

Black Soil Oil and Ethnicity in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

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Foreword

To write a master thesis is a difficult and lonely task. Luckily one does not fully realize this until the project is well underway, and the point of no return is passed many library visits ago. Personally I have had great benefit of writing this master thesis. Not only has it provided me with an opportunity to thoroughly explore a subject that I find very interesting, but also taught me the basics of how to conduct and report scientific research.

First and foremost I want to thank my supervisor Helge Blakkisrud for indispensable guidance and support throughout the work on this master thesis. I am also grateful for comments and pointers from Øystein Noreng and Janne Haaland Matlary, especially in the initial research phase.

My mother Trine has, as always, been very helpful with proofreading, encouragement, and general academic advice. Per-Anders deserves thanks for interesting discussions. A big thanks also goes to Leif Petter for enduring my 'fotristing' and endless repeats of the Les Misérables soundtrack. Last, but not least, to Stine: thank you for everything!

It is with a certain degree of melancholy that my time as a student at the University of Oslo has now come to an end. After so many years of traversing the auditoriums, study halls, cafeterias, and the endless stairs to the 9th floor, Blindern has become like my second home. I will certainly remember the innumerable days of hard study, the good friendship, and – the carefree nights down at the pub.

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Blindern, October 26, 2005.

Map 1. The Caucasus Region.



Map 2. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh.



1. Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the creation of 15 new states where there previously had been a single and vast multi-ethnic empire. Of the former Soviet territories, the Caucasus region – wedged in between the Black and the Caspian Sea – stands out. In addition to being haunted with separatism and civil war for the passed 14 years, the region has also evolved into a focal point for Russian and US great power interests regarding control over the substantial oil reserves situated in and around the Caspian Sea.

One of the most serious and long-standing conflicts in the Caucasus is the controversy between Armenia/Armenians and Azerbaijan/Azeris over the ethnically mixed Nagorno-Karabakh province located in the southwestern corner of Azerbaijan. In 1991–94 the two factions fought a devastating war for control of the contested province. An unstable ceasefire along the line of contact was agreed upon in 1994, but more than 1 million internally displaced persons (IDP) are still hindered from returning to their homes.

In 1992, the Minsk Process was initiated by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later OSCE) with the purpose of negotiating a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Two main alternative formulas for resolving the conflict have been attempted. One is a phased settlement of the contested issues where the Armenians first give up occupied Azerbaijani territory outside of Nagorno-Karabakh, and then negotiate the future status of the province itself. The other approach is an all-in-one package deal where status and transfer of occupied territory is settled simultaneously. Despite numerous efforts to solve the conflict, no peace settlement acceptable to both parties has emerged throughout the years.

1.1. Research Question and Hypotheses

To study the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is highly relevant for several reasons. First, the conflict sustains a sizeable human catastrophe in the Caucasus by obstructing the return of more than 1 million IDPs. Second, the conflict effectively drives a wedge through the region, and threatens the transit of Caspian oil to the world market. (This is especially relevant in a Norwegian context since Statoil is a sizable shareholder in several of the major oil development projects in Azerbaijan). Third, the conflict ties up the entire Caucasus, as Armenia and Azerbaijan are placed on opposite sides of two rivalling blocks in the region: the East-West US-Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan axis and the North-South Russia-Armenia-Iran axis. Fourth, the conflict might erupt into a new war with substantial regional consequences.

It is therefore of interest to discuss why the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unsolved. This master thesis essentially aspires to answer the research question:

Why has there not, despite several international peace efforts, been a resolution to the prolonged conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh?

As a starting point, there are at least two main approaches for answering the research question outlined above. First, it is possible to analyze the Minsk Process itself. Institutional arrangements or process-generated stakes could block the creation of a viable peace-settlement. Second, it is possible to analyze the underlying conflict dimensions. The conflict could be of such nature that a peace-settlement is very hard to reach, or that no viable peace-settlement exists at all. Since I suspect the Minsk Process to reproduce the already set conflict dynamic, my approach will be the latter¹.

¹ Since 1992, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been conducting peace negotiations within the framework of the Minsk Process. Despite a shown willingness to find a solution to the stalemate, the regional combatants have nonetheless blocked all proposals that do not entirely satisfy their aspirations regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. It is

The next question is then what theoretical perspective should be useful to uncover the underlying conflict dimensions in Nagorno-Karabakh. Realism conceives primarily of the great powers as crucial for behaviour in the international system, and it has for long been the prevailing theory in the field of International Relations. As a theoretical perspective, realism could probably provide us with valuable insight because its theoretical assumptions seem to fit nicely with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: the great powers Russia and the US are rivalling over vital energy resources and other states in the region have a very limited power projection capacity vis-à-vis the great powers. From a realist perspective there would be only one dominant conflict dimension – that of the great powers. This provides us with the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved because of a US-Russia system level conflict dimension in the Caucasus.

Nevertheless, the realist perspective – with its emphasis on the system level of analysis² – could prove to be inadequate for unveiling all aspects of the complicated and entrenched Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A cutting edge contribution to International Relations in this respect is Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's (2003) *Regional Security Complex Theory*. This theoretical perspective essentially argues the case of several levels of analysis operating simultaneously in the post-Cold War world, and maintains that these levels need to be kept in relation to each other. The existence of several interacting conflict dimensions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is plausible. This would give us the following alternative hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved because of the interplay between a US-Russia system level conflict dimension and an Armenia-Azerbaijan regional level conflict dimension in the Caucasus.

Although providing alternative approaches to realism has become, in the words of Charles W. Kegely (1993:134), a "growth industry" in the later years, it is not the intention of this master thesis to refute the realist perspective altogether or repudiating the validity of its main assumptions. Instead this master thesis aspires to assess whether *Regional Security Complex Theory* – which also contains materialist elements close to realism – offers a more promising approach than the conventional realist perspective for understanding the unresolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

1.2. Method

1.2.1. Nagorno-Karabakh as a Critical Case Study

As a scientific method, case studies are essentially a thorough investigation of one or few units. A main strategy for testing hypotheses against empirical data is to conduct a study of a critical case: a case that should be typical for a well-documented theory, but where something still is wrong. This is founded on plain falsification logic: if the theoretical assumptions are correct, they should at least be correct in the case at hand (Andersen 1997:86). The case study can then establish whether the theory's propositions are correct or whether some alternative explanation might be more

thus probable that the disparity between what Armenia and Azerbaijan considers an acceptable peace-agreement is reproduced in the peace-negotiations.

² In the article *The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations*, David Singer (1961) argues that it is possible to analyze the international system from a system, as well as from a national level. Since the publication of Singer's article, there has been a debate in International Relations concerning which (and how many) levels should be given priority, and how the relationship among the levels should be organized.

relevant. Applied in this manner, a case study can represent a significant contribution to our general knowledge and theory building (Yin 2003:40).

Due to the significant great power overlay in the Caucasus, the theoretical assumptions of realism should be overriding in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Realism is thus expected to be the best-suited theoretical perspective. If the empirical data nonetheless reveals an independent regional conflict dimension, then an opportunity exists for assessing where realism fails as a theoretical framework, and also for evaluating whether Regional Security Complex Theory can provide a better understanding of the shortcomings of realism.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is in this way applied as a critical case study. Such a research design has two main benefits for the purposes of this master thesis. First, it seems promising to test two different hypotheses in order to provide an answer as to why the conflict remains unsolved. Second, this approach can contribute to the general theory building in the field of International Relations.

1.2.2. The Use of Empirical Data

A major strength of the case study method is the opportunity for applying multiple sources of evidence (Yin 2003:97). The empirical data used in this master thesis is based on three main sources: interviews with key informants, official policy documents, and secondary literature such as books, articles published in scientific journals, and Internet resources.

Interviews. There is no set answer as to how qualitative interviews should be conducted. Steinar Kvale (2001:59) argues that depending on how much resources and time that is available, interview studies ought to include 5 to 25 informants. This master thesis has used semi-structured interviews to gather information from five key informants: Mikeal Danielyan (Helsinki Association), Øystein Noreng (BI), Willy Olsen (INTSOK), Tigran Karapetyan (Armenian legal expert), and Ulvi Akhundly (OSCE). In this type of interview the main questions are sketched out in advance, but not the exact wording or order of appearance (Ryen 2001:97-99). It is important to note that interviews – regardless of type – generally are subject to bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation (Yin 2003:92). In order to overcome the problems, the interview data has been crosschecked against empirical data from other sources of evidence. The main role of the interviews in the research process has been to isolate interesting questions and problems, and gaining insight into the political life of Armenian and Azerbaijan.

Official documents. Several documents are used as empirical data in this master thesis. The Russian documents includes the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation [Kontseptsiya Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii³] (1993), the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation [Voennaya Doktrina Rossiyskoi Federatsii] (1993), the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation [Kontseptsiya Natsionalnoy Bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi Federatsii] (1997), and the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation [Kontseptsiya Natsionalnoy Bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi Federatsii] (2000). The US documents includes the Silk Road Strategy Act (1999) and the National Energy Policy (2001). A read-through of Armenian and Azerbaijani official documents relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict revealed that these sources are highly politicized, and not very informative for understanding official policy. Thus, no such documents are used in this master thesis.

³ The Russian policy documents have all been read in Russian, but for matters of simplicity, they will be referred to in the text in the English translation.

The advantage of using the Russian and US policy documents is that they lay down the official policy of the countries studied. It is, however, important to keep in mind that every document was written for some specific purpose and specific audience other than those of the case study being undertaken here (Yin 2003:87-88). The documents are consequently not taken for granted as evidence, but rather interpreted from a critical point of view.

Secondary literature. This is the largest source of empirical data. It is imperative that these references, as well as the interviews and documents outlined above, are both reliable and valid (Hellevik 1999:102; Yin 2003:35-38). Reliability refers to the trustworthiness of the empirical data, and the degree of accuracy regarding the collection and handling of data. Validity, on the other hand, refers to the relevance of the empirical data for the research question at hand. This master thesis have used a number of Russian, US, Armenian, and Azeri sources, in addition to several other scholars and analysts that have the Caucasus as a field of special interest. This enhances data reliability, because data from different sources confirms the trustworthiness of the empirical material. It also increases the possibility of data being relevant for the research question.

A key element regarding data reliability is that another scholar should be able to conduct the same case study, and arrive at the same results and conclusions. References in this master thesis are therefore clearly stated, and all documents and interviews are readily available for further examination. Data validity is furthermore improved through maintaining a clear chain of evidence –essentially helping the reader to understand the organization of the empirical material and the logic of my argumentation.

Because ultimately anyone can post anything on the web, Internet based resources cause a special challenge when applied as data. It is thus crucial to carefully choose web sites that are serious and well known, i.e. the “publisher” must be known, the site stable and updated, and have links to other serious sites (Beck 2005). Most web articles used in this master thesis consequently originate from renowned web sites or newsgroups such as the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst (Johns Hopkins University), ANKAM (Anakara Centre for Turkish Policy Studies), Berkeley University, Eurasianet (updated news and analysis on the Caucasus and Central Asia), and the Brookings Institute (Washington think tank). If one carefully follows the guidelines outlined above for retrieving data from the Internet, the sources should be considered just as valid and reliable as printed material.

1.3. Limitations and Clarifications

This master thesis aspires to test whether it is the interaction between a system level conflict dimension and a regional level conflict dimension that hinders a resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh. In order to achieve this aspiration, a thorough empirical analysis of the possible top-down and bottom-up linkages between the regional actors and the system level actors is deemed necessary. A substantial part of this master thesis is therefore devoted towards outlining the empirical data with regard to these linkages.

The period covered in this master thesis is 1991-2005⁴. Due to the restricted time and scope of a master thesis, the research design is limited to a single case study of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the actors involved. This implies that the conflict will not be analysed in view of the other major transformations taking place in the former Soviet Union –e.g. the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. There are furthermore some often used terms that needs clarification:

⁴ Developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been monitored right up to November 1, 2005.

The Caucasus. The Caucasus region is divided by the massive Caucasus Mountains into a northern and a southern part. North-Caucasus is a part of the Russian Federation, and includes seven administrative republics – among them the war-torn Chechnya. South-Caucasus or Transcaucasus includes the former Soviet Republics Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Unless otherwise explicitly stated, in this master thesis the Caucasus refers to the South-Caucasus.

Ethnicity. Ethnic affiliation is important in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and it is thus necessary to distinguish the ethnicity of the parties involved. The term 'Azeri' is used to describe the Muslim and Turkic-speaking population that make up the ethnic majority group in Azerbaijan, as well as their ethnical kinsmen living outside of Azerbaijan's borders. To use the term 'Azerbaijani' risks being misleading, as it could be interpreted as encompassing all citizens of Azerbaijan. The term 'Armenian' refers to the majority Christian population that inhabits Armenia, and their ethnical kinsmen living outside of Armenia's borders.

Nagorno-Karabakh. The contested province constitutes a special case because it is both an intra-state conflict between Armenians and Azeris living in Azerbaijan, as well as an inter-state conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Lloyd Jensen's (1997: 133-34) term *external ethnic-linked state* can be applied to Armenia's relationship with Nagorno-Karabakh, although with the important deviance that the two, as a consequence of the 1991-94 war, are linked by territory and are relatively well integrated politically, economically and militarily. Because of the intertwined relationship between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, it would provide us with little additional information to keep them as separate units of analysis. As an example, regular units from the Armenian army patrol the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh, while several key officials in Armenia – including the president himself – are natives of Nagorno-Karabakh. These two units are therefore conceived of as constituting a single unit. This implies that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is viewed primarily as an inter-state conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

1.4. Place in the Literature

Realism has since the beginning of the Cold War dominated the study of International Relations. Major works in the period of classical realism (or human nature realism) includes Reinhold Niebuhr's (1932) *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and Hans Morgenthau's (1948) *Politics among Nations*. This school of thought argued the case of states being led by human beings that all have a "will to power" given from birth. States consequently look for opportunities to dominate other states. In the late 1970s, Kenneth Waltz (1979) further refined the realist position in his *Theory of International Politics*. Waltz's neorealism (or structural realism) argues that it is the anarchy of the international system that forces security-seeking states to compete with other states for power, because power is the best means for survival. Based on Waltz's conception of anarchy, several versions of realism have emerged in the literature. Stephen Walt's (1987) balance of threat and John J. Mearsheimer's (2001) offensive realism are examples.

The origin of Regional Security Complex Theory can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 70s, when a literature emerged in the field of regional subsystems (Russett 1967; Cantori and Spiegel 1970; Haas 1970). Barry Buzan (1991) outlines the first version of Regional Security Complex Theory in his *People, States and Fear*. In this book the region is applied as a focal point from where it is possible to systematically link the study of the different security dynamics operating in the international system. After the end of the Cold War, several additional works on regionalism and regional security orders have appeared (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995; Lake and Morgan 1997; Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998). The latest supplement to this literature is Barry Buzan and Ole

Wæver's (2003) *Regions and Powers*, which expands the applicability of Regional Security Complex Theory, and applies it methodically to a number of regions worldwide.

