy will be most effective in dealing with existing challenges (balancing).<sup>97</sup> The major cause of the initial change in and subsequent continuity of Georgia’s foreign policy was the rise to power of a young elite with a strong Western identity. “The previous elite was more oriented towards Russia, mainly because of their past. So, while talking about Georgia’s foreign policy since the Rose Revolution, the role of this new elite cannot be overemphasized . . . especially their Western education and socialization in the West.”<sup>98</sup> “The people who came to power since the revolution view Georgia as part of Western civilization and not as a part of post-Soviet or CIS space where countries are not independent political entities.”<sup>99</sup> All security-, economic-, and education-sector reforms reaffirm the elite preference for a social order and a state-building project that are significantly more compatible with Western models than with the Russian approach. Even the Russian language, once the country’s *lingua franca*, is gradually diminishing in importance. “Children and young people know less and less Russian. Ever fewer are able to read even an elementary Russian text. In this way, Georgia has become increasingly excluded from the former Soviet space, in which the language of interethnic communication remains Russian.”<sup>100</sup>

Despite strong political, economic, and military pressure from Russia, the political elite in Georgia have remained fundamentally united on foreign policy issues. We agree with one scholar’s characterization that “Georgian foreign policy cannot be explained without understanding its elite’s perceptions of its culture and place in the world.”<sup>101</sup> In Georgia, the 2008 war with Russia is widely interpreted in ideological terms as the “price for freedom.” Georgia’s elite believe that the major cause of the war was Georgia’s pro-Western proclivities and Russia’s desire to hinder them. The extent to which these interpretations are true or distorted is not our concern here; instead, we highlight such statements for what they say about the role of elite ideas, identities, and preferences over alternative social orders in explaining change

<sup>96</sup> Sergi Kapanadze, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia, interview with authors, 19 May 2011, Tbilisi.

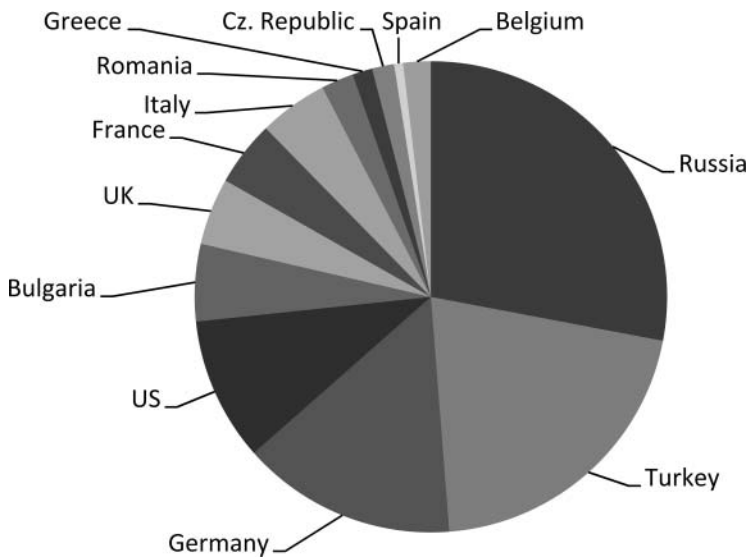
<sup>97</sup> The importance of elite consensus is emphasized in Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Randall L. Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing,” *International Security* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 169–70.

<sup>98</sup> Kapanadze, interview.

<sup>99</sup> Archil Abashidze, professor at Ilia State University, interview with authors, 16 February 2011, Tbilisi. For similar views, see also Tornike Sharashenidze, professor at Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, interview with authors, 20 March 2011, Tbilisi; David Darchiashvili, chairman of the Committee on European Integration, Parliament of Georgia, interview with authors, 12 January 2011, Tbilisi.

<sup>100</sup> Kornely Kakachia, “Can Russia Win the Ideological Battle in Georgia?” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no. 67 (Washington, DC: George Washington University, Elliott School of International Affairs, September 2009), 5.

<sup>101</sup> Jones, “The Role of Cultural Paradigms,” 104.



