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Ukraine's Strategic Relations with the South Caucasus

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Taras Kuzio

Ukraine's relations with the three Southern Caucasian states of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia have been varied during the three decades since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Ukraine has paid greater attention to pro-Western Georgia and multivectoral Azerbaijan, and the least attention to pro-Russian Armenia.

In Soviet times, the Ukrainian and Georgian dissident and nationalist movements maintained close ties, and this influenced the development of friendly relations between Ukraine and Georgia in the post-Soviet era. From the late 1990s onwards, Ukraine and Georgia made joining both NATO and

the EU priority goals, which also played a role in bringing Kyiv and Tbilisi together. Azerbaijan pursued a multi-vector foreign policy of integration without membership in these two institutions, managing to be cautiously pro-Western but at the same time not anti-Russian. Armenia, on the other hand, has been a member of all Russian-led regional integration projects since the early 1990s, and therefore Kyiv has had few common interests with Yerevan.

Relations with Armenia have deteriorated since 2014 because of Armenia's support for Russia's annexation of Crimea and the presence of Armenian mercenaries fighting against Ukraine

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in the ranks of Russia's proxies in the Donbas. During the Second Karabakh War, the Ukrainian media, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and all political parties (except one pro-Russian one) enthusiastically supported Azerbaijan.

Hybrid Warfare and Frozen Conflicts

It would be very wrong to believe that hybrid warfare and information warfare were invented by Russia's President Vladimir Putin or the country's Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov who famously published in February 2013 an article entitled "The Value of Science in Prediction" that analyzed hybrid warfare (or what the Russians call "non-linear warfare").

Still, the latter's essay is a benchmark and is worth quoting at the onset. Reflecting on the Arab Spring, Gerasimov writes that the "very 'rules of war' have changed. He then explains that "the role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness." He goes on to define "non-military measures" in the following manner: "the broad use of

political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other measures—applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population." He then adds: "All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special-operations forces." And he concludes: "The open use of forces—often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation—is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict."

But if we take a step back, we realize that the Soviet Union had pursued these or similar policies for decades, and that even in the pre-internet era was a master at propagating disinformation (fake news). Assassinations abroad ("wet operations") by the Soviet secret services stretch back to the 1920s; in 1926, 1938, 1957, and 1959, four Ukrainian nationalist leaders were murdered in Paris, Rotterdam, and Munich. The Soviet regime spread fake news about the 1933 *Holodomor* (Murder Famine) that murdered four million Ukrainians, admitting only in 1990—one year before the USSR disintegrated—that an artificial famine had taken place in Ukraine.

In the 1990s under President Boris Yeltsin, Russia continued to pursue hybrid warfare in the former Soviet region by seeking to undermine central governments through political instability and inter-ethnic and regional conflicts. Frozen conflicts were engineered in the early 1990s in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, as well as nearly in Crimea, Ukraine.

It is important to recognize six consistent policies pursued by Russian security policies towards Russia's neighbors since 1992. The first of these is covert backing of separatist proxy forces by supplying them with military equipment and inserting Russian special forces (*spetsnaz*). This aims to create frozen conflicts in favor of the separatists who are given direct Russian (South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Trans-Dniester, Donbas) or indirect Russian (Nagorno-Karabakh) assistance.

The second is ethnic cleansing, as exemplified in the success of Russian-led separatist forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven districts, as well as South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Nearly one million Azerbaijani's

were forced to flee from Armenian pogroms and occupation. Two million people have fled or were pressured to leave Russian-controlled Donbas, of which 1.7 million are IDPs in other parts of Ukraine and the remainder are refugees in Russia.

The third is assassination attempts against political leaders and terrorism in regions outside the frozen conflict. The fourth is the weaponization of energy through blockades and corruption of local elites. Russia's biggest export in Europe is corruption, not energy.

The fifth consists of contradictory rhetoric of officially supporting the territorial integrity of Russia's neighbors while unofficially backing separatist forces. This plank of Russian policy was swept away in 2008 when Russia (alone in the CIS) recognized the "independence" of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and in 2014 when it annexed Crimea. The sixth and last is the positioning of Russia as a negotiator and peacemaker with proposals to resolve frozen conflicts through federalization leading to weak central governments and weak neighboring states.

