This article examines the interaction among education, national identity, and external players attempting to influence post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The authors argue that in the circumstances surrounding transition, education became a major political tool for outside powers to advocate their own political philosophy among Azerbaijanis. It is argued that the policies of the U.S., Europe, Russia, and Turkey to provide education opportunities to Azerbaijanis in hopes of affecting Azerbaijani society resulted in a stratification of Azerbaijani civil society, which in the short to medium-term hinders the democratization process with which the country is currently struggling, and in the long run may induce potentially profound conflicts of interests among the various domestic groups.

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The 21st century indeed heralds a new world order, though it appears a very different world order than was anticipated in the waning years of the 20th century. The fall of communism, the rise of the challenge of political Islam, the addition of some 25 de facto states to the world, and the need to incorporate these new elements has proved a challenge for the great powers. Many of these elements come together in the most unlikely of places: Azerbaijan.

Interest has heightened over the last two decades in the Caucasus and Central Asia, both because of the presence of energy resources in these regions and because they exist on the periphery of the Islamic world. Azerbaijan, though small in population, holds special significance because of its oil and gas reserves,¹ its potential as a land route for an oil and/or natural gas pipeline,² its proximity to Iran,³ and as a potential example of a “secular” Islamic society.⁴ This invites the attention of outside powers – the United States, Europe, Russia, Turkey, and Iran being the most notable in the list – which have been trying to influence Azerbaijan. One method of extending influence is through education. The U.S., Europe, Russia, and Turkey have all provided education opportunities to Azerbaijanis hoping to affect Azerbaijani society. This article examines an intimate relationship among education, civil society, and external players attempting to influence Azerbaijan. It then discusses the ways in which the workings of this triangular interaction have interfered with Azerbaijan’s efforts of post-Soviet nation and state-building. Finally, the article looks into and analyzes different mechanisms through which Baku could work to neutralize those negative effects and steps it could take to better capitalize on the intellectual capital built through international education.

During Soviet rule, people throughout the empire were united by a single pan-Soviet identity. The end of the Cold War eliminated this identity. For Azerbaijan

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in particular, the “identity vacuum” was especially complicated because of the large number of options that Azerbaijan’s historical background suggested. Azerbaijan was left to opt between the Turkic, Iranian, Islamic, Russian, and newly added Western/liberal components of its complicated identity. Without an agreed-upon coherent national identity, the centrifugal forces of other attendant identities, whether transnational or ethnic, can tear a state apart.

Creating a new political identity would be difficult for any young state in a globalizing world. But in Azerbaijan this situation was aggravated by the weakness of the newly established political regime. Consequently, the state became an obvious target for surrounding regional powers, as well as the United States and, to some extent, Europe. These states have sought to impose their own ideological philosophy and political culture on Azerbaijan through different means, including religion and education (and sometimes, religion through education). Education is a tool of choice because it appears altruistic and does not seem to interfere in another state’s internal affairs to the extent other methods might.

Education in the post-Soviet transitional states, including Azerbaijan, faces a dilemma that provides an opening that external powers have sought to exploit. On the one hand, since gaining independence, these countries have undergone profound economic, social, and political upheavals that in many ways have damaged their educational systems. On the other hand, education is essential if these transitional societies are to successfully cope with challenges such as fully adopting democratic governance and a market economy. Because the government has often proved incapable of providing high quality education, it has been left to individuals to provide themselves with a proper one. And since education is crucial for the country’s future, these individual actions have not met opposition from the government but rather have been encouraged.

In the circumstances surrounding transition, it is therefore unsurprising that education became a major political tool for outside powers to advocate their own political philosophy among Azerbaijanis. Education acts as a socializing mechanism across the world. Predictably, the educational programs offered by the United States, Russia, Turkey, Europe, and others sought not just to provide