**FIGURE 3** Georgian imports by country in 2005. Source: Department of Statistics, Republic of Georgia, [www.statistics.ge](http://www.statistics.ge).

and continuity in Georgia's foreign policy. A focus on ideas not only helps explain the shift in foreign policy in 2003, but also sheds light upon the puzzling continuity in foreign policy since the Rose Revolution and in the wake of the most recent war. Despite several objectively adverse changes in its external security environment, Georgia continues to exhibit balancing behavior. An important reason for this continuity is that Georgia's dominant ideological paradigm—Western integration—has remained constant since the Rose Revolution (Figure 3).

A theoretical and empirical focus on elite ideas and identities helps us to understand the puzzling case of foreign policy change and continuity. In an article entitled "Can Russia Win the Ideological Battle in Georgia?" one observer remarked that "an economically and politically stable Georgia might become a successful Eastern European country, [and] can be a model for development that other post-Soviet states as well as Caucasian Republics within the Russian Federation might emulate. For the Kremlin, this scenario is a dangerous and costly zero-sum game."<sup>102</sup>

Although the conventional wisdom that small states generally bandwagon with power and threat may be true in some cases, it is worth examining the causal logic in cases where this is clearly off the mark. To explain change and continuity in the foreign policy of small states, ideas and identities can play an important and central causal role. To underscore this point, we draw on a "paired comparison" with the quite different ideas

<sup>102</sup> Kakachia, "Can Russia Win," 1.

and identities of the foreign policy and national security elite in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is similarly positioned in the regional balance of power system, and in fact less economically dependent upon Russia for energy, but nonetheless pursues a foreign policy that is closer to classical bandwagoning.

## AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY POSTURE

Georgia and Azerbaijan are both similarly placed in international and regional systems, but they hold drastically different foreign policy priorities and pursue disparate objectives abroad. The fundamental foreign policy objective of Georgia is complete integration into the Western political-military institutional architecture, including NATO and EU membership. By contrast, Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategy is described as an "interest-based multidimensional policy," a balancing act that is generally pro-Russian, but not necessarily anti-Western.<sup>103</sup> Azerbaijan asserts that cooperation with NATO is important but that it will not apply for NATO membership.<sup>104</sup> The "National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan," its major national strategy document, states: "The Republic of Azerbaijan pursues a multidimensional, balanced foreign policy and seeks to establish it with all countries."<sup>105</sup> Azerbaijan is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program yet cooperates with Russia on a range of security issues and allows Russia to maintain the Qabala strategic radar station on Azerbaijani territory.<sup>106</sup>

With its vast oil and gas resources, however, Azerbaijan has always been less economically dependent on Russia than Georgia. Yet Baku has never strayed too far from Moscow, except during the brief presidency of Abulfaz Elçibey.<sup>107</sup> Even though the trade data show that the EU is a more important trade partner for Azerbaijan than for Georgia, Azerbaijan is nonetheless much

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<sup>103</sup> See Nazrin Mehdiyeva, "Azerbaijan and its Foreign Policy Dilemma," *Asian Affairs* 34, no. 3 (November 2003); Avinoam Idan and Brenda Shaffer, "The Foreign Policies of Post-Soviet Landlocked States," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27, no. 3 (2011): 241–68; Inessa Baban and Zaur Shiriyev, "The U.S. South Caucasus Strategy and Azerbaijan," *Turkish Policy* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2010); Houman Sadri, "Elements of Azerbaijan Foreign Policy," *Journal of Third World Studies* 20, no. 1 (2003); Pinar Ipek, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy and Challenges for Energy Security," *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2009); Elkhan Nuriyev, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Strategy & Great Power Politics," US-Azerbaijani Relations: The State of Strategic Partnership, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC, 9 November 2010, available at [http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Azerbaijan\\_Event\\_Final\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Azerbaijan_Event_Final__2_.pdf); Elkhan Nuriyev, "The Geopolitics of Azerbaijan," REP Roundtable Summary, Chatham House, London, 28 April 2010; Anar Valiyev, "Victim of a 'War of Ideologies': Azerbaijan after the Russia–Georgia War," *Demokratizatsiya*, 17, no. 3 (July 2009): 269–88.

<sup>104</sup> "Azerbaijan not planning to join NATO – FM," *Highbeam Business*, <http://business.highbeam.com/407705/article-1G1-240193935/azerbaijan-not-planning-join-nato-fm>.

<sup>105</sup> "National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan" (Baku: Ministry of National Security of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2007), available at <http://www.mns.gov.az/en/>.

