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Neoclassical Realism: Foreign Policymaking in the South Caucasus

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University of Glasgow

School of Social and Political Sciences

University of Tartu

Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Ilia State University

School of Arts and Sciences

Jack Gill

2348336G

Supervisors:

Prof. Giorgi Gvalia (Ilia State University) & Dr Huseyn Aliyev (University of Glasgow)

International Master in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies

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Neoclassical Realism: Foreign Policymaking in the South Caucasus

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Abstract

The states of the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) each have remarkably different interests and orientations when it comes to their foreign policy. One would think that 3 small Post-Soviet states occupying the same geographical region, with common histories of domination by neighbouring powers, would have operate in similar ways towards their larger neighbours and the rest of the world. In point of fact, the opposite is true – each state has its own unique orientation, which can be seen clearest in the way each state conducts its own foreign policy. There is, of course, a multitude of reasons explaining this divergence in foreign policy. Using a neoclassical realist theoretical basis, this study aims to examine foreign policy by identifying both system- and unit-level variables that have influenced foreign policy in the countries of the South Caucasus since gaining their independence while testing the applicability of a theory for small state foreign policy analysis. Drawing upon information gathered from primary interviews with foreign policy experts in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, the study shows that unit-level intervening variables do have some influence on foreign policy making at various times and under various conditions. As such, the study demonstrates the utility of neoclassical realism in small state foreign policy analysis.

Key Words

South Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, foreign policy, neoclassical realism

ABBREVIATIONS

- BTC – Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (oil pipeline)
- CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States
- CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organisation
- DV – Dependent Variable
- EaP – Eastern Partnership (of the European Union)
- EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union
- EU – European Union
- EUAA – European Union Association Agreement
- FPE – Foreign Policy Elite
- GD – Georgian Dream (Georgian political party)
- GDP – Gross Domestic Product
- IV – Independent Variable
- IVV – Intervening Variable
- NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
- OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- UN – United Nations
- UNM – United National Movement (Georgian political party)

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1 Introduction

Over the course of the last twenty-eight years, the countries of the South Caucasus have found themselves at the centre of some of the greatest political, economic, and cultural upheavals in living history. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, to which they had belonged as constituent republics, meant that these new independent states had a freedom that they had never known. However, the euphoria of gaining their newly gained independence was short-lived. A number of ethnic conflicts exploded around the region, which had been brewing since the late Soviet-period, during which every South Caucasian country was affected. These conflicts had an impact on almost every part of life in the South Caucasus and large numbers of displaced people were sent away from their homes to live in more ethnically homogenous regions.

Since gaining their independence, the countries of the South Caucasus have embarked on very different paths in terms of their foreign policy orientation. Georgia has developed a very pro-western foreign policy, which ultimately aims for Georgia to join Euro-Atlantic institutions, namely the European Union and NATO. Armenia, on the other hand, has maintained an extremely close strategic partnership with Russia, which has led to Armenia joining the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and more recently the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Russia's EU inspired political and economic integration project. Azerbaijan, in contrast to its neighbours, has quite a different approach. Its abundant natural resources (mainly oil and natural gas) have allowed Azerbaijan much greater independence from Russia, as well as the flexibility to pursue a largely independent foreign policy agenda.

By using a most similar systems design, it is possible to examine the factors that have influenced the foreign policies of three countries in the same region, with similar political systems and who each are each similar in terms of the region they occupy, their size, political systems, as well as their common history as former constituent republics of the Soviet Union. In theoretical terms, by using a neoclassical realist framework it should be possible to provide a clearer picture of the way these countries orient themselves towards each other, their neighbours, and the rest of the world. Neoclassical realism as a theoretical concept predicts that, while such system-level factors as the international system and a state's relative power

capabilities are the main driving force behind foreign policy decision-making, intervening variables on the unit (domestic) level of analysis also play an important part in this process. Therefore, in undertaking a neoclassical realist study of foreign policy in the South Caucasus, it is necessary to examine the external dimension of a state's position in the international system and its relative power capabilities, as well as important domestic factors ranging from the levels of individual foreign policy decisionmakers and the ideology of governing regimes, to the levels of domestic institutions and societal beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, by using neoclassical realist theory to examine these three countries, the study can also present itself as a test of how useful this particular theory is in the study of small states with very different foreign policy orientations. The main utility of neoclassical realism lies in its explanatory power, which allows for a comprehensive foreign policy analysis, reconciling the realist predictions of the main role of systemic stimuli with unit-level intervening variables by creating a framework that effectively incorporates these variables, which were before the main concern of constructivist theories, without changing the fundamental realist foundation.

The aim of this thesis is to identify unit-level intervening variables that have been of influence in the three countries since they gained their independence from the Soviet Union. In doing so, I hope to contribute to existing neoclassical realist studies of foreign policy by offering three case studies to which to apply the theory. Furthermore, I hope to shed light on small state foreign policymaking by applying a theoretical model that takes into account both unit- and system-level variables. The research puzzle (as discussed further below) is an anomalous occurrence in the international system, in this case three similar countries with very different foreign policies and, as such, using a neoclassical realist theoretical framework, this study aims to identify and analyse what intervening variables, if any, influence foreign policymaking in these countries. This is in contrast to previous neoclassical realist studies of the region, which previously only considered one or two intervening variables, often in only one country. Moreover, I hope to do this by drawing upon previous studies, as well as primary source information gained by myself conducting in-depth interviews with foreign policy experts in each of the three countries, which I will analyse in due course.

In the first chapter, a theoretical background will be provided, conceptualising the main neoclassical realist theoretical framework through which this study examines foreign policy. This section will conceptualise the variables under analysis in this study, which as a

neoclassical realist study will employ not only a dependent (DV) and independent (IV) variable, but also intervening variables (IVV), the use of which will be explained in due course. Moreover, the different variables will be connected and applied to the original research collected for this study.

The next chapter will review previous foreign policy literature, covering many sources and concepts relating to small state foreign policy, as well as previous studies that have also employed a neoclassical realist framework. This section will also contain more country specific analyses of foreign policy in the region, discussing a number of studies that have been done and their contribution to the field of study, as well as their drawbacks.

After this, the methodology chapter will operationalise the variables and explain the ways in which they will be used to analyse the information collected in the interviews. This section will also offer a conceptualisation for small states according to previous research. Moreover, the research methods used to gather the original information used in this study will be discussed.

Thereafter, the research that I have undertaken as part of this thesis will be discussed, based on the interviews with experts who offered their analysis of foreign policy in the South Caucasus. In the interviews, I discussed with each expert about what they consider to be the main issues influencing policymakers in their respective countries. With this information, I am able to identify occurrences in which the earlier clarified intervening unit-level variables, as well as system-level variables play a role in foreign policymaking and in what way these variables in each country affect its foreign policy in relation to the theories used in this study. A conclusion will then be given.

2 Theoretical Background

According to Kenneth Waltz (1979), states generally try to emulate the successful practices of other states, be they economic, political, military, technological etc. Moreover, in the face of threats, larger states tend to balance against more powerful states by building alliances or coalitions against them (Waltz, 1979). This assertion is backed up by Stephen Walt (1985), who asserts that “bandwagoning behaviour stands in sharp contrast to the predictions of balance of power theory” (p.8) because states with the power to form alliances against larger threatening powers seek to do so with smaller partners so as not to be dominated by other states, as would happen if they were to bandwagon with an aggressor, thus finding themselves at its mercy (p.5). However, this theory applies more to the primary cases of great power politics, and less to the foreign policy of smaller and weaker states. As Walt (1985) notes:

“...small and weak states in close proximity to a great power are the most likely candidates for bandwagoning. Because they will be the first victims of an attack, because potential allies may be scarce or distant, and because they lack the capabilities to stand alone or alter the balance significantly, accommodating a neighboring great power may occasionally make more sense.” (p.18)

However, Walt concedes that, in spite of this, occurrences of bandwagoning are rare, and a bandwagoning relationship will often falter due to disparities. Moreover, even in a case of bandwagoning by a smaller state, the consequences for the international community will be minor (p.18). A key issue with this theory is that, while explaining general tendencies in the international system, “[it] does not explain why and how states choose among different types of “internal” balancing strategies” (Taliaferro, 2006, p. 466). That is, it does not seek to explain the multitude of internal processes that affect foreign policy decision-makers and their state’s capacity to extract the resources needed to conduct foreign policy.

Because neorealist theory, in its raw sense, does not take into account the role of unit level (domestic) variables in foreign policymaking, other theories have been developed to approach foreign policy analysis from the domestic level. According to Gideon Rose (1998), one of the main such theories of foreign policy is “*Innenpolitik*”, which focuses almost exclusively on the influence of domestic factors on foreign policy (p.148). *Innenpolitik* holds

that to find out why a country behaves the way it does, one must take into account domestic factors (such as political ideology, political systems, socioeconomic structures etc.) and examine the role these play in influencing a state's foreign policy (p.148). A key example of this theory is democratic peace, which holds that democracies behave differently when they deal with each other (p.148). However, the key issue with *Innenpolitik* theory in terms of small state foreign policy analysis is because it ascribes the main explanatory power to domestic processes in foreign policy. Due to the nature of small states in the international system (namely that they are far more constricted by it than larger countries), it is generally agreed that it is more likely that system-level factors will play a larger role in small state foreign policymaking (Elman, 1995, p. 172).

In contrast to *Innenpolitik* theory, a number of realist theories have been developed, which draw upon Waltz's fundamental neorealist theory and stress the supreme role of the international system in foreign policymaking. *Offensive realism* takes states as rational actors seeking security "by maximising their relative advantage" in a Hobbesian world of international anarchy (p.149). As a result, states seeking security are bound to come into conflict with others if they perceive that their position in the international environment will be more secure because of it (p.149). In this way, conflict is the natural result of rational actors trying to improve their security by increasing their relative advantage. In order to understand foreign policy, according to the theory, the researcher should look to the international environment and the state's relative capabilities, which are easily translated into foreign policy and "shape how a state chooses to advance its interests" (p.149).

Defensive realism, on the other hand, presumes that security is more plentiful and, as such, states only need to concern themselves when an external threat appears. Moreover, even when such a threat appears, states tend to employ a balancing strategy, thus "deter[ing] the threatener and obviat[ing] the need for actual conflict" (p.149). The key fault with this theory, Rose (1998) argues, is that it does not take into account the fact that a state's perception of a threat is influenced by its relative power and thus cannot explain foreign policy without resorting to unit-level variable examinations (p.151). These theories each have their own merits, but in the study of sometimes counter-theoretical behaviour in small state foreign policy, a theory with a broader focus that incorporates unit-level variables in a realist framework is required, which is where neoclassical realism comes in.

2.1 Neoclassical Realism

The main theory that this study draws upon in order to analyse unit-level intervening variables that may influence foreign policy is neoclassical realism. For this, I draw primarily upon Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (Ripsman et al. 2016), whose comprehensive Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics outlines the ways in which intervening variables may be incorporated into foreign policy analysis.

Neoclassical realism is based on the initial assumption that “states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment” (p.152). That is, they will pursue as much influence as possible given their relative power capabilities. Thus, with increasing capabilities comes greater foreign policy ambition. However, neoclassical realists argue that it is not solely these system-level variables that influence foreign policy; according to them, the impact of system-level variables on foreign policy is not direct but is in fact translated through unit-level variables into the mind of foreign policy decision-makers, whose decisions are made based not only on external considerations, but on internal ones too. Unit-level intervening variables, according to Ripsman et al. (2016), can be seen as:

“the various constraints on the central actors, the interactions within and between decision-makers and society as a whole, and the processes and mechanisms by which foreign policy is formulated, each of which can affect the manner in which states respond to external stimuli.” (p.59)

As such, it is necessary to incorporate unit-level intervening variables into the analysis as they can provide greater clarity of the decision-making process at the level of the decision-maker. A small number of studies have already been done using both unit- and system-level variables to explain the foreign policy of Georgia (Gvalia et al., 2013, 2019) and (Oskanian, 2016), Armenia (Åberg & Terzyan, 2018), and Azerbaijan (Valiyev & Mamishova, 2019). However, as will later be discussed in the literature review, these studies are rather narrow in their focus.

2.2 Dependent Variable: Foreign Policy Outcomes

The neoclassical realist approach to foreign policy analysis can stipulate a number of potential dependent variables (DV), depending on the level of analysis in question. Ripsman et al. (2016) argue that the scope of neoclassical realism to explain international outcomes grows over time and is not simply a tool to explain individual foreign policy decisions, as had been previously thought. As such, they have developed a useful model showing the neoclassical realist perception of not only foreign policy, but international politics more broadly. As demonstrated in figure 1.1, system-level stimuli are processed through the foreign policy elites (FPE) into policy decisions. The FPE are, during the process, subject to influence from other unit-level intervening variables at various points and to varying degrees, and which ultimately influence the outcomes of the decision-making process.