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6 For one example of this dynamic, see Ulrich Teichler and Wolfgang Steube, “The Logics of Study Abroad Programmes and Their Impacts,” Higher Education, Vol. 21, No. 3 (April 1991), pp. 325-349.
an education but also to socialize students in the political culture of the providing state. Consequently, many of the best Azerbaijani students were socialized in various ways, depending on the state providing the educational program. Participation in U.S. educational programs, for example, has been intended in part to inculcate certain American values, thereby contributing to the creation of an Azerbaijani civil society that shares key American values; the essence of soft power.\(^7\) The Turkish government, in turn, has regarded the education opportunities it moved to offer students coming from Azerbaijan—as well as from other Turkic republics of post-Soviet Central Eurasia—as a powerful mechanism through which a common “Turkic identity” among those who have been viewed as the future generation of leaders of Azerbaijan, or ones who were to stand in the vanguard of the social, economic, and political transformation of their country could be crafted.\(^8\) As a former Turkish minister of national education explicitly stated, “when [students] return to their countries after finishing their education, they will become the architects of the great Turkish world.”\(^9\) Indeed, the goal was nothing else but “a thorough cultural reorientation”.\(^10\) If socialization into the U.S. cultural system is likely to shape a rather cosmopolitan agenda for the emerging elite of Azerbaijan, those with a Turkish educational experience are apt to develop a rather communitarian—nationalist—perspective on their country’s future development. Unlike the beneficiaries of the U.S. programs who tend to develop an inclusive civic understanding of their national identity, those who have benefited from Turkish education (either in Turkey or in a Turkish educational institution in Azerbaijan) are likely to embrace a more narrow definition of their identity, one based on ethnic (Turkic) kinship rather than citizenship.

Once students return to Azerbaijan with their newly earned education credentials, they are strongly encouraged to network among their fellow alumni, which in turn reinforces and further develops their new identities. This is especially true for Turkish and U.S. graduates. As a result of having the alumni engage in a tight circle of social intercourse and by facilitating their post-education recruitment

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by agencies of the sponsoring states (including governmental, transnational, or non-governmental institutions), the networking process has created a confined yet self-sufficient world for the alumni. This approach discourages alumni from taking a citizenly interest in public matters, as well as from interacting with broader society and engaging in a dialogue with other societal groups. In turn, this created and deepened the vast gap both among these different social groups and within civil society itself.

The differences in political philosophy underlying higher education for Azerbaijani resulted in a stratification among those educated by external actors. It also divided those with a foreign education from those with a local education, which is considered qualitatively inferior to Western and Turkish-provided education. Every foreign educated group has its own cultural and political agenda closely linked to the ideology of the host country, in which its members received their education. Moreover, there is a large gap, both cultural and intellectual, between those with a foreign education and those lacking it.

Two noteworthy implications arise from the educationally induced increasing segregation of Azerbaijan’s young elites. First, in the short-to-medium-term the formation of a strong civil society in Azerbaijan is impeded. Different sections of the educated strata of the society rarely interact with each other. Instead, they remain in their closed circles, perpetuating different perceptions of reality and different answers to the fundamental questions of Azerbaijan’s contemporary development. A weak civil society, in turn, hinders the democratization process with which the country is currently struggling.

The second implication which may become increasingly salient in the long run is that different alumni groups do not simply fail to communicate but increasingly have competing understandings of how national identity should be understood and which development model their country should end up opting for. These differences exist both among the foreign educated and between the foreign educated and locally educated. At some point in the future, this may have important domestic ramifications, including potentially profound conflicts of interests among the various groups. Indeed, it is not improbable that this may eventually cause a serious “political conflict over the determination of national identity.”\(^{11}\)

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Among external powers providing education opportunities to Azerbaijanis, Turkey and the United States are probably the two that have a vested interest in a stable Azerbaijan and hence should be keen to take whatever steps are needed to ensure that the education policy they pursue toward Azerbaijan does not in the long run result in a polity torn apart in conflict. Unlike the United States, however, the Turkish government has little, if any, policy towards, and hence control over, the life paths of the graduates its education programs produce. This being the case, the burden of responsibility for facilitating post-graduation transition of Azerbaijanis who studied at a Turkish university, as well as those who received their education as part of a program sponsored by other states, lies solely with Azerbaijan itself, its people and its government. In this article, the focus is therefore on the mechanisms through which the intra-state agency could work to alleviate the structural problem of a segregated civil society, unintentionally engendered by the multitude of outside-sponsored education programs that exist for Azerbaijanis. Given that the programs that the U.S. Department of State sponsors also envisage some mechanisms through which to influence the choices their alumni make and preferences they come to develop after graduation, the article will continue by first focusing on what the United States—as an external agent—could do to help Azerbaijan minimize the negative effects of the study abroad programs it offers.