<sup>106</sup> Avinoam Idan and Brenda Shaffer, "The Foreign Policies of Post-Soviet Landlocked States," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27, no. 3 (2011): 255.

<sup>107</sup> See Valiyev, "Victim of a 'War of Ideologies,'" 271.

less pro-Western in its foreign policy orientation.<sup>108</sup> Why these two small states in the South Caucasus, each with a similar regional position, pursue such disparate international alignments (compared to each other and over time) cannot be explained by reference to purely material (economic and security) considerations.

Instead, we suggest that a more fruitful approach would focus on the role of elite ideas about a preferred social order. Consider the first two presidents of independent Azerbaijan—Ayaz Mutalibov and Abulfaz Elçibey. Mutalibov, who was also the last president of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and the first president of independent Azerbaijan, pursued a largely pro-Russian foreign policy. After suffering a military defeat against Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and principally after the Khodjaly massacre, Mutalibov was forced to step down.<sup>109</sup> Abulfaz Elçibey, leader of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, became the second post-Soviet president in June 1992. In contrast to his predecessor, Elçibey pursued a staunchly anti-Russian policy that also emphasized pan-Turkism and Azerbaijan's strategic partnership with Turkey. Whereas Mutalibov was a typical Soviet politician having a strong affiliation with and links to Moscow, Elçibey was a former Soviet dissident and anti-communist leader who considered Russia to be the main threat to Azerbaijan's independence and pursued the strictly anti-Russian, pro-Turkish policy accordingly. Compared to structural and materialist approaches, ideational approaches offer significantly more leverage in explaining this variation in Azerbaijan's foreign policy under Mutalibov and Elçibey.

Elçibey's foreign policy priorities were based on a belief that Turkey, not Russia, was the best model of development for Azerbaijan.<sup>110</sup> Turkey and Azerbaijan, he claimed, were "Two states, One Nation."<sup>111</sup> Soon after assuming power, Elçibey signed several contracts with Western oil companies. His pro-Western and in particular pro-Turkish foreign policy positions angered Azerbaijan's powerful neighbors—Russia and Iran—who both retaliated by inciting ethnic tensions in Azerbaijan's Talish and Lezgin minority communities. At roughly the same time, the Karabakh army finally defeated the Azerbaijani army and occupied additional Azerbaijani territory during the winter of 1992–93. This defeat triggered an anti-government insurrection, forcing Elçibey to resign and resulting in the rule of Heydar Aliyev, former Soviet deputy prime minister and head of Soviet Azerbaijan.

<sup>108</sup> In 2008, the EU's share in Azerbaijan's total trade was 53 percent and 27 percent in Georgia. See Oscar B. Pardo Sierra, "No man's land? A comparative analysis of the EU and Russia's influence in the Southern Caucasus," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44 (2011): 239.

<sup>109</sup> Ipek, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy," 30.

<sup>110</sup> Areyh Wasserman, "A Year of Rule by the Popular Front of Azerbaijan," in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Roi Yaacov (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 150.

<sup>111</sup> Zeyno Baran, "The Caucasus: Ten Years after Independence," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 226.

In contrast to Elçhibey, Heydar Aliyev was a more experienced, heavy-weight politician. After coming to power, he oriented Azerbaijani foreign policy toward Russia, while remaining warm with Turkey and lukewarm to the West. Naturally, his rise to power immediately improved relations with Russia. His first initiatives involved making a number of concessions to accommodate Russia's interests, including inviting Russian oil companies to participate in energy projects in Azerbaijan and joining Azerbaijan to the Commonwealth of Independent States. In exchange, Aliyev sought Russian support on Karabakh and on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. He failed, however, on the Karabakh issue, as Moscow's cease-fire agreement resulted in a 20 percent loss of Azerbaijan's total territory. Aliyev's foreign policy advisor, Vafa Gulizade, put it concisely: "Oil is our strategy; it's our defense and our independence."<sup>112</sup> Azerbaijan has since emerged as "one of the EU's major oil and gas partners."<sup>113</sup> Aliyev also engaged with the West. "Aliyev's long-term strategy," as one scholar notes, "was to bring in multiple countries' investment in the oil and gas sector to strengthen national security."<sup>114</sup> The Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) illustrates the role of elite ideas in Azerbaijan. In 1993, it invited eight Western companies, one Saudi Arabian company, and one Russian firm (Lukoil) to develop the country's offshore oil and gas fields.<sup>115</sup> In 1995, Aliyev gave Russia the largest share in the development of the Karabakh oil field. A few years later, however, Aliyev signed agreements to develop the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline for transporting oil and gas to Western markets through Georgia and Turkey, bypassing Russia.

Heydar Aliyev effectively laid the foundations for a multidimensional and balanced foreign policy. He improved relations with Russia while not damaging and arguably deepening Azerbaijan's relations with the West.

In 2003, power was transferred from the father to the son, Ilham Aliyev, in what one analyst describes as "Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism."<sup>116</sup> Ilham Aliyev substantially changed his father's approach to foreign policy by further intensifying relations with Moscow. The new ruling elite downgraded relations with the EU and NATO, at least rhetorically, and changed its language from "integration" to "partnership."<sup>117</sup> Other symbolic manifestations of this new strategy include joining the Non-Aligned Movement in May 2011.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "Getting Crude in Baku: The Crude Face of Global Capitalism," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 October 1998.

<sup>113</sup> Rashad Shirinov, "A Pragmatic Area of Cooperation: Azerbaijan and the EU," *International Politics and Society* no. 3 (July 2011): 74.

<sup>114</sup> Ipek, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy," 233.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 232–24.

<sup>116</sup> Farid Guliyev, "Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Transition to Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism? An Attempt at Conceptualization," *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 393–436.

<sup>117</sup> Shirinov, "A Pragmatic Area of Cooperation," 74.

<sup>118</sup> Rashad Shirinov, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: Seeking a Balance," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* no. 37 (29 March 2012): 4.



There is also a substantial change in the official discourse of the new ruling elite under Ilham Aliyev. Whereas Heydar Aliyev paid lip service to democracy and human rights issues and was very careful in the presence of Western countries, the ruling elite under Ilham Aliyev “has become more sincere . . . and no longer plays the game of democracy.”<sup>119</sup>

“Heydar Aliyev was a statesman,” writes one scholar. “Ilham Aliyev is a businessman. This is the biggest difference between policies before and after 2003.”<sup>120</sup> Aliyev the son rules Azerbaijan like “a huge company” and has turned the country into a typical “petro-state.”<sup>121</sup> The change has not gone unnoticed. During Ilham Aliyev’s presidency, Azerbaijan moved from the “partially free” list of countries to the group of “not free” countries on the Freedom House Index of Democracy.<sup>122</sup> “Azerbaijan consistently ranks as one of the most corrupt countries on earth.”<sup>123</sup>

Ideologically, Ilham Aliyev’s elites feel more comfortable with the Russian model of managed democracy. The idea of Putin-like “sovereign democracy” is a proverb frequently used in government circles.<sup>124</sup> Azerbaijani expert Orkhan Gafarli suggests that “there is strong consensus among the Azerbaijani ruling elite that the model of sovereign democracy is what Azerbaijan needs and domestic politics [is] in accordance with this concept. . . . As for the European values, we do not have them yet. Of course, these values exist, but only on the paper and these principles are not practiced in life.”<sup>125</sup>

The current “Azerbaijani model” is based on two sets of ideas. The first is “a cult of personality” for Heydar Aliyev, the founding father, as well as for the son. The second idea is “a strong presidency” to retain political stability and ensure economic development.<sup>126</sup> In this view, “democracy should be developed taking into account the ‘national peculiarities’ or ‘national mentality’ of Azerbaijan.”<sup>127</sup> As Elkhan Nuriyev, former director of Azerbaijan’s

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in “Azerbaijan: Vulnerable Stability,” Europe Report no. 207 (Moscow: International Crisis Group, 3 September 2010), 6.

<sup>120</sup> Shirinov, “Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy,” 3.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.; Farid Guliyev, “Oil Wealth, Patrimonialism, and the Failure of Democracy in Azerbaijan,” *Caucasus Analytical Digest* no. 2 (15 January 2009): 2–8.

<sup>122</sup> “Azerbaijan: Vulnerable Stability,” 1, n. 3.

<sup>123</sup> Rainer Freitag-Wirminghaus, “Prospects for Armenia and Azerbaijan between Eurasia and the Middle East,” in *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives*, ed. Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (Washington, DC and Vienna: Johns Hopkins University and Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2008), 79–80.

<sup>124</sup> The most evident manifestation of this phenomenon is the plea of the head of department of political analysis and information provision under the president of Azerbaijan, Elnur Aslanov. “The Aim of Azerbaijan is a Sovereign Democracy,” *RIA Novosti*, 24 January 2007, available at [http://de.rian.ru/comments\\_interviews/20070124/59643239.html](http://de.rian.ru/comments_interviews/20070124/59643239.html).

<sup>125</sup> Orkhan Gafarli, expert at South Caucasian Strategic Research Center, interview with authors, March 2012, Tbilisi.

<sup>126</sup> “Azerbaijan: Vulnerable Stability,” Europe Report no. 207 (Moscow: International Crisis Group, 3 September 2010), 5–6.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 6.

Center for Strategic Studies, put it somewhat sarcastically, “We do not Westernize our country. We are modernizing our country. We look at the Western democracies and their experience and get their best practices and apply these practices in Azerbaijan.”<sup>128</sup>

Western strategy toward Azerbaijan, especially in contrast to Georgia, has also reinforced the country’s leanings to the East as long as it remains stable. After Azerbaijan’s 2008 elections, US president George W. Bush congratulated Ilham Aliyev on winning his second presidential term, even though the elections were widely viewed as flawed.<sup>129</sup> As the head of Azerbaijani opposition Liberal Party, Lala Shovket Hajiyeva, observed, “The West sees Azerbaijan as a petrol station, with only one goal, to function properly. Here the West keeps its interests higher than its values.”<sup>130</sup>

In sum, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy, except during the short-lived presidency of Elçibey, has been significantly more pro-Russian than pro-Western, especially since Ilham Aliyev came to power. Although it is difficult to explain these patterns by adopting a primarily structural or materialist approach, focusing on elite ideas, identities, and preferences over alternative social orders across different administrations provides a considerably better explanation for why Georgia and Azerbaijan behaved similarly before the Rose Revolution but so differently after.

## CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN FOREIGN POLICIES OF SMALL STATES

This article aims to understand and explain change and continuity in the foreign policies of small states. The literature on small states’ foreign policy behavior has emphasized the role of the international system and the external security environment. Although structural and materialist approaches represent influential theoretical frameworks, the Georgian case may be an exception that proves the rule. Ignoring the role of elite ideas and identities might represent an acceptable omission in exchange for greater parsimony in some situations, but the analysis presented here indicates that theories that include such factors can help us in better comprehending some puzzling cases.

<sup>128</sup> Nuriyev, “Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy Strategy.”

<sup>129</sup> “Presidential Election, 15 October 2008” (Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2008), <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/70066>; “Bush congratulates Aliyev on election victory,” *Azernews*, 29 October 2008, available at [http://www.azernews.az/en/Nation/8226-Bush\\_congratulates\\_Aliyev\\_on\\_election\\_victory](http://www.azernews.az/en/Nation/8226-Bush_congratulates_Aliyev_on_election_victory).

<sup>130</sup> Jim Nichol, “Azerbaijan’s October 2008 Presidential Election: Outcome and Implications,” CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 27 October 2008), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22977.pdf>.

We show that an emphasis on elite ideas, identities, and preferences can provide significant leverage in understanding the foreign policy behavior of a critical case and note that this focus can be used in future research on other states and in other regions of the world where anomalies are evident. Although there are clear limitations to what can be learned from a chronological case study, even when studied alongside a paired comparison, there are also significant benefits, including the ability to utilize original data that focus explicitly on the posited causal mechanism and are difficult to collect in a large-N design. By analyzing a compelling, critical, and puzzling case, this study highlights the role that elite ideas and identities can sometimes play in explaining the foreign policy of small states in the international system.

Looking beyond Georgia, we can also observe that our understanding of the behavior of other small states in the post-Soviet space would benefit from including individual- and state-level explanations. We have shown why Azerbaijan, which is comparable to Georgia in its international and regional status but not as economically dependent on Russia as Georgia, is nevertheless much less pro-Western and much more pro-Russia. One might also consider other post-Soviet cases. Ukraine, for example, recently shifted its foreign policy priorities and became more pro-Russian, even though it did not experience any substantive change in its external security environment. These are important questions that we cannot adequately answer here, but they suggest the importance of providing a more detailed analysis of prevalent ideas in domestic politics in cases that appear puzzling from the perspectives of realist international relations theory.