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Russia supported separatism in Ukraine's Crimean region throughout the 1990s, which led to Ukrainian security policy having common interests with Azerbaijan and Georgia—as both had suffered from similar activities. Frozen conflicts fomented by Russian-backed separatists in Azerbaijan's region of Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia's regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Moldova's Trans-Dniester, coupled with Russia's failed attempt to do the same in Crimea, was a major factor behind the formation of what is now the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development in 1997 (GUAM stands for Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova; three years later Uzbekistan joined before withdrawing in 2005). GUAM was an Azerbaijani idea put forward in the 1990s when the country had a limited number of allies and when Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma provided various forms of assistance, including exporting military equipment.

GUAM epitomized the close national security and energy relations

of Ukraine with both Azerbaijan and Georgia, which have survived in high and low points up to the present day. Relations between GUAM participating states have gone through three periods: a high point from 1997 to 2009, a low point in 2010-2013, and a revitalization of relations since the 2014 crisis in Ukraine.

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Relations in the First Period

Of GUAM's four participating states, Ukraine and Georgia wished to join NATO, called for the Atlantic Alliance to keep its doors open, and rejected Russia's demand for a veto over former Soviet countries joining NATO. Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia by and large supported NATO enlargement into post-communist countries and backed high levels of integration and cooperation by their countries with a wide range of NATO structures.

Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia actively participated in NATO-led peacekeeping operations and

created a peacekeeping battalion under NATO auspices. Remembering the ethnic cleansing conducted by Russian-backed separatists in Georgia and Azerbaijan, GUAM participating states supported NATO's operation against Serbia in 1999. All four GUAM countries held a suspicious attitude towards Russia because of its support for separatism and its unwillingness to recognize their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Thus, GUAM's founding document called for the recognition of the inviolability of the territorial integrity of states and rejected "aggressive separatism," "ethnic intolerance," and "religious extremism."

Political leaders during the first period of Ukraine's relations with the South Caucasus came from the Soviet *nomenklatura* and because of this they approached dealing with Russia in a cautious manner; this was very much in contrast to their nationalist critics at home whose rhetoric and actions would often inflame relations with Russia. Hence, Ukraine's Leonid

Kuchma, Azerbaijan's Heydar and Ilham Aliyev, Georgia's Eduard Shevardnadze, and Moldova's Vladimir Voronin each adopted multi-vector foreign policies of integration with the West and cooperation with Russia and the CIS.

Although Kuchma had come to power in 1994 on a moderately pro-Russian platform, he quickly

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became pro-Western because of Russian intransigence over recognizing Ukraine's territorial integrity, borders, and sovereignty. Russia's relations with Ukraine were far more problematic than with any other post-Soviet state because Moscow never accepted Ukrainian independence, claimed Ukraine was an "artificial state," and denied the existence of a separate Ukrainian nation.

In 1994, Russia, the U.S. and the UK signed the Budapest Memorandum with Ukraine, which provided security assurances for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty in exchange for Ukraine giving up the world's third

largest nuclear weapon arsenal that had been inherited from the USSR. It took Yeltsin three years to travel to Kyiv to sign an inter-state treaty that recognized the Russian-Ukrainian border and another two years before it was ratified by both houses of the Russian parliament (in other words, this took Kuchma's entire first term in office, which lasted from 1994 to 1999). The Budapest Memorandum and the subsequent inter-state treaty were both flouted by Russia in 2014 when it invaded and annexed Crimea.

In the 1990s, Kyiv also developed relations with Ankara. Turkey positioned itself as the protector of Crimean Tatars, although not to the same extent as during the subsequent period of Recep Tayyip

Erdogan's rule. Kemalist Turkish politicians were less keen on exporting Turkish soft and hard power compared to Turkish Islamic nationalists. From the onset Ukraine became an active participant in the Turkey-led Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Pact initiative (which in some versions

noticeably did not include Armenia), and various energy transportation projects. Azerbaijan believed that it was in its security interests to support Ukraine's energy independence from Russia and exported the first consignment of 50,000 tons of oil in 1999 through a pipeline that crossed Georgia.

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The Georgian Rose and Ukrainian Orange Revolutions changed the dynamics of GUAM and Ukraine's relations with the South Caucasus states, but also with Russia and Turkey. National democratic leaders Mikhail Saakashvili and Viktor Yushchenko came to power in Georgia and Ukraine, respectively, and they moved away from multi-vector foreign policies, instead prioritizing relations with the West. In 2005-2007, politics in Russia turned in a nationalist direction with the creation of the Russian World Foundation, an extensive cyber-attack against Estonia, the assassination of the Russian FSB defector Alexander Litvinenko in London, and Putin's xenophobic speech to the Munich Security Conference.

