

**Javakhk: Stability through Autonomy**  
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Recent developments in Georgia have given rise to new concern over the state of affairs in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, a strategically located region of southern Georgia with an ethnic Armenian majority population concentrated in the districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda (known as Javakhk to the Armenians). The start of the partial Russian military withdrawal from Georgia and the internal political tension between the central Georgian government and the increasingly assertive leaders of Ajaria, and the continuing stalemate over the Georgian conflict with Abkhazia, have added new complications to an already tenuous stability in Javakh. The situation in Javakhk, with its overwhelming Armenian population, complicates Armenian-Georgian relations and threatens to add a new internal dimension to the obstacles of resolving the relations between Tbilisi and the Ajarian and Abkhazian governments. Even more disturbing is the involvement of larger regional powers, namely Russia and Turkey, in an attempt to exploit the Javakh issue into a justification for political or even military, intervention. The temptation for such regional involvement or intervention is enhanced by the proximity of the proposed oil pipelines to transport Azerbaijani oil from the Caspian to the Georgian Black Sea ports.

#### Historic Javakh

The historically Armenian Javakh region consists of the districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, with the Armenian population constituting nearly 95 percent of the population. Javakh lies about twenty kilometers east-southeast of Ajaria, shares a roughly 80-90 kilometer border with Turkey to its west and southwest, and has approximately 45-50 kilometers of common border with Armenia, which lies to its south, and is just west of the ethnic Azeri populated region of Marneuli. The Armenian population of Georgia has, for much of the last several hundred years, been concentrated in the Tbilisi capital and in the Javakh region, along the common border areas of modern Armenia and Georgia. Armenians have long been the dominant minority in Georgia, surpassing the Russian presence and far outnumbering the ethnic Azeri and Turkish populations. In fact, the Georgian capital Tbilisi has been home to more Armenians than Georgians for much of the past two hundred years. These factors, however, have also adversely affected Armenian-Georgian relations and have led to sporadic conflict and territorial disputes, including military confrontation during the early period of independence from 1918-1920.

Compounding this bilateral friction was the Georgian resentment of Armenian control over much of the Georgian economy, as Armenians dominated local and regional commerce and capital. Under Russian rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an influx of Armenians and Meskhetian Turks (Moslem Anatolian Turks) into the region. Stalin later forcibly deported the Meskhetian community in 1944, fearing that they would conspire with neighboring Turkey. With the deportation of nearly all of the 100,000 population of Meskhetian Turks to Uzbekistan, the indigenous Armenian community in Javakh solidified its traditional 95 percent majority throughout the region.

National identity in Javakhk today is strongly Armenian, and plainly evident in most aspects of everyday life. Although three languages, Armenian, Georgian and Russian, are seen in the street signs throughout the region, the Georgian presence virtually ends there. Armenian television, not Georgian, are watched in Javakhk due to both easier reception and popular preference. The Russian ruble, the Armenian dram, and to a lesser extent, the American dollar, are the only forms of currency to be found in Javakhk. Faced with a transaction involving the Georgian lari, most Javakhk businessmen are not even sure of the official exchange rate. All schools in Javakhk today are dominated by Armenian-language instruction, with the only exception being a few Russian classes. The relative isolation of Javakhk combined with the unofficial cultural autonomy of the region, has reinforced this strong Armenian identity despite being under Georgian rule.

### Georgia's Demographic Assault on Javakhk

The historically Armenian Javakhk area was incorporated into a much larger administrative region known as the Samtskhe-Javakheti by the Georgian government. This territorial redistricting was a conscious attempt to dilute the Armenian majority by altering the demographics of the region. By incorporating the Armenian districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda into a greater region with four other districts, the Georgian government sought to gradually diminish the Armenia majority and to reassert Georgian control over its southern areas.

This greater Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, consists of an area of nearly 6413 square kilometers, representing about 9.3 percent of Georgia proper, and has a total population of almost 235,000 (as of last year). Within this greater region, the Armenian population's majority has been steadily reduced to about 65-70 percent. Although still retaining a significant overall majority, the total composition of the region is today about 20-25 percent Georgian and a little more than five percent Russian. The region is divided into six districts,<sup>1</sup> with Akhaltsikhe as the regional center. There are seven major towns, 66 smaller administrative units,<sup>2</sup> and over 250 villages.