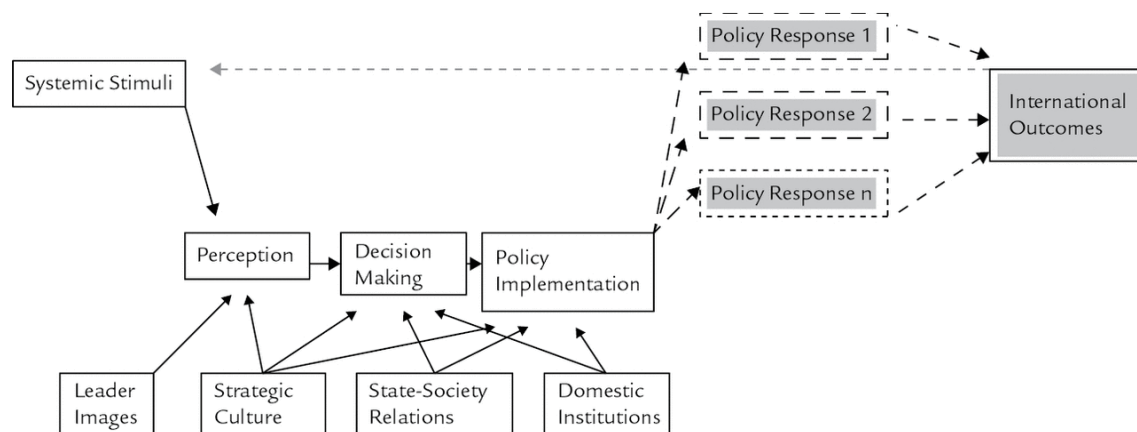


Figure 1.1 Neoclassical Realist Model of Foreign Policy (Ripsman et al. 2016, p.81)

One key aspect of this theory is that foreign policy outcomes can change depending on the timescale. For example, in the shorter term (days to months), a country's relative power is unlikely to shift, which means that policy making "consists of navigating the given power distribution, without opportunities to augment one's own power" (p.83). In other words, the FPE are faced with crises and other unexpected events that require rapid response and, having no time to ameliorate their relative power capabilities, must make decisions based on their current abilities. Moreover, with such a constrained timescale, states are generally unable to form new alliances or employ necessary pre-emptive balancing strategies to respond to the event or crisis in time (p.83).

As the timescale lengthens, so too does the opportunity for wider variables outside the FPE to influence policymaking. When speaking about the short-to-medium term (months to

years), states have more flexibility to employ more concrete strategic planning to improve their international standing, with their foreign policy becoming “more forward-looking and less responsive to fixed conditions and imperatives” (p.83). As such, states, building on their existing resources, can develop themselves further economically and militarily, as well as establish alliances with other powers (p.84).

Going further still, in the medium-to-long term (years to decades), we begin to see the impact of the strategic planning employed by states interacting to produce systemic outcomes internationally, by which Ripsman et al. mean the “observable political phenomena resulting from the coaction and interactions of the strategies pursued by two or more actors in the international arena” (p.85). Thus, at this timescale we start to see the results of the interplay of different countries’ foreign policy strategies.

In the long term (decades), the international system itself can be influenced by the policies and grand strategies of its constituent units because, according to Ripsman et al. 2016, “systemic outcomes can alter systemic structure by weakening existing powers and/or generating new ones” (p.86). Moreover, while structural realists agree that the differential growth rates of great powers are the main cause of structural change, their rate of growth is “largely determined by the strategic economic and political choices [they] make over time as part of their foreign policy and grand strategic planning” (pp.86-87).

2.3 Independent Variable: The International System & Relative Power Capabilities

In this neoclassical realist study of foreign policy, the key independent variable (IV) is the international system and the state’s relative power capabilities. Ripsman et al. (2016) discuss the ways in which these factors are the primary causal influence on a state’s foreign policy, which they see as the main factors limiting (or expanding) possible policy directions. Because the condition of the system at any one time may determine how one state interacts with that system, at this level of analysis it is necessary to examine system-level dynamics such as the propensity for other systemic stimuli to exert influence on a nation state’s foreign policy.

Defining the international system has often presented an issue in international relations, since the way one defines it can have theoretical implications. For the purposes of this study,

however, I shall use the definition outlined by Ripsman et al (2016), who define it as state-centric, focussing primarily on the actions of state actors. Historically speaking, they define it as:

“the interstate system that emerged in Western Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries... had grown into a single global international system subsuming previously autonomous systems”
(Ripsman et al., 2016, p.35).

Drawing on Kenneth Waltz’s (1979) conception of structural realist theory, Ripsman et al. (2016) outline two important ways in which neoclassical realism draws on Waltz’s original idea. The first is that while the international system can impose constraints on its units by providing a number of potential strategic options and outcomes, the international system alone cannot determine the precise behaviour of its units (p.36). The second is that the anarchic nature of the international system creates uncertainty among the units (p.37). In other words, the international system – primarily the “relative distribution of material capabilities and anticipated power trends” – sets the broad parameters for the ways in which states can behave, but its influence on states’ actual external behaviour is “complex and indirect” (p.37). Moreover, according to Waltz, the international system is by its nature anarchic, as opposed to hierarchic, since, rather than being one large hierarchy or empire with one actor or unit above all others, the modern international system is composed of “like units co-acting”, with each performing the same tasks without specialising, as opposed to each specialising as a part of a much larger entity (Waltz, 1979, p. 18).

Neoclassical realism builds on this anarchic system foundation but makes one important change – it acknowledges that there are other variables on both the systemic and unit level of analysis, while accepting that the main explanatory variables are the relative distribution of power and power trends, which “are conditioned by structural modifiers” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.43). Drawing on the term “structural modifiers”, coined by Glenn Snyder, which includes such factors as geography or “the rates of technological diffusion”, they concede that these factors “can modify the effect of the system’s structure... [on] the likely external behaviours of individual units.” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.40). These structural modifiers can create constraints or opportunities for certain states, but given the unique way in which, for example, a state’s geostrategic location will provide it with opportunity or constraint, these

will not apply to the system as a whole but rather to particular states or regions (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 41-42). It is thus the international system, in particular the relative distribution of power and power trends within the system, that sets the parameters for states to conduct their foreign policy by determining the choices available to them. The relative distribution of power in the international system can be measured, according to neoclassical realists, by “various measurements or indicators of a state’s material capabilities”, such as its gross domestic product (GDP); its level of defence spending (as a percentage of GDP); the size of its armed forces; the size of its population; its natural resources; and the size of its territory (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.44).

Other important concepts stem from the relative distribution of power. The first is polarity, which “denote[s] the number of great powers or major states in existence within a system at a given time” and “their control over sufficient material components of power as well as the political and bureaucratic means to extract and mobilize these resources” (Ripsman et al. 2016, p.45). The international system may approximate to one of three ideal types at any given time: unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar. The polarity in the system, according to Ripsman et al. (2016), “is a function of the relative distribution of capabilities among the major states in the system” (p.45) and is thus an inevitable by-product of the system.

However, Ripsman et al. go on to mention that it is not only the polarity of the system that is important, but also the “clarity” with which foreign policy decision-makers perceive the polarity of the system. As a key systemic variable for neoclassical realist analysis of foreign policy, they identify three components of clarity which can significantly impact of a state’s foreign policy decisions:

- “The degree to which threats and opportunities are readily discernible;
- Whether the system provides information on the time horizons of threats and opportunities;
- Whether optimal policy options stand out or not” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.46)

These factors can greatly limit the number of choices available to states – greater clarity of the threats posed by other states and the time-frame of potential action, as well as possible options should mean that the number of possible options open to a state should be few, whereas poor clarity of threats means that the number of options should be higher and

open to interpretation (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 49-50). However, while the international system and material power capabilities, as well as the clarity of threats and opportunities, and polarity of the system greatly limit the number of choices open to states, it is through other unit-level 'intervening variables' that we can better understand the ways in which these systemic factors are translated into actual policy.

2.4 Incorporating unit-level intervening variables

According to Rose (1998), neoclassical realists argue that while a state's foreign policy is governed primarily by factors at the systemic level of analysis, these systemic level factors must be "translated through intervening variables at the unit level" (p.146). In other words, domestic factors, or unit-level variables, must be taken into account when analysing foreign policy because these affect the ways in which foreign policy decision-makers understand and respond to issues in the international system. Furthermore, according to Taliaferro (2006), neoclassical realism differs from neorealism because where the latter looks for patterns in international politics, the former looks to explain why individual states' foreign policies differ over time, or when two states' foreign policies differ when they face similar external constraints (p.480). Neoclassical realism thus reconciles unit-level variables with systemic theories of international relations and provides a clearer account of foreign policy decision-making. Valerie Hudson (2014) confirms the necessity of examining variables on both levels of analysis in her book on foreign policy analysis:

"a foreign policy analyst would be remiss in dismissing these theories of more macrolevel attributes of nations and systems. Clearly these things affect foreign policy choice. To achieve its explanatory objectives, FPA [Foreign Policy Analysis] must examine all levels of analysis for possible impact on foreign policy choice." (p.162)

Therefore, when conducting a neoclassical realist comparison of the states of the South Caucasus, it is necessary to include intervening variables that have the potential to influence foreign policy in a number of ways. The utility in using neoclassical realism for analysing foreign policy in the South Caucasus has already been proven in a number of studies. In order to examine what exactly influences foreign policy in the South Caucasus through the lenses of neoclassical realism, it is necessary to conceptualise the types of intervening variables (IVV) to take into account. In response to criticism that neoclassical realist studies select their cases

in an eclectic and ad-hoc manner and can, therefore, only apply to specific foreign policy situations (pp. 59-60), Ripsman et al. (2016) conceptualised four types of intervening variables (see figure 1.1 above), which I have backed up in this study with similar conceptualisations by Valerie Hudson (2014) and Randall Schweller (2006), and discuss the impact they could potentially have on foreign policy decision-making: elite preferences; strategic culture; state-society relations; and domestic institutions.

2.4.1 Elite Preferences

The first type of intervening variable, drawing on a type defined by Ripsman et al. (2016) as “leader images”, which they define as the beliefs or images of individuals in the foreign policy executive (FPE), including key decision-makers in foreign policy such as the “president, prime minister, or dictator, and key cabinet members, ministers, and advisors charged with the conduct of foreign and defense policies” (p.61). However, examination of these kinds of variables requires an in-depth psychological analysis of key decision-makers, their personalities, previous experiences, beliefs, and values – cognitive filters through which they perceive the outside world (p.61). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, this kind of IVV has been restructured as “elite preferences”. That is, the vested interests held by the FPE both internationally and domestically that can influence their foreign policy decision-making. Such variables can include, for example, business interests and regime security – factors that may drive the FPE to make certain decisions, which are made in their own interests but not necessarily in the interests of broader society.

According to Ripsman et al. (2016), these kinds of variables “should matter most in the short term” because in times of crisis most other actors with the potential to influence policy are excluded from the process (p.91). Conversely, when the timescale is greater, it is expected that elite preferences will play a less important role in decision-making because other actors are brought into the process “to contribute to defining problems and devising policy solutions” (p.91).

This approach is also emphasised by Hudson (2014), who also mentions the importance of an FPE’s actual interest in foreign policy, and thus how likely they are to delegate their authority in the foreign policy decision-making process to subordinates, in which case it would be required to examine the subordinates as well (p.40). In addition, an FPE’s interest and

involvement in foreign policymaking may vary over time, from low during peacetime to high in times of conflict or crisis (p.40). Another dynamic outlined by Hudson is the role of group dynamics in the decision-making process, in particular small groups. She states that groups will behave differently depending on the power of the leader, as well as the role that members of the group consider themselves to be playing, i.e. whether they are loyal to the leader's views, representing a certain part of the government bureaucracy (e.g. the security services, military etc.), or whether they are acting autonomously, representing their own beliefs and preferences (p.74).

One measurement criteria discussed by Schweller (2006) is that of "elite cohesion", which he defines as "the degree to which a central government's political leadership is fragmented by persistent internal divisions" (p.54). In this way, more-cohesive governments will more likely be able to conduct an effective balancing strategy as they face less internal division or resistance from other elites (p.55). However, if elites are fragmented, they will be far less likely to be able to pursue a balancing strategy in the face of a threat. Balancing a threat is difficult and requires the mobilisation of societal resources (for example, higher taxation for higher defence spending), and in no way will be accepted by other elites unless there is a high degree of cohesion (p.55).

2.4.2 Strategic Culture

Another type of intervening variable outlined by Ripsman et al. is "strategic culture". Strategic culture can concern the "organisational culture" of a government bureaucracy on the one hand or, more generally, widespread societal norms, such as the beliefs and expectations of wider society and their attitudes towards others, on the other (Ripsman et al. 2016, p.63). These in turn can influence foreign policymaking in that they "constrain a state's behaviour and freedom of action by defining what are acceptable and unacceptable strategic choices" (p.64). In other words, the FPEs will be limited in their foreign policy choices to those that comply with the wider the strategic culture, or else face a backlash. Furthermore, the dominant ideology of a state could be included in strategic culture, in that it affects a country's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, other countries and the international system, as well as limiting acceptable policy option (p.65).

Ripsman et al. (2016) predict that strategic culture will be influential over both the short and the long term. In a day-to-day situation, it can constrain the number of options the FPE have, particularly in terms of “national attitudes towards the use of force” (pp. 91-92). In the longer term, strategic culture can exert significant influence over the FPE and its long-term foreign policy strategies because, in case the FPE have not already been “inculcated with national attitudes”, the FPE will seek to avoid building societal opposition towards their strategy by going against national values and attitudes (p.92).

Similarly, Hudson (2014) also discusses the role of culture and national identity in foreign policymaking. On a fundamental level, when trying to define ‘culture’, she identifies the role of ‘shared meaning’ between decision-makers of a certain country, and thus how their country or people should behave in relation to others. However, such a study of the impact of culture on foreign policymaking would require an in-depth analysis of specific cultural norms and the way they influence the psychology of a person, as well as how that may lead them to take certain decisions in foreign policy and, according to Hudson, may not be very worthwhile unless examining a “totalitarian microculture” (p.136).