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Meanwhile, Turkey began moving away from a political system dominated by Kemalist politicians to one led by Islamic nationalists after the Erdogan-led Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2003. In contrast to his Kemalist predecessors, Erdogan has demonstrated greater preparedness to assert Turkish leadership over the Sunni world and to export Turkish soft and hard power throughout Ukraine and the Greater Middle East, as seen in Azerbaijan, the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere.

This re-configuration was taking place against the background of the Greater Middle East having become divided into two geopolitical groups that have remained more or less constant to the present day. On the one side stands Greece (although a NATO member), Armenia, Russia, and Iran. On the other stands Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the other two GUAM participating states. Iran and Russia see eye to eye on designating the Caspian as an “internal lake,” oppose alternative Azerbaijani energy routes, and back Russia’s monopolization of peacekeeping in Eurasia (or what is coming to be known in some circles as the Silk Road region). Iran remains very sensitive over its large Azerbaijani minority, which actively supported Baku in

the Second Karabakh War. In contrast to GUAM participating states, Armenia has always supported Russian military bases on its territory.

Iran and Russia have long viewed the West in negative terms. Russia is very hostile to what it claims is the West encroaching on Russia’s “privileged sphere of influence,” as Dmitry Medvedev described Eurasia in 2008. Iran backs Russia’s view of a multipolar system and its opposition to a U.S.-led unipolar international system. Russia never condemned Iran’s building of nuclear weapons and when Ukraine succumbed to U.S. pressure by halting its supply of nuclear turbines to Iran, Russia went ahead and supplied them.

Ukraine’s relations with Azerbaijan are continuing to develop in several areas. Ukraine’s large military industrial complex is a source of weapons for Azerbaijan as it has been for Georgia. Both countries’ intelligence services have fruitfully cooperated. Ukraine and Azerbaijan have always supported each other’s territorial integrity, as in 2014 when Crimea was annexed. It is therefore little wonder Ukraine’s relations with Armenia never progressed, as Yerevan always backed Russian policies, integration initiatives, and hybrid warfare in Eurasia.

Under Yushchenko, GUAM became institutionalized with the creation of a parliamentary assembly, which received observer status at the UN. A headquarters and secretariat were established in Kyiv with coordinating offices located in each participating state. GUAM received a moniker, becoming known officially as the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development. GUAM expanded its interests beyond security to the economy and transportation, business cooperation, security and combatting organized crime, culture and tourism, and youth and sports. The heads of state of GUAM meet twice a year at international summits such as the UN General Debate, and foreign and defense ministers meet twice a year as well.

Saakashvili and Yushchenko had very bad relations with Putin over a wide range of factors, including NATO’s explicit endorsement of Ukraine and Georgia’s aspirations to join the Atlantic Alliance (“we agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO,” to quote from the April 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration) and written support for Kyiv and Tbilisi to each apply for Membership Action Plans (MAP) at an undisclosed future date. Although espionage against fellow members was not permitted in the CIS, Russian

intelligence increased its subversive activities in the GUAM participating states. In 2008, Yushchenko rallied Polish and Baltic leaders in support of Georgia during Russia’s invasion when Russia was incensed its aircraft had been shot down by Georgian forces using Ukrainian surface to air missiles. In 2009, Ukraine expelled three Russian diplomats for espionage and providing support to separatists and extremists in Crimea and Odessa, which led to a very undiplomatic open letter protest from President Medvedev.

GUAM, Russia, and the West Under Yanukovych

The second period of relations between GUAM participating states (2010-2013) was quieter during Viktor Yanukovych’s presidency of Ukraine. Yanukovych’s election signaled a return to “normality” for Russian leaders, as he was viewed as a satrap in similar fashion as is Belarus’s President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Yanukovych and his Party of Regions was hardline pro-Russian: its electoral stronghold in the Donbas resembled Crimea in the strength of its inhabitants’ pro-Russian sentiments and their deeply-felt Soviet nostalgia. In the CIS (Russia aside), only the

Party of Regions and its allies—the Communist Party of Ukraine and Crimean Russian nationalists—backed Moscow’s 2008 recognition of the “independence” of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Yanukovich implemented what Medvedev had demanded the year before, which included dropping Ukraine’s goal of seeking NATO membership and replacing it with a vague “non-bloc” foreign policy. NATO membership had been supported by both Kuchma and Yushchenko and by Yanukovich when he had been prime minister during Kuchma’s presidency. Although Yanukovich continued to claim he supported Ukraine’s participation in the Eastern Partnership, which offered integration with but not membership in the EU, his relations with Brussels were strained over the imprisonment of opposition leaders Yulia Tymoshenko and Yuriy Lutsenko.

