

Great Decisions, Katonah Chapter
The Caucasus – April 26, 2011
(by Elizabeth Hall)

Does the U.S. have commercial interests in the Caucasus/Caspian Region that should be protected by the force of our government? (Think Exxon-Mobil.)

Should we use arms to protect the crude oil pipeline that runs from Baku in Azerbaijan through Georgia to the Mediterranean coast of Turkey? This pipeline supplies Europe. Georgia has rescinded the right of Armenia and Russia to transport arms across its territory. In the Caucasus area generally, Armenia and Iran have common interests as do Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Are there sub-regional conflicts where the pipeline crosses these countries? It hasn't come up. It's more likely to come up if Russia pursues its interests in the area.

There are also natural gas pipelines, one generally paralleling the Baku oil pipeline. New methods allow countries to extract much more gas. In fact, the U.S. is changing some ports so they will be able to export gas. But the production of natural gas by fracking requires enormous amounts of water. Turkey is at the headwaters of the Tigris and Eurphrates Rivers. Turkey's increased development will require more water and likely to lead Turkey to start damming these rivers and diverting their water.

Are the borders in this region level or flat? Around Baku the land is flat, and oil and gas comes right out of the ground. Further west, the land is mountainous. The Caspian Sea is shallow, so laying pipelines in no problem.

One of the troubles in developing this area is linguistic. The tribal languages are often unrelated and come from different linguistic families. Religion is also a major problem, especially between Turkey and Armenia. Yet another problem is the role of the Kurds. This area is a true mosaic.

Chechnya is another part of the mosaic. Why was it not given independence after the USSR broke up? It's a very Muslim country. Perhaps Russia feared to let it go or perhaps it was kept to act as a buffer state. It's still a problem.

Why is the U.S. so interested in the oil from this region? It's 7,000 miles away. Why do we risk terrorist attacks here by going after this oil? How much risk are we willing to buy for the sake of this oil? Wouldn't it have been smarter to concentrate on better relations with Venezuela and the rest of Latin America?

Does the U.S. confuse "superpower" with "omnipotence?" What interests do we have there? We have military bases there. We have oil companies there. Perhaps it's simply

the industrial-military complex again. Perhaps the Europeans are reluctant to step up to the plate. Where's the plate?

Some of these pipelines carry oil; others carry gas. Exporting gas is expensive, because it has to be liquefied before shipping. Once oil is out of the ground, it goes anywhere.

Where does China fit into all of this? One of the reasons the price of oil keeps rising is the increasing consumption of oil by China.

South Ossetia and Abkhazia are technically part of Georgia, but they've seceded with Russia cooperation. If you're in Georgia, you say they're part of Georgia. If you're outside Georgia, you say they're independent. It gives Russia a chance to send in "peacekeepers." South Ossetia has a large Russians population.

Stalin was born in Georgia and spoke all his life with a strong Georgian accent.

How does "Caucasus" get mixed up in the definition of "race?" The city of Baku was the center of the old Persian Casbah. The ring outside the Casbah is composed of beautiful old brownstones. Outside that it's a mess of rundown Russian-built structures. [Sorry, I didn't get any development here.]

[I found this at www.yale.edu/glc/events/race/Painter

Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University

Collective Degradation:

Slavery and the Construction of Race

November 7-8, 2003

Yale University

New Haven, Connecticut

Why White People Are Called 'Caucasian?'¹

Nell Irvin Painter

Russia has said, wait a minute, don't push too hard on Georgian membership in NATO.

Whenever we talk about democracy, we always say "democracy and human rights." Does democracy have to be linked with human rights

When oil and gas are flowing through various pipelines, it's to our interest to keep that oil and gas flowing. Any impediment affects the supply all over the world as buyers shift to new sources of oil. We should try not to get anybody mad at us.

It's to our interest to protect oil companies when they're building pipelines.