This reapportionment of Armenian Javakhk was followed by a more recent demographic assault in 1989 as part of an aggressive campaign by a group of Georgian nationalists led by former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Meraba Kostava. The nationalists sought to further alter the demographic majority held by the Armenians of Javakhk by introducing new settlements of ethnic Svans, allegedly for resettlement due to heavy flooding in the Svan's native districts. The nationalist campaign was seen by many to have an overtly anti-Armenian tone, a situation compounded by their distinction between ethnic Armenian and Azeri and their strongly pro-Azeri sentiment. This was also evident in the electoral record of the Gamsakhurdia presidential election, as he received over 86 of the vote in the ethnic Azeri Marneuli region and barely 52 percent in the Armenian Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts.

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<sup>1</sup> The six districts of Samtskhe-Javakheti are Adigeni, Aspinadza, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, and Ninotsminda.

<sup>2</sup> The administrative unit is known as a "Sakrebulo."

## Javakhk under the Gamsakhurdia Regime

Following the establishment of independence in Georgia and the coming to power of the nationalists, the Armenians of Javakh were faced with an even more strained relationship with the central Georgian government. Newly installed Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia made no secret of his disdain for the Armenians of Javakh and specifically favored the ethnic Azeri minority over the Armenians. The Gamsakhurdia government instituted a series of discriminatory policies in governing Javakh. But the most damaging policy for Javakhk was one of economic neglect. For decades, Javakhk was the most underdeveloped region of the country. But since independence, the Georgian government's irresponsible policies, mismanagement and neglect laid the foundations for the economic suffering and hardship that plagues Javakhk today.

During the early 1990s, the Javakh Armenians refused to recognize the authority or jurisdiction of the Gamsakhurdia-appointed governor (or presidential plenipotentiary representative) and launched a broad campaign of passive resistance by refusing to serve in the Georgian army during 1992-1995. The local population, although never prone to the outright secessionist tendencies in nearby Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, began to forge a sense of self-sufficiency. The situation fostered the formation of new indigenous organizations, playing an increasingly important role in defending and articulating the demands of the Javakhk Armenians. This tendency was reinforced by the inability, and unwillingness, of the Armenian government of the time, led by President Levon Ter Petrosian, to raise their concerns and highlight their plight with the Georgians.

The proximity of the Russian military base at Akhalkalaki also helped to create an overall self-sufficiency for the Javakh Armenians that culminated in the Georgian hesitance to directly impose its rule in Javakh for much of the first half of the decade. In light of the poor state of relations with the Gamsakhurdia regime, the Javakh Armenians began to establish ties to other Georgian groups and political parties united in a loose anti-Gamsakhurdia grouping. This early "foreign policy" formed new relationships with the Abkhazians and, perhaps most importantly, with the neighboring Ajarian leadership.

## Javakhk and Shevardnadze

As the Gamsakhurdia regime collapsed under the weight of its own internal dissension and conflict, the initial stage of the Eduard Shevardnadze government's policy regarding Javakhk consisted of official promises to ease the economic concerns of Javakh. This promise of economic redress was matched by a subtle political agenda, however. Politically, while stressing future economic aid, the Shevardnadze government imposed a hard-line response to the recently acquired sense of self-sufficiency among the Armenians. Seeing the Armenians of the region as a threat to his overall consolidation of power, Shevardnadze initially miscalculated and applied the same hard-line policies against the Armenians as he wielded against the separatists in Ajarian, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Shevardnadze first moved against the Armenians of the nearby Akhalitskhe district. Seeking to avoid a direct confrontation with the Javakhk Armenians, Shevardnadze targeted the more vulnerable Armenians of Akhalitskhe. The Armenians of this district, although part of the

overall region, were separated from Javakhk proper, and were suffering a higher degree of emigration than that of historic Javakhk. The Armenian parity with the native Georgians in this district had also decreased significantly during the Gorbachev years.<sup>3</sup> Tbilisi deployed units of the local Georgian "Mkhedrioni" (Horsemen), a paramilitary militia affiliated with the standing National Guard but subordinated to direct presidential control. The Mkhedrioni militia, eventually disbanded and outlawed for its excesses and abuses of the population, was utilized to restore central control over the surrounding districts of Javakhk and threatened the start of a new effort to militarily restore Georgian rule over the entire southern region.

This hard-line reaction by Shevardnadze fostered a strong resentment of the central Georgian government and edged Javakhk away from any hopes that their future lay with Tbilisi. Later efforts to repair Tbilisi's relations with Javakhk continued to be hindered by the severity of this period and were also strained by Georgia's increasingly close relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey. This led to the Georgian government's current policies of avoiding any overt presence in the region. But this pretense of non-interference in Javakhk also includes a continuation of economic neglect and underdevelopment. For example, the record of central Georgian investment and development in Javakhk is limited to a mere two presidential decrees. The first decree, issued in 1996, resulted in the restoration and reconstruction of only ninety medium-sized enterprises and factories. This limited job creation program was followed by another presidential decree in 2000 attempting to provide some state financing for addressing the stagnant socio-economic situation. Therefore, the pledge for a new investment and economic development package recently announced by the Shevardnadze government seems much too little and much too late.

#### Current Conditions in Javakh

The Georgian strategy to restore its rule over the Javakh region continued to gradually erode local Armenian gains established during the chaotic period of the Gamsakhurdia regime. The Shevardnadze government followed a more subtle path of socioeconomic pressure, including an emphasis on reduced funding for regional and district education, a refusal to address increasing unemployment in Javakh, and through measures to replace the local organizations and leadership with officials carefully selected and groomed by the Georgian government. This policy was not always successful, however, as one such Georgian appointee, Sergei Dorbinyan, was assaulted by angry Armenian crowds in Javakh no less than five times, before finally being removed in 1998. The Georgian government sought someone more experienced with Armenian affairs and chose Gigla Baramidze, a former Georgian ambassador to Armenia from 1995-1998, as its presidentially appointed Regional Governor.

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<sup>3</sup> For much of the Soviet period prior to the Gorbachev era, the Armenian population was virtually equal to the Georgian population in this district.

## The Most Pressing Problems are Economic

The most pressing problems in Javakhk are economic. Although the challenges and problems facing Georgia during this difficult transition period of market reforms is shared by all regions of Georgia, they are not shared equally. As Javakhk was notably the most underdeveloped region in the country for many years, the mounting social costs of Georgia's transitional economics disproportionately affects Javakhk. It has the one of the highest unemployment rates of the country, the lowest level of state investment and its infrastructure is the oldest and most damaged in Georgia. For Javakhk residents not fortunate enough to have work associated with the local Russian military base, conditions force much of the male population to seasonally migrate to Russia in search of work, only returning to their families in winter.

Local industry is virtually nonexistent in Javakhk, aside from the service industry affiliated with the local Russian base. Javakhk has only subsistence-level agricultural and no manufacturing capacity. Javakhk is also prone to the same shortages of electricity and energy as the rest of the country, although shortages have been improved somewhat by Armenian supplies of electricity to the region. The communications infrastructure is in such a state of disrepair that outside communications links with Armenia is easier to establish than with Tbilisi. Road and highways continue to be in severe need of investment and reconstruction. The normal two-hour trip from Ninotsminda to Tbilisi, for example, takes six to seven hours due to the poor conditions of the main road. These overwhelming needs, therefore, tend to exacerbate the overall economic decline in the rest of the country and the relative poverty of Javakhk, consistently below the national level, only heightens Javakhk's vulnerability and insecurity.

## The Threat of Resettlement: The Meskhetian Turks

An even more threatening factor to the viability and security of the Armenian Javakhk majority is the issue of the Meskhetian Turks. Prior to their World War II deportation by Soviet Premier Stalin, the Meskhetian Turks resided in the district of Meskhetia (now known as Samtskhe) adjoining Javakhetia (Javakhk). The district itself was ceded to Georgia by the Adrianople peace treaty between Russia and Turkey and the Meskhetian Turks have always considered themselves as ethnic Turks, continuing to more closely identify themselves with Turkey than with Georgia proper.

Following their deportation to Central Asia, their native lands in the district were repopulated by settlements of Armenians, Georgians, and to a lesser degree, by Russians. But with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Meskhetian Turks have renewed their demands to return to their ancestral homes in southern Georgia. An influx of Meskhetian Turks would significantly alter the already delicate demography of the region and would only exacerbate tensions. The issue could also conceivably arouse a renewed Turkish claim to the territory, making the implications severe for the future of the nearby Armenians.