A lesson Ukraine has learnt from that presidency was that agreeing to all of Russia’s demands never led to an improvement in Russian-Ukrainian

relations; rather, each demand Ukraine fulfilled simply led to further Russian demands. Despite fulfilling virtually all of Medvedev’s demands, Russia charged Ukraine the highest gas price in Europe throughout Yanukovich’s presidency. In addition, Yanukovich and his gas oligarch allies had no interest in Ukraine seeking energy independence from Russia, of which Azerbaijan was an important element, because they were making billions of dollars from corrupt gas intermediaries.

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Following Putin’s re-election in 2012, Russia pursued a three-fold strategy. *First*, pressure would be brought to bear on Armenia and Yanukovich to drop the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which happened in November 2013. *Second*, Russia would ensure Yanukovich’s re-election as president in January 2015. *Third*, a re-elected Yanukovich would take Ukraine into the Eurasian Economic Union (as the CIS Customs Union was renamed). Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the onset of hybrid war in eastern Ukraine was its angry response to the failure of the second

and third strands of the Russian strategy to include Ukraine in the Eurasian Economic Union (with its core being the three eastern Slavic nations of the Russian World). It was also a result of Putin’s personal anger at having been humiliated for a second time. The first occurred during the Orange Revolution, which denied Yanukovich’s fraudulent election, and has been described by Russian political technologist Glen Pavlovsky as “Putin’s 9/11.”

Ukraine and the Greater Middle East in the Aftermath of the 2014 Crisis

The 2014 crisis—Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the onset of hybrid warfare in Donbas—brought Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan closer together in a similar manner to what happened during the 2008 Georgian-Russian crisis.

Russia’s brazen annexation of Crimea was undertaken in the belief the West would react in a weak manner, as it had in response to Russia’s invasion of Georgia and

Yerevan’s pro-Russian stance can be seen in the fact that Yerevan has never condemned Russian military aggression anywhere in Eurasia, including in Ukraine in 2014.

Moscow’s recognition of the “independence” of two separatist Georgian territories, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, six years earlier. Initially Moscow appeared to have made a proper judgment. Western sanctions only became tougher in July 2014, after a Russian BUK missile shot down the MH17 civilian airliner that killed 298 civilians and a month later when the Russian army invaded Ukraine.

Armenia has been a long-term Russian ally since the disintegration of the USSR in the early 1990s; Yerevan’s pro-Russian stance can be seen in the fact that Yerevan has never condemned Russian military aggression anywhere in Eurasia, including in Ukraine in 2014. Armenia benefitted from Russian hybrid warfare when former Soviet troops assisted Armenia in occupying Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven districts surrounding the region during the First Karabakh War.

In Eurasia there are two types of color revolutions: pro-European and pro-Russian. The former has included Ukraine (2003-2004, 2013-2014) and Georgia (2003), whose

leaders then sought NATO and EU membership; the latter has included Armenia (2018) and Belarus (attempted in 2020), and in both cases the countries have remained in the Eurasian Economic Union.

In 2013, Armenia withdrew from the EU's Eastern Partnership and joined the CIS Customs Union (from 2015, called the Eurasian Economic Union). Armenia's 2018 color revolution brought Nikol Pashinyan to power and did not lead to an 'Armexit'—a withdrawal of

Armenia from the Eurasian Economic Union. Had the opposition come to power in Belarus, it also would not have engendered a 'Belexit'—a withdrawal of Belarus from the Eurasian Economic Union. Countries can only be in one customs union, which for Eurasian countries means either the Eurasian Economic Union or the EU. Pashinyan's rule was more nationalistic than it was democratic and his bombastic statements on Nagorno-Karabakh and his military aggression in July 2020 ultimately laid the ground for the Second Karabakh War and Armenia's defeat.

Ukrainians rose up against Yanukovich when he attempted to end Ukraine's path to European integration in the same year Yerevan turned its back on Europe—a major contrast. Russian policies succeeded in Armenia but failed in Ukraine. Armenians did not protest their country's shift from European to Eurasian integration while Ukrainians protested in the millions and hundreds were murdered during the Euromaidan Revolution in defense of their country's European choice.