2.4.3 State-Society Relations

State-society relations as a type of intervening variable involves examining the “character of interactions between the central institutions of the state and various economic and or societal groups” (Ripsman et al. 2016, p.66). Included among such variables are the level of cohesion fragmentation of the government and society, the level of opposition a government faces in society (p.66), as well as regime vulnerability, all of which can have a large impact on foreign policymaking. These factors influence the government’s ability to extract resources from the population and harness the country’s potential and, therefore, the government’s freedom to conduct foreign policy according to its preferences (p.66). In this sense, corruption may be a particularly influential factor, as widespread corruption can strongly hinder a government’s ability to extract its country’s resources. Moreover, the higher the cohesion between government and society, and the more satisfied society is with the government’s performance, the greater freedom the government will have to respond to systemic issues. However, maintaining good state-society relations may also result in foreign policy that “satisfies domestic interest, rather than exclusively international ones” (p.67) as well as lead

to under-balancing a potential threat if the government must take into account the interests of powerful societal actors (p.68). When state-society relations are sub-optimal, the government may have to spend considerably more resources to extract what it needs from society (p.67). As such, an unpopular regime may not only face domestic opposition, but may be threatened with losing an election, or worse being ousted in a coup or revolution if it fails to meet society's demands.

In terms of timescale, Ripsman et al. (2016) would expect state-society relations to be more influential over the long-term since, in the short-term, "the exigencies of a crisis or quick decision place disproportionate power in the hands of the leader to shape the national response" (p.93). However, over a longer timescale, important societal actors will have greater opportunity to shape policy according to their interests and preferences (p.93). Thus, societal actors will have more influence on the grand strategies of the FPE than on quick decision-making.

Schweller (2006) also identifies some measurement criteria that could come under state-society relations, the first of which is "government/regime vulnerability". This concerns the challenges the governing regime faces from other actors in society, such as the military, political opposition, or societal actors, and the risk of losing its power through either elections or other means (p.49). Similar to Ripsman et al.'s (2016) variable discussed above, FPEs that are particularly vulnerable often cannot pursue their foreign policy preferences to the same degree as their safer counterparts in other countries because they must pay more attention to satisfying the preferences of other actors that challenge their power. Moreover, they will be unable to mobilise the resources they need from government and society to pursue a costly or risky balancing strategy at the expense of other actors' preferences should the need arise (p.50).

Schweller's second state-society relations measurement criteria is "social cohesion". A key aspect of this variable is the legitimacy that society places on the ruling government/regime; if the society accepts the legitimacy of the ruling elite, it will be less likely to oppose, or at least act against, the policies pursued by the ruling elite (p.51). Social cohesion is more likely in states where society feels interconnected and where there are mechanisms to solve internal disputes. Moreover, the existence of an outside threat can lead to greater social cohesion due to a "rally round the flag effect" that mobilises the population against a common

threat (p.51). However, this may not always be the case. Different groups in society who are already competing with each other may not simply drop their differences for the common good; according to Simmel (1955) “A state of conflict... pulls the members of so tightly together and subjects them to such uniform impulse that they either must get completely along with, or completely repel, one another” (pp. 87-88). As such, the use of conflict with an external threat to increase internal societal cohesion should only be used as a last resort (pp. 87-88).

2.4.4 Domestic Institutions

The final type of intervening variable discussed by Ripsman et al. (2016) concerns the role of domestic institutions. According to them, formal domestic institutions, such as the parliament, judiciary, civil service etc. have the power to influence policy by reshaping or even blocking government policies they do not agree with. Consequently, the institutional structure of a state, including the power allotted to each institution, can play a role in foreign policymaking (p.69). Equally, it is important to note the degree to which political power is concentrated in the hands of the executive and the institutional constraints placed on them as these factors determine the executives’ ability to harness the country’s power and thus to respond to events in the international environment (p.70).

In her discussion of domestic political institutions, Hudson (2014) also makes the point that domestic institutions can set the political agenda, as well as introduce checks and balances, such as veto powers, judicial reviews, and supermajorities (p.143). While these kinds of domestic political issues can make the implementation of foreign policy more complex and time-consuming, they can also serve to improve the bargaining power of both the government (when negotiating in the international system) and domestic players (when negotiating with a government that requires their support) (pp. 142-143). Furthermore, Hudson (2014) emphasises that in order to understand where international factors influence foreign policymaking, it is first necessary to understand the domestic “game board” or political landscape and the role domestic factors have in the policymaking process. After doing so, one should be able to see where and how, if at all, international factors fit into the process (p.145).

2.5 Connecting the Independent, Dependent, and Intervening Variables

In their attempt to demonstrate neoclassical realism, not only as a theory of foreign policy but as an all-encompassing theory of international politics, Ripsman et al. (2016) have shown that the scope of neoclassical realism for analysis develops over time. In the short term, it has the power to explain the causes and results of FPE's decision-making in response to system-level events or crises, while in the longer term it can ultimately explain the system-level outcomes of states' grand strategies developed over the course of decades. However, the different types of intervening variables will be more or less likely to be influential on foreign policy depending on the timescale involved. The elite preferences IVVs, for example, are more likely to play a larger role in foreign policymaking in the short term because in certain situations, such as a crisis, when rapid decision-making is necessary, leaders exclude other societal actors from the process (p.91). In such situations, the role of the FPE is enhanced, as it is almost exclusively they who make decisions, and thus leader image-type variables have the potential to be more influential. On the other hand, when the FPE is not so constrained by time, other societal actors can be brought into the decision-making process, as leaders can afford to take the time to consult them (P.91). Thus, as the timescale increases, so too does the potential influence of actors further removed from the FPE.

Neoclassical realism's independent variable (systemic stimuli and relative power capabilities) has the effect of significantly narrowing down the choices available to states in the international system. Because states are bound by such systemic factors as geography and relative power, for example, they must navigate themselves within the boundaries raised by these factors. Moreover, the polarity of the international system, combined with the clarity of threats, opportunities, their timescales, as well as the possible policy directions stemming from these are important when it comes to foreign policy decision-making. However, neoclassical realism stipulates that although these factors govern the broad direction a state's foreign policy will take, they alone cannot account for the particular decisions made by a country's FPE and, as such, unit-level intervening variables must be examined to determine the precise causes and outcomes of foreign policymaking.

When analysing foreign policy according to a neoclassical realist theoretical framework, it is necessary to examine a number of different types of intervening unit-level variables that have

the potential to influence foreign policy decision-makers ability to mobilise the state's resources. These variables can guide the policy choices of the elite to varying degrees, depending on the power they have over decision-making process. Thus, at all levels of society, unit-level intervening variables have the potential to influence foreign policy in various situations.

Having conceptualised the systemic stimuli, intervening variables, and foreign policy outcomes, should help to categorise and explain numerous different factors that influence foreign policy in the South Caucasus, which will be discussed in due course. However, while this theory discusses the primary role of *great* powers and their long-term strategies in influencing the international system over time, it does pose the question of where small states fit into the system, and what role they play. For the purposes of this study, which focuses primarily on the foreign policy of *small* states and not *great* powers, and the fact that the time scale of particular foreign policy outcomes (as opposed to grand strategies) tends to be in the scale of days to years, it thus befalls this study to examine key decisions and their outcomes that occur over a short-to-medium term timescale of days to years. As Ripsman et al. (2016) note:

"In the short-to-medium term... states must act within a given international structure, which constrains their foreign policy and grand strategic choice, as well as the range of likely international systemic outcomes" (p.90)

Moreover, as small states are generally bound by the systemic interactions of great powers in the system and their much larger neighbours (in the case of the states of the South Caucasus), it would require a much greater analysis with the scope of decades to properly examine the systemic impact of the "grand strategies" of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Thus, in this study we shall focus primarily on short-to-medium timescale foreign policy outcomes. One important issue with the neoclassical realist theoretical framework laid out above is that it focuses primarily on the role of *great* powers and less on the role of *small* states. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan can be considered small states by most measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), population size, military spending etc. Conventional neorealist wisdom has maintained that due to the nature of small states, the international system is almost always the most important influence on small states' foreign policy due to the systemic constraints placed upon them by larger and more powerful states, such as

opportunities for alliance formation and hostility of neighbouring larger states, because of which, therefore, small state foreign policy should be entirely predictable (Elman, 1995, p. 179). Furthermore, Elman (1995) notes that the received opinion in foreign policy scholarship is that it is difficult to use constructivist theories to explain small state foreign policy outcomes, while realist theories hold much greater explanatory power in this regard. As such, neoclassical realism should have more utility in small state foreign policy analysis due to its fundamental predictions of the overall importance of systemic stimuli (a prediction shared by previous foreign policy scholarship), while allowing a greater degree of flexibility thanks to its ability to examine unit-level variables as well.

3 Literature Review

Much has been written already on the subject of foreign policy in the South Caucasus. Each country, in its own way, provides a unique example of many kinds of state behaviour and is subject to many types of influences not found in larger countries. Being three small countries of the same region and thus bound by similar geographic and systemic constraints, at first glance one could imagine they would react to external events in similar ways, given the systemic constraints they face. However, existing literature has shown that this is not necessarily the case, and each state's foreign policy is bound not only by external realities, but also by domestic processes within the states themselves, as will be explained.

3.1 Georgia

Much research has already taken place on the subject of Georgian foreign policy. Georgia itself has proved to be a very interesting case in foreign policy study due to its seemingly contradictory orientation in theoretical terms. In particular, Georgia has been the focus of a number of studies, each identifying different variables that could be the main cause of Georgia's foreign policy choices. Firstly, the main articles I draw upon for this thesis concern primarily neoclassical realist approaches to foreign due to their relevance to the present study.

The first main study I draw upon is Gvalia, Siroky, Lebanidze & Iashvili (Gvalia et al. 2013). This study seeks to explain Georgia's foreign policy in terms of elite ideas about the identity and purpose of the state as an attempt to explain the discrepancies between the way in which Georgia would be predicted to according to structural realist and materialist theory, and Georgia's geopolitical orientation in reality. They first identify a number of ways in which ideas can influence foreign policy: perception of external threats, framing of options and outcomes, ideas as constraints in the foreign policy decision-making process, and consistency in decision-making (p.109). These then serve to suggest that ideas and ideology are key intervening variables in the foreign policy decision-making process and are thus the main reason why Georgia has continued its attempts to integrate further with Euro-Atlantic institutions and rejects a path that would take it into Russian-dominated institutions. However, a key drawback of this study is that it is quite narrow, focusing primarily on the tenure of one

government over two periods of foreign policy, as well as taking the view that Georgia's pro-western orientation started after the Rose Revolution, when in reality it began during the Shevardnadze period. Although in all fairness, this course did dramatically pick up the pace after the revolution.

A study by Kevork Oskanian (2016) sought to use neoclassical realism to explain Georgian foreign policy between 1992 and 2014. However, in contrast the earlier study by Gvalia et al. (2013), Oskanian identifies that Georgia's pro-western orientation had already begun under Shevardnadze's leadership and that it merely sped up under Saakashvili. Consequently, Oskanian comes to the conclusion that it was in fact the Georgian leadership's perceptions of decreasing Russian power, combined with increasing western power and commitment in the region, that led it to pursue a much stronger pro-western foreign policy that it otherwise would have. In addition, Oskanian notes that it was this miscalculation on the part of Georgia that also led it to try to regain control over the secessionist region of South Ossetia, which culminated in the 2008 war that was disastrous for Georgia. Moreover, in the aftermath of the war, the Saakashvili government's dependence on its pro-western ideology meant that Georgia was unable to reconcile with Russia in any meaningful way until the replacement of Saakashvili's government by the Georgian Dream (p.632).

In a more recent study, Gvalia, Lebanidze & Siroky (Gvalia et al. 2019) seek to explain Georgian foreign policy behaviour by examining the influence of the unit-level factors of elite cohesion and state capacity. Using a neoclassical realist framework, they examine Georgian foreign policy between two period – before and after the Rose Revolution. They identify that the dramatic increase in state capacity developed by the new reformist government of Saakashvili, combined with a high degree of consensus among the elite, have enabled Georgia to more robustly pursue its western integration ambitions. Moreover, in contrast to their earlier study, (Gvalia et al. 2013) they find that it was not only the strength of the pro-western ideology of the government itself that led to effective foreign policy, but the significant improvement and development of the state institutions and state capacity that gave decision-makers the resources they needed to do it (pp. 41-42).

The latter two studies have been crucial in demonstrating the applicability of the neoclassical realist theory for analysis of the foreign policy of Georgia, which therefore provide an invaluable basis on which to conduct further study. Of course, there have been a number of

other, non-neoclassical realist studies of Georgia to determine the key variables that influence its foreign policy. One such recent example is by Kakachia, Minesashvili & Kakhishvili (Kakachia et al. 2018), which examines the role of identity in foreign policymaking. Using a social constructivist theoretical framework, they find that the way Georgian politicians view the country and its capabilities influences their perceptions of how foreign policy should be conducted. By analysing the political discourse of elites from different political parties (the United National Movement and the Georgian Dream), they discovered that their perceptions of the international environment determine the way they view the role of Georgia itself in the world, and thus how it should act on the world stage. Kakachia et al. see this as a key variable that changed Georgia's foreign policy after the change of government in 2013.