After the Meskhetian Turks' demand for return was first articulated following ethnic conflict in the Fergana Valley in 1989, the Georgian government has reacted cautiously by establishing a commission to study the issue and delaying action by contending a "shortage of land" in the Meskhetia district. According to one of the organizations representing the Meskhetian Turks, the

"Vatan" society, more than 145,000 of the total 210,000 Meskhetian Turk population in the former Soviet Union are now seeking to return to Georgia. Further complicating the issue is the disingenuous Georgian argument of a land shortage as the population figures of the Meskhetia district are in fact lower today than the pre-deportation level. And nearly all of the original Meskhetian homes remain vacant and uncontested as much of the Armenian, Georgian and Russian settlers preferred to erect their own structures when they first moved there. The very threat of reparation, however, provides the central Georgian government with useful leverage over the region.

### The Russian Base at Akhalkalaki

The importance of the Russian military base at Akhalkalaki to the Javakh Armenians represents much more than a strategic deterrent. The military installation provides employment for several thousand local Armenians. The Russian military presence in the region, first established in 1828, offered the Javakhs Armenians its only tangible reassurance in the face of the population's fear of the Turks. With a border with Turkey twice as long as with Armenia, Javakhs is quite vulnerable to potential Turkish aggression. The Russian military presence, therefore, serves more than a strategic defense against possible Turkish aggression, it also serves to calm the Armenian fear of a renewed Turkish threat. This fear was soundly reinforced by the history of the region and, for the Armenians of Javakhs in particular, Turkish military intervention was as recent as 1920.

The 62<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Russian base at Akhalkalaki, with its force of 3000 soldiers, is home to the Russian 147<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division. It is also the largest, and only reliable, source of employment in Javakhs. The base provides jobs for several thousand local Armenians, offers the local workers access to decent health care and includes the operation of a 500-person factory on the grounds of the base. Some estimates also reveal that nearly half of the region's population is engaged in work related to providing goods and services to the base, a fact of obvious importance to the struggling Javakh regional economy and its high unemployment rate. Nearly half of the 3000 Russian soldiers, both officers and enlisted men, stationed at the base are in fact local Armenian Javakh residents.<sup>4</sup>

The negotiated closure of the Russian military facilities in Georgia has been ongoing for several years, with the Javakh Armenians consistently opposed and fearful of the implications and insecurity that would result from a Russian withdrawal. The Georgian government has expressed concern over the fate of the Russian military equipment, weapons and hardware currently on hand in the two southern Russian bases at Batumi and Akhalkalaki. Georgian military officials fear that the possible transfer of some of these weapons to local Armenians and Ajarians by the Russian forces as they withdraw will greatly alter the military balance on the ground. In order to counter this fear, some Georgian analysts have suggested a new leasing arrangement allowing the Russians to pay the Georgian government for the use and maintenance of their two bases in southern Georgia for an extended period.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that this includes the local Armenians serving in the "Akhaltzikhe Brigade" assigned to limited deployment in the region.

The security provided by the presence of the Russian base is further reinforced by the fact that Javakh has the largest population of ethnic Russians outside of Tbilisi. Currently, Russia has agreed to close two of its four bases<sup>5</sup> in Georgia by mid-2001 and, according to the terms of an agreement reached at the Istanbul summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), has already begun a partial withdrawal from its Vaziani base outside of Tbilisi. With financing of the withdrawal provided by the United States and Great Britain, the remaining Russian forces are scheduled to be fully withdrawn by 2004.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1998, the Javakh community expressed concern over the security implications of a Russian withdrawal when a preliminary Russian-Georgian agreement was reached calling for the replacement of Russian and CIS border troops with Georgian units along the Georgian external border with Turkey. This raised fears over the deployment of Georgian forces along the Ajarian and Javakh border regions, seen as a move aimed at reasserting Georgian control. Only the delay in implementing the agreement has temporarily mollified this issue.

The Russian military base is also a counterweight to the growing role of the Turkish military in Georgia. Turkey is second only to the United States in providing military assistance and training to the Georgian armed forces. For the period of 1998 to 2000 alone, Turkey provided some \$13.3 million in official military assistance. And much of this Turkish military assistance serves as part of an overall Turkish military strategy. For example, Turkey provided \$1.27 million for the reconstruction of a military airfield in the Marneuli district, home to a sizable ethnic Azeri majority population, bordering Javakhk to the west and Armenia to the north. This airbase was formally reopened in January 2001.

### Georgian-Armenian Relations

Throughout the 1990s, Armenia sought to maintain a cooperative relationship with Georgia as the severe restraints imposed on Armenia by the dual blockade of the landlocked country by Azerbaijan from the east and Turkey from the west made the Armenian outlet to the north through Georgia a vital necessity. The Azerbaijani and Turkish blockade of Armenia's railway and transport links, their disruption of the regional energy network and the breakdown of communications links all contributed to a serious Armenian dependence on Georgia for all essential commodities. As Armenia's sole external link, Georgia is key to Armenian economic viability and relations between Tbilisi and Yerevan, therefore, rests on this dependency, forcing Armenia to overlook secondary factors.

These secondary factors in Armenian-Georgian relations comprise a problematic set of issues, including growing ties between Azerbaijan and Georgia based on a geopolitical marriage between Georgian ports and Azeri petroleum. Issues relating to the state of the Armenian minority in Georgia, and the conditions facing the Armenians in Javakh in particular, have been generally skirted by the Yerevan government as Armenian dependence on Georgia has prevented Armenia from endangering the sensitive bilateral relationship. Overall, the course of bilateral

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<sup>5</sup> Two of the four Russian bases, Vaziani and Gudauta, are to be closed in the first wave of withdrawal from Georgia, set for mid-2001, with the remaining Batumi (in Ajaria) and Akhalkalaki bases to remain until 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Western financing of the Russian withdrawal has been set forth according to the terms of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty which sets limits on the number of Russian troops deployed in the Transcaucasus.

relations remains predicated more on an emphasis on the congruence of immediate interests and less on the common long-term strategic interests of both countries.

This Armenian dependence on Georgia and its restraining influence on the Armenian government's handling of the Javakh issue has been most clearly demonstrated during the presidency of Levon Ter Petrosian. In the late 1990s, for example, Armenian President Ter Petrosian was so concerned over the potential destabilizing effect of the Javakh issue that he ordered the closure of the Armenian "Lragir" newspaper for three months for publishing a series of articles calling for the annexation of ethnic Armenian territory in Georgia.

#### Kocharian Offsets Armenian Dependence

Under the government of Armenian President Robert Kocharian, the traditional Armenian dependence on Georgia has been significantly offset by Georgia's desperate need for supplies of Armenian electricity. With a growing energy crisis throughout Georgia worsening over the past few months due to growing shortages stemming from a Russian halt of energy shipments, the Kocharian and Shevardnadze governments reached new bilateral accords whereby Armenia began to supply electricity to Georgia. According to the terms of the agreement, Armenia is paid directly by the U.S. AES Silk Road company, which recently acquired ownership of the main Tbilisi energy distribution network.

The sale of Armenian electricity was expanded by more than 12 percent in December 2000 to a current level of 2.7 million-kilowatt hours per day, bringing Armenia revenues of \$12 million per month. Most importantly, this arrangement included the modernization of the 35,000 kilowatt Ashotsk-Ninotsiminda-Akhalkalaki electrical power line by Armenia, an element that allows Armenia to supply electricity directly to Javakhhk without connecting to the main Georgian national energy grid. Although some outstanding questions remain concerning the ownership and payment schedule for this Armenian-Javakhhk energy deal, it allows Armenia to directly meet an important need of the Javakhhk population and sets an important precedent in establishing a special Armenian role in assisting Javakhhk.

#### Reducing Armenian Dependence on Georgia

This recent lessening of Armenia's traditional dependence on Georgia is further encouraged by the Georgian government's own set of economic and financial challenges. The Georgian foreign debt, for example, stood at over \$2 billion, roughly 85 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as of April 2000. These economic constraints, combined with the internal instability posed by the separatist regions of Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, has led to a marked retreat or collapse of central Georgian government authority. Pursuing a policy promoting itself as a "transit state" and positioning itself to garner a share in the profits from the Caspian energy resources in landlocked Azerbaijan, the Georgian government continues to broaden its ties with Turkey and Azerbaijan, while balancing the threat from Russian ambitions in the region. But this Georgian "transit state" policy is seriously hindered by its crisis as a state approaching collapse. In this situation, Javakhhk has both the opportunity to leverage its geographic importance as well as the vulnerability of being trapped within a collapsing state.

Most recently, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze has publicly recognized Armenia's special interest in the Javakhk region in a statement on March 1, 2001. Accepting the special Armenian role in Javakhk demonstrates the potential for negotiation over the status of Javakhk and may signal a willingness by Georgia to offer true autonomy for the region. For his part, the Georgian president has promised to draft a new 7-10 year development economic development program. But as details have not yet been released, and as the Georgian economy further declines, Javakhk is increasingly looking to Armenia for assistance. And the recent Armenian shift from outright dependence on Georgia, as evident in Yerevan's role as the key supplier of electricity to Tbilisi, may be the strategic leverage necessary to reconfigure Javakhk's position within Georgia.

### The Geopolitical Picture

Aside from the internal implications of the Javakh issue within Georgia, there is a broader geopolitical element. The long contested plan to transport Azerbaijan's oil from its offshore Caspian reserves to Western markets continues to be hindered by the lack of a secure and reliable export route. Georgian territory is seen by many as a crucial transit stage to effectively bypass Russia. Amid the competing pipeline proposals and rivalries for dominance among Russia, Turkey, Iran and the West, the territory of Javakh holds the key to any feasible pipeline. Javakh stands as a fulcrum in the balance of ports and petroleum, lying in the path of all planned pipelines spanning Georgian territory to access its Black Sea ports.

Bilateral relations between Turkey and Georgia are also much deeper than simple cooperation in the transport of Azerbaijani oil. Turkey is now Georgia's second largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching some \$112 million in 2000. Even more importantly, Georgia continues to look to Turkey for a lead role in modernizing and financing the Georgian armed forces and Georgia also has played a lead role in the Azerbaijan-inspired GUUAM group. Comprising Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Moldova, the GUUAM group is a regional economic, political and security body centered around the need to coordinate the region's ability to exploit, transport and sell the energy resources of the Caspian Sea. Most threatening to Armenia and Javakhk, however, is GUUAM's new directions in military policy. Advancing a special role for GUUAM to protect and secure the region's infrastructure and, therefore, the region's oil and natural gas pipelines, this poses a potential military threat to Javakhk and Armenia.

Another related geopolitical element in this dynamic is the recently resurrected plan to establish a railway link from Tbilisi to Kars. This plan has overcome a history of financial problems with the announcement in February 2001 that China will assume all financing and costs for the railway project. Notably bypassing the more direct, and commercially cheaper, route from Tbilisi to the northern Armenian city of Gumri and on to Kars, this plan is the latest attempt to isolate Armenia. This is made even more obvious by the refusal to utilize the already existing rail link from Armenia to Kars. For Javakhk, however, the railway plan poses a slightly different problem. According to the details of this plan, the railway would link Marabda, just outside of Tbilisi, with Kars by passing through Javakhk. By transiting Javakhk, the railway invite Turkish or Azerbaijani interference or even intervention in Javakhk, presumably justified by the GUUAM group's stated ambition to militarily "protect and secure" the regional infrastructure.

## Conclusion: Autonomy is the Key

The trend of devolution of power from the central state to the increasingly assertive autonomous regions and republics underway in Georgia is determining the future of Georgian statehood. It has become apparent that Georgia is on a course toward reconstituting its statehood and transforming itself into a confederation. For Javakhk, the most attractive path toward security and greater potential for economic development is autonomy within a new Georgia.

There is also a set of potential economic benefits to be realized through an autonomous Javakhk. The most realistic of these benefits include the possible share of proceeds from the lease agreement for the Russian military base in Javakhk currently being negotiated between Tbilisi and Moscow. A second benefit lies in the possibility of sharing in the profit from the utilization of Javakhk territory for a possible oil pipeline or for the proposed Tbilisi-Kars railway. There are some precedents for an autonomous region negotiating a share of transit fees in this way, as the Ajarians are paid for the use of their Black Sea port Poti or as the Chechen government has received tariff payments for the pipeline from Baku through Chechnya to the Russian port facilities on the Black Sea. Even more encouraging would be the possibility of utilizing such revenue in a special “Javakhk Development Fund” to be administered by the regional government of an autonomous Javakhk and with the possible involvement of both Armenia and Georgia.

By following this course of Georgia's devolution toward confederation, an autonomous Javakhk, at this time, represents the most prudent and most promising avenue for securing the rights and meeting the needs of the Javakhk Armenians. With the opportunity for security and the promise of stability through autonomy, Javakhk may effectively overcome the geopolitical and economic challenges in its path by remaining within a new Georgia. But this autonomy will undoubtedly be tested by the realities of Georgia's future.

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