

Conclusion

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Caucasus is a whole. We nevertheless have decided to deal with only one part of it. What used to be called Transcaucasus, and is now referred to as “South Caucasus,” has been taken as the primary topic of this third issue of the *Quarterly Journal*.

We had several good reasons (and a few bad incentives) to make that decision, and we do not intend to discuss it here. We take responsibility for the latter and accept any further reproach accordingly.

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The strategic importance of this key region, sitting astride Europe and Asia—between the North and the South, Islam and Christianity, development and poverty—deserved to be dealt with, and we have attempted to do so through eight articles written from very different points of view. Central as it is, the Caucasus can be viewed from three different perspectives: inner, regional, and global. Each article clearly shows in its own way that everything is still “under construction” in the three states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which are all characterized by high levels of instability and permanent tensions.

Since their accession to independence over ten years ago, all three countries have been faced with three major challenges: restoring internal and regional security, enforcing the rule of law, and coping with regional geopolitics.

In that respect, the challenges faced by Russia in the region, even when limited to South Caucasus, seem to be more and more pressing. Major changes are on the horizon in many fields, ranging from the Russian military presence and the crisis in Chechnya to the gas and oil business. Debates are about to intensify, though it remains difficult to assess precisely what their magnitude, their nature, and their outcome will be.

The American influence in the region has increased substantially since September 2001. The United States is altering the regional equation by focusing on energy flows, enlarging its sphere of influence through the Partnership for Peace or other such engagement efforts, on insuring freedom of access to the oil fields, and on fighting, on its own terms, the global war on terrorism.

Iran has found herself isolated after the ordeal of September 11, in spite of some remarkable improvements in her regional posture regarding most of the issues pertaining to geopolitics. Teheran’s relationships with Baku, Ankara, and

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Moscow have reflected Iran's unwillingness to situate itself firmly in the camp of the United States, which remains some sort of "Great Satan," in accordance with the old saying that "the friend of my enemy is my enemy." Iran, given her theocratic approach, somehow wants to remain in the vanguard of the fight against American imperialism.

Turkey, faced by different issues that reflect her ambiguous geopolitical situation, and by difficult internal debates on democracy, religion, nationalism, and membership in Europe, has had some difficulty finding the right stance regarding Caucasus; the Armenian thorn is still in her side, and the Kurdish question casts a shadow on her reputation. Turkey has endeavored to remain quiet in the last couple of years, and certainly does not want to hamper the effectiveness of her major ally in its fight against terrorism.

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There is nothing really new in this short assessment: we are at the gates of Asia, in a culture where the notion of *time* in policy-making does not match that held in the West. The short term is never given preference or, were this to happen, the time units used to measure the short term would not be the same as are used in the West. Everything should therefore be put in a longer-term perspective. Time will be needed to build up oil and gas pipe-lines, but also to make them safe and secure; time will be needed for both *physical security* and *economic security*—closely related to the notion of development—to take shape and, it is hoped, to achieve some sort of stability. Only reconciliation can bring that about in minds shocked and troubled by so many past, present, and potential changes in day-to-day life as well as in the national and regional environments.

This conclusion constitutes an attempt to link together the perceptions and the expectations expressed by these eight texts, so different and at the same time so close due to their common preoccupation: stability, peace, and development. *Balance, equilibrium, stability*: these words are meaningful for this ancient, rugged, and mountainous region, so often subjected to both natural and human disasters. One actor's initiative, whatever it might be, immediately produces waves in the regional pond that cause each individual national boat to rock. In addition, alliances in the Caucasus do not have the long-lasting character they have in the West. They are too often the result of circumstances, short-term interests, and political ambitions. As a result, balance, equilibrium, and stability are rendered even more difficult to achieve.

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Paris, for, on everyone's part, expressing with conviction and objectivity a dynamic and well-substantiated outlook on this very difficult region, so often at the heart of crises, always subject to the winds of history, to the tide of competing passions and interests.

Beyond any doubt, their most valuable contribution will foster a better reciprocal understanding and enrichment, both in our community and, hopefully, in the region itself. Such is the goal of the Consortium of the Willing!