The curious case of Georgia's foreign policy over time has, it seems, become a useful training ground for foreign policy analysts to test their theories. It is clear that in such a small state, bound by the international environment and dominated by its much larger neighbour to the north, neoclassical realism offers the best framework for analysis, particularly for Georgia. However, all of these studies seem to focus specifically on elite ideas and their influence on foreign policy. Moreover, while Gvalia et al. (2019) also identify state capacity as a key intervening variable, there is still a lack of research into other unit-level variables, such as societal cohesion and regime stability, and the effects these may have on foreign policy.

3.2 Armenia

Armenian foreign policy has been the topic of much discussion in both English and Russian language academia, and as such, I have tried to draw on Russian language publications to offer greater insight into non-western perceptions of Armenian foreign policy.

The first key study I draw upon is by John H.S. Åberg & Aram Terzyan (2018), examines Armenian foreign policy since independence to explain its foreign policy choices. Seeking to refute the common belief that Armenia's pro-Russian orientation is merely the result of "Armenia's geographical location and material weakness" (p.151), Åberg and Terzyan identify that "structural", "dispositional", and "intentional" dimensions are key variables that have influenced Armenian foreign policy since its independence. Regarding the first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, they note that his pragmatic approach towards foreign policy saw Armenia trying not to become overly dependent on Russia for security, believing that Armenia

would have to make concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh (p.157). However, his strategy was cut short by oppositionists in Armenia in favour of the Karabakhi pro-Russian Robert Kocharyan. Having learnt from his predecessor's mistakes, Kocharyan's rigidity in not compromising over Karabakh and deepening the strategic relationship with Russia. The assassination of the two key power holders left Kocharyan as the core policymaker, at which time he shifted to a pro-Russian foreign policy (p.161). Åberg and Terzyan go on to say this was due to Kocharyan seeking stability and security for his regime in a time of colour revolutions in post-Soviet countries, as well as improving relations between Russia and Azerbaijan (pp. 161-162). Moreover, they argue that Kocharyan's personal position on Karabakh could have come from the fact that he was its president for a time, and his role in the conflict undoubtedly influenced his approach to the conflict (p.163). In terms of Serzh Sargsyan's presidency, the authors offer an explanation of his decision to reject the EU's Association Agreement in favour of EAEU membership as the absence of any EU security guarantees, combined with the EU's lack of influence on Azerbaijan's behaviour forced Armenia to accept the Russian offer (p.168). The ideational factors behind this decision, they note, were that Sargsyan had hardened his rhetoric against Turkey after the failed "football diplomacy", the reinforced perception of Russia as Armenia's saviour, and Sargsyan's regime security in light of the recent Euromaidan events in Ukraine (pp.168-169). The key findings of this study were that the cases in which system-level factors *appear* to influence foreign policy, but where in reality there are often unit-level variables, in this case the ideational preferences of the lead decision-maker of Armenian foreign policy, which have the power to influence policy decisions.

Taline Papazian (2006) discusses the phenomenon of continuity rather than change in Armenia foreign policy between 1991 and 2003. She examined why Armenian foreign policy had continued with minimal changes, despite a complete change in leadership in 1998 from Levon Ter-Petrosyan to Robert Kocharyan, both of whom have different backgrounds (intellectual vs military). In order to find out why, she examined the decision-making process and political elites, as opposed simply to the international environment. She discovered that the unchanging nature of the Armenia's problems, a lack of funds, as well as caution rather than ambition on the part of the leadership, have meant that Armenia has a very limited number of choices when it comes to foreign policy. As a result, a change in leadership has had no effect on foreign policy conditions. Indeed, she claims, "it is foreign policy that weighs

more on Armenia's foreign policy" than vice versa (p.236). Despite her examination of domestic factors, she found that Nagorno-Karabakh, throughout the period in question, has been the main concern of foreign policy decision-makers.

Another study, conducted by Michael Kambeck (2014), sought to explain Armenian foreign policy choices in the wake of the September 2013 decision by Serzh Sargsyan not sign an Association Agreement with the EU, but instead join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. Kambeck identifies the idea of complementarity, wherein Armenia seeks the best possible relations with as many partners as it can, often relying on its diaspora for essential connections to its main partners in Russia, Europe and the United States. However, this complementary foreign policy can sometimes come into conflict when Armenia must choose between the West and Russia, an example of which being the decision to forsake the Association Agreement with the EU for the Russian dominated customs union. As a result, since the disputes between Russia and the western powers are beyond Armenia's control, Armenia should focus on maintaining positive relations with both sides. Moreover, Kambeck notes that Armenian foreign policy did not in fact change after the 2013 decision, but it was a reflection of Armenia continuing to address its primary goals of improving its security and economic situation (p.36).

An article by V.K. Atoyan (2015) examined the main processes of Armenian foreign policy and its priorities. Atoyan identifies that since its independence, Armenia's foreign policy has been based on two fundamental principles: complementarity (as mentioned above) and involvement (p.97). Based on these principles, as well as its strategic alliance with Russia, Armenia seeks to conduct a multi-vectored foreign policy, taking into account risks to its security, and cooperating wherever possible with all powers in the region (p.99-100). In terms of the main influences on foreign policy, Atoyan discusses the exceptional role of the diaspora as a form of soft power acting in Armenian interests in other countries, as well as preventing Azerbaijan from monopolising relations with the West and using them against Armenia (p.100). Furthermore, Atoyan refers to the strategic partnership between Armenia and Russia, in the face of the Turkey-Azerbaijan alliance, being a cornerstone of Armenian foreign policy. In particular, he identifies Armenia's dependence on Russian energy resources, Russian capital in the Armenian economy, the size of the Armenian diaspora in Russia, and the traditional links and friendly relations with Russia as the key factors in the relationship (p.104).

These relations were raised to a new level with Armenia's accession into the EAEU, which gave clarity to (p.114). As such, Atoyán comes to the conclusion that Armenian foreign policy is first and foremost about security, and the best way to ensure stability is to maintain and develop its relationship with Russia. However, this deepening of relations in no way means a reduction of the economic importance of the EU for Armenia. Thus, Armenia can maintain its security while continuing economic and humanitarian cooperation with the EU (p.117).

Overall, the common denominator between studies of Armenian foreign policy appear to be that the key features involve security and diversifying Armenia's relations with as many other actors as possible. This confirms the applicability of neorealist approaches to studies of Armenian foreign policy. Moreover, Åberg & Terzyan (2018) emphasise the influence of unit-level variables in their study of the personal preferences of Armenian presidents over time, also confirming that neoclassical realism can be a useful tool in examining the foreign policy of states seemingly bound supremely by external factors. However, similarly to previous research about Georgian foreign policy, there is a lack of research on different unit-level variables, with the exception of Åberg & Terzyan (2018), and the role of other domestic factors have not been thoroughly researched.

3.3 Azerbaijan

In addition to its western neighbours, Azerbaijan too has a unique foreign policy strategy that has been the subject of much foreign policy literature over the years. One key recent study by Anar Valiyev and Narmina Mamishova (2019) examines Azerbaijan's foreign policy towards Russia since its independence. Using a neorealist and neoclassical realist theoretical framework, they identify that Azerbaijan has pursued a foreign policy towards that they describe as "strategic hedging", a middle ground between completely balancing against, and bandwagoning with, Russia. In this way, Azerbaijan has been able to maintain a strong relationship with Russia, while also being able to pursue its own oil-driven interests with the rest of the world. This "strategic hedging" policy, developed under the presidency of Heydar Aliyev and continued under by his son İlham Aliyev, has sought to learn from the inconsistent policies of their predecessors and form a balanced middle way that also satisfies Russia's interests. Moreover, Valiyev and Mamishova note that two key moments of change in Azerbaijan-Russia relations, namely the change of presidency between Boris Yeltsin and

Vladimir Putin in 2000, and a shift following the Russia-Georgia War in 2008, whereby Russia re-established itself as *the* dominant power in the South Caucasus, were indeed not caused by Azerbaijan, but by Russia (pp. 287-288). By accepting Russia's dominant position in the region, Azerbaijan has thus sought to accommodate Russia's interests and does not seek to provoke Russia by pursuing ambitious western integration projects in the way Georgia has done. In addition, Valiyev and Mamishova emphasize the applicability of neoclassical realism in explaining Azerbaijan's foreign policy due to its contradiction of neorealist predictions. In this sense, a country in Azerbaijan's position would be expected to bandwagon with Russia in light of its more aggressive, expansionist foreign policy since 2008. On the contrary, Valiyev and Mamishova identify that the huge oil and gas reserves have given the Azerbaijani elite more confidence in their foreign policy, which has allowed Azerbaijan to maintain and pursue its non-bloc identity (pp. 285-286).

Another useful study of Azerbaijan's foreign policy to draw upon has been by Eske Van Gils (2018), which looks at Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union. By examining two key areas where Azerbaijan and the EU do not agree, namely democracy and human rights, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, she has been able to identify the strategies used by the two parties to gain more out of their negotiations. On the one hand, the EU sees itself as a strong promoter of the values of democracy and human rights (DHR), and these policies are based largely on its perceived role in promoting these norms. Moreover, regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, the EU stresses the role of the OSCE in the resolution of the conflict yet struggles to reconcile its 'supporting actor' role in the conflict with its role as a regional security actor (p.753). On the other hand, Van Gils finds that Azerbaijan's priorities in its relations with the EU are its national independence, its balancing strategy, and the legitimacy of its regime (p.753). However, in order to examine the effects of the EU's and Azerbaijan's priorities on their relations, Van Gils finds they use proactive and reactive strategies by which they promote their own priorities while resisting those of their counterpart. Interestingly, Van Gils finds that the EU's values-based approach to its relations with Azerbaijan is a frequent cause of tension in the relationship, as Azerbaijan perceives the EU's promotion of human rights as interference in Azerbaijan's domestic politics and threatens the legitimacy of its regime. In response, Azerbaijan counters these tactics by limiting exposure of human rights violations in the media while highlighting Azerbaijan's economic and political independence (p.745). On

the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan's proactive strategy to get the EU more involved in the resolution of the conflict puts pressure on the EU, which cooperates with both Armenia and Azerbaijan through the Eastern Partnership. These difficulties are made worse by the EU's insistence on the role of the OSCE Minsk Group in the conflict resolution, the chairs of which (US, France, Russia) Azerbaijan perceives to be biased in favour of Armenia (de Waal, 2010, pp. 104-105). Therefore, Azerbaijan seeks for the EU play a more active role in its support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity (p.749). She concludes that the EU and Azerbaijan can resist the others proactive strategies using reactive strategies, the ultimate result of which is that it is "easier to defend the status quo than to bring about reform" (p.753).

Current literature on the foreign policy of Azerbaijan has been very insightful in its descriptions and explanations of its foreign policy. Indeed, the concept of strategic hedging has been very useful, and their use of neoclassical realism adds further weight to their arguments. However, the main criticism of Valiyev & Mamishova's (2019) study is that it is somewhat narrowly focused on Azerbaijan's relations with Russia and does not offer in-depth explanations of its behaviour vis-à-vis other countries. Moreover, it does not examine the role of other domestic factors such as ideational influences on key decision-makers. Regarding Van Gils's (2018) study of Azerbaijan-EU relations, she examines primarily their strategies for dealing with one another without considering too much the role of other variables in Azerbaijani foreign policy, in particular the role of Russia, which especially recently has changed Azerbaijan's approach to its relations with other powers.

3.4 Additional Literature

In addition to the country specific studies mentioned above, a number of other studies discuss the serious geopolitical issues facing the South Caucasus. One such study, by Souleimanov, Abrahamyan and Aliyev (2018) discussed the influence of Russian coercive diplomacy utilising unrecognised states in the South Caucasus, namely South Ossetia and Abkhazia. According to them, Russian has sought to maintain its proactive role as peacekeeper in the secessionist conflicts in the region because it sees the dependency of the unrecognised states on Russia as a "core precondition for Russia's long-term influence on its post-Soviet neighbours afflicted by ethnic and territorial conflicts" (Souleimanov et al. 2018, p.77; Van Herpen, 2015). The first of three key instruments that Russia uses, they identify, is "military deployments", whereby

Russia maintains its military presence on the territory of the breakaway regions, usually under the guise of peacekeeping forces. This tactic safeguards the local population and keep them dependent on Russia for their security, as well as provides a deterrent against incursions from the Georgian side (p.79). The second instrument identified was “passportization”, which involves Russia granting the local citizens in the unrecognised state access to Russian citizenship. In doing so, it strengthens Russia’s justification for involvement as it is defending its own citizens from foreign governments (pp. 80-81). The third instrument leads on from the second – “responsibility to protect”. This involves Russia using citizens in the secessionist regions as a means to justify its use of the UN approved Responsibility to Protect (R2P) mechanism (p.82). As a result, Russia was able to use this to legitimise its incursion into South Ossetia after the Georgian offensive as a means to protect its (newly “passportized”) citizens (pp.82-83). This study provides a unique insight into Russia’s strategy to maintain and increase its role as the dominant position in the South Caucasus, and how it uses the secessionist regions as leverage against Georgia. However, the study does not offer much explanation into the ways the use of unrecognised states as leverage directly impacts the foreign policy response of the country against which they are being used, in this case Georgia.

Another important geopolitical factor in the region has been the newly formed Eurasian Economic Union. One article by M. Vardazaryan (2014) discusses the decision of Armenia policymakers to join the EAEU. Looking at various factors, Vardazaryan comes to the conclusion that Armenia’s decision to join the Russian-led customs union was due to the significantly more economically lucrative deal on offer by Russia, which in this case trumped the EU’s Association Agreement. According to Vardazaryan, in financial terms, the AA would offer Armenia 2.3% economic growth, worth \$150 million. On the other hand, by joining the customs union Armenia would save \$150 million in gas subsidies alone, and full membership would offer Armenia 4% economic growth, worth \$400 million (p.34). Moreover, the AA was conditional upon Armenia increasing its economic competitiveness and reforming its judicial and educational sectors. However, these were modest compared to Russian guarantees in terms of energy and military support (p.34). Thus, it appears for more profitable for Armenia to have joined the EAEU, than sign the AA with the EU. However, the study makes no reference to a potential backlash by Russia were Armenia to sign the AA, which would have

been probable, or to any intervening variables, such as those discussed by Åberg & Terzyan (2018).

3.5 Conclusion

There exists much literature on foreign policy in the South Caucasus. Each of the three countries provides in its own way an interesting topic of study, and while there have been a number of studies utilising neoclassical realist theory to examine Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Georgian foreign policy. However, in spite of this, there has yet to be a comprehensive study of the foreign policies of the three countries through the lenses of unit-level intervening variables. As such, an important dimension in the literature is missing. From previous research, it now appears clear that both unit- and system-level intervening variables influence foreign policy in the South Caucasus to some degree, while the power dynamics of larger countries in the region show it is still the international environment that dominates foreign policymaking in the South Caucasus. Moreover, other studies about the region offer insights into other influential factors, such as the development of new regional integration projects, and the status of unrecognised states. However, previous neoclassical realist literature tends to focus on the role of one or two IVVs without much regard for many other potential influences. In this way, the present hopes to offer a much broader analysis in each country and examine deeper the roles these variables play specifically because it analyses the foreign policies of the South Caucasus republics through the lenses of unit level variables.

4 Methodology and Research Design

4.1 Methodology

Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are three small states with a common post-Soviet history. They all occupy a common geographical space in the South Caucasus, surrounded by Russia, Turkey, and Iran. They are all of a similar size, share similar political systems, and were all constituent republics of the Soviet Union. Therefore, I have used the most similar systems design as the base of my analysis. This study will examine the foreign policies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan over the course of the last 28 years, paying particular attention to the key moments of change, as well as structural changes over the years. These range from domestic situations like violent revolutions and regime overthrow, to reactions to international events, like foreign invasions and wars. The study is built on the structural realist basis with systemic stimuli as the main independent variable and foreign policy outcomes as the dependent variable and from there identifying intervening variables hope to clarify certain foreign policy outcomes, while maintaining the expectation that states will behave according to realist theory.

The model drawn upon for this study is from a framework devised by Ripsman et al. (2016), who set out a clear path for the development for neoclassical realist studies of foreign policy. According to them, examining puzzling phenomena in international relations should in fact be called a “research puzzle” (as opposed to a single research question), which Ripsman et al. define as a “surprising outcome or causal sequence that appears anomalous from the predictions of existing theories” (p.102). This is an accurate representation of the current study, as it seeks to examine intervening variables that could possibly influence the foreign policy of three states of the same typology. A research puzzle, moreover, questions the existing consensus because it “highlights an observable outcome that does not appear to match theoretical expectations” (p.103). Ripsman et al. (2016) also note that neoclassical realist studies follow a “causes-of-effects” approach, in which the researcher seeks to identify patterns on the basis of well-selected case (pp.108-109), in this case on the basis of three small states of the same typology.

In this study, I seek to examine foreign policy outcomes in the South Caucasus and, using original source information, identify what the main drivers were that influenced those policy outcomes. Based on the collected information, it should be possible to identify the key systemic stimuli at the time, as well as any possible intervening variables. Moreover, by taking into account perceived systemic constraints and opportunities, as well as the contemporaneous polarity of the international system, it should be possible to construct a clear picture of the systemic and domestic context in which these policy outcomes occurred. Bringing this all together under a neoclassical realist umbrella, this study should be able to offer an interesting and useful insight into the geostrategic position of the South Caucasus as well as, if at all, unit-level IVVs have influenced foreign policy.

4.2 Research Design

The research that I have undertaken as part of the thesis aims to test the underlying assumptions concerning the foreign policy of the states of the South Caucasus using a neoclassical realist theoretical framework. In order to gain a clear picture as to the main outcomes of, and factors contributing to, foreign policy making, I have conducted interviews with foreign policy experts in each of the three countries. In doing so, this study tries to build a clear picture of the main factors influencing each country's foreign policy, both internally and externally. The last 28 years have seen great changes in the international system, with various powers rising and falling. As such, by only examining unit-level variables, the role of these systemic changes would not otherwise be mentioned.

Because this study is examining foreign policy over a period of years, it is necessary to identify intervening variables of all levels (as outlined in the theoretical background chapter). It pursues a deductive strategy to identify intervening variables. Ripsman et al. (2016) mention that for studies on longer-term variables, it is advisable "to privilege variables from the strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions" categories since, according to them, "the impact of [elite preferences] diminishes over time" (p.114). However, this study does not exclude variables of this type since the nature of government in the South Caucasus is such that these countries tend to have very centralised power structures that give the leaders more power than they would in, say, a western democracy. As Elman (1995) notes, "The received wisdom in the field is that domestic determinants will be less salient when

studying small state behaviour because external constraints are more severe and the international system is more compelling” (p.172). She goes on to mention, however, that “small state foreign policy provides a unique opportunity for those scholars who insist that that domestic politics matters in explaining international and foreign policy outcomes.” (p.172). In light of the numerous studies discussed above in the review of previous literature that examine the role of domestic-level variables on foreign policy in the South Caucasus, there is definite worth in studying potential influence of such variables on small state foreign policy. However, in contrast to most studies on foreign policy in the South Caucasus, which tend to focus specifically on one or two variables in one country, this study will identify and examine a number of intervening variables in all three countries over a longer period of time. In doing so, it should provide a broad insight into foreign policymaking in the South Caucasus. During the analysis, I will firstly identify occurrences of the IV, the international system and relative power capabilities of these countries, and where these were influential in foreign policymaking based on the research undertaken through interviews. From there, the IVVs will be identified and categorised according to the four types of IVV conceptualised in the theoretical section. After the identification of the variables, they will be analysed and discussed in order to find out under which conditions and circumstances the variables were influential. In doing so, it should build a clearer picture of the what influences foreign policy in the South Caucasus.

Data Collection

For this research, I have conducted 10 in-depth interviews of varying length totalling 414 minutes (6.9 hours) of interviews. Four of these interviews were on Georgia, three on Armenia, and three on Azerbaijan, with foreign policy experts from Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, who each discussed the foreign policy of their respective countries. I recorded each interview having first gained their permission to do so (using a voice recorder application for the in-person interviews and over skype for electronic interviews). The participants were contacted via email and asked if they wanted to participate. Those that chose to participate were given a consent form and a plain language statement to make sure they understand fully the purpose of the research and the interview they were about to undertake. The participants were chosen based on their expertise of foreign policy in their country and each one was asked only about their own country. It was important to conduct expert interviews because

the previous literature, while providing in-depth examinations and explanations, was also lacking details, such as the influence of other important factors, such as societal factors, and not only details of the foreign policymaking elite. Moreover, these interviews were able to provide up to date information of recent events, such as the recent Armenian revolution, about which not much literature exists.

Some interviews were conducted in Tbilisi, Georgia by myself, and the rest I conducted over electronic communication, primarily over Skype, as well as one via written answers to the interview questions. In addition, one interview partner chose to remain anonymous, and the information gained from that particular interview will not be discussed. The interviews were semi-structured in that I would ask a question and allow the participants flexibility in their response. I would ask further questions to delve deeper into the subject, not always following the set interview questions. During the interviews themselves, I first asked the participants to divide (if possible) the history of their country since 1991 into specific periods of foreign policy. I then asked them a number of questions, which would identify domestic and external intervening variables that influence. From there, I categorised the variables according to the different types of intervening variables discussed above in the theoretical chapter.

5 Empirical Discussion

It should first be noted that the periods of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, and Ayaz Mutalibov and Abulfaz Elchibey in Azerbaijan in the early 1990s are not discussed in this section because, due to the incoherence of their foreign policy and the chaotic nature of foreign policy at the time, as well as the lack of foreign policy outcomes of their respective foreign policies, those interviewed as part of the research broadly agree that examining foreign policy during this period is largely irrelevant. In terms of structure, I will first discuss the role of the independent variable in foreign policymaking. After this, I shall breakdown the research by type of IVV. Within each IVV, I shall further breakdown by country, and then chronologically, working forward from the earliest occurrence to the latest. This IVV section focuses on identifying the instances of IVV influence. After this section will follow an empirical analysis, in which the role of the independent and intervening variables and the impact they had on foreign policy will be analysed in detail, as well as the ways in which this research compares to other previous studies.

5.1 International System and Relative Power Capabilities

When compared to the intervening variables, cases of the international system and state material power influencing foreign policy in the South Caucasus were much more prevalent. Indeed, to list and explain every instance identified in the research would require an entire book to accomplish. However, in order to demonstrate the supreme influence of the independent variable of this study, I shall use some particular examples identified in the research.

The first example concerns that of the lack of state power in Georgia during the 1990s. According to Ghia Nodia, until 1995, Shevardnadze's foreign policy was largely aimed at gaining humanitarian support because Georgia was essentially a failed state.¹ As such, Georgian foreign policy was tailored primarily towards state-building and establishing positive relations with other nations that could help in that regard. Davit Darchiashvili mentions in this regard that the lack of state capacity in Georgia was one of the main factors affecting foreign

¹ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

policy. In response to the question of how state capacity affected foreign policy, Darchiashvili noted during an interview:

*"I think directly. I think it was one of the main reasons, if not the only reason, because when the state is not able to function and provide services and maintain the monopoly of violence, to provide national cohesion, then such a state can hardly have a consistent foreign policy."*²

The restoration of territorial integrity also played an important role in foreign policymaking in Georgia. During Shevardnadze's leadership, he considered that Russia could guarantee the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia, because of which he pursued a more pro-Russian foreign policy between 1993 and 1999. During this time, Georgia joined the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Common Security Treaty Organisation. However, when it became clear that Russia would not fulfil this aspiration and, indeed, when Russian peacekeepers were involved in the renewed conflict in Abkhazia in 1998, Georgia began to drift towards the West and left the Russian political and military structures of the CIS and CSTO in 1999.³ Furthermore, Tornike Sharashenidze noted that early during Saakashvili's presidency, the role of restoring territorial integrity was key in driving Georgia towards an aggressively pro-American foreign policy.⁴ These factors (namely improving Georgia's state capacity and restoring territorial integrity) demonstrate the role of Georgia's material power capabilities (or lack thereof) in pushing its foreign policy towards other countries that the Georgian leadership thought could help improve the country's situation. Firstly, it sought Russian assistance by joining Russian-led international bodies. When this strategy failed to solve Georgia's problems, it began to turn towards a more western-oriented foreign policy.

Another key factor that strongly influenced foreign policy in both Georgia and Azerbaijan was the increasing western interest in Caspian Sea oil exploration. During the 1990s, major energy companies from a number of countries, including the US and Russia, joined the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) consortium beginning the mass international exploitation of Azerbaijan's oil and gas supplies in the Caspian Sea (de Waal, 2010, p. 175). In

² (Davit Darchiashvili, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

³ (Nika Chitadze, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

⁴ (Tornike Sharashenidze, Personal Communication, 20/06/2019)

Georgia, this started a turn in orientation from Russia towards the West. The process was gradual until 1999, however, due to Georgia's continued hopes that Russia would be the guarantor of its territorial integrity.⁵ One of the major breakthroughs, according to an interview with Tornike Sharashenidze, was the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline carrying Azerbaijani oil through Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea, which marked "the first time that Caspian oil was transported to oil markets bypassing Russia."⁶ This was followed by the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, which made Georgia less dependent on Russian energy supplies. Indeed, thanks to this project, Georgia currently receives 90% of its natural gas from Azerbaijan.⁷ This decreasing dependence on Russian energy, combined with a weakened Russia after the 1998 financial crash in Russia, allowed Georgia considerably more international flexibility to pursue a more balanced foreign policy in the late 1990s, to the point that Georgia declared its intention to join NATO at the 2002 NATO Prague summit.⁸

The 2008 Russia-Georgia War was also very influential on Georgian foreign policy. Before the war, Georgia had been pursuing a very pro-western and particularly pro-American foreign policy in order to restore Georgian territorial integrity.⁹ However, the lack of action in support of Georgia on the part of the West during the war resulted in Georgia becoming less pro-American and instead becoming more pro-European and regionally balanced after the conflict.¹⁰ For example, Ghia Nodia noted in an interview that before the war, Georgia had fairly bad relations with Iran and Belarus, whereas afterwards it built very positive relations with the two countries, "becoming more independent of the US and more balanced."¹¹ As such, we can see that when the US in particular failed to live up to Georgian expectations of support during the crisis, it was subsequently forced to look elsewhere, in this case towards improving relations with other countries, while at the same time not abandoning its pro-European aspirations. On this same point, however, Kevork Oskanian (2016) argues that Georgia's foreign policy shift after the war was due to the Georgian elites' previous *perception*

⁵ (Nika Chitadze, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

⁶ (Tornike Sharashenidze, Personal Communication, 20/06/2019)

⁷ (Tornike Sharashenidze, Personal Communication, 20/06/2019)

⁸ (Nika Chitadze, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

⁹ (Tornike Sharashenidze, Personal Communication, 20/06/2019)

¹⁰ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

¹¹ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

that the West would provide tangible support to help it regain its breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, I would disagree with this and instead suggest that the fault was not the elites' *perception* of the dedication of the West's commitment to Georgia, but in fact the systemic *clarity* with which the Georgian FPE saw their options during the situation. In other words, Georgian policymakers believed it was *clear* the US and Europe would support Georgia to the extent that they would enable it to retake its lost territories. The cause of the decision to go to war was thus not a unit-level but system-level variable. Nevertheless, Georgia maintained and deepened its relations with NATO and the EU after 2008, establishing the NATO-Georgia Commission the same year, joining the EU's Eastern Partnership in 2009, and signing the EUAA in 2014.¹²

Armenia is a country where the international system has played perhaps the most prominent role in influencing foreign policy. Ever since Armenia became independent of the USSR, it has been in conflict with Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to Benyamin Poghosyan, at the beginning of its independence, Armenia pursued two main goals; to establish good relations with all powers in the South Caucasus, including Turkey, Iran, Russia, the US, and Europe, and secondly to resolve the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.¹³ After the conflict escalated into war and Turkey declared its support for Azerbaijan, Armenia was forced into finding strategic external partners willing to defend its security, the only candidate for which was Russia. As such, Poghosyan notes, Armenia "will develop [its] relations with all other partners to the extent that it does not jeopardise or threaten the Russian-Armenian strategic alliance."¹⁴ The systemic constraint of the strategic partnership thus significantly limits Armenia's room for manoeuvre in terms of foreign policy and has done since the early 1990s.

Another example of the systemic constraints imposed upon Armenia are its closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey and, in particular, the way it drove Levon Ter-Petrosyan to pursue better relations by giving concessions over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to Poghosyan, while Armenia had pursued good relations with other countries in the region,

12 (Nika Chitadze, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

13 (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

14 (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

such as joining the NATO Partnership for Peace and establishing the strategic partnership with Russia, Ter-Petrosyan understood that Armenia would not be able to develop economically if the borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan were to remain closed.¹⁵ Thus, while Armenian society's forcing Ter-Petrosyan to step down after trying to make concessions was a "strategic culture" IVV [see above], the constraints imposed by the closed borders were undoubtedly systemic and therefore strongly limited Ter-Petrosyan's choices.

Regional stability is also an important systemic issue that has influenced Armenian foreign policy. According to Anna Karapetyan, a good example is the effect of US-Iranian relations; because Iran is a very important trading partner for Armenia, notably in terms of its being a major supplier of oil to Armenia, the poor relations between the US and Iran, which have resulted in international sanctions being placed on Iran, have and will continue to affect Armenia negatively while at the same time Armenia is powerless to stop it.¹⁶ Thus Armenia finds itself being indirectly negatively affected by other states' disputes in the international system.

As mentioned above, no intervening variables could be identified to have influenced Azerbaijani foreign policy since its independence. The information collected from the interviews made clear that the foreign policy of Azerbaijan is primarily influenced by system-level factors. The first system-level factors influencing Azerbaijani foreign policy identified from the research was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Since gaining independence, Azerbaijan has been in conflict with Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has had a significant impact on Azerbaijan's foreign policy. According to Rovshan Ibrahimov, the conflict, which ended in a ceasefire in 1994 but which yet remains unresolved, has been frozen without solution by Russia in order for Russia to maintain a significant "instrument of pressure over both Armenia and Azerbaijan in order to prevent the possible presence of the West into the region and the possible move of Azerbaijan and Armenia towards the West, NATO and the EU."¹⁷ As such, Azerbaijan, since 1993, has pursued a strategy "to attract as many big powers as possible into the region and to keep all these

¹⁵ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

¹⁶ (Anna Karapetyan, Personal Communication, 02/08/2019)

¹⁷ (Rovshan Ibrahimov, Personal Communication, 20/08/2019)

powers at the same distance” in order to balance Russian power in the region, which was at the time the only major power with interest in the South Caucasus and against which Azerbaijan was powerless.¹⁸ The rationale behind this was that “the more actors there are in the region, the more interests will be diversified and flexibility and manoeuvring will be increased.”¹⁹ In order to fulfil this strategy of bringing more powers to the region, Azerbaijan used its oil and gas resources to attract western energy companies epitomised in the ‘Contract of the Century’, signed in 1994. Furthermore, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan crude oil pipeline marked the first time that was able to export its natural resources bypassing Russia, which marked a great decrease in dependence on Russia and greater cooperation with other global and regional partners. Thus, Azerbaijan’s physical energy resources, their exploitation by foreign energy companies and transnational regional energy pipeline construction (excluding Russia) have been the key driver of Azerbaijani foreign policy since its independence, especially so since Heydar Aliyev came to power in 1993, and allow Azerbaijan to pursue a successful balancing strategy by which it is not pushed or pulled away or towards any regional power.

However, while this strategy has broadly remained unchanged, there has been one key moment since 1993 that has challenged this policy, namely the 2008 Russia-Georgia War. After the war, Azerbaijan pursued a more neutral path:

“The weakening of the West’s and the corresponding strengthening of Russia’s influence in the South Caucasus, exemplified by the [Russian] invasion of Georgia in 2008, provided Azerbaijan and other post-Soviet states with an incentive towards pro-Russian behaviour. That, in turn, resulted in the modification of their foreign policies towards recognizing Russia as a reaffirmed regional hegemon.”²⁰

In response to increasing Russian regional power in the South Caucasus and Ukraine, Azerbaijan decided to join the Non-Aligned Movement in May 2011 and has maintained its strategy not to securitise its interests with other powers nor “move towards excessive rapprochement with any of them.”²¹ As noted by Anar Valiyev, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy has

¹⁸ (Rovshan Ibrahimov, Personal Communication, 20/08/2019)

¹⁹ (Rovshan Ibrahimov, Personal Communication, 20/08/2019)

²⁰ (Narmina Mamishova, Personal Communication, 22/08/2019)

²¹ (Narmina Mamishova, Personal Communication, 22/08/2019)

been reactive rather than proactive, responding to changes in the international system as opposed to actively seeking to change the system.²² From the theoretical framework, the systemic issue of polarity is relevant here. The increase of Russian power in the South Caucasus after the 2008 war saw a change in the polarity of the international system, which saw Russia becoming a much larger pole of power in the region. As such, the subsequent alteration of Azerbaijani foreign policy, which saw it becoming more neutral and cautious, was a response to the changing polarity of the international system from unipolar to multipolar. Moreover, this decision was also an instance where the clarity of the system, namely that Russia was gaining an increasingly important position in the region, was used by the Azerbaijani FPE to make a strategic alteration of their foreign policy in response to the systemic changes.

On the whole, in response to the question of whether or not domestic factors have any influence on Azerbaijani foreign policy, Rovshan Ibrahimov stated categorically:

“No, absolutely not. As it is in domestic policy and foreign policy as well... It’s very stable, very foreseeing, very clear, very pragmatic, and can only be changed if external factors were sharply changed.”²³

Overall, foreign policy in the South Caucasus has been strongly influenced by the international system and these states’ material power capabilities. In Georgia during the 1990s, the lack of state power and the widespread corruption that plagued state functioning, as well as the lack of territorial integrity due to the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia led Georgia to exhibit bandwagoning behaviour towards Russia in the form of joining the CIS and CSTO. With lesser energy dependence on Russia and the increase in state capacity, Georgia gained confidence internationally and sought to build greater ties with the West. However, this confidence faced a backlash after the 2008 war and Georgia has since pursued a more cautious strategy while not abandoning its pro-western orientation.

Since independence Armenia has struggled with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, for which it is heavily dependent on Russia for security. While it pursues good relations with all powers in

²² (Anar Valiyev, Personal Communication, 14/08/2019)

²³ (Rovshan Ibrahimov, Personal Communication, 20/08/2019)

the region (to the extent it does not infringe upon the Russia-Armenia strategic partnership), the international constraints caused by the conflict have severely limited Armenia's room for manoeuvre. Moreover, any attempts to make concessions on the Karabakh issue are met with hostility by Armenian society, thus further limiting Armenia's foreign policy choices.

Azerbaijan too is also bound by systemic constraints, although not nearly to the same degree as Georgia or Armenia. That being said, Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategy is reactive as opposed to proactive and, as such, does not seek to pursue any policy options that could jeopardise its comparatively fortunate position compared to its smaller neighbours thanks to its natural resource wealth.

One key factor that has strongly influenced all three countries is Russia. Ever since the three countries became independent, Russia has sought to maintain its hold on the region in many ways, shapes, or forms. Russian control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been a major impediment for Georgia internationally because with the ongoing dispute, Georgia will almost definitely fail to achieve its goals of NATO and EU membership. For Armenia, the importance of the strategic partnership strongly limits Armenia's foreign policy choices vis-à-vis other states. Moreover, both Armenia and Azerbaijan are limited internationally by the frozen Karabakh conflict, which Russia has used as an instrument of pressure over both countries. Russia has also exerted pressure over Azerbaijan in other, indirect ways:

*"If any instrument of pressure is needed for Russia, they always pressed on Georgia. It's enough to press on Georgia in order to make problems for Azerbaijan because all strategic routes for energy and the economy are interrelated with Georgia. So, it's less costly to press on Georgia rather than on Azerbaijan, but the result will be the same."*²⁴

5.2 Intervening Variables

5.2.1 Elite Preferences

The first occurrence of an elite preferences IVV identified by the interviews influencing foreign policy found in Georgia occurred during the period of Mikheil Saakashvili's leadership of the country. From 2003 until 2012, Georgia had a markedly pro-western orientation, which

²⁴ (Rovshan Ibrahimov, Personal Communication, 20/08/2019)

occurred largely as a result of the revolutionary government under Saakashvili's leadership. He and his FPE were very pro-western in their ideology, which was reflected in their foreign policy. Indeed, in 2005 Georgia adopted its first national security concept²⁵ outlining its goals of western integration openly.²⁶ Moreover, as noted by Ghia Nodia during an interview, Saakashvili's FPE were very cohesive and centralised in their preferences and they did not face any strong institutional opposition from the Georgian Parliament nor any other domestic actors.²⁷ A particular instance in which elite preferences influenced foreign policy is the way in which Saakashvili's foreign policy affected Georgia's relations with Russia. In reference to Saakashvili's power after the death of his co-revolutionary Zurab Zhvania in 2005, Tornike Sharashenidze stated that "Saakashvili was too impulsive... he was left alone and unchecked, so to say... that's how our [Georgian] foreign policy became more impulsive... extremely anti-Russian."²⁸ Because of Saakashvili's strong pro-NATO and pro-EU foreign policy, relations with Russia deteriorated. According to Davit Darchiashvili, Saakashvili's desire to join NATO "was probably the main reason why relations with Russia deteriorated... eventually leading to war."²⁹ As such, the FPE in Saakashvili's government's ideological preference for a pro-Western foreign policy strongly affected Georgia's relations with Russia, the outcome of which was continuously worsening relations to the point that the two countries eventually went to war. Of course, the unresolved system-level issue of Russian-occupied Georgian territories in Abkhazia and South Ossetia set the conditions for a future conflict between Georgia and Russia, but in this case Saakashvili's pro-western orientation contributed to the deterioration in relations to the point where a conflict could happen.

Another example occurs during the leadership of the Georgian Dream Coalition (GD) led by Bidzina Ivanishvili (2012-present). In contrast to Saakashvili's very proactive western orientation, Ivanishvili's government has been very passive diplomatically.³⁰ Rather than pursuing Saakashvili's approach with the same vigour, the GD has remained pro-western,

²⁵ (National Security Concept of Georgia, 2018)

²⁶ (Nika Chitadze, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

²⁷ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

²⁸ (Tornike Sharashenidze, Personal Communication, 20/06/2019)

²⁹ (Davit Darchiashvili, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

³⁰ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

particularly pro-EU, while taking a cautious approach towards Russia.³¹ However, in contrast to his predecessor, Ivanishvili is a billionaire businessman with vested interest in his businesses. As such, in response to the question of why Ivanishvili maintains seeks to maintain good relations with both the West and Russia, Sharashenidze noted:

*“He has to care, first of all, about his family and his businesses. For that he needs good relations with both the West and Russia. After that, he wants Georgia to be safe and secure because he wants to live here, and for that he needs good relations with both Russia... and the West.”*³²

Thus, it is suggested that Ivanishvili’s vested business interests to a degree influenced his government’s foreign policy decision-making, namely by improving relations with Russia by restoring trade between the two countries. However, Ivanishvili’s decision-making is notoriously obscure and it is uncertain who makes particular decisions. According to Ghia Nodia, “there is no clear centre or clear process where and how any decisions are made” and we can only guess which decisions he takes himself and which he delegates to other.”³³ Because of this lack of transparency, it is unfortunately not possible to determine accurately the decision-making process of the GD government. Nevertheless, expert opinion does suggest certain individuals, primarily those close to Ivanishvili, have significant influence. Ghia Nodia mentions the role of a “special representative of the PM who was appointed just to deal with Russia” whose mandate was only about “humanitarian and economic issues.”³⁴ Although it is unknown exactly what was said in meetings with his Russian counterpart, the result was a significant improvement in the economic relations between the two countries.³⁵ Another example of obscure and unquantifiable influence is from a cousin of Bidzina Ivanishvili – Ucha Mamasashvili. According to Darchiashvili, Mamasashvili “is no one – he has no formal positions, he is simply employed in [Ivanishvili’s] business empire... [he] has more influence and more weight than formal ministers.”³⁶ While it is not possible to identify

³¹ (Tornike Sharashenidze, Personal Communication, 20/06/2019)

³² (Tornike Sharashenidze, Personal Communication, 20/06/2019)

³³ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

³⁴ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

³⁵ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

³⁶ (Davit Darchiashvili, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

precisely this individual's influence, least of all in foreign policy, it is clear that such people are a part of Ivanishvili's FPE and thus have some influence over government policy.