1.5. A Roadmap

The next chapter provides a short historical introduction to the Caucasus region and the roots of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Chapter three further outlines the theoretical foundation for the two rivalling hypotheses and proposes two models for how to better understand the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The following chapters four, five, and six are dedicated to accounting for the empirical data at hand. Finally chapter seven will analyse the empirical data in view of the theoretical perspectives, and assess the strength of the two rivalling hypotheses.

2. A Historical Introduction

Throughout history, control over the Caucasus has been important because this narrow strip of land constitutes a strategic invasion and trade corridor between the landmasses in Eurasia. Greek, Roman, Persian, Arabic, Mongolian, Turkish, and Russian empires have all waged an almost endless chain of wars for control and domination in the region. The name Nagorno-Karabakh indicates itself the influence of the numerous empires that have dominated the Caucasus: "Kara" means black in Turkish, "bag" means garden in Persian ("bakh" is an alteration to Russian), and "nagorno" means mountainous in Russian. This chapter provides a short overview of the history of the Caucasus, and shows how the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh – the Mountainous Black Garden – has developed throughout the centuries.

2.1. Ethnical Landscape and Early History in the Caucasus

2.1.1. The Armenians

The modern historical consensus is that the Armenian people, following the disintegration of the Urartu Kingdom in Anatolia, settled on the Armenian plateau from the 6th century BC (Hewsen 2001:10). The region was initially a province of Persia, but evolved in the 2nd century BC into a sizable empire of its own. At its zenith, from 95-66 BC, this Armenian Empire ruled over large parts of present-day Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. Early in the 3rd century AD Armenia became the first state to adopt Christianity as a state religion, and established the independent Armenian Apostolic Church.

2.1.2. The Azeris

Originally the Azeris were Turkish nomads from the Eurasian plains that gradually settled in the lowlands of the Caucasus region. According to Peter Golden (1983:45) one can speak of contact between the indigenous Albanian⁵ population and Turkish tribes from the 4th century AD, but large-scale settlement and intermarriage did not occur before the 11th century AD. During this century the Seljuk Turks – which recently had converted to Islam – became the dominant force in present-day Azerbaijan. In the 16th century AD, Azerbaijan became the nucleus of the Safavid dynasty – the last of the great dynasties to rule the Persian Empire.

2.2. The Great Empires in the Caucasus

2.2.1. The Persian Empire

The Persian Empire, in its various forms and dynasties, more or less continuously ruled the Caucasus from the 6th century BC to the 18th century AC. Armenia and Azerbaijan belonged both culturally and politically to the same Persian sphere of influence during this extensive time lag. Feuds between Azeri and Armenian princes were not uncommon,

⁵ 'Albanians' was the word that the Romans gave to the population in the Caucasus when they invaded the region in 58 BC. There is no connection between Albanians in the Caucasus and Albanians in the Balkans.

and Nagorno-Karabakh – as well as several other provinces – recurrently changed hands between Azeri, Armenian, and foreign rulers. All the same, there is no proof indicating that the two ethnic groups were locked into a pattern of permanent hostility. Azeri and Armenian royal houses waged war against each other just as often as they stood together against foreign invaders and conquerors (Leeuw 2000: 141). Thus, the present-day conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be conceived of as based on ancient ethnic hatred between Azeris and Armenians in the Caucasus.

2.2.2. The Ottoman Empire

In the 17th and early 18th century the Ottoman Empire fought numerous wars against the Persian Empire for control in the Caucasus, and the collapse of the Safavid dynasty in 1722 eliminated the Persian threat in the East once and for all. Even so, by the 19th century the one time so powerful Ottoman Empire constituted a mere shadow of its former glory. Progress had stalled, and the Empire was in general decay. The weakening of Ottoman power coincided with a renewal of Armenian nationalism in Eastern Anatolia. As a result, the last Ottoman Sultans and their successor, the Young Turks increasingly started to view its long time Armenian subjects as a dangerous Christian fifth column that could threaten the unity of the already fragile Empire.

The fear in Constantinople for a large scale Armenian uprising in the midst of the Turkish heartland culminated in a modern genocide: 200,000 Armenians were killed in 1895-96, and additionally 1.5 million were massacred in 1915 (Overly 2000: 228). The surviving Armenians were forced on a mass exodus to the Caucasus, or more precisely to present-day Armenia, which was located within the borders of the Russian Empire. In this way Armenia essentially became a country swamped by refugees that nourished sincere fear and hatred of the Turkish people.

2.2.3. The Russian Empire

Russian troops temporarily invaded Baku already in 1722, but it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the Russian Empire became seriously involved south of the Caucasus Mountains. The Russian Tsars viewed the Christian Armenians as its natural allies in the Caucasus. The Azeris, on the other hand, were conceived of as a potential Muslim fifth column, and even more so after the Russian-Ottoman wars in 1855-56 and 1877-78. In order to reinforce its hold on the volatile region, Russia started encouraging extensive population swaps – redistributing Armenians from Ottoman and Persian territories to Russian controlled Caucasus, and moving the Muslim population vice versa⁶ (Kaufman 2001: 50). This somewhat overlapped with a dawning awakening among the Azeris regarding their Turkish roots and ancestry.

The October Revolution in 1917 threw Russia into a devastating civil war, and the superstructure of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus subsequently collapsed. Fuelled by an unrelenting nationalist rhetoric that had been active since the late 19th century, Armenia and Azerbaijan seized the moment to fight over three ethnically mixed provinces in the region. Nakhichevan and Zangezur were ethnically cleansed of Armenians and Azeris respectively, and only in Nagorno-Karabakh did the question of ethnic dominance remain unsettled.

2.3. The Soviet Union

2.3.1. The Bolsheviks Draw the Borders in the Caucasus

By 1920 the Russians were back in the Caucasus, only now they wore the uniforms of the Bolshevik Red Army. In order to rapidly reestablish control over the great multiethnic Russian Empire, the revolutionary regime in Moscow created the federative Soviet Union. The largest ethnic group in each Union Republic was given the status as

⁶ Numbers from the Russian census gives us a good picture of the dimension: in 1823, only 9% of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh was Armenian (the remaining was labeled ‘ Muslim’), in 1832, the number was up to 35%, and in 1880, the Armenians constituted a majority with 53% (Cornell 1999:5).

'titular nation', and enjoyed a favorable political, economical, and cultural position at the expense of other ethnic minorities (Strømme 1999:51-53).

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan obtained status as Union Republics in the Soviet Union, and Azerbaijan was in 1923 given Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous 'oblast' (region). The background for this decision was probably twofold. First, the ethnic affiliation of the province was primarily Armenian, but the economical and geographical ties of Nagorno-Karabakh nonetheless spoke in favor of uniting it with Azerbaijan. Second, an ethnic Armenian enclave inside the predominantly Muslim Azerbaijan would provide Moscow with the opportunity for divide and rule politics in the Caucasus (Waal 2003:130-31).

2.3.2. From Lenin to Gorbachev

An unforeseen by-product of Lenin's territorial arrangements for the Soviet Union was that the linkage between land and nationality – the principle of titular nations – essentially conserved nationalism in a latent form inside Armenia and Azerbaijan. Through the years Armenia several times appealed for the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan to Armenia, but all such petitions were firmly refused by the Kremlin. When Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power in 1985, a markedly change in the political climate took place. Movement on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh suddenly became an option as Gorbachev promised reform and a new approach to the Soviet Union. These promises hit a nerve in the Armenian population. Mass demonstrations were held in both Yerevan and Stepanakert all through February 1988, and the demand was clear: Nagorno-Karabakh had to be reunited with Armenia.

The vocal Armenian demands regarding Nagorno-Karabakh led to uncertainty and unrest in Azerbaijan. The Azeris essentially felt that the Armenians were attempting to seize a region that legitimately belonged to Azerbaijan. Ethnic riots broke out February 27, 1988 in Sumgait, an industrial town located just outside of Baku. A loosely organized Azeri mob rapidly took control of the streets, and started attacking the Armenian population. The death toll was relatively modest – around 30 Armenians and Azeris were killed (Cornell 1999:16; Waal 2003:40) – but the stories of pillages, molested bodies, and raped women made the Armenians compare the situation with the Armenian genocide in 1915.

2.3.3. The Conflict Gets Out of Hand

After the pogrom in Sumgait the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh gradually escalated into civil war. On June 15, 1988 the Supreme Soviet of Armenia approved the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, while the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet two days later reaffirmed that the province belonged to Azerbaijan. In the second half of 1988 both Armenia and Azerbaijan forcefully began to deport their respective Azeri and Armenian minorities. Moscow wanted to halt the conflict, but finding a compromise was difficult. Gorbachev feared that any redrawing of the borders would open a Pandora's Box, as there were over 30 other existing territorial claims in the USSR (Bowker 1997:56). A specially appointed administration was set up to rule Nagorno-Karabakh, but with few results. From the fall 1989, a low-key civil war existed between Azeris and Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh (d'Encasusse 1993:64-65).

The abortive coup d'état against Gorbachev August 19–21, 1991 led to the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union. As in 1917, the Russian superstructure in the Caucasus disappeared overnight, and the result was full-fledged war. In 1992–93 the new Armenian army utilized its superior training and organization to drive the Azeris out of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as capturing large territories to the south and west of the contested province. A massive Azeri counter offensive was initiated in the winter 1993, but with marginal territorial gains. When ceasefire was finally agreed upon in May 1994, the Armenian army effectively occupied 14% of Azerbaijan.

3. Theory and Hypotheses

The research question for this master thesis was summarized in chapter one:

Why has there not, despite several international peace efforts, been a resolution to the prolonged conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh?

In order to answer the research question, this master thesis aspires to assess whether Regional Security Complex Theory is a better theoretical tool for explaining the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict than the conventional realistic perspective. Since the realist perspective is well known, only the very basic framework of the theory will be sketched out. The greater part of this chapter is devoted towards presenting Regional Security Complex Theory as a new and promising approach to the study of security relations in the post-Cold War world.

3.1. Realism

It is important to note that realism is not a single cohesive theory. Michael Mastanduno (1997:50) calls it a "research program that contains a core set of assumptions from which a variety of theories and explanations can be developed". This master thesis chooses to apply the neorealism (or structural realism) of Kenneth Waltz (1979).

Neorealist thinking is based on the assumption that the world is an anarchic international system. Anarchy does not imply chaos, but rather the absence of central political authority. Unitary states are the main units in this system, and all states essentially face the same global self-help system. Anarchy compels states to contend with each other for power because power is the best means to survival. The global or system level is defined by the distribution of material power among states, and it can be conceived of in terms of power polarity – ranging from unipolarity to multipolarity. Great powers dominate, and shape the system level because these states command significant military and economical resources that are unattainable for the remaining states in the system (Waltz 1979). The behavior of the great powers is influenced mainly by their external environment (consequently the other great powers) "We ask what range of expectations arises merely from looking at the type of order that prevails among [states] and at the distribution of capabilities within that order" (Waltz 1992:17).

Although Waltz (1979:39; 65; 69) does not disregard that developments at the domestic level of analysis can be of importance, he nonetheless maintains that it is problematic to study state behavior at this level. This is because the relationship between state intentions and actions on the one hand, and the result of these actions on the other hand, are not concurrent. The two levels of analysis – domestic and system – therefore require two different theories that are not easily combined:

The theoretical separation of domestic and international politics need not bother us unduly. Economists get along quite well with separate theories of markets and firms. Students of international politics will do well to concentrate on separate theories of internal and external politics until someone figures out a way to unite them (Waltz 1986:340).

Waltz (1979:132) argues that security for all states is dependent on sustaining a balance of power between them. "In the anarchy of the international system, the most reliable brake on the power of one state is the power of other states" (Goldstein 2004:92). Balancing and counter balancing occurs regularly, and this maintains the stability of the international system. We could thus conceive of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a matter of two great powers – the US and Russia – balancing against each other in the power vacuum left behind in the Caucasus with the sudden collapse of the

Soviet Union. In this context Armenia and Azerbaijan are merely pawns on the global chessboard because the great power overlay essentially determines the outcome of the conflict. Accordingly, the system level is the appropriate level of analysis for studying the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

3.2. Regional Security Complex Theory

3.2.1. The Level of Analysis

Buzan and Wæver (2003:43) do not refute the neorealist concepts of anarchy and polarity, but argue that superpowers and great powers⁷ are the only states that are sufficiently integrated to be analyzed at the system level of analysis. The opportunity for studying the security concerns of other states at the system level only exists when great powers are extremely dominant. This was the case during the Imperial Era (1500–1945) when the European international system expanded until it became global. Since the Second World War, however, the supremacy of great powers has been in constant recession; first with the process of decolonization, and then with the end of the Cold War and bipolarity. A consequence of this dramatic transformation of the international system is that states increasingly have been left to sort out their military-political relationships with less interference from great powers than before (Buzan and Wæver 2003:14-19).

This is not to say that Buzan and Wæver are strong supporters of a genuine national approach to security analysis. To the contrary, they argue that national security does not stand alone as a meaningful level of analysis since security dynamics are essentially relational. National security is not self-sufficient, and it cannot function independently from the security concerns of other states (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 43).

A pure system- or national level analysis is therefore inadequate for understanding security in the post-Cold War world. The different levels of analysis need instead to be kept in relation to each other because no single level of analysis holds the master key to the full interpretation of security. Buzan and Wæver (2003:52) propose that a *regional* approach to security offers the opportunity to view the different levels of analysis in relation to each other. Regional Security Complex Theory builds on the assumption that most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones. Since states are primarily concerned with the capabilities and intentions of their neighbors, security interdependence is normally strongest at the regional level of analysis – identified as located between the extremes of the system and national levels of analysis (Buzan and Wæver 2003:12-13).

Buzan and Wæver do not claim that the regional level is the only, or necessarily dominant level of analysis, but the theory implicitly assumes that the regional level of analysis is of considerable importance for the study of security after the Cold War. Security can be studied at four different levels of analysis: domestic, regional, interregional, and system. The aim of Regional Security Complex Theory is to map how things are *securitised*: who or what is defined as the (origin of) threats, and whom the actor targets in countermeasure (Buzan and Wæver 2004:462). Regional Security Complex Theory takes the region as a point of departure from where it is possible to systematically link the study of internal conditions, relations among states in a region, relations between regions, and the interplay of regional dynamics with globally acting powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003:52).

⁷ Buzan and Wæver (2003:34-36) argue that the post-Cold War world is made up of one superpower (USA) and four great powers (Britain/France/Germany – EU, Japan, China and Russia). For matters of simplicity, this master thesis will hereafter refer to both superpowers and great powers as ‘great powers’.

3.2.2. Security at the Regional Level of Analysis

Regional Security Complex Theory uses a blend of materialist⁸ and constructivist⁹ approaches. On the materialist side, Buzan and Wæver (2003:28-29) utilize ideas of bounded territoriality and distribution of power that is close to neorealism. They also establish a wide conception of security that includes new security issues in addition to the traditional military concerns such as financial flows, migration, and trade liberalization. On the constructivist side, Buzan and Wæver (2003:47) maintain that the particular relationship of amity and enmity within a region is normally not introduced from the system level, but generated internally in the region by a mixture of history, politics, and material conditions.