After 2014, Georgia and Azerbaijan aligned with Ukraine in defense of its territorial integrity. Turkey also stated it would never recognize the annexation of Crimea. One reason is because Turkey has longstanding historical ties with the Crimean Tatars who have been subjected to centuries of discrimination. The Crimean Khanate had existed for three centuries before the peninsula was annexed by the Tsarist Russian Empire in the 1780s. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, millions of Crimean Tatars had fled from Russian and later Soviet persecution towards the

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Ottoman Empire and later Turkey. In 1944, Crimean Tatars were victims of genocide when half of them died during Stalin's ethnic cleansing campaign and the other half ended up in Central Asia. Crimean Tatars began returning to Ukraine in the late 1980s, were staunch supporters of Ukrainian independence, and their representatives were elected to the Ukrainian parliament as part of Yushchenko's Our Ukraine and the Poroshenko Bloc. Pro-Russian forces in Ukraine and nationalists in Russia have traditionally supported Stalin's ethnic cleansing of Crimean Tatars while Ukrainian national democrats and centrists have condemned this genocide. In 2015, the Ukrainian parliament recognized Stalin's ethnic cleansing as an act of genocide committed against the Crimean Tatars. Since 2014, 30,000 Crimean Tatars have fled to the Ukrainian mainland, Crimean Tatar institutions have been closed down, hundreds of activists have been imprisoned, and dozens have been murdered.

In Turkey, where there are an estimated six million Crimean Tatars, they are often called Crimean Turks

because of the closeness of Turkish and Crimean Tatar languages, culture, and history. This sizeable Crimean Tatar minority is vocal, active, and influential in Turkey. In the 1990s, Turkey supported Crimean Tatars and Ukraine's territorial integrity, but this support became more vocal and active starting in the early 2000s.

Turkey played an important behind-the-scenes role in supporting Ukraine's campaign to achieve religious autocephaly (independence) from the Russian Orthodox Church. Moscow's control over Ukraine, which began in the seventeenth century, was declared uncanonical by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople in January 2019 in a Tomos (decree) of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

The loss of 40 percent of the worldwide total number of Russian Orthodox Church parishes, which had been located in Ukraine, was a geopolitical disaster for Russia and a defeat for Russian soft power in Ukraine. President Putin called an emergency session of the Russian Security Council to deal with this

religious conflict in Ukraine. The Russian Orthodox Church is no longer the largest of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches and is now similar in size to the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Moscow cannot understand the Russian World without Ukraine and the historic city of Kyiv, which is 600 years older than Moscow.

Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are longstanding pro-NATO and pro-Western former Soviet states in a contested region that Russia demands the West recognize as its exclusive sphere of influence. As a NATO member, Turkey supports their integration into and cooperation with NATO. Erdogan support's Ukraine and Georgia's NATO membership aspirations.

Turkish-Ukrainian security cooperation is growing through the Quadriga (2+2) comprehensive dialogue formula of foreign and defense ministers as well as through Kyiv's Crimean Platform initiative, which is described by analyst Vladimir Socor as a "a multi-level framework for devising actions that would raise the costs of Russia's

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occupation and contradict Moscow's thesis about the irreversibility of its hold on the peninsula." Ukraine's First Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova — herself of Crimean

Tatar origin—has said the Crimean Platform is part of Ukraine's strategy for the "de-occupation of Crimea." It is designed to work on four levels: through foreign heads of state, foreign and defense ministers, an inter-parliamentary group, and experts.

The Crimean Platform is needed because the West has focused on the war in the Donbas while consenting to Russia's demand that Crimea's status is non-negotiable. Thus, Crimea was never included in the largely unproductive Normandy Format bringing together Ukraine, France, Germany, and Russia—the last meeting of which was held in December 2019, the first to be held since October 2016, and the sixth to be held since it was set up in 2014. Additionally, Crimea was never included in the OSCE-led negotiations within the Protocol on the Results of Consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group (known as the Minsk Protocol).

Zelenskyy is as unhappy with the lack of achievements of the Minsk Protocol over the last six years as Azerbaijan was of the OSCE Minsk Group's results regarding Nagorno-Karabakh over nearly 30 years of existence. France adopted pro-Armenian and pro-Russian stances in the Minsk Group and the Minsk Protocol, respectively, which disqualified Paris as an impartial and neutral negotiator.

Ukrainian-Turkish relations developed in a more sustained and productive manner under both Poroshenko and Zelenskyy. At an October 2020 joint press conference with Zelenskyy, Erdogan said, "Turkey sees Ukraine as a key country for ensuring stability, peace, and prosperity in our region. Within this framework we have always supported and will continue to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including over Crimea." Erdogan then added, "Turkey has not recognized and does not recognize the annexation of Crimea." In language reminiscent of Turkish support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity,

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a joint statement issued by the two presidents said, "we agree to continue our efforts towards de-occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as restoration of Ukraine's control over certain areas in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine." The joint Turkish-Ukrainian statement also raised the plight of Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian prisoners held by Russia and the protection of human, national, and religious rights in Crimea.

A related point is the fact that Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine have developed common interests in the area of Black Sea security in the aftermath of Russia's November 2018 naval piracy in the Azov Sea. Turkey, the U.S. and the UK support the rebuilding of Ukraine's navy, which is being boosted by Ukraine's purchase of Turkish MILGEM-class corvettes.

Another important point is the fact that cooperation between Turkey, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the joint

production and use of military equipment is progressing in the aftermath of Azerbaijan’s successful use of Israeli and Turkish drones in the Second Karabakh War.

Ukrainian policymakers and experts are assiduously studying the implications of Azerbaijan’s military victory for the Donbas and Crimea theatres. Ukraine has already purchased 48 Bayraktar TB-2 drones, which will be based in the Donbas war zone. NATO training, electronic warfare, military communications, intelligence, drones, and other forms of military equipment such as night vision are important areas of Turkish-Ukrainian cooperation. And Ukraine’s military is learning lessons from Azerbaijan’s experience in the Second Karabakh War. Turkey and Ukraine are jointly manufacturing drones and other military equipment befitting a twenty-first-century army. A huge \$3 billion of Armenian military equipment was destroyed by Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War, which brought out the inferiority of Russian military equipment. Turkey’s Akinci (Raider) drones are powered by Ukrainian

Ivachenko-Progress A1-450T turboprop engines. Other areas of mutual military cooperation include unmanned fighter jets, a technology used successfully by Azerbaijan in the recent conflict with Armenia.

Azerbaijan is the main country providing gas supplies to Turkey and Europe as an alternative to hydrocarbons originating in Russia, which has major geopolitical ramifications for the South Caucasus, Black Sea countries, and Southeast Europe. The American pursuit of sanctions against

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Nord Stream 2, which is supposed to supply Russian gas to Germany, is strategically good for both Ukraine and Azerbaijan. With regards to the former, this is because it forces Russia to continue using

Ukraine’s pipeline network to export gas to Europe; with regards to the latter, this is because it would enable Azerbaijan to compete with Russia in supplying gas to European customers. Ukraine has been independent of Russian gas supplies since 2015 and seeks to become an importer of Azerbaijani gas.

Lastly, Turkey is a vital regional hub for the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), one of

three pipelines in the Southern Gas Corridor connecting Azerbaijan’s Shah Deniz II field to European markets. The Turkish-Azerbaijani strategic alliance cements the former as a regional energy hub independent of Russia while enabling the latter for the first time to become a major gas exporter to Europe and Ukraine. In addition, 40 percent of the oil that Israel imports originates from Azerbaijan, an important factor which cements that particular strategic partnership. A high proportion of Jews in Israel are from Ukraine, and ties between Ukraine and Israel are also close.

Conclusions

Ukraine first developed close and productive relations with the South Caucasus and the Greater Middle East during Kuchma’s second term (1999-2004) and Yushchenko’s presidency (2005-2010), although both sets of ties began deepening further in the wake of the 2014 crisis, during Poroshenko’s term and continuing into Zelenskyy’s. Ukraine’s relations with Turkey have grown into a strategic partnership under Poroshenko and Zelenskyy, as well.

Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have consistently supported several shared objectives. They do

not agree to Russia having a monopolistic sphere of influence over Eurasia or having the CIS representing them in international organizations. They disagreed with the UN and the OSCE agreeing to Russian demands for a monopoly on conducting peacekeeping operations in Eurasia. Azerbaijan and Georgia have sought for decades—without success—to replace Russian with UN or OSCE peacekeepers. Ukraine proposed a plan to introduce UN peacekeepers on the Russian-Ukrainian border only to have Russia oppose it, demanding instead any peacekeeping force be stationed on the contact line in the Donbas war zone.

Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Georgia distrust Russia because of Moscow’s support for separatism in their respective countries. They believe it is in their interests to develop their countries energy independence from Russia. They view membership (Ukraine, Georgia) and integration (Azerbaijan) into Trans-Atlantic structures as a means to remain independent from Russian hegemony. Finally, they support a minimalist CIS rather than having the CIS used as a vehicle to deepen Russian-led integration, which in turn would limit the sovereignty of its non-Russian members.

This, then, is how we in Ukraine see these matters. **BD**