In Armenia, elite preferences IVVs were also the most frequently occurring. The first case presented from the interviews concerns the leadership of Robert Kocharyan (1998-2008). Kocharyan's leadership was (especially after May 2000, when Kocharyan's regime became more authoritarian and consolidated) very cohesive, being "like a pyramid" in structure, with himself at the top.³⁷ According to Benyamin Poghosyan, under Kocharyan Armenia significantly increased its economic dependence on Russia when key parts of the economy, such as "telecommunications, Armenian Railways, some power generation plants, and the Armenian gas and electricity distribution network" were sold off or given as concessions to Russian companies in order to fulfil Kocharyan's goal to "establish an economic alliance with Russia, and thus "solidifying [Russia's] economic influence over Armenia."³⁸ In this sense, the strategy of Robert Kocharyan and his FPE's preference for increasingly closer relations with Russia influenced Armenian foreign policy towards Russia as it brought the two countries much closer by allowing much greater economic control by Russian companies. However, this should not be seen as a major change in direction in foreign policy; Russia and Armenia (under Levon Ter-Petrosyan) had already established a very deep strategic partnership during the mid-1990s and, as such, this could be seen as part of the deepening relationship between the two counties.

Another case from the Kocharyan period concerns his approach towards international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. While there were no significant changes in Armenian foreign policy under Kocharyan, his personal emphasis on international genocide recognition can be seen as a minor technical change in Armenian foreign policy.³⁹

During the leadership of Serzh Sargsyan (2008-2018), a number of elite preferences IVVs have also been identified. Firstly, it should be noted that Sargsyan's leadership was similar in structure to Kocharyan's and very cohesive, not coming under much public pressure until 2016.⁴⁰ When Sargsyan came to power, he began negotiating with Turkey to establish

³⁷ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

³⁸ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

³⁹ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁴⁰ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

diplomatic relations and open the Turkish-Armenian border to allow trade and support the development of the Armenian economy. This process, known colloquially as “football diplomacy” due to the leaders of the two countries attending football matches together, ended in the Zurich Protocols, which were signed in 2009.⁴¹ While Turkey ultimately rejected the protocols due to the lack of progress on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, this is a good example of how the Armenian leader’s preferences to improve relations with Turkey, in contrast to his predecessor, could have led to improved foreign policy between the two nations. Similarly, the period between 2009 and 2011 was, according to Poghosyan, “a very active phase of negotiations” between Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a solution to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴² While a basic agreement was reached and was to be signed in Kazan during the summer of 2011, ultimately Ilham Aliyev rejected to sign the agreement, resulting in a deadlock.⁴³ Nonetheless, this is an example of the change of approach influenced by the Armenian FPE’s preferences towards the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A final occurrence of an elite preferences IVV identified in Armenia is that of the Armenian leaders’ relationship to Nagorno-Karabakh and their approach to solving the conflict. Specifically, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan were both from Nagorno-Karabakh, and as such they negotiated internationally on behalf of both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. When Kocharyan came to power, he changed the negotiation format from trilateral (Armenia-Azerbaijan-Nagorno-Karabakh) to bilateral (Armenia-Azerbaijan).⁴⁴ This has subsequently changed with the new leadership of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who is not a native of the breakaway territory. On coming to power, Pashinyan has stated that he does not have the authority to negotiate on behalf of Nagorno-Karabakh since he is not a native of the territory and did not participate himself in the conflict and would thus like to see the return of the trilateral format with Nagorno-Karabakh at the negotiating table.⁴⁵ While negotiations are continuing with Azerbaijan, there is little chance of them being productive since Azerbaijan does not recognise the independence of the territory and thus does not recognise their legitimacy at the negotiating table. In this regard, the very background of the Armenian

⁴¹ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁴² (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁴³ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁴⁴ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁴⁵ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

leader can have an impact on foreign policy in terms of Armenia's negotiation strategy vis-à-vis Nagorno-Karabakh. However, while this has yet to translate into any meaningful foreign policy outcomes since the process of negotiation is continuous and has seen both ups and downs to no avail, it nonetheless demonstrates the effect of Nikol Pashinyan's preference not to negotiate on behalf of Nagorno-Karabakh due to his particular background not coming from there and not having the legitimacy to do so.

5.2.2 Strategic Culture

The only significant IVV that can be classified as strategic culture occurred in Armenia, concerning Armenian society's attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to Benyamin Poghosyan, after the ceasefire in 1994, Armenian society has considered the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to be already solved. Thus, when leaders attempt to change the situation, it is often met with hostility.⁴⁶ In the case of the leadership of Levon Ter-Petrosyan, his desire to change the situation by making concessions to Azerbaijan in the form of returning territories significantly contributed to his eventual downfall. Poghosyan notes:

*"The resentment against Ter-Petrosyan was not due to his foreign policy. Not due to the decision to sign an agreement on the Russian military base or the mutual defence and cooperation with Russia. It was mainly triggered by the sharp decline of the socio-economic situation in Armenia. Why was he attacked? When he said we have to make concessions on the Karabakh issue... we have to give lands back to Azerbaijan."*⁴⁷

While Ter-Petrosyan's popularity in Armenia had been declining significantly since the 1996 election, which was perceived to be rigged and after which he could only keep power through the support of the army, as well as the sharp decline in the living standards of the people, his decision to make concessions significantly contributed to his downfall.⁴⁸ This can thus be categorised as a strategic culture IVV since, while not leading to any major international outcomes, the societal beliefs within Armenia, namely that the leadership

⁴⁶ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁴⁷ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁴⁸ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

should *not* make concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh, hindered Levon Ter-Petrosyan's ability to act on the issue to the extent that he had to step down.

5.2.3 State-Society Relations

Perhaps the most significant factor that can be categorised under state-society relations in the South Caucasus is the issue of corruption. In response to the question of what internal factors that affected Georgian foreign policy under Eduard Shevardnadze, Nika Chitadze noted that high-level corruption played a significant role:

*"The institutions were corrupted and it was very difficult to control them... Because, as they say, foreign policy is a reflection of internal policy. And, of course, gradually it was becoming more and more difficult for Shevardnadze to establish close contact with western countries because many western authoritative institutions like Freedom House or Corruption Index etc... they considered Georgia a country with big problems related to corruption."*⁴⁹

Chitadze gave the example of countries not wanting to help Georgia financially since it could give no guarantee that the money would be properly distributed. Moreover, foreign investors were strongly put off from investing in Georgia as their investments would not be protected.⁵⁰ As such, this is an example of the way in which the culture of corruption strongly impeded Shevardnadze's quest to improve the country through foreign western investment and thus how much the government could extract from its society in terms of foreign policymaking.

Another Georgian example of state-society relations comes recently, during the leadership of Salome Zurbishvili of the GD. According to an interview with Ghia Nodia, after the incident of the invitation of a Russian MP to attend the Georgian parliament on the 20th June 2019, during which he was sitting in the chair of the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, large anti-occupation and anti-Putin protests opposing the government for being anti-democratic and pro-Russian began in Tbilisi.⁵¹ As a result, "the government was really pushed to strengthen its rhetoric against Russia." Moreover, after a particularly obscene rant by someone on Georgian television, this sparked a backlash in the Russian Duma (Parliament), during which

⁴⁹ (Nika Chitadze, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

⁵⁰ (Nika Chitadze, Personal Communication, 25/06/2019)

⁵¹ (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

there were some calls to introduce some economic sanctions against Georgia.⁵² While ultimately this situation led only to Russia imposing a short ban on flights between Georgia and Russia, it is an example of how public protests were able to influence (albeit to only a minor degree) the Georgian government's position on its relations with Russia.

Finally, another example of state-society relations affecting foreign policy in the South Caucasus occurred in Armenia under Serzh Sargsyan. Among Armenian society, according to Poghosyan, there had been an attitude of forgiving (or at least overlooking) the practices of "entrenched corruption, nepotism, lack of rule of law [and] lack of good governance" among the Armenian elite because they had previously safeguarded Armenian security effectively.⁵³ However, after the brief four-day war with Azerbaijan in 2016, which resulted in small territorial losses for Armenia, the Armenian public began to question seriously the ability of the government to provide territorial security for the population. Poghosyan notes that this, combined with Sargsyan's decision not to sign the EUAA, was "a key blow" to Sargsyan's leadership.⁵⁴ However, while this weakened Sargsyan's leadership, even to the point of his eventual resignation, it was not responsible for any significant foreign policy outcomes.

5.3 Empirical Analysis

INTERVENING VARIABLES	GEORGIA	ARMENIA	AZERBAIJAN
Elite Preferences	2	4	0
Strategic Culture	0	1	0
State-Society Relations	2	1	0
Domestic Institutions	0	0	0

Table 1: Occurrence of Intervening Variables based on Research Interviews

⁵² (Ghia Nodia, Personal Communication, 10/07/2019)

⁵³ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

⁵⁴ (Benyamin Poghosyan, Personal Communication, 08/07/2019)

The data collected from the interviews conducted produced a number of interesting findings. The first major result that can be mentioned here is that of the three countries under examination, instances of unit-level IVVs having an effect on foreign policy occurred most often in Armenia and the least influence in Azerbaijan. Indeed, perhaps one of the most interesting outcomes of this research is that of all the information collected on Azerbaijan, no intervening variables could be identified. The significance of this will be discussed later.

The research found that, based on the interviews, domestic institutions in fact play a minor role in foreign policymaking in the South Caucasus since not one instance of domestic institutions influencing foreign policymaking was found. This, I suggest, is the result of the overwhelming role of the international system and the material power capabilities of the South Caucasus, as well as the nature of the regimes governing these countries (i.e. that the leadership is often very strong and cohesive, leaving little room for other domestic actors to have any influence). Hence the greater preponderance of IVVs categorised under “elite preferences”, whereby the room for the FPE’s preferences to have some influence is understandably larger.

Of particular note is the comparatively frequent occurrence of IVVs in Armenia, particularly of “elite preferences” variables. These occurrences were due primarily to the leaders attempting to improve relations between Armenia and other countries, such as Kocharyan’s increasing Russian control over the Armenian economy and international genocide recognition, as well as Sargsyan’s trying to improve relations with Turkey through “football diplomacy” and being able to increase cooperation with the EU, albeit to the extent that he was not allowed to jeopardise the strategic partnership with Russia. The reason for the preponderance of elite preferences IVVs was, based on the interviews, due the largely cohesive nature of the regimes in Armenia and the lack of opposition they faced from society or other domestic actors.

Those elite preferences IVVs found in the case of Georgia, while less numerous, are much more substantial. As per the research interviews, the first case – Saakashvili’s extremely pro-western foreign policy – involved seismic changes not only to Georgia’s foreign policy, but to the country as a whole. At that time, Georgia experienced not only a radical change of government, but over the years after the Rose Revolution in 2003 it saw a massive increase in state capacity. As also noted by Gvalia et al. (2019), this increase in state capacity gave

Georgia the relative power capabilities needed to pursue an effective foreign policy agenda, which was thus a system-level variable. However, it was the elite preferences, namely Saakashvili's FPE's pro-western ideological preferences, that guided Georgia effectively towards the west. Another area where there is likely influence at the level of elite preferences is in the leadership of Bidzina Ivanishvili. While it seems quite probable, based on the research, that certain individuals close to Ivanishvili (such as those discussed above) have a lot of influence on the decision-making process, unfortunately the secretive nature of decision-making makes it difficult to quantify such influence, and thus we cannot know for sure.

More often than not, the occurrence of IVV influence has been on the part of elite decision-makers, in particular the president or prime minister. In Georgia, for example, the FPE's own personal preferences regarding Russia can have a large impact on the relations between the two countries – negatively in the case of Saakashvili and more positively in the case of Shevardnadze and Ivanishvili. In Armenia, while the FPE's preferences have not determined or changed Armenia's foreign policy strategy significantly, they have been responsible for some minor changes; the approach towards the Karabakh conflict's negotiations has changed format depending on whether or not the leaders themselves were from Karabakh, as is the case with Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, and not in the case of Nikol Pashinyan.

Previous studies of foreign policy using a neoclassical realist theoretical basis have also found variables that can be categorised as elite preferences IVVs. Gvalia et al. (2013; 2019) found that elite ideas and elite cohesion were influential in foreign policymaking in Georgia, particularly after the Rose Revolution and during Saakashvili's leadership. This was also a finding in the present study, which found the FPE's foreign policy strategy to be cohesive and influential in driving Georgia's pro-western agenda. However, Gvalia et al. (2019) also demonstrated the importance of the system-level factor of state capacity in foreign policymaking, which significantly hindered the government of Eduard Shevardnadze and which improved markedly under Saakashvili. This is somewhat similar to the current study, although here it was found in particular that corruption played an important role in limiting Georgia's foreign policy abilities during the 1990s. In this case it was classified as a "state-society relations" IVV.