The world can be divided into mutually exclusive *Regional Security Complexes (RSC)* that is made up of specific and interdependent patterns of rivalry, balance of power, and alliances among states within the region. RSCs are defined as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from each other" (Buzan and Wæver 2003:491).

The structure of a RSC is made up of four variables:

- Boundary: distinguishes the RSC from its neighbors,
- anarchic structure: the RSC must be made up of two or more autonomous states,
- polarity: distribution of power among the states in the RSC, and
- social construction: patterns of amity and enmity among the states in the RSC.

Regional theorists such as David Lake and Patrick Morgan (1997) have argued the necessity of utilizing a broad definition of RSCs that includes economic, cultural, and historical components. Buzan and Wæver (2003:43-44), on the other hand, argue the case that "security complexes are regions as seen through the lens of security. They may or may not be regions in other senses, but they do not depend on, or start from, other conceptualizations of regionness". In the international system, it is within the RSCs that most of the interaction among states takes place. States with limited capabilities are usually locked into a specific RSC, and are in this way restricted to interaction with its adjacent neighbors. The interaction between RSCs is significantly less intense than the interaction between states inside a RSC.

To describe states that are located between different RSCs Buzan and Wæver (2003:40-41) applies the term *insulator*. Insulators do not have the sufficient means to unify its different RSCs into one, and most often such states play a rather passive role in the international system. Some states command considerable power capabilities within their own RSC, but not enough to matter on a global scale. These states are labeled *regional powers*¹⁰.

Buzan and Wæver (2003:55-56) further distinguish between *standard* and *centered* RSCs. A standard RSC is made up of two or more states and one or more regional

⁸ The materialist elements of Regional Security Complex Theory include neorealism and globalism. Neorealism was discussed in subchapter 3.1. Globalism is generally considered to be the antithesis of realism because it argues the increasing deterritorialisation of world politics. This theoretical perspective maintains the independent role of both transnational entities and intergovernmental organizations and regimes (Held et al. 1999). Regional Security Complex Theory presupposes the prominence of territoriality in the domain of security analysis, but nonetheless recognizes that non-territorial security can be of importance.

⁹ Social constructivists maintain that the way states behave toward each other is not a function of how the materialist world is structured – as realists argue – but instead is largely determined by how individuals think and talk about international politics (Wendt 1999).

¹⁰ Examples of regional powers include states such as Brazil, Egypt, Iran, Nigeria, and South Africa.

powers that define the power polarity of the RSC – ranging from unipolar to multipolar. Inside a standard RSC the security agenda is mainly influenced by the relationship between the regional powers. In a centered RSC, however, there exist one or more resident great powers that define the power polarity of the RSC. Potential regional powers are not strong enough to make up an independent pole of polarity in such a RSC. The great powers direct their policies towards the system level, and therefore to a certain point suppress the regional security dynamics. Only other great powers can make their interests matter in such a RSC. Because the remaining regional actors nonetheless have a high degree of security interdependence, the region still makes up an independent RSC.

By definition great powers possess adequate power to surpass the geographical confinement of region (Buzan and Wæver 2003:34-35). Because they also make up the system level of analysis, it is not sufficient to study these states solely within the framework of RSCs. Buzan and Wæver (2003:46) identify the mechanism of *penetration* as the theoretical link between the system and the regional dynamics of the RSCs. Penetration happens when great powers make security arrangements with states inside a particular RSC. A linkage between the system and regional level is not, however, exclusively determined by great power penetration alone. Local states, following balance-of-power logic, also can request assistance from great powers in their regional conflicts.

3.2.3. A Regional Approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Regional Security Complex Theory proposes that all states can be located in one and only one RSC, except for great powers that operate in several RSCs, and insulators that are located between RSCs. Nagorno-Karabakh is located within the post-Soviet RSC, and the smaller Caucasus subcomplex¹¹. Subcomplexes are essentially the same as a RSC, the difference being that a subcomplex is firmly embedded within a larger RSC. The post-Soviet RSC is classified as a centered RSC where the great power Russia defines the unipolarity of the region (Buzan and Wæver 2003:55).

Following the logic of Regional Security Complex Theory, security dynamics in the post-Soviet RSC should be characterized by sizeable great power overlay because regional powers are supposedly non-existent in centered RSCs. Besides the conflicting parties Armenia and Azerbaijan, only Russia and one or more of the other great powers can make their influence matter in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In recent years the US has emerged as a challenger to Russian hegemony in the Caucasus and Central-Asia subcomplexes, and it is plausible that US interests in the Caucasus influence upon the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Buzan and Wæver 2003:398). Given the remote and mostly landlocked status of the Caucasus subcomplex, it is not likely that any other external great power than the US would command sufficient resources or interest to penetrate the region at the present time.

Thus a regional approach to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh should include the two regional rivals Armenia and Azerbaijan, the resident great power Russia, and conceivably also the US, which may or may not penetrate the conflict.

3.2.4. Limitations to the Proposed Approach

Such a tidily classification of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict might, however, be drawn into question as both the domestic and interregional level is effectively left out. With regard to the interregional level, it may seem odd to ignore the influence of Iran and Turkey¹² when considering how successive Persian and Ottoman dynasties (in their

¹¹ The post-Soviet RSC is made up of Russia and four subcomplexes: the western group of states (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova), the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan). For most of the states in the post-Soviet RSC, security concerns relate primarily to other states in the subcomplex plus Russia.

various forms) have cultivated strong interests and links to the Caucasus for numerous centuries. While not altogether denying the possibility of Turkish or Iranian influence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I nonetheless agree with Ib Faurby (2003) and Fiona Hill (2003) who proclaim the relatively limited impact of Turkish and Iranian power in the Caucasus. Both countries have significant interests in the Caucasus, but at the present moment Turkey and Iran do not have the capability to maneuver freely in the region without the support of respectively the US and Russia¹³. In order not to unnecessarily complicate the research design, Turkey and Iran are therefore omitted as independent actors from the further analysis, and are instead briefly dealt with in the following empirical chapters.

The rationale for excluding the domestic level of analysis is connected to the theoretical ambitions of this master thesis. As previously outlined, Buzan and Wæver do not refute the neorealist concepts of anarchy and the distribution of power, but they give priority to a lower level of analysis – the regional level. This master thesis aims to establish whether or not an Armenia-Azerbaijan regional level conflict dimension – in addition to an expected US-Russia system level conflict dimension – influences the unsettled Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To include a separate analysis of how the domestic level interplays with the regional and system level would thus be on the sidelines of this research design. Furthermore, it would greatly swamp the empirical material, as the number of possible linkages to investigate drastically increases with each level added to the analysis. Since the costs – as I understand it – outweigh the benefits, a separate analysis of the domestic level is omitted from this master thesis. Instead the following empirical chapters will be careful to include any credible indications, if such exist, of domestic level influence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

One might of course object that excluding both the interregional and domestic levels of analysis leaves us with an incomplete version of Regional Security Complex Theory. I acknowledge this objection, but nonetheless argue that using only two levels is the better approach for the aim of this master thesis. The strength, but also weakness, of Regional Security Complex Theory is that it aspires to explain everything that neorealism does *and more*. It is likely that an approach which utilizes the domestic, regional, interregional, and system level of analysis is able to discover an aspect that neorealism – with its less complicated framework – cannot account properly for. Using only the regional and system level gives us instead a stronger test: either the system level is dominant for explaining the unresolved conflict, or there exists an independent regional level that also influences the conflict. Both levels are expected to operate in accordance with neorealist (materialist) assumptions, but neorealism can only explain the system level dynamic. The problem with the complexity of Regional Security Complex Theory will be further discussed in the next subchapter.

3.2.5. A Critique of Regional Security Complex Theory

Theory is essentially the glasses that we use for structuring our knowledge of the empirical world. It is consequently imperative that we use theories that can provide us with valuable insight regarding the cases that we wish to study. Since Regional Security Complex Theory is a brand new approach in the field of International Relations, it is appropriate to note some critical remarks to the theoretical framework.

¹² Buzan and Wæver (2003:189; 392) locate Iran within the Middle Eastern RSC, and labels Turkey as an insulator between the post-Soviet RSC, the European RSC, and the Middle Eastern RSC.

¹³ Inadequate economical resources, sensitivity towards internal ethnic unrest, and the priority of membership in the European Union have forced Turkey to employ a cautious policy towards the Caucasus that essentially is in line with US interests and wishes. Iran's influence in the Caucasus has been limited by its much-needed Russian backing for arms supply and technology transfer (nuclear technology in particular).

Regional Security Complex Theory could essentially be conceived of as a coherent toolbox containing several theoretical perspectives. This gives the theory large explanatory power, a prime quality of a good theory, but Buzan and Wæver may nonetheless be throwing the net too wide. When elements from such diverse perspectives as neorealism, globalism, and constructivism, as well as four levels of analysis – domestic, regional, interregional, and system – are included into one framework, it could threaten the parsimony of the theory (Evera 1997:17-19). Neorealism, on the other hand, has here the great advantage of simplicity. Waltz (1997:73) uses only one independent variable (the distribution of material power) and one level of analysis (system level) that is considered able to account for behavior and outcome in the international system.

Using a too broad theoretical framework runs the risk of explaining 'everything', thus really explaining nothing. The likelihood of an all-inclusive Regional Security Complex Theory approach ending up as an overwhelming and insurmountable research project cannot be disregarded. In order to avoid drowning in unnecessary details, the independent influence of the domestic and interregional level of analysis has already been ruled out. Thus, this master thesis applies a stripped down version of Regional Security Complex Theory that focuses primarily on the core elements of the theory – utilizing Buzan and Wæver's conception of the regional and system level, and the constructivist assumption of enmity and amity being created internally in the region. The fact that such a precaution is deemed necessary is definitely a weakness of Buzan and Wæver's theory.

Furthermore it is unclear how Regional Security Complex Theory operationalizes the regional patterns of enmity and amity. Buzan and Wæver (2003:47) maintain that these relations generally are created internally in the region by a mixture of history, politics, and material conditions. Nevertheless, Regional Security Complex Theory fails to argue convincingly that these relations could not be the result of materialist elements such as balance-of-power and self-help dynamics. The constructivist element of the theory might be put into question, and we need to assess carefully the moving causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

3.3. Conflict Dimensions

3.3.1. The System Level Conflict Dimension

Russia has been involved in the Caucasus for more than 200 years, and the region was considered to be located firmly within Moscow's sphere of influence right up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Today the situation is more fluid. In the later years increased US presence in the region has challenged Russia's traditional hegemony in the Caucasus. The system level conflict dimension can be conceptualized as made up of three main components:

The first component is the importance of oil in the security policy of both Russia and the US. Russia is aspiring to the role as the main oil producing country in the world, and the US is already the world's greatest consumer of energy resources (Noreng 2003a:163; Victor and Victor 2003:49). An estimated 4–6 % of the world's proven oil reserves, and 7-10 % of the world's proven gas reserves are located in the Caspian Basin¹⁴ (Roberts 2003:143). Because of the landlocked status of the Caspian Basin, the oil must be transported to the world market through expensive and vulnerable pipelines¹⁵. In order

¹⁴ This is undoubtedly less significant than the Middle East, which controls some 2/3 of the world's proven oil reserves, but the Caspian Basin nonetheless has a potential production capacity roughly equivalent to or possibly larger than the North Sea (Morse and Richard 2003:18).

¹⁵ It is important to notice the difference between oil and gas. Caspian gas must be exported to an already prepared market (as Europe or Turkey) for instant use because gas is not easily stored or sold at the global spot

to secure reliable access to the Caspian oil reserves, Russia and the US have strong incentives to control the direction of the pipelines.

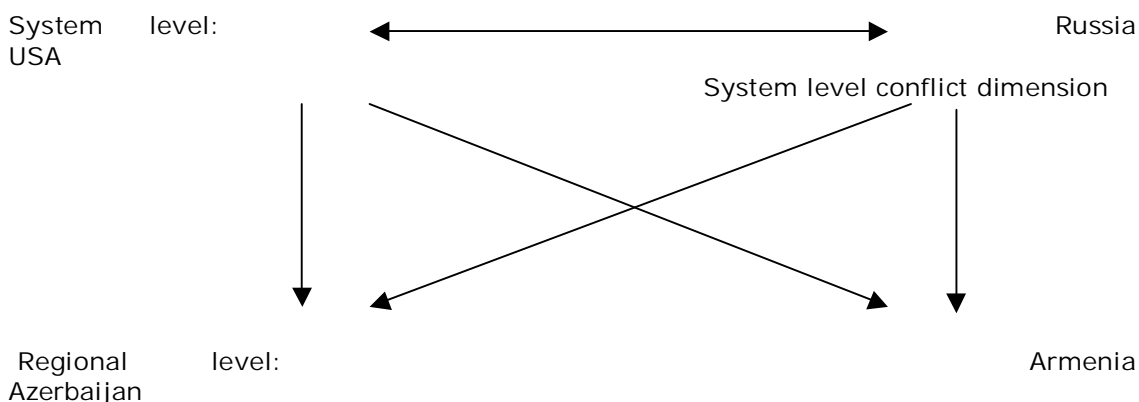
The second component is Russia's fragile great power status. If Russia is to remain a great power able to both defend itself and assert some influence globally, it needs to retain its sphere of influence in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For Russia losing the Caucasus could be the beginning of an unchecked fall from great power to regional power status (Krayev 2004). Traditionally Moscow has relied heavily on military power to keep unwelcome influence out of its vulnerable southern rim, but this strategy has become progressively defective with the steadily declining power projection potential of the Russian armed forces (Baev 1997a:57). Dominating the flow of oil from the Caspian Basin is as an attractive strategy that could compensate for Russia's reduced military capacity. If Russia were to control the Caspian oil valves – essentially routing the pipelines northwards through Russian territory – it would imply that both energy importing and energy exporting countries in the Caucasus would be very dependent on Moscow's grace.

The third component is the US double-sided policy towards Russia. Washington openly aims for a stable and consolidated Russia, but also desires to restrict Moscow from becoming strong enough to reinstate its old hegemony in the former Soviet republics (Wiberg-Jørgensen 2003:8). For the US it is therefore crucial to route the Caspian oil pipelines away from Russian control, and build a southwestern route that transports the oil through friendly territory and into the Mediterranean. This policy has increased in prominence since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, due to the need for US military bases on the territory of the former USSR in order to effectively carry out the global War on Terrorism.