What the United States Can Do

The United States has an interest in a stable Azerbaijan for at least two reasons. First, Azerbaijan is a Shia Muslim democracy, albeit one with growing pains. Azerbaijan already is what the United States has so tragically been trying to make out of Iraq. In fact, Azerbaijan was the Islamic world’s first democracy (the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-1920\textsuperscript{12} came five years earlier than the Turkish Republic of 1923). Certainly liberal democracy (on Azerbaijani terms) needs to solidify. But the U.S. can help ensure this success by improving American education initiatives in the country. A successful democracy in Azerbaijan becomes what America had hoped for Iraq: a model for other Muslim countries as well as a daily reminder to the Iranian people of the possibility of non-theocratic rule that coexists with religion. Beyond this, Azerbaijan sits on top of significant energy resources and provides a nexus for pipeline routes that avoid

\textsuperscript{12} For more on the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, see Charles van der Leeuw, \textit{Azerbaijan: A Quest for Identity} (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 104-124.
Russia. While these points are well known in policy making circles and the oil industry, the American government has not taken a holistic approach to building a long-term friendly society in Azerbaijan, thereby guaranteeing U.S. access to the region into the future. Each of these goals would be more readily obtained if the U.S. allowed the development of a secular Azerbaijani identity that does not mirror the United States but rather respects the liberal approach to domestic governance while at the same time making room for local values and traditions.

Of course, to achieve these goals requires a concerted effort by the United States across many areas of civil society. In this article, we argue that one area that can provide significant dividends is in U.S. education policy towards Azerbaijan. Rather than attempting to imprint American identity on those who come through American high education programs, American-sponsored education should develop the tools with which a liberal identity, informed by local reality, can develop. This identity will be an amalgamation of many identities imported from around the world and modified by local political culture. So to begin with, the U.S must aim to promote not an American identity but rather a local identity that is compatible with Western identity. As long as the U.S. and others involved in educating Azerbaijanis promote mirror images of their own identity rather than encourage the development of the Azerbaijani civil society, no identity will take root. An Azerbaijani society highly divided over ideology, agendas, and understandings of national identity is weak and open to outside –including radical– influences.

The United States should modify its education policy toward Azerbaijan in at least two ways. First, the U.S. could require that its graduates, working in teams with graduates from other international education programs, implement one year community projects of their own design. This approach would invest in arranging and building a dialogue on the future of Azerbaijan between U.S. alumni and other international alumni, as well as local Azerbaijani graduates. The U.S. should help sponsor regular meetings, seminars, and conferences involving all these groups, thus enabling international alumni –along with local graduates– to influence and shape the new Azerbaijani identity they all agree upon. Among other positive implications, this will demonstrate the common problems they all face as Azerbaijani citizens, and create among the Azerbaijani youth a sense of joint responsibility for, and common ownership over, the future of their country. This, in turn, will help create a solid stratum of intellectuals who may themselves be leading Azerbaijan in the coming decades.
Second, the U.S. government and U.S. grant providing organizations should not limit the scope of their activities to promoting democracy and human rights issues only. This greatly limits the variety of activities the U.S. alumni, as well as alumni of other programs, can pursue in Azerbaijan. The result of this one-sided approach aimed at aggressively “selling” liberal ideology in Azerbaijan is that a large portion of Azerbaijan’s educated youth is simply not interested in the nature of activities that the U.S. government and U.S. grant making organizations would be ready and willing to fund. Even those specifically educated in the U.S. quickly leave for work in the private sector and almost inevitably soon after stop participating in public life. This results in a less active civil society and less democracy in the country. Moreover, those alumni and others who decide to go on with projects that have little direct relevance to their interests undertake such projects with minimal enthusiasm, and lack any sense of social responsibility. As a result, these projects are ineffective and do little to promote democracy or otherwise achieve their goals. This aggressive promotion of democracy actually hinders democratic development.

U.S. private and governmental organizations should allow the applicants, both non-alumni and alumni, greater freedom in conceptualizing and proposing solutions to the problems facing their country. This would accomplish a number of goals.