One key area where the present study differs from other academic research is in its explanation of the actions taken by the Georgian government during the 2008 war with Russia. Kevork Oskanian (2016) argued that it was caused by the Georgian FPE's perceptions of western support for their cause of territorial integrity, which would thus in this study come under "elite preferences" as an IVV due to their desire to regain control over their breakaway territories combined with their belief that it was possible with western support. However, it seems logical, based on information collected in the current study, that this perception was actually due to a lack of clarity in the international system and was thus in fact a system-level factor.

The one instance of a "strategic culture" variable affecting foreign policy occurred in Armenia. In this instance, the information gained from the expert interviews suggested that Armenian society itself was able to influence foreign policy in a way that limited the foreign policy choices open to the Armenian FPE, namely by forcing Levon Ter-Petrosyan to resign for trying to make concessions over Nagorno-Karabakh. A common attitude widely shared in Armenian society is that the conflict is already solved and Armenia should simply move on. In this regard, it is thus unlikely that Armenian society would permit its leaders to give away any concessions on the issue, which they would see as a betrayal. This is what happened to Ter-Petrosyan and, as such, his successors learnt from his mistake of misjudging public opinion. This particular case, however, does not demonstrate direct influence of a particular IVV on foreign policy. Rather, it shows the limits placed on foreign policymakers by Armenian society.

The instances of state-society relations type IVVs were also found to have influence. The case found in Georgia of the recent protests during the summer of 2019, which saw the Georgian government change its rhetoric towards Russia, resulted in a minor diplomatic incident and a slight worsening in relations. While this case can be considered of minor importance in the grand scale of things, it was insightful of how state-society relations can exert some influence in an environment dominated by external factors. While previous research has highlighted the issues of elite ideas and cohesion, as well as state capacity, which are also found in this research, here it was also found that society can also put pressure on the government to act in a certain way, although this, again, concerns more how a government should *not* act rather than how it should specifically. Moreover, the brief conflict with Azerbaijan in 2016 also demonstrated the influence of society on Armenian foreign policy, namely their expectations

of their government in terms of providing security. Similar to the cases of state-society relations in Georgia, in Armenia too the influence of these factors lies more in the way they limit the policy options open to the FPE, rather than determining specific foreign policy outcomes.

Azerbaijan, significantly, did not exhibit any influence from IVVs in its foreign policy based on the interviews. As seen in the discussion of system-level factors based on the collected evidence, Azerbaijani foreign policy is very much reactive to international stimuli, as opposed to seeking change caused by domestic factors. This is perhaps the result of a very consolidated FPE that exerts great power over Azerbaijani society. The authoritarian regime further inhibits any influence from domestic actors or society, which makes Azerbaijan a good example of the way in which structural realist theory would predict a state in Azerbaijan's position should behave. Its pragmatic response to systemic stimuli, such as its more cautious approach to Russia in light of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, combined with its large-scale oil and natural gas exploitation make it in Azerbaijan's interest to preserve regional stability and to avoid significant influence from any other country. This strategy was referred to by Valiyev & Mamishova (2019) as "strategic hedging", in which Azerbaijan metaphorically acts like a magnet, attracting and repelling other actors to keep them in balance at a distance.

The key systemic factors of clarity and polarity were also influential, according to the research. This was perhaps most clearly seen in the case of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, which had a number of implications for foreign policymaking in the South Caucasus. As demonstrated above, the clarity of systemic constraints facing Georgia was particularly influential in the decision to go to war in 2008. While there is a very fine line between the clarity of systemic information and the perception of that information by the FPE (with which they form their foreign policy), the information itself derives from systemic stimuli and is thus a primary causal factor in foreign policymaking. Moreover, the change in the polarity of the international system after the 2008 war was very influential in making the Azerbaijani FPE pursue a more cautious and neutral policy towards Russia to avoid becoming involved in any conflict or tension with Russia. As such, the polarity of the system, as well as its clarity to the FPE, are key drivers of foreign policymaking.

While the experts' opinions suggest there is at least some room for unit-level IVVs to exert influence to varying degrees under certain conditions, overall it is clear that the international

system and the material power capabilities of the states of the South Caucasus have been the main drivers of foreign policymaking in these countries. The constraints posed on these countries by the international system are hugely influential, namely due to the lack of power of these countries and their much larger neighbours', especially Russia's, influence and power in the region. The systemic constraints imposed by Russia is an overarching theme throughout the study and one which shows that small states are forced to consider their powerful neighbours when making foreign policy decisions. While in the 1990s, when all three countries were very weak, they all sought to bandwagon with Russia in some way, mainly by joining the Russian-led institutions of the CIS and the CSTO. However, with an increase in state power, particularly in Georgia and Azerbaijan, but to a lesser degree in Armenia, these countries were able to move away from bandwagoning with Russia and towards pursuing a more independent foreign policy based on their national interests. For example, in Georgia this meant pursuing a radically pro-western foreign policy (after the Georgian UNM under Saakashvili came to power) that was compatible with the ideology and beliefs of leaders. In Azerbaijan, this meant pursuing a balancing strategy, keeping all partners at arm's length so as to avoid bandwagoning and causing problems with its neighbours while allowing it to exploit its resource potential, as well as inviting the presence of a larger number of powers into the region and creating an environment of greater regional balance, which does not allow Russia to dominate Azerbaijan.

Armenia is different in this regard, in contrast to Azerbaijan and Georgia's strategies to move away from Russian dependence. As noted by the interviewees, Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia has continuously developed to the extent that Armenia and Russia are very deeply integrated in all aspects. That is not to say, however, that Armenia has not pursued relations with other actors. Even since Robert Kocharyan came to power, Armenia has sought deeper relations with the EU (even going so far as to call the EU Armenia's "civilizational choice" (Åberg & Terzyan, 2018, p. 170)), although, while being hindered to a large degree by the partnership with Russia, progress has been made to the extent that Armenia signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the EU in

2017.⁵⁵ Thus, systemic constraints being what they are, Armenia does nevertheless seek to balance as much as it can to maintain its independence and improve its prosperity.

In terms of theoretical implications, the expert interviews have shown that while the countries were particularly weak during the early 1990s, the lack of state power, as well as the lack of territorial integrity led Georgia and Azerbaijan to exhibit bandwagoning behaviour towards Russia, thus allowing Russia significant control over, and continued presence in, the region and the breakaway territories, which remains to this day. Armenia too has exhibited bandwagoning behaviour with Russia due to its role as Armenia's security guarantor, which again has remained as yet unchanged. On the other hand, after the significant development in state capacity in Georgia (in the early-mid 2000s) and Azerbaijan (since the mid-1990s), these countries have been able to largely develop their own independent foreign policy strategies based on national (and FPE) interests. These findings support the structural realist theory that suggests relative power capabilities are a key driving force in international relations. This trend of increasing foreign policy independence due to increased state power could be generalised to other countries that have experienced rapid state development. Moreover, through a neoclassical realist theoretical framework using different types of intervening variables, it is also clearer to identify at which level specifically cases of IVV influence have occurred. In the case of this study, IVVs of the "elite preferences" type have occurred most frequently, which suggests that when an opportunity for influence occurs, it is more often at the level of the decision-makers themselves in the case of the Georgia and Armenia. Indeed, the comparatively more frequent occurrence of elite preferences variables in Armenia shows that, while producing minor foreign policy outcomes, the Armenian FPE are able to exert some agency outside of systemic constraints in their foreign policymaking. The reason for this, I suggest in the case of the leadership of Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Serzh Sargsyan, was the Armenian FPE's desire to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which, while potentially bringing them into an uneasy position vis-à-vis Armenian society, was the ultimate goal of Armenian foreign policymakers.

Going back to Walt's (1990) original predictions of when and how states tend to bandwagon or balance against threats, the current study has demonstrated that the conditions under

⁵⁵ (Anna Karapetyan, Personal Communication, 02/08/2019)

which these small states have bandwagoned with another country have been when they were at their weakest. All three countries' dependence on Russia during the early 1990s, when they were at their weakest, is testament to this. As Georgia and Azerbaijan grew in state power, they gradually moved away from bandwagoning towards pursuing effective balancing strategies (which has been most visibly effective in Azerbaijan). Furthermore, while Armenia still exhibits bandwagoning behaviour with Russia in terms of security, it has demonstrated its somewhat pro-western colours in its attempts to improve relations, particularly with the EU, which suggests that if Armenia were more independent from Russia, it would pursue a similar path to Georgia.

The timeframe in which the variables were influential varied, producing outcomes that lasted from days to years. Perhaps the most significant occurrence in this regard was the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, which had a lasting impact on both Georgian and Azerbaijani foreign policy and resulted in significant foreign policy changes. However, most occurrences of IVVs had short-term outcomes and resulted only in minor policy shifts.

Based on the neoclassical realist theoretical framework, taking the presupposed supreme role of systemic stimuli into account, the study has shown that even in small states, where the role of systemic stimuli in foreign policymaking would be the main drivers of foreign policy, unit-level intervening variables have the opportunity to influence policy outcomes. However, the role of IVVs has been shown to be often very minor and, as predicted by neoclassical realist theory, systemic stimuli are indeed the most important in terms of their influence. The intervening variables identified have had a modifying effect on foreign policy. That is, the IVVs have had some influence on the foreign policy outcomes in the South Caucasus, but the overall drivers of foreign policy have been systemic factors. This is not to say, of course, that previous studies of foreign policy in the South Caucasus are invalid. On the contrary, this study has demonstrated that IVVs *do* have influence on foreign policy, which is often subtle and can be very revealing in terms of how exactly they influence foreign policy.

6 Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate the applicability of neoclassical realism for foreign policy analysis in the South Caucasus. Due to the nature of small and weak states in the international system, many foreign policy behaviours are exaggerated in scale, and these states have proven themselves to be an excellent ground for theory testing. By taking these three small countries of the same post-Soviet region, which are bound by similar histories and political systems, a neoclassical realist examination of their foreign policies has shown that the theory can be utilised to identify and explain numerous intervening variables that influence foreign policy. It also helps to explain the extent to which variables common to all three countries, such as Russian pressure, have the capacity to influence each country's foreign policy in different ways.

Building on previous literature, much of which focuses on particular intervening variables, it is clear that the foreign policies of the states of the South Caucasus are influenced by multiple factors. Systemic constraints have limited the ability of foreign policymakers in the region to varying degrees and at various times. Having demonstrated that unit-level intervening variables had the most influence at the level of the decisionmakers, and least of all at the level of domestic institutions in the South Caucasus, this study shows that neoclassical realist theory should be most applicable in examining states with greater relative power capabilities, since, as shown by the research collected, unit-level intervening variables played a much smaller role in weak states, as exemplified by Georgia and Azerbaijan during the early 1990s.

This study has also proved itself as a test of the applicability of neoclassical realism for foreign policy analysis of small states. The results gained from the interviews demonstrated that while the international system and relative power capabilities were the most important factors in these countries' foreign policymaking, intervening variables were identified to have influence, albeit often minor, thus showing that it was possible to identify IVV influence in an otherwise system-level variable dominated area of foreign policy. As such, one important conclusion that can be drawn from this is that small state foreign policy should not be dismissed by structural realists for the understandable presumption that these states are bound solely by the systemic stimuli. Moreover, neoclassical realism has great value in small state foreign policy analysis due to its powerful ability to explain phenomena from the level of the individual decisionmaker up to the level of the international system. Such an all-

encompassing approach has its limits, however, since neoclassical realism's explanatory power is highest in analysing specific unit-level phenomena, such as the causes of a particular foreign policy decision. The previous studies that have employed neoclassical realism have also been most effective at explaining foreign policy outcomes by examining decisionmaker-level variables.

With the research that was conducted as part of this study – the expert interviews – I hoped to offer a more comprehensive source of information. This has been especially useful, since I was able to gather the most recent information available, which was collected during the summer of 2019. In doing so, I was able to identify very recent occurrences of IVV influence, such as the case of the summer 2019 Georgian protests, which saw the Georgian government's change in rhetoric towards Russia and resulted in a diplomatic incident. Moreover, by having in-depth and detailed discussions with foreign policy experts, I was able to go into great detail with their information, from which I found cases that in all probability would normally have been overlooked.

In terms of the constraints of the study, it would be useful in the future to acquire a greater range of interview data to draw upon, which would offer the possibility to create a more quantitative analysis and offer more solid information to analyse. Moreover, in hindsight, it would be wise to employ a more direct approach in terms of interview structure, such as structured interviews, as semi-structured interviews, while useful in gaining broad and in-depth knowledge of a subject, can often lead to gaining many indirect answers and make the required information more obscure and difficult to identify. That being said, the interviews conducted as part of this study offered a vast amount of extremely useful information, from which I have been able to draw some significant conclusions.

As a recommendation for further study, I would suggest future neoclassical realist examinations of foreign policy should focus more specifically on comparisons of a smaller number of countries or individual cases to be able to offer a more in-depth analysis or, on the other hand, conduct a larger-scale analysis with a greater number of countries, but examining a specific phenomenon common to each. Nevertheless, the findings of the original expert interviews analysed through a neoclassical realist theoretical framework resulted in a study that has demonstrated the utility of neoclassical realism in small state foreign policy analysis.

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