All in all, control over the pipelines running from the Caspian Basin is the preferred strategy of Russia and the US for securing reliable access to Caspian oil, as well as cementing their position in the Caucasus. It is important to note that these interests are asymmetrical. For Russia it is an absolute necessity to maintain its hold on the Caucasus, while neither the security nor superpower status of the US is directly threatened. This system level conflict dimension might be conceived of as an ongoing realignment of power in the Caucasus following the inevitable weakening of Russia's power projection potential after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Such an outlook of the system level conflict dimension is compatible with both the neorealist approach and the materialist elements of Regional Security Complex Theory, and it can be graphically outlined in a model:

marked. Caspian oil, on the other hand, can be transported over extensive distances; stored for later use; or sold readily at the global spot market. Oil is of considerable greater importance than gas as an energy resource globally, and this master thesis will thus predominantly focus on the localization of oil pipelines from the Caspian Basin (Khokhar and Wiberg-Jørgensen 2000:30).

Model 1. The Dominance of the System Level Conflict Dimension



The model anticipates that it is US-Russian rivalry over the flow of Caspian oil that shapes and determines the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict [downward whole lines]. The weak states Armenia and Azerbaijan are expected to have little or no influence on the structure or outcome of the conflict. Thus, the reason for why the conflict remains unsolved is to be found exclusively at the system level of analysis.

3.3.2. The Regional Level Conflict Dimension

Most Azeris and Armenians believe the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to be an ancient ethnic struggle between their two peoples (Walker 1998a). In chapter two, however, it was argued that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is rooted in the collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires early in the 20th century. The 'ancient' source of the conflict is therefore questionable. It is more accurate to comprehend the widespread feeling of ethnic hatred as a consequence of Nagorno-Karabakh becoming a powerful and emotional symbol for the emerging Armenian and Azeri nationalism in the dying phase of the Soviet Union. In this sense the origin of the conflict is very modern.

Building on the existing literature concerning ethnopoltical conflict (Brown 1996; Cornell 2002; Crocher, Hampson, and Aall 2001) the regional conflict dimension in Nagorno-Karabakh can be conceptualized as made up of three key components. (This conceptualization was additionally confirmed in interviews with Mikeal Danielyan¹⁶, Tigran Karapetyan¹⁷, and Ulvi Akhundly¹⁸). The first component is the problematic ethnic geography in Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes a strong Armenian territorial base close to Armenia proper, and as a result of the 1991-94 war the two territories are connected through the Lachin corridor. This has made Nagorno-Karabakh's secession from Azerbaijan a viable option for the Karabakh Armenians, as well as an impending threat to the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and a grave challenge to the Azeri government in Baku.

The second component is the mutual distrust and fear between Armenians and Azeris. If one disregards the national rhetoric about historical rights to Nagorno-Karabakh, the more fundamental problem is the question of security. The Armenians fear political and economical discrimination, pogroms, and renewed hostilities if they where to give up the occupied territories before the question of Nagorno-Karabakh's status is resolved. The Azeris, on the other hand, can never feel secure as long as the Armenian army physically occupies Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as seven other provinces of Azerbaijan.

¹⁶ Personal interview January 31, 2005.

¹⁷ Personal interview September 8, 2005.

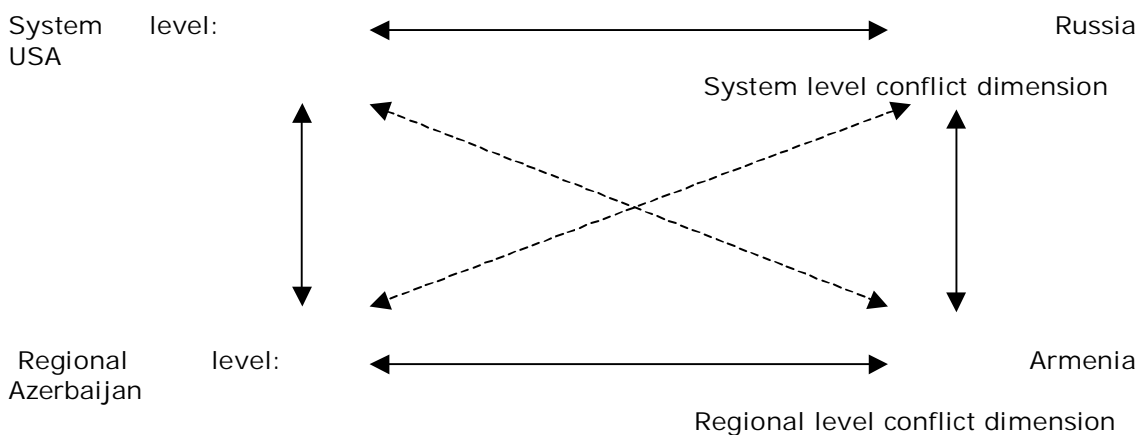
¹⁸ Personal interview September 8, 2005.

The third component is the weak state structures in Azerbaijan. Strong states normally have a capability to either accommodate or suppress internal challenges to their territorial integrity. The government in Baku has neither of these options. A militarily solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not achievable in the near future, and a negotiated secession of territory would be an inconceivable blow for a state that struggles to maintain its newly won independence. The dubious quality of the infant democracy in Azerbaijan also questions the ability of the government to uphold any negotiated agreements concerning the future of Nagorno-Karabakh. Taken together, these three components make up the regional conflict dimension in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In its most basic nature, the conflict dimension is a modern ethnic contention over territory wrapped in a cloak of mistrust and historical grievances.

It is fair to question why the weak states Armenia and Azerbaijan are expected to have independent influence on the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, when Turkey and Iran were excluded from the analysis because of great power overlay in the Caucasus. Should not a pure neorealist perspective provide us with the same insight as an approach that includes both the regional *and* system levels of analysis?

As previously discussed, Regional Security Complex Theory consists of both materialist and constructivist approaches to security. The constructivist element of the theory argues that patterns of friendship and hostility between states in RSCs normally are generated internally in the region. The regional level matters most for the states located within it, but it also has implications for the great powers because they are often drawn into a pattern of regional turmoil that was active prior to their involvement. If great power penetration is existent in Nagorno-Karabakh, we should expect it to penetrate the already problematic Armenia-Azerbaijan regional conflict dimension – thus linking the regional and system level of analysis. Consequently it is of importance to make sure that local factors are given their appropriate weight when studying why there has been no resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The relationship between this top-down and bottom-up influence can be graphically outlined in a model:

Model 2. The Interplay of the Conflict Dimensions



First, the model anticipates that the influence of Azerbaijan and Armenia is crucial for defining the composition of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and consequently the alternatives for great power penetration. The regional combatants have clear preferences regarding which great power to ally with [upward whole lines]. Second, the penetration of Russia and the US is expected to link the system level conflict dimension together with the regional level conflict dimension [downward whole lines]. Third, despite the marked distinction between the two opposing blocks in the model, there are also some weaker linkages between the conflict dimensions that crosscut the primary alliances. The post-Soviet RSC has been constantly reshaped after the dissolution of the

Soviet Union, and the choice of alliances still to some degree remains open and unsettled. Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as Russia and the US could have incentives to ride more than one horse in the Caucasus region [stipulated lines].

The core assumption of model 2 is that the linkage between the two conflict dimensions requires a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that satisfies the interests and preferences of both the regional actors Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as the system level actors Russia and the US. My anticipation is that such an intertwined relationship hardly is facilitative for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued the plausible existence of a system level Russia-US conflict dimension, and a regional level Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict dimension operating in the Caucasus. Neorealism only coincides with the system level conflict dimension because this theoretical perspective maintains that there is mainly one dominant security dynamic – that of the great powers (the system level of analysis). Regional Security Complex Theory, on the other hand, is reconcilable with both the system level and regional conflict dimensions because this theoretical framework argues the plausibility of several security dynamics operating simultaneously. As outlined in chapter one, there are consequently two rivaling hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved because of a US-Russia system level conflict dimension in the Caucasus.

Hypothesis 2. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved because of the interplay between a US-Russia system level conflict dimension and an Armenia-Azerbaijan regional level conflict dimension in the Caucasus.

This master thesis aspires to assess whether Regional Security Complex Theory is a better tool for understanding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict than the conventional neorealist perspective. In order to do so, the following empirical chapters will systematically outline the empirical data regarding the top-down linkages of the system level conflict dimension, as well as the bottom-up linkages of the regional level conflict dimension in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. If the empirical analysis establishes the existence of a regional bottom-up linkage that interacts with, and shapes the alternatives on the system level, a noteworthy finding thus would have been made in support of Buzan and Wæver's theory.

4. The US-Azerbaijan Linkage

I find it convenient to start off with the empirical data concerning the linkage between the US and Azerbaijan. This is because our understanding of the Russia-Armenia linkage – which will be accounted for in next chapter – is more easily grasped when viewed in the light of US intrusion into Russia's traditional sphere of influence.

In order to give the empirical analysis an expedient structure, the chapter is divided into three time periods based on the main trends in US foreign policy towards the Caucasus: 1991–94, 1995–2000, and 2001–05. The policy choices made by the US and Azerbaijan concerning the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh will be outlined for each of these time periods.

4.1. The Caucasus 1991–94

4.1.1. The Disinterest of the US in the Caucasus

Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US had no previous history of significant engagement with the Caucasus. Before and during the Cold War, the Caucasus had been inconsequential in US bilateral relationships with the USSR, Turkey, Iran, and China (Hill

2001). As a consequence of this historical disinterest, the US was unfamiliar and inexperienced in dealing with the newly independent states in the region.

Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall (1998) served as US Deputy Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia from 1994 to 1996. She states that prior to 1994, the US was preoccupied with the four 'nuclear successor states' (Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus), and lacked a robust regional policy for the Caucasus. No vital US interests seemed to be at stake in the region, and the Caucasus was considered to be strategically unimportant: Russia was pulling out, Iran posed no immediate threat, and the ambitions of Turkey coincided with the interests of the US (Conradson 2003:32). Consequently the US could allow itself not to prioritize future developments in the Caucasus.

Both Georgia and Azerbaijan called for US support against perceived Russian meddling in their internal problems, but these calls largely went unanswered by the Clinton administration. In the early 1990s, Caspian oil and great power rivalry with Russia in the Caucasus did not seem to be a US foreign policy priority. Illustrating to this point was a meeting held between Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin in January 1994. After the meeting Clinton emphasized the stabilizing role of Russia in the Georgian crisis, and told Yeltsin that "You will probably be more likely to be involved in some of these areas near you, just like the United States has been involved in the last several years in Panama and Grenada near our area" (as quoted in Dekmejian and Simonian 2001:132).

The direct involvement of the US in the Nagorno-Karabakh war 1991–94 was limited to two specific measures – the Freedom Support Act and the Minsk Process, both of which commenced in 1992. The Freedom Support Act was an US aid program meant to help the former Soviet republics transform themselves into democracies and market economies. Due to an amendment in the Act (Section 907), Azerbaijan was prohibited from receiving US assistance as long as Baku upheld its economical blockade of Armenia. Yerevan, on the other hand, received relatively large aid grants from Washington. This point will be discussed further in chapter six, and for now it is sufficient to note that Armenia could be characterized as a protégé of the US in the Caucasus in the early 1990s.

The Minsk Process¹⁹ was initiated as a consequence of Armenia and Azerbaijan joining the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Its purpose was to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, but the impact of the Minsk Process was very limited in the period 1992–94. This was hardly surprising considering that the CSCE had no prior experience in conflict resolution; Russia was running parallel peace-efforts; and the US did not commit much resources or prestige to the negotiations (Cornell 1999:117). According to John Maresca, a former US representative to the Minsk Process, "[...] it was clear, especially to the negotiators who represented the parties to the conflict, that the Western countries were not very interested in the Karabakh war" (as quoted in Wall 2003:230).

4.1.2. Azerbaijan's Problematic Search for Allies

The time period 1991–94 coincides with the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. No less than three different presidents governed Azerbaijan during this turbulent period. As we will see, all of them had a unique approach to Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

¹⁹ The Minsk Process included twelve members: Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Turkey, Germany, Sweden, Belarus, France, Italy, Russia, and the US. Hereafter these countries will be referred to as the 'Minsk Group'.

Azerbaijan declared independence from the Soviet Union on August 30, 1991. Presidential elections were held, but the opposition boycotted them, and Ayaz Mutalibov – the sole candidate and former First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party – won 98 % of the vote. The Mutalibov administration was essentially a prolongation of the old Soviet leadership in Azerbaijan, and it continued to nurture strong ties with Moscow. With Moscow's support Mutalibov's neo-communist regime hoped to secure a rapid victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan consequently joined the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991, and Mutalibov had plans to endorse the collective security agreement of the CIS – the Tashkent Agreement (Cornell 1999:50; Bonesmo 1997:92).

Such a policy proved to be disastrous for Azerbaijan. The Russian leadership that came to power in Moscow following the abortive coup d'etat in August 1991 was not very receptive towards the Azeri case in Nagorno-Karabakh because its interests were focused towards the Atlantic world (Yürükel 1998:270). Baku itself did not command the power necessary to subdue the unruly province without the backing of the Russian Army. Although Azerbaijan had inherited substantial military assets with the split-up of the Soviet Army, it lacked the knowledge of how to convert these assets into an operative fighting force, as during Soviet times Muslims had generally not served as officers or first-line troops. Mutalibov was forced to resign after the ragtag Azerbaijani army suffered severe military setbacks in Nagorno-Karabakh.

With Mutalibov gone the nationalist Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) raised to power in Baku. Abulfaz Elchibey, leader of the APF, was elected president in June 1992, and his administration marked a sharp turn away from the Russian inclination of Mutalibov. The new leadership in Baku was convinced that utilizing the Turkish aspect of Azerbaijan's identity, and thus forging an alliance with Turkey (and hopefully also with Turkey's main ally, the US) was a better strategy for victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. In October 1992 Elchibey withdrew Azerbaijan from the CIS, changed the alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin, altered the names of cities, roads, and institutions to Turkic, and highlighted the ideas of pan-Turkism – the political unity of all Turkic lands from the Balkans to China (Yürükel 1998:270; Hiro 1998). Azerbaijan's extensive overtures to Turkey angered and alienated both Russia and Iran²⁰ (Mehdiyeva 2003:274).

Turkey's support to Azerbaijan turned out to be much less significant than initially anticipated by Baku – it eventually amounted to diplomatic and moral backing, and an economical blockade of Armenia. The magnitude of military, financial, diplomatic, and human resources needed to secure a position in Azerbaijan, let alone the rest of the Caucasus and Central-Asia, was simply out of reach for Turkey (Mehdiyeva 2003:274). Left without substantial foreign military support the Azerbaijani army was unable to hinder additional reverses on the battlefield in the spring 1993. Elchibey blamed one of his influential army commanders, Suret Husseinov, for the military setbacks, and relieved him from his post. Husseinov responded by withdrawing his forces from the frontline, and initiated a march on Baku in June 1993. The Elchibey administration rapidly crumbled in the ensuing chaos, and the political veteran Heydar Aliyev²¹ took advantage of the power vacuum to assume presidential powers.

²⁰Because there is a large Azeri minority living in northern Iran – totaling some 10 to 20 millions, the regime in Tehran was from the beginning very skeptical of an independent Azerbaijan. Teheran consequently dreads any notions of linking present Azerbaijan with northern parts of Iran, creating a 'Greater Azerbaijan'. Elchibey's frequent allusions to "the oppressed brothers in South-Azerbaijan" were not helpful for creating good relations between the two neighboring states (Dekmejian and Simonian 2001:82).

²¹Aliyev commanded a powerful and influential network in Azerbaijan, as he in 1960s and 70s had been head of the Azerbaijani KGB, and later First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party.

Several scholars, including Dekmejian and Simonian (2001:74), Kleverman (2003:22), Magnusson (2003:189), and Rondeli (2004:110), argue that Aliyev made explicit use of the promising and untapped oil fields on Azerbaijani territory to acquire leverage in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. The rationale was straightforward: if Azerbaijan could get powerful countries to invest in its oil sector, the support of the same countries could be utilized for securing a favorable diplomatic victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. In September 1994 what is known as the "Deal of the Century" was signed between Azerbaijan's state owned oil company SOCAR and an international oil consortium – Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) – led by BP and AMOCO²². The agreement, which allowed the AIOC to develop some of the largest Azerbaijani oilfields, earmarked \$7.4 billion for investment in Azerbaijan's oil sector (Nassibli 1998).

4.2. The Caucasus 1995–2000

4.2.1. The Awakening of US Interests in the Caucasus

The US consumes 25% of the oil produced worldwide, and slightly more than half of this oil is imported (National Energy Policy 2001). A paradox is that even though the US increasingly relies on producers in the Western hemisphere to meet its energy needs, Washington is still dependent on the stability and production capacity of oil-rich states in far-away regions such the Middle East. This is mainly because the price of oil is set globally, and the US economy is more sensitive to changes in the oil price than most other industrial countries²³. Being the world's greatest oil importing country, as well as home to the lion's share of the most important oil companies, the US also has an interest in being represented in all major oil provinces in the world (Noreng 2003b:67).

In 1994 the 'Deal of the Century' brought important US commercial interests to bear in the Caucasus. In the years 1995–97 a number of additional oil contracts were agreed upon, and by 1997 more than \$30 billions had been earmarked for investment in Azerbaijan's oil sector (Nassibli 1998). The oil companies wanted to protect their substantial sunken costs in Azerbaijan, and consequently they had an interest in stabilizing Aliyev's regime and relax the restrictions on US economical aid to the country. In the mid 1990s an influential 'oil lobby' was created to promote these interests in full force (MacDougall 1997). Several scholars, including Khokhar and Wiberg-Jørgensen (2000:92), Dekmejian and Simonian (2001:134), and Magnusson (2003:191) argue that the oil companies were instrumental in moving the US foreign policy makers to realize the potential significance of Azerbaijan. In November 1999, Congress passed the Silk Road Strategy Act (1999), which formulated a clear US policy for the Caucasus and Central Asia:

[...] to assist in the development of infrastructure necessary for communications, transportation, education, health, and energy on a East-West axis in order to build strong international relations and commerce between those countries and the stable, democratic, and market-oriented of the Euro-Atlantic community; and to support United States business interests and investments in the region (Silk Road Strategy Act 1999).

In order to do so, Washington promoted building a southwestern 1,700 km pipeline, which would route the Caspian oil from Baku to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Eastern Mediterranean coast – the Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline²⁴. The BTC was criticized for being too long, too vulnerable, and too expensive, but it satisfied a number

²² In December 1998, BP and AMOCO merged into one company.

²³ Personal interview with Øystein Noreng April 25, 2005.

²⁴ The US also supported a smaller pipeline running from Baku to Suspa, situated on Georgia's Black Sea coast. This pipeline was meant to carry 'early oil' in anticipation of a main export pipeline (the BTC) from the Caspian Basin to the world market.

of vital US interests: routing the oil away from Russian control, upholding the containment of Iran, providing secure oil transit to Israel, bolstering Turkey with transit revenues, and creating an East-West energy transport corridor linking Central-Asia and the Caucasus to the West (Kleverman 2003:27; Noreng 2003a:161-62; Matchavarian 2003). In this respect the BTC pipeline first and foremost was a political project, although it was to be operated on a commercial basis.

The shortest route between Baku and Ceyhan is through Armenia, but the proposed direction of the BTC was through Georgia. This would entail making a long northern turn, and Armenia – the main beneficiary of US support in the period 1991–94 – thus would be curtailed from receiving much needed oil transit revenues. The reason for this reshuffle of US priorities is twofold, and it can be found in the regional security dynamics of the Caucasus.

First, the extensive involvement of the oil companies in Azerbaijan had in effect connected vital US interests to the future well-being of Azerbaijan. Second, Armenia had proved unwilling to compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – a conflict that was necessary to resolve if the oil was to transit through Armenian territory. In addition Yerevan seemed stoutly determined to continue nurturing its traditional tight security and economical ties with Moscow. When the US evolved from a disinterested to an interested actor in the Caucasus, Washington consequently had to adjust its support from Armenia to Azerbaijan.

In Lisbon in December 1996, at the OSCE summit, the change in US policy became apparent. At this summit the Minsk Group presented an US-sponsored proposal that was very favorable to Azerbaijan's interests. It included three main principles (Magnusson 2003:187):

- Maintaining the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Armenia,
- the highest degree of autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan, and
- security guarantees for the population in Nagorno-Karabakh.

By throwing its support behind the Lisbon principles, the US essentially shifted its weight from Armenia to Azerbaijan. From 1997 the US also acquired a permanent seat as Co-chairman in the Minsk Group. Washington initiated a more active role in the peace-process that generally downplayed Armenia, and supported the main interests of Azerbaijan (Magnusson 2003).

4.2.2. Azerbaijan's Waiting Game

Over time Azerbaijan could expect oil revenues and increased US involvement to facilitate a favorable solution in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The US was, however, far from making any serious resource commitments in Azerbaijan. Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act was still in force, and the US refused to give Azerbaijan any security guarantees (Khokhar and Wiberg-Jørgensen 2000: 105). Washington had merely signaled intent to involve itself in the Caucasus.

Although the US had yet to commit any significant material assets, it still supported Azerbaijan diplomatically. Washington needed at an early stage to make sure that the pipelines carrying the projected Azerbaijani oil would be directed through friendly territory. In 1995 Moscow put great pressure on Baku to accept a single pipeline route, i.e. through Russia (Baku-Novorossiysk) for the 'early oil' coming from the Caspian Basin. Washington then persuaded Aliyev to stand firm and uphold the multiple outlets strategy – a northern Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline, and a western Baku-Suspa pipeline (Hadjian 2001: 142).

Consequently Azerbaijan was locked into a somewhat peculiar position. The linkage to the US brought promise that the balance of power would eventually turn in Azerbaijan's favor, but this shift would not occur in the immediate future. Thus Baku initiated a waiting game in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the period 1995–2000 a number of peace-proposals followed from the Minsk Group. Most of them were based on the principles from Lisbon and thus acceptable to Azerbaijan, but not to Armenia (Cornell 1999). Baku anticipated that its negotiation position would only improve with time, and Azerbaijan therefore had little incentive for conceding to Armenia in order to facilitate an agreement that would be acceptable to both parties. In this waiting period Azerbaijan also moved to restock its militarily arsenal in order to ensure that Nagorno-Karabakh – if negotiations in the long run should prove futile – possibly could be retaken by force.

4.3. The Caucasus 2001–05

4.3.1. The Heightening of US Stakes in the Caucasus

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 significantly increased the importance of the Caucasus and Caspian oil in US foreign policy. There were two main reasons for this.

First, the US could no longer solely depend on Saudi-Arabia to single-handedly stabilizing the oil price. The cornerstone of US energy security had traditionally been the capability of Saudi-Arabia to deliver the last oil that the market demands – effectively restraining an increase in the oil price²⁵ (Noreng 2003c:411). The increasing anti-American sentiment in Saudi-Arabia, uncertainty concerning the future of the Saudi regime in Riyadh, and strained relations to the Middle Eastern countries because of strong US support to Israel, made it a priority for the US to diversify its oil dependency away from the Middle East. The National Energy Policy (2001) states that: “We need to strengthen our trade alliances, to deepen our dialogue with major oil producers, and to work for greater oil production in the Western Hemisphere, Africa, the Caspian, and other regions with abundant oil resources”.

Second, the geopolitical significance of the Caucasus substantially increased with the prolonged War on Terror. Azerbaijan became not only essential for access to Caspian oil, but also for supplying and sustaining US bases in Central-Asia, and possibly also a future staging area for US operations in Iran. Zbigniew Brezezinski (1997:129) had earlier described Azerbaijan as an important ‘cork’ controlling the access to the ‘bottle’ of the Caspian Basin and Central-Asia. Brezezinski's statement seemed about to materialize – Azerbaijan was evolving into a vital piece in the geopolitical puzzle.

Washington moved rapidly to strengthen its ties with Azerbaijan. In January 2002 Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act was removed. Later the same year Washington signed a major security assistance agreement with Baku, which included upgrading Azerbaijan's air defense systems, training Azerbaijani officers, improving the protection of the country's land borders, and enhanced Azerbaijan's naval capabilities in order to protect its territorial and economic zones in the Caspian Sea – where most of the oil fields are located (Cornell et al. 2004:58). In September 2002 the building of the BTC – with a projected capacity of 1 million barrels a day – was also initiated.

The increased US-Azerbaijan cooperation raised the possibility of permanent US bases on Azerbaijani soil. In order to be better equipped to meet the new security challenges of the 21st Century, the US initiated a review of its overseas bases. Azerbaijan was one out of two countries (the other was Nigeria) that, due to its potential oil resources, were given special attention by the Overseas Basing Commission (OBC) (Smith 2004). In August 2004 Azerbaijan's foreign minister Eldar Mammadyarov acknowledged that talks

²⁵ Saudi-Arabia controls 25 % of the world's proven oil reserves, and enjoys very low extraction costs. The Saudi oil sector is far from utilizing its full potential, and this unexploited asset enables Saudi-Arabia to play the role as moderator in the oil market (Morse and Richard 2003:18).

concerning the stationing of US troops were ongoing, but stressed that no final decision had been taken (Ismailzade 2004a). The prospect of US bases is even more plausible after the BTC became operational in May 2005.

4.3.2. No Solution in Sight

Immediately after 9/11 Azerbaijan proclaimed its intention to join the US-led anti-terrorism coalition. Promptly Baku granted passage rights for troops deploying to the newly created US bases in Central-Asia. All US aircrafts that took part in military operations in Afghanistan transited through Azerbaijani territory. Furthermore Azerbaijan provided troops to support the Enduring Freedom operation in Afghanistan, and it is the only Muslim country with troops stationed in Iraq (Cornell et al. 2004:27; Ismailzade 2004b).

The US did not, however, follow up its increased involvement in Azerbaijan after 9/11 with a serious effort to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Abbasov 2004a). In fact the last serious peace-effort was held prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks – in April 2001 in Florida²⁶. Being deprived of a diplomatic victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan continued spending its oil revenues on building a capable military force that in due time could retake by force what might not be gained by negotiations alone.

In 2003 Ilham Aliyev succeeded his father Heydar Aliyev as President. Unable to achieve outright victory through diplomacy, the younger Aliyev has taken a hardliner approach – stressing that the Azerbaijani army is ready to liberate its territory if negotiations should fail. In this stance he is in line with the Azeri public attitude. The people of Azerbaijan are not ready to accept anything less than autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh within the borders of Azerbaijan. Moreover war is generally looked upon as an acceptable alternative for achieving this goal²⁷.

4.4. Conclusion

The preceding empirical data reveals two main trends. First, the US is essentially involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by choice. Washington did not until the mid 1990s, when the prospect of tapping into the Azerbaijani oil reserves became apparent, consider it a viable option to move into the Caucasus. The option for exit has, however, gradually diminished after 9/11 and heightened US interests in the region. Second, Azerbaijan – after a turbulent period following independence – has embarked on a strategy of using its oil reserves to secure US assistance for a stronger position in Nagorno-Karabakh vis-à-vis Armenia. So far US support has not led to a favourable resolution of the conflict for Azerbaijan.

5. The Russia-Armenia Linkage

This chapter will essentially continue to outline the empirical data regarding the top-down influence of the system level conflict dimension, and the bottom-up influence of the regional level conflict dimension in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The focus of the present chapter is the linkage between Russia and Armenia. In order to better understand the policy choices of Russia and Armenia concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this chapter applies a division of the time periods that is based on the main trends in Russia's foreign policy towards the Caucasus: 1991–93, 1994–99, and 2000–05.

²⁶ The deliberations in Florida were secret, but there are indications that Azerbaijan and Armenia came close to reaching an agreement based on a swap of land-corridors: Nagorno-Karabakh connected to Armenia through the Lachin corridor, and Azerbaijan connected to Nakhichevan through the Megri region in southern Armenia (Magnusson 2003:210-11).

²⁷ Personal interview with Ulvi Akhundly September 8, 2005.

5.1. The Caucasus 1991–93

5.1.1. Russia's Shift from Atlantic to Eurasian Foreign Policy

Russia became the main successor state to the USSR, and inherited most of the geopolitical status, military power, and economic resources of the former Soviet Union. In the initial years 1991–92, the Yeltsin administration directed its foreign policy almost exclusively towards the Atlantic world. This Westward focus was a consequence of two main factors.

First, there was an unrealistic expectation in the Kremlin that the US would significantly help rebuild Russia in order to make the country a partner for managing international security (Bugajski 2004:7). Second, because the newly independent republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia had in effect been an integral part of Russia for centuries Moscow had an inadequate understanding of the former Soviet Empire in Eurasia. Thus, in Moscow there existed little know-how and a great deal of bewilderment concerning how to deal with these new entities (Trenin 2002:13). Neglect of the old Soviet Empire consequently became the order of the day.

It soon became apparent, however, that an exclusive Atlantic approach was insufficient for Russia's needs. Significant help from the West failed to materialize, and Moscow found it not tenable to disentangle itself from the regional security dynamics of the post-Soviet RSC. There existed a large degree of economic interdependency between Russia and the former Soviet republics, the breakup of the Soviet Union had left some 25 million ethnic Russians living outside of Moscow's effective control, and a number of destabilizing ethnical conflicts were rapidly mounting on Russia's vulnerable southern rim (Bowker 1997:185-86).

Because Moscow could no longer entirely disregard the legacy of its former land-based empire in Eurasia, in 1992–93 the Russian foreign policy gradually tilted from an exclusive Atlantic approach to a more Eurasian approach. The new Foreign Policy Concept (1993) emphasized that the Near Abroad (the former Soviet republics) should be given top priority, and the Military Doctrine (1993) further argued that Russia had the exclusive right to use military force in the defense of Russian nationals on the territory of the former Soviet Union. In a speech held in February 1993 Boris Yeltsin stated that:

Stopping all armed conflicts on the territory of the former USSR is Russia's vital interest. [...] I believe that the time has come for distinguished international organizations, including the UN, to grant Russia special powers as a guarantor of peace and stability in the former regions of the USSR (as quoted in Donaldson and Norgee 1998:172).

The increasingly proactive stance towards Eurasia led to heightened Russian attention concerning the Caucasus. Moscow had two key interests in this respect. First, securing the incorporation of the former Soviet republics into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and second, reinstating its troops in a strong forward position along the old Soviet borders – thus creating strategic depth for the defense of Russia's new frontier (Trenin 1996:33; Evangelista 1996:126). The main challenge in this respect was not Armenia, as will be discussed in the next subchapter, but rather the unruly and self-reliant Azerbaijan, which needed to be brought into line with Russian interests.

From the winter 1992 Moscow consequently moved to provide Armenia with militarily hardware and training²⁸. The objective was not to realign the regional balance of power exclusively in favor of Armenia, but rather to check Azerbaijan's willingness to disconnect itself from the Russian sphere of influence (Waal 2003). After substantial Armenian advances on the battlefield Moscow started to supply also Azerbaijan with much needed weaponry. This was done in order to prevent Armenia from single-handedly obtaining its objectives concerning the future of the contested province (Heradstveit 1998:375-376). If Russia could make both Armenia and Azerbaijan dependent on Russian support for their war-effort in Nagorno-Karabakh, then Moscow's influence would be paramount to any viable peace settlement.

5.1.2. The Weak Geo-strategic Position of Armenia

The nucleus of the popular demonstrations that demanded Nagorno-Karabakh's transfer to Armenia was a group of Yerevan intellectuals called the Karabakh Committee. By 1990 the successor of the Karabakh Committee – the Armenian National Movement (ANM) – had eclipsed the Armenian Communist Party, and was in effective control of the state apparatus in Armenia. In October 1991 the ANM candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian was elected president with more than 80% of the votes.

The newly independent state of Armenia faced two grave challenges to its security. First, the initial Armenian advances in Nagorno-Karabakh could possibly be reversed in the very near future. Although Yerevan had managed to assemble a military capacity prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Baku still commanded significant manpower and weaponry that might turn the balance of power in Azerbaijan's favor²⁹.

Second, Armenia was nearly besieged in the Caucasus. The war with Azerbaijan and Turkey's economic blockade effectively closed its eastern and western borders. Georgia, to the north, was in permanent crisis, and not a very viable option for secure land passage. Iran, located in the south, was forthcoming towards Armenia, but it was remote and hard to reach by overland routes (Waal 2003:205). The situation was close to unbearable for a country that was landlocked and poor in resources. Tellingly, Armenia's GDP fell with nearly 40% in 1992, and industrial output was set back to the production levels of 1971 (Dawisha and Parrott 1994:190).

At the outset the Ter-Petrosian administration sought to break out of this isolated and vulnerable situation by improving relations with its neighbors. Armenia first attempted to make some overtures to Turkey, but these were refuted because Yerevan was not ready to give up the main bone of contention – Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Lachin corridor connecting it with Armenia proper (Sunny 1999:158-59).

The Armenian approach towards Iran was more successful. Communications rapidly were established with Teheran, and Iranian trade was instrumental for keeping Armenia afloat in the early 1990s (Faurby 2003:291). Teheran feared that Baku had irredentist ambitions with regard to the large Azeri minority living in northern Iran, and thus it was in Iran's interest to support Armenia against Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, extensive Iranian

²⁸ When the Soviet Union collapsed the Russian army had large numbers of personnel and material in the Caucasus. Left without official directives in the period 1991-92, the generals on the ground took most of the decisions regarding withdrawal and division of weaponry (Trenin 1996:98; Zverev 1996:32). The Russian army consequently played an independent role in the Nagorno-Karabakh war prior to the winter 1992, but due to the confused state-of-affairs in the initial years of the war, it is hard to authoritatively assess the impact of this involvement (Waal 2003; Cornell 1999).

²⁹ In Soviet times Armenia was envisaged as a possible combat zone because of its common border with the NATO-member Turkey, while Azerbaijan was considered to be a basing area. Thus Azerbaijan had a greater concentration of military forces and hardware on its territory than Armenia, and Baku subsequently inherited more weaponry when the Soviet army was split-up in 1992 (Waal 2003:198).

backing for the Armenian cause in Nagorno-Karabakh never materialized. Teheran essentially acknowledged its limited potential for power projection in the Caucasus, and stayed out of the conflict (Cornell et al. 2004: 18; Ramezanzadeh 1996:172-74).

In order to offset the geopolitical disadvantage of having hostile neighbors on its eastern and western flanks, and only a single lifeline to the south, Yerevan had few other alternatives than strengthening its ties with Moscow. The Azeri threat in the east was curbed by acquiring substantial amounts of Russian military hardware. Russia supplied Armenia with weapons and spare parts worth some \$1 billion in the period 1992-96. This was done free of charge and despite a Yeltsin directive from September 1993 banning arms sales to both Armenia and Azerbaijan (Walker 1998b). Ter-Petrosian later stated that:

It turned out that there was three times more weapons in Azerbaijan than in Armenia. And when we talked to the Russian side, we came to the conclusion – and I managed to get them to agree to this – that we should be compensated for this. [...] In the following years – 1992, '3, '4 – we were almost completely compensated. [...] That means equipment, tanks, artillery, APCs, handheld weapons (as quoted in Waal 2003:199).

Armenia furthermore deterred any possible ambitions in Ankara regarding military adventurism on the behalf of Azerbaijan by allowing Moscow to retain Russian troops and bases on Armenian territory (Allison 1999: 32). Any Turkish military assault on the Armenian homeland thus faced the possibility of a regional war with Russia.

5.2. The Caucasus 1994–1999

5.2.1. Russia's Reduced Capabilities in the Caucasus

Russia's exclusive standing in the Caucasus did not persist for very long, however. Due to the general disarray of the Russian economy and the failure of the Russian army to obtain a clear-cut victory in Chechnya, Moscow's power projection potential in the post-Soviet RSC became rather limited and fragile (Sergounin 2003:20; Pain 1999:192). From the mid 1990s Russia simply did not command the means to decisively check the increasing US ambitions in the Caucasus region.

Deprived of much of its former military leverage, Moscow needed to consider other approaches for not being marginalized in its former sphere of influence (Baev 1997a). In order to keep the US out of the Caucasus, Russia needed to control, or at least be able to disrupt, the oil pipelines running from the Caspian Basin. Exit was a real option for the US, and Russia thus calculated that without the prospect of dominating the flow of oil – essentially meaning dependable access to Caspian oil and substantial leverage in the Caucasian states – Washington's costs for challenging Moscow in its own backyard would be largely disproportionate to the benefits.

In this respect Armenia was vital to Russian interests. The country separated Azerbaijan and Turkey, and functioned as a wedge dividing the US sponsored energy corridor running from the Caspian Basin to Turkey. Armenia was also necessary for linking Russia with Iran, and thus opening the possibility for creating a North-South axis rivaling the US East-West axis consisting of Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan (Spector 2002). In addition, the simmering conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh would most likely reduce the economical viability of the BTC pipeline, as it was projected to run only some 30 km from the heavily fortified and highly unstable line of contact separating Armenian and Azerbaijani forces. Penetrating Armenia could thus disturb the preferred pipeline option of the US, and buy Moscow some time until economic revival enhanced its resource base sufficiently to allow for a once more proactive stance in the Caucasus (Baev 1997b: 58).

Moscow consequently moved rapidly to expand Armenia's dependency on Russia. In December 1994, at the CSCE summit in Budapest, Russia acquired a permanent seat as Co-chairman of the Minsk Group from where it could influence the peace-process in Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, in April 1997 an agreement secured the continued presence of Russian military bases on Armenian territory for the next 25 years (Allison 1999:50). In August the same year Armenia and Russia signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. The Treaty was the first of its kind in the post-Soviet RSC. It envisaged mutual military support, a pledge of both parties not to join other military alliances, and Armenia's agreement to Russia's patrolling of its Turkish and Iranian borders (*Fortnight in Review* 1997).

5.2.2. Armenia's Precarious Waiting Game

By the mid 1990s Armenia had de facto reached its aspirations concerning Nagorno-Karabakh. The contested province was firmly linked to Armenia, and the Azerbaijani army could not retake it in the near future. The prime objective of Yerevan was thus to preserve the status quo, and hope that all other interested parties in due time would get used to the new situation.

Nevertheless, Armenia's waiting game was more precarious than that of Azerbaijan. Most likely an US penetration of Azerbaijan would, although not overnight, bring Baku significant economical benefits that could be converted into a superior military capability. In addition Armenia was losing out in the economical development of the region: the profitable BTC pipeline bypassed Armenian territory, and the Turkish economical blockade was hurting Armenia's fragile economy³⁰ (Weinstein 2004a).

In December 1996 the isolated position of Yerevan became all the more evident at the OSCE Lisbon Summit. Except for Armenia the entire Minsk Group supported a resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that was very favorable to the interests of Azerbaijan (see chapter four for further details on the resolution). The Ter-Petrosian administration consequently began to realize that Armenia would have to shed its territorial acquisitions in Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh, in order to survive economically (Libaridian 1998). Ter-Petrosian stated that: "It happened in Bosnia. The Serbs lost everything. I don't think that the maintenance of the status quo is a real option. We may resist for a year or two, but the international community will become exasperated and lose all patience" (as quoted in Latin and Suny 1999).

Based on the Lisbon principles, in September 1997 the Minsk Group proposed a step-by-step solution. Armenia would first withdraw its troops from the occupied territories, and only after the complete withdrawal of the Armenian forces, negotiations concerning the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh would commence. Yerevan signaled that this scheme was acceptable, but Ter-Petrosian was offbeat with influential forces in his own administration, as well as the general attitude in the Armenian people. He was therefore disposed in a 'palace coup' in February 1998, and replaced with the hardliner Robert Kocharyan (Cornell 1999:122).

With Kocharyan in power a literal Karabakhi takeover had taken place in Yerevan. Kocharyan was the former "president" of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and – like himself – a number of his key ministers were Karabakh Armenians. Neither willing nor able³¹ to surrender Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, the new administration instead returned to Armenia's traditional reliance on Russia – proclaiming

³⁰ The World Bank has estimated that lifting the embargo on Armenia would raise its GDP by 14 %. Other studies suggest that transport costs would fall by 30-50% (Blank 2005).

³¹ Ter-Petrosian's swift fall from power had clearly demonstrated that to surrender Nagorno-Karabakh was equal to political suicide.

that the economic problems of Armenia would be solved without any compromise in Nagorno-Karabakh (Suny 1999:159; Herzig 1999:72).

5.3. The Caucasus 2000–05

5.3.1. Moscow Flexes Its Economical Muscles

From the turn of the millennium a notable shift occurred in Moscow. In the National Security Concept (2000) the new Putin administration outlined a security doctrine that was essentially more pessimistic regarding Russia's international standing, and more oriented towards power politics, than the previous National Security Concept (1997). The change in Moscow's security perception was in large a consequence of the substantial setbacks that Russia had suffered in the second half of the 1990s: the August 1998 financial crisis, the Kosovo war, NATO's eastward expansion, US-Russian tensions concerning strategic arms control, and the second Chechen war (Sergounin 2003:20). The National Security Concept (2000) especially emphasized the growing number of external threats to Russian security:

Threats to the Russian Federation's national security in the international sphere can be seen in attempts by other states to oppose a strengthening of Russia as one of the influential centers of a multipolar world, to hinder the exercise of its international interests and to weaken its position in Europe, the Middle East, Transcaucasus, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific region (National Security Concept 2000).

In relation to Russia's position in the Caucasus, the pragmatic Putin administration acknowledged that it did not command the necessary military power to make Washington quit the region altogether (Lo 2004:82-83). Several scholars, including Hill (2004) and Ismailzade (2004b), argue that Russia instead moved to utilize its expanding economical muscle to bind the states along its southern rim tighter to the Russian sphere of influence. Largely due to a rise in oil prices from a low of around \$10 in December 1998 to around \$33 a barrel in September 2000, the Russian economy had been steadily recovering from the devastating financial crisis in the 1990s³² (Hill 2004:10).

By the use of its new soft power resources the Kremlin essentially aspired to create a parallel security structure that could thwart US ambitions in the region concerning the directions of the flow of oil from the Caspian Basin. Armenia was still the main focus of Moscow's attention, but as will be further discussed in chapter six, also Azerbaijan began to feel the mounting economical muscles of Russia.

To make sure that Armenia could not untie itself from Russian influence, Russia moved to expand its economical penetration of the country³³. In 2002 a debt for equity deal settled Yerevan's \$100 million debt to Moscow by transferring five of Armenia's key industrial plants to Russian ownership (Weinstein 2004a). Russia further acquired control of the main energy generating facilities in Armenia (producing 75-80% of the current demand), and made efforts to entrench its position as Armenia's sole provider of gas (*Eurasian Daily Monitor* 2005; Martirosyan 2005). Moscow was also Yerevan's primary trading partner, its largest source of investment, and the main destination of its surplus labor and migrant workers (Weinstein 2004a; USIP 1999).

³² Almost half of Russia's hard currency income originated from oil and gas, and every \$1 shift in the price of oil translated into about \$1 billion for the Russian state budget (Cornell 2000:20; Victor and Victor 2003:50). In the period 1998-2004, the Russian economy grew on average 6.5% annually (CIA World Factbook 2005).

³³ For Armenia, Russian economical penetration was not a new phenomenon. Moscow had been economically involved in Armenia since its independence in 1991. Illustrative to this point is that in 1994 some 60% of Armenia's budget revenues originated from Russian loans (Trenin 1996:100).

In addition to the economical penetration of Armenia, Russia continued to expand its militarily engagement in the country. In November 2003 Moscow announced its plans to modernize Armenia's military by expanding training programs and weapon transfers (Berman 2004:66). In May 2005 the US friendly regime in Tbilisi acquired an agreement with Moscow on the closing schedule for Russia's two bases in the country (Parsons 2005). This led to Moscow's gradual transfer of troops and material from Georgia to its Armenian base in Gyumri.

5.3.2. No Peace, No War

While still holding on to Nagorno-Karabakh the Kocharyan administration managed to improve Armenia's economical situation only marginally. Nevertheless, in 2004, beginning his second presidential term, Kocharyan stated that he was not going to recede from his earlier position regarding Nagorno-Karabakh: either the outright independence of the province or its annexation to Armenia (Abbasov 2004b).

Obviously this stance was not very facilitative towards finding a peace agreement acceptable to both Azerbaijan and Armenia, and it thus ensured Armenia's further dependency on Russia. Armenia has essentially locked itself into a hurting stalemate of neither peace nor war. Interestingly enough, the Kocharyan administration's handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the one issue where the Armenian public does not criticize the president³⁴.

5.4. Conclusion

Despite its limited resource base, Russia has displayed substantial capacity to influence Armenia, as well as countering US intrusion into the Caucasus. The Kremlin is fighting for its fragile great power status, and in the regional context of the Caucasus subcomplex, the closeness and potential of Russia cannot be disregarded. Owing to a combination of Armenia's inherent geo-strategic weakness and its unwillingness to surrender Nagorno-Karabakh, Yerevan is left stranded inside of Moscow's sphere of influence. This also shows that Russian great power support has not been facilitative for a resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh.

6. Crosscutting Linkages

In the preceding analysis I have so far investigated the possibility of two main linkages operating in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: the US-Azerbaijan linkage and the Russia-Armenia linkage. As outlined in chapter three, the two rivaling models for understanding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict proposes the additional existence of crosscutting linkages in the region: the US-Armenia linkage and the Russia-Azerbaijan linkage. The present chapter will account for the empirical data regarding these linkages.

6.1. The US-Armenia Linkage

6.1.1. The Sustained US Assistance to Armenia

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Armenia became a major beneficiary of US economical aid. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, was deprived of almost all such assistance due to Section 907 in the Freedom Support Act, which stated that Azerbaijan would not be awarded US aid as long as Baku upheld its economical blockade of Armenia.

Märta-Lisa Magnusson (2003:183) argues that Washington's favorable inclination towards Yerevan in the early 1990s first and foremost was due to the highly vocal and influential Armenian diaspora living in the US. Being well funded, well organized, and supported by prominent figures in Congress like Senator Bob Dole, the Armenian lobby

³⁴ Personal interview with Tigran Karapetyan September 9, 2005.

constituted a very powerful pressure group in Washington. This group consistently and vigorously lobbied for US assistance to Armenia³⁵, and in 1992 it was in part instrumental for pushing Section 907 through Congress (Waal 2003:234; Cornell et.al 2004:57).

As outlined in chapter four Washington changed its diplomatic support from Armenia to Azerbaijan when the prospect of tapping into the oil riches of the Caspian Basin became evident in the mid 1990s. The special interests of the Armenian diaspora consequently had to yield for basic great power interests as the US evolved from a largely disinterested to an interested actor in the Caucasus. Nevertheless, the diaspora's influence on US foreign policy was not entirely wiped out as Armenia continued to be the second largest per capita recipient of US aid after Israel – totaling more than \$1.6 billion since 1992 (Martirosyan 2004; Mainville 2005).

With more at stake in the Caucasus following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US found it increasingly hard to leave Armenia uncontested in the hands of Russia (Starobin and Mukhin 2003). Washington thus moved to expand its penetration of the stoutly pro-Russian regime in Yerevan. A breakthrough in this respect was achieved in April 2004 when a US-Armenian military cooperation agreement was signed and preliminary discussions concerning joint military exercises were opened (Berman 2004:62). In January 2005 trade relations between the US and Armenia were also normalized (Danielyan 2005). Despite this substantial rapprochement between the US and Armenia, Yerevan nevertheless upheld its nonflexible attitude regarding a solution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The rationale behind this position will be further discussed in the next subchapter.

6.1.2. Armenia's Unattainable Quest for Complementarity

In the modern history of Armenia Yerevan's reliance on Moscow as a credible security guarantor in a hostile geo-strategic environment has been a dominant trend. Although US economical aid somewhat helped to relive the shattered Armenian economy in the 1990s, it was nonetheless Russian weaponry and backing that ensured Armenia's continued occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Chapter five outlined how the Ter-Petrosian administration was toppled because it was willing to surrender Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan. When Kocharyan replaced Ter-Petrosian as president in 1998, he defined the main goals of Armenia's foreign policy as the following: securing reliable energy supplies and foreign investment, opening its borders to trade, preventing Azerbaijan from reasserting sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh, and forging closer relations with the West without damaging Armenia's vital ties to Russia (Kiniklioglu 2004). In order to efficiently pursue these interests, Yerevan opted for a foreign policy of 'complementarity'. The aim of this policy was to place Armenia into a network of relations with other regional actors based on convergent interests. Essentially it meant cultivating good relations with the four regional actors in the Caucasus: Russia, the US, Iran, and Turkey.

This ambitious policy was, however, more a pipe dream than an achievable reality. The main reason was that Armenia was not vital to US regional interests. The US undoubtedly had an interest in securing better relations with Yerevan, but the well-being of Armenia would always come second to that of oil-rich Azerbaijan in any US-Armenian relationship (Weinstein 2004a). Yerevan consequently realized that any large reorientation towards the US was in reality not compatible with the continued occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. This strictly limited Armenia's room of maneuver in relation to the

³⁵ The diaspora also supported Armenia directly with cash grants and privately financed development projects. Most notable was the opening in 1998 of a brand new \$10 million highway connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia proper through the occupied Lachin corridor (Waal 2003:248).

US. The Kocharyan administration pragmatically accepted Washington's call for improved US-Armenian cooperation in the Caucasus – among other things participation in a number of NATO exercises and programs – but remained inflexible on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. This stance furthermore thwarted Armenia's cautious overtures to the US regional ally Turkey.

Undeniably Yerevan has moved somewhat closer to the US in the later years, but its dependency on Russia (and to a certain degree Iran) in the post-Soviet RSC is still paramount. One could conceive of this as a 'Russia plus' strategy. In addition to its traditional alliance with Moscow, Yerevan views rapprochement with the US as a sort of bonus.

6.2. The Russia-Azerbaijan Linkage

6.2.1. Russia's Move towards Azerbaijan

In the early 1990s Russia was the only great power present in the post-Soviet RSC. Chapter five outlined how Russian weaponry was generously supplied to both sides of the frontline in Nagorno-Karabakh. Several scholars, including Hill et al. (1994:12), Trenin (1996:100) and Cornell (1999:31-32) argue that Moscow also actively contributed to the chain of events that led to the fall of the anti-Russian President Elchibey and the subsequent rise of Aliyev to power in Baku.

The new Aliyev administration was an initial success for Russian interests in the Caucasus. Azerbaijan rejoined the CIS in 1993, and an understanding was reached with regard to the redeployment of Russian troops along the Azerbaijani border to Turkey and Iran (Zverev 1996:34). In the long run, however, the Aliyev administration proved to be a disaster for Moscow's regional influence. In 1994–95, Baku successfully resisted – with US support – the stationing of Russian soldiers on its territory, and began constructing a westbound pipeline to the Georgian town of Suspa that would effectively bypass Russian territory and control.

It is important to note that even though Washington from the mid 1990s obtained a foothold in Azerbaijan, the leverage of Moscow was not entirely marginalized. Proximity and almost two hundred years of political-economical relations with Azerbaijan left a rather wide room of maneuver for Russia to exploit. Nevertheless, the Yeltsin administration was not so successful in utilizing Russia's regional advantage for leverage in Azerbaijan. In response to what Russia considered hostile US penetration of Azerbaijan, Moscow would usually restrict itself to occasional bursts of activity (Lo 2004:81-82).

When the Putin administration came to power in the Kremlin this changed drastically. Buoyed up by its economic revival, from the turn of the millennium Russia began to penetrate Azerbaijan economically. The intention was clear: to persuade Azerbaijan to depart from its westward trajectory. Several symbolic economical treaties subsequently were signed with Azerbaijan, and Moscow further offered Azerbaijan helpful developments such as restoring the railway lines between Baku and Sochi, and increased activity in the North-South transport corridor (Ismailzade 2004b).

In 2002, after several years of Russian opposition, the Putin administration even agreed to straighten out the demarcation line between Russia and Azerbaijan in the Caspian Sea – where most of the oilfields are located (Badykova 2003). Moscow did, however, not attempt to woo Baku with carrots alone. Russia's capability to cause socio-economic disruption in Azerbaijan – due to its nearness and relative economical size³⁶ – was also

³⁶ Any long-term closure of Russia's border to Azerbaijan would most definitely trigger a hurting surge in prices for consumer goods and foodstuffs in Azerbaijan (Abbasov 2004a). Moscow could furthermore threaten

applied in order to put diplomatic pressure on the regime in Baku. Russia's penetration of Azerbaijan has not gained Moscow any direct leverage regarding a resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh, but it has led to an improvement of Moscow's general influence in Baku.

6.2.2. Azerbaijan's Difficult Balancing Act

When Aliyev came to power after the downfall of President Elchibey in 1992, it was generally expected that Russian influence would be reinstated in Azerbaijan. Aliyev was no puppet of Moscow, but he had solid and strong connections to Russia – not at least as a former member of the Soviet Politburo.

An exclusive reorientation towards Russia did not take place. From day one the Aliyev administration saw that Azerbaijan's rich oil reserves could be utilized for balancing regional and external actors to its own advantage³⁷. Herein was the possibility for increasing Azerbaijan's regional prominence, and also regaining sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. The composition of the international oil consortium AIOC (Azerbaijan International Operating Company) that signed the 'Deal of the Century' contract with SOCAR reflected this balancing approach, as it included Turkish, Russian, European, and US oil companies³⁸.

The Aliyev administration essentially invited Russian oil interests to join the AIOC in order to secure a more constructive Russian stance towards Western penetration of Azerbaijan. In 1994 the Russian oil company Lukoil therefore obtained a decent 10% share of the AIOC contract (Baev 2004). Baku ensured in this way that Moscow had substantial economical interests in a project that eventually would reduce Russian influence in the Caucasus.

In the mid 1990s Azerbaijan opted for the US as its primary source of diplomatic, military, and economical support. At the same time state-to-state relations between Azerbaijan and Russia became strained and uncooperative. Baku continued, however, to acknowledge Moscow as a regional partner in security policy (Allison 1999:32). The Aliyev administration firmly resisted Moscow's ambitions regarding a forward security zone in the Caucasus, but found it hard to disregard Russia's regional influence altogether.

As earlier discussed in chapter four the trouble with Azerbaijan's tilt towards the West was that the US proved unwilling to apply its enormous military and economic potential for solving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to Azerbaijan's favor. Baku therefore had to look for additional ways that could break the deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh. Because Moscow commanded substantial leverage over Azerbaijan's adversary Armenia, Russia was in this respect important. If Baku could get Moscow to support Azerbaijan's interests in Nagorno-Karabakh, then a favorable resolution to the conflict might be within reach. When Putin succeeded Yeltsin as President in 1999, the Aliyev administration began a slow tilt of its foreign policy towards Russia – trading vital concessions for potential future Russian assistance.

to deport more than 1 million Azeris working in Russia, thus depriving the dependent families of much needed income, as well as dangerously increasing the level of unemployment in Azerbaijan (Ismailzade 2003).

³⁷ Personal interview with Willy Olsen May 25, 2005.

³⁸ Baku initially also wanted to incorporate Iran in the AIOC, but it proved impossible due to US demands regarding the continued containment of Teheran.

In 2002 Baku offered Moscow renewed exclusive access to the important Gabala Radar Station³⁹ for a trial period of ten years (Sohbetqizi 2002). Furthermore, in 2004 at the Istanbul summit Azerbaijan did not apply for NATO membership, dragged its feet with regard to sending new troops to Iraq, and expressed favorable opinions on Russia's design for a Single Economic Space within the CIS (Weinstein 2004b). In the later years, friendlier relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have certainly developed, although this has not led to a tangible reorientation of Russia's policy on Armenia. Moscow has so far been reluctant to use its leverage in Yerevan in order to facilitate a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

6.3. Conclusion

Without doubt the controversy over Nagorno-Karabakh is a complicated matter. All the involved actors in the conflict have attempted, although with a varying degree of success, to ride more than one horse in order to improve their position vis-à-vis that of their adversaries. Russia and Azerbaijan are in the strongest position for exercising such crosscutting influence. Moscow has essentially utilized its closeness and ties to the Caucasus region for additional leverage, while Azerbaijan has applied its oil fields and strategic location for an improved position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

7. Analysis and Conclusion

Chapter four, five, and six have provided a comprehensive account of the empirical data relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. All in all, eight possible linkages have been explored – four top-down and four bottom-up – between the regional actors and the system level actors. Based on the empirical material outlined in the preceding chapters, this concluding chapter will analyze the findings in view of the hypotheses initially sketched out in chapter one. The intention of such an analysis is to assess whether Regional Security Complex Theory offers a more promising approach than the conventional neorealist perspective for understanding the deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh. Finally this chapter will discuss the empirical and theoretical implications of this master thesis concerning the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

7.1. Neorealism

The dissolution of the Soviet Union left Moscow with a rather weak power projection potential, but Russia still remained a regional great power. Chapter five demonstrates how Russia in the early 1990s effectively balanced Armenia and Azerbaijan against each other in order to accomplish its own security interests regarding a forward security zone in the Caucasus. Given the weak geo-strategic situation of Armenia, it is unlikely that Yerevan would have commanded the means necessary to conquer, and then hold on to Nagorno-Karabakh as well as seven other Azerbaijani provinces, without the extensive patronage of Moscow. It is also doubtful that Azerbaijan initially would have agreed to the deployment of Russian troops on its territory if it was not for Russia's strong hand in the Caucasus. This top-down influence fits adequately with the neorealist perspective. Waltz (1979:73) argues that it is the states with the greatest capabilities that set the scene of action for others as well as for themselves.

The empirical material furthermore discloses that the entry of the US into the Caucasus was not facilitative regarding a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

From the mid 1990s a realignment of power occurred in the Caucasus, and the region effectively broke into two opposing great power blocks: the US sponsored East-West

³⁹ This radar station – located on Azerbaijani territory – is essential for Russia's monitoring of missile launches from the Southern Hemisphere and China (Zagorski 1999:69).

axis and the Russian sponsored North-South axis. Rather than being dominated by a single great power that could have forced through a resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan became locked in on opposite sides of the US-Russia system level conflict dimension dividing the Caucasus.

The regional combatants Armenia and Azerbaijan gradually became more dependent on the developments at the system level, as they now needed great power support in order to compensate for the great power support of the opponent. Yerevan moved to strengthen its already substantial links with Moscow, while Baku enhanced its ties with Washington.

At the same time Russia and the US proved unwilling to commit the resources needed for solving the conflict decisively in favor of their respective regional allies. For the Kremlin, a deadlock guaranteed Armenia's continued dependency on Russia, constituted a basis for improved Russian leverage in Azerbaijan, and also threatened the regional stability that was crucial for the US to transport Caspian oil to the world market. Freezing the conflict was thus a viable strategy for upholding Russia's influence in the region. For Washington the unresolved conflict was more problematic, as it threatened to undermine the BTC pipeline. Nevertheless, if the conflict could be kept at a simmering level, and contained to Nagorno-Karabakh and the other occupied Azerbaijani provinces, it would not considerably put at risk the BTC, which conveniently made a bend around these areas. With much at stake in the Caucasus, an open confrontation with Armenia – and consequently Russia – could be more dangerous than a continuation of the status quo.

Baku and Yerevan were thus dependent on the great powers for accomplishing their ambitious regional objectives, but it was not imperative for the great powers to solve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in order to reach their system level interests in the region. With heightened stakes in the Caucasus – following Russia's financial recovery and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US – this state of affairs became even more entrenched, as Moscow and Washington moved to expand the dependency of the Caucasian states.

Considering the implications of the empirical data discussed above, it is clear that the top-down impact of the great powers in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is substantial. The influential position of Russia and the US seems to constitute a clear-cut example of how the system level is primary for explaining state behavior. To a large extent, the great power interests of Russia and the US concerning domination in the Caucasus – essentially meaning control over the pipelines running from the Caspian Basin – effectively has blocked a resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh. In a neorealist perspective one could therefore argue that the deadlock is upheld because the status quo best suits the interests of the US and Russia in their rivalry for dominance in the Caucasus. It is additionally rather unlikely that we will see a rapid solution to the conflict as long as the great powers remains locked into their system level rivalry over energy corridors in the Caucasus region. At the end of the day, what matters in the international system are primarily the interests of the great powers. Such an understanding of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is in accordance with the neorealist hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved because of a US-Russia system level conflict dimension in the Caucasus.

On the whole, studying the positions of Russia and the US in the Caucasus seems to be a sound approach for acquiring new insight regarding the nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A system level analysis essentially offers a wealth of information as to why the conflict remains unresolved.

7.2. Regional Security Complex Theory

7.2.1. The Significance of the Regional Level in Nagorno-Karabakh

In itself, the top-down influence revealed in the previous subchapter is unproblematic to explain within the theoretical framework of Regional Security Complex Theory. The materialist element of Regional Security Complex Theory uses ideas of bounded territoriality and distribution of power that is close to neorealism. Buzan and Wæver (2003:55) classify the post-Soviet RSC as a centered RSC, and consequently expect great power overlay to be sizeable. The question is whether this theory will be able to provide us with additional knowledge as to why the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved.

Interesting to this point is that the US-Russia system level conflict dimension does not seem to explain the outbreak of war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia's attention was in the time period 1991–92 focused almost exclusively towards the Atlantic world, and the US did not involve itself in the Caucasus until the mid 1990s. Instead the empirical chapters indicate that the eruption of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh was a consequence of primarily an ethnic contention over territory: in essence the powerful desire of the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh to break away from Azerbaijan, and the strong dedication of the Azeris to keep Nagorno-Karabakh within the borders of Azerbaijan. Consequently the regional Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict dimension was active prior to any great power involvement in the region.

The existence of a separate regional conflict dimension in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict corresponds nicely with Regional Security Complex Theory, as this theoretical perspective argues the case of several levels of analysis operating in the international system. Neorealism, on the other hand, claims that the system level is primary for explaining state behavior in the international system. Ethnic strife and hostility as explanatory variables do not fit very well into this design. Nevertheless, from a neorealist perspective one could argue that such factors are trivial for explaining the deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh: if the regional level conflict dimension does not significantly influence the behavior of the great powers, it is uninteresting whether or not it is actually present in the conflict.

In order for Regional Security Complex Theory to have significant explanatory power in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia and Azerbaijan must be able to exercise independent bottom-up influence on the great powers. We consequently need to assess the strength of the regional conflict dimension, and also evaluate whether or not this regional conflict dimension interplays with the system level.

Regional Security Complex Theory maintains that local states, following balance of power logic, can request assistance from great powers in their regional conflicts (Buzan and Wæver 2003:46). As earlier demonstrated Armenia to some degree, and especially Azerbaijan, most definitely were instrumental in linking the regional conflict dimension to the system level dynamics of the great powers operating in the Caucasus. Yerevan acquired Russian armaments and interest for the Armenian war-effort in the initial phase of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while Baku effectively played the 'oil card' for external great power support – making sure that the West, and especially the US, had a continued interest in a stable Azerbaijan.

The maneuvering of Yerevan and Baku in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict shows that Armenia and Azerbaijan not merely were pawns in the great power game for influence in the Caucasus region. Even more important, it displays that Azerbaijan was instrumental for bringing US interests to bear in the Caucasus. The militarily and economically weak Azerbaijan applied its only valuable asset – the promising oilfields – to forge a linkage

between the system level interests of Washington, and its own regional level interests. Baku consequently exercised crucial bottom-up influence on a great power, and revealed a significant capability to be a player in the Caucasus alongside with Russia and the US.

The importance of Azerbaijan's regional balancing act cannot be overstressed. By manipulating the interests of the US, Azerbaijan successfully forced a realignment of power in the Caucasus. First, the Kremlin had to adjust its regional strategy from balancing Armenia and Azerbaijan against each other to a more thorough penetration of Armenia. Second, Washington had to move from its previous passive support of Armenia to a more proactive support of Azerbaijan.

In effect, great power penetration of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was contingent on the regional actors, and independent maneuvering at the regional level led to the splitting up of the Caucasus into two great power blocks. This bottom-up influence cannot be explained within the system level focused neorealist perspective, while Regional Security Complex Theory here can provide us with additional knowledge regarding the nature of the conflict.

7.2.2. After Great Power Penetration

So far, the empirical analysis has disclosed the existence of both top-down and bottom-up influence operating in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Nevertheless, in order to properly assess the importance of the regional level, it is crucial to evaluate whether or not the regional level continues to decisively influence the system level also *after* great power penetration. Should the top-down influence of Russia and the US prove to be overriding following the entry of great power interests into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, then the value of Regional Security Complex Theory is limited for explaining the prolonged deadlock. In such a situation, neorealism would stand out as the better theory, as it can account for great power behavior within a less complicated theoretical framework than Regional Security Complex Theory⁴⁰.

It is clear that the leverage of Russia and the US is limited to influencing the distribution of power in the already established Armenia-Azerbaijan regional conflict dimension. Neither Moscow nor Washington has attempted to alter the fundamental dynamic of the conflict. Essentially, the great powers have allowed the regional combatants to entrench their positions, but not actively hindered them in making peace. As an example, the downfall of President Ter-Petrosian in 1998 was not a consequence of Russian interference meant to disrupt promising developments in the Minsk Process, but rather Ter-Petrosian being offbeat with the conceived security interests of Armenia. Mikeal Danielyan⁴¹ summarizes the situation accordingly: "Russia's position towards Armenia has undergone no changes in the recent ten years. Russia doesn't even need to make any effort in this respect, as we are ourselves ready for full obedience. This is the key trouble of Armenia".

Armenia and Azerbaijan have consequently locked *themselves* into a dependency on the great powers because they are not willing to make the painful compromises necessary for resolving the stalemate. Both of the regional combatants sustain the hope that great power support will turn the balance of power in their favor, and subsequently grant them a unilateral victory in Nagorno-Karabakh.

⁴⁰ When two rivaling theories can explain the same phenomenon, it is a good scientific strategy to choose the theory that includes as few variables as possible.

⁴¹ Personal interview January 31, 2005.

This point is important because it suggests that Baku and Yerevan still hold the key to any viable solution of the Gordian knot in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is the high aspirations of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and not great power top-down influence, which uphold the mutually hurting stalemate. If either of the regional combatants was to change its stance regarding a solution to the conflict, it might result in far-reaching consequences for the peace process. In other words: the possibility for viable peace-resolution remains situated at the regional level even after great power penetration.

Moreover, the objection voiced in chapter three regarding the constructivist element of regional patterns of enmity and amity in Regional Security Complex Theory seems to be unwarranted in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict dynamic is not imported from the system level, but generated internally in the region.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the creation of the crosscutting alliances in Nagorno-Karabakh. In chapter six we saw how Azerbaijan tilted its foreign policy towards Moscow in a trade-off for assumed Russian support in Nagorno-Karabakh when its primary alliance with the US proved insufficient for a unilateral victory. Even though the impact of this change of strategy was limited, it nevertheless demonstrated that Baku upheld a capability for manipulating the regional balance of power following great power penetration of the Caucasus region. The US-Armenia alliance furthermore demonstrates how Washington had to act in a way that was contradictory to its system level interests, i.e. providing Armenia with substantial economical aid, while at the same denying the similar assistance to its regional ally Azerbaijan.

Thus, a continuous interplay between bottom-up and top-down influence exists in the conflict. Barry Buzan (1991:222) has observed that local and external patterns tend to reinforce each other's rivalries through the addition of resources and allies. In effect, such a relationship materializes in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The intertwined and diverse relationships linking the regional level interests of Armenia and Azerbaijan with the system level interests of Russia and the US simply requires too many interests to be satisfied all at once in order to facilitate a solution to the conflict.

Any viable peace agreement must include both Armenia and Azerbaijan's interests regarding the future of the contested province as well as the interests of the US and Russia regarding the pipelines in the Caucasus. The interplay between the levels of analysis reveals a core element of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that is entirely left out in the neorealist analysis. This continuous interaction is, however, nicely incorporated within hypothesis 2, which is based on Regional Security Complex Theory:

Hypothesis 2. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved because of the interplay between a US-Russia system level conflict dimension and an Armenia-Azerbaijan regional level conflict dimension in the Caucasus.

It is my point of view that including the regional level of analysis significantly expands our understanding of the conflict dynamic in Nagorno-Karabakh. Neorealism, on the other hand, disregards Armenia and Azerbaijan as unimportant for explaining behavior in the international system, as they do not have the necessary military and economical power to matter on a global scale. Thus, the crucial bottom-up influence of Baku and Yerevan is left out in the pure neorealist approach, but included within the framework of Regional Security Complex Theory.

7.2.3. A Broader Application of Buzan and Wæver's Theory

Chapter three outlined the rationale for omitting an independent analysis of the domestic and interregional levels from the research design. The empirical chapters have, however, been careful to include data relating to the two levels. Before carrying on to

the conclusion of this master thesis, it necessary to evaluate whether or not using only the system and the regional level of Regional Security Complex Theory can be considered a suitable strategy for studying the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Iranian and Turkish influence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demonstrates at best to be limited. Turkey and Iran have ambitions in the Caucasus, but they do not command the power necessary to make their interests decisively matter in the region. Interregional influence can therefore be safely omitted from the analysis. With regard to the domestic level, one could argue that the conflict remains unresolved because the political leaders in Armenia and Azerbaijan do not have the popular support for making the necessary tough decisions. Although not entirely repudiating the validity of such an assumption, the empirical material is nonetheless rather unambiguous with regard to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh being securitised at the regional level of analysis. As the conflict stands today, it is plausible that neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan can feel secure without controlling the Nagorno-Karabakh province.

An unexpected discovery, however, is the significance of the domestic level for Washington's policy towards the Caucasus. For several years the Armenian diaspora enjoyed significant leeway in molding the US conception of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In 1992 Congress classified Azerbaijan as the aggressor of the conflict, and subsequently deprived Baku of US economical aid through Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. No similar sanctions were initiated against Yerevan when the Armenian army de facto altered international recognized borders by force a year later.

Another unexpected discovery is the influential position of the international oil companies in moving Washington to realize the potential significance of Azerbaijan. It is an open question whether BP and AMOCO – the main shareholders of the AIOC – should be conceived of as transnational entities or companies with a substantial national affiliation. All the same, the influence of the oil companies can be appropriately fitted into Regional Security Complex Theory – either at the domestic level of analysis or within the globalist element of the theoretical framework.

Altogether, the influence of the Armenian diaspora and the international oil companies falls outside of the neorealist perspective. Furthermore it is apparent that an even broader appliance of Regional Security Complex Theory than used in this master thesis can provide us with supplementary insight regarding the complicated nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These additional findings do not, however, appear crucial for understanding the fundamental conflict dynamic in Nagorno-Karabakh. In order to not drown in details – as it was cautioned against in chapter three – this master thesis considers the initial research design of focusing primarily on the system and regional levels of analysis to constitute a suitable approach for studying the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

7.3. Conclusion

After 13 years of negotiating, the Armenians and Azeris are no closer to achieving a viable peace-settlement. In order to provide an answer as to why the conflict remains unresolved, this master thesis has put two theoretical perspectives – neorealism and Regional Security Complex Theory – up against each other.

As earlier stated in chapter one, it is not the intention of this master thesis to refute the neorealist perspective altogether. The existence of a strong system level conflict dimension that employs significant top-down influence in Nagorno-Karabakh is therefore not unexpected or very surprising. A more interesting discovery is, however, that neorealism proves insufficient for explaining several important aspects of the unresolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Not only were Armenia and Azerbaijan instrumental for linking the regional and system level conflict dimensions together, but they continue to

influence the system level and the conflict dynamic in Nagorno-Karabakh even after significant great power penetration.

The strength of this bottom-up linkage is contradictory to the neorealist assumption of states facing one and the same level of analysis. The independent maneuvering of Armenia and Azerbaijan has demonstrated that balance of power logic operates not only at the system level, but also on the regional level of analysis. This lower level of analysis is furthermore intertwined with the security dynamics of the great powers. Armenia and Azerbaijan may not matter extensively on a global scale, but they definitively command the ability to influence the choices of Russia and the US within the context of the Caucasus region. In the words of Barry Buzan (1991:166), "The system level is only one of several major variables that shapes and mediate the security consequences of anarchy". In my opinion, a substantial problem area in the neorealist perspective is to be found right here. The theory is elegant in its simplicity, but nonetheless inadequate for fully grasping the nature of international security in the post-Cold War world.

Regional Security Complex Theory, on the other hand, stands out as a more promising approach for enlightening the essential core of why the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unsettled. The advantage of this theoretical perspective is that it can explain the top-down influence of the great powers just as good as neorealism, and at the same time fit in the bottom-up influence that the Armenia-Azerbaijan regional level conflict dimension bring to bear on the US-Russia system level conflict dimension in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although Regional Security Complex Theory has the disadvantage of being more complex than neorealism, it seems to offer a satisfactory solution to the shortcomings of the neorealist perspective.

A strong two-way linkage (top-down and bottom-up) has been revealed between the high aspirations of Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding a solution in Nagorno-Karabakh and the great power interests of Russia and the US concerning domination in the Caucasus. Based on the findings of this master thesis, I argue that it is the linkage of several diverging interests, located on two different levels of analysis, which essentially blocks a resolution to the conflict. Thus, in order to fully grasp the nature of the deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh, the system level conflict dimension and the regional level conflict dimension need to be viewed in relation to each other. This implies that hypothesis 2 seems to be strengthened, while hypothesis 1 is to some extent weakened. All in all, this master thesis has made a noteworthy finding in support of Buzan and Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory.

It falls outside the limits of this master thesis to provide a specific policy recommendation as to how the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could be resolved. The insight acquired in this master thesis can, however, indicate where future peace-efforts ought to be concentrated. Shortly summarized, a crucial step towards a peaceful resolution appears to be the disentanglement of the linkages between the system level conflict dimension and the regional conflict dimension. In isolation, a resolution to the regional conflict dimension might be achievable. Since it is unrealistic to anticipate that Russia or the US will in the near future quit the Caucasus region, a feasible approach is instead to focus the peace-efforts on how Armenia and Azerbaijan can unlock themselves from their great power dependency.

This modest proposal might not resolve the faceted conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is my hope, however, that it might be an important first step in moving it away from the present deadlock, and hopefully towards a more problem solving approach between the parties involved.

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