First, it would be more attractive for the young Azerbaijanis as they will run projects that ideally fit their interests and background. Second, it would generate greater efficiency within the project with concomitant results for Azerbaijani society. Third, it would gradually prepare the young educated Azerbaijanis to advocate good governance in their country, considering that many of the projects they will work on will emphasize the necessity of certain reforms and changes in the governance system. Fourth, it would mitigate widely-held beliefs that the U.S. imposes a self-serving democratic view on Azerbaijan, and elsewhere, since this approach will have the Azerbaijanis gradually necessitate reforms in the governance system.

**What the Azerbaijani Government Can Do**

Whatever the rationale behind its initial actions, the Azerbaijani government has by now come up with a plethora of initiatives which could potentially serve to alleviate the challenge of a segregated civil society and the long-term possibility of intra-state political conflict.
The Azerbaijani government’s decision to set up a “government-supported funding scheme for local NGOs” stands out in this respect. The scheme is administered by what came to be called the Council of State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations (hereinafter called “the Council”), an institution established by the Presidential Executive Order in December 2007. \(^{13}\) Starting in 2008, the Council has been running two cycles of NGO grant competition annually, with each cycle allocated a budget of around AZN 1.2 million, (or 1.49 million dollars) disbursed among some 200 winning organizations, and focusing on several among 15 thematic areas prioritized for funding by the Concept of State Support for Non-Governmental Organizations (hereinafter called “the Concept”) approved by the Presidential Executive Order in July 2007. \(^{14}\) Among those 15 priority areas outlined in the Concept, the most recurrent ones have been human rights and democracy; the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the conveyance of the realities thereof to the international community; Azerbaijan’s integration into the international community; Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); environmental protection; education and culture; social and economic issues. To keep the process transparent, overall results of the selection process for each cycle are made public on the Council’s official website. \(^{15}\) The initiative is therefore a great—and long awaited—leap forward in that it attempts to streamline the enthusiasm of the educated youth of Azerbaijan with project themes aiming to tackle outstanding national and societal problems indigenous to Azerbaijan. The problems have been exacerbated by external agents with limited knowledge of the local context and the specific dynamics intrinsic thereto. \(^{16}\) As such, the initiative is meant to bring together talented Azerbaijani youth from different educational, social and professional backgrounds and have them—through a joint work in the area of their expertise—develop an inherent interest in public matters and, as an extension of the latter, a collective—civic—identity based on, and rooted in, a sense of joint responsibility for, and common ownership over, the future of their country.

\(^{13}\) For details on the Council and its activities, visit www.cssn.gov.az


\(^{15}\) For the results of the first annual grant competition of 2010, for example, see www.cssn.gov.az/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=180&Itemid=54, accessed 27 March 2010.

\(^{16}\) In the introductory part of the report of the Council of State Support to NGOs on its activities in the year 2009, Azay Guliyev, the chairman of the Council, specifically pointed out that in 2009, the Council devoted special attention to funding the projects that focused on issues of patriotism and the problems of those who suffered from the Armenian aggression, areas which he emphasized have never been paid due attention by the outside funding agencies. Council of State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations, Projects Funded in 2009 (Baku: Avrasiya Press, (2010), in Azerbaijani, p. 5.
However, the initiative’s potential impact is bounded by the constraints imposed by budget limits, a condition that fails to allow for more than some AZN 5,000 to 10,000 per a funded project (with AZN 20,000 set as a maximum amount the Council can grant to a single project). Apparently, this leaves more ambitious projects—one with a potentially greater societal impact—aside. One consequence of the latter is that certain projects which are not normally funded by outside agencies but are within the priority list of the government-supported scheme fail to be realized since their scope goes far beyond what the government can potentially fund. The result is that the skills of many educated and enthusiastic youngsters who could otherwise take a strong interest in public matters go wasted. Hence, if the initiative is to aim for a more profound societal impact than it already does, the government should consider a radical increase in the envisaged budget for this scheme. One way to go would be to differentiate between small grant competition and priority grant competition cycles, with the latter meant to fund projects with more ambitious scope and objectives.

Its short history notwithstanding, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (hereinafter called “ADA” or “the Academy”) has also made considerable headway in helping the country grapple with the challenges that its dual goal of post-Soviet state- and nation-building has brought to the surface. The Academy’s activities in at least two directions are worthy of notice in this respect. First, through a number of its programs—ADA Majlis, Global Perspectives, Friday Hearings, and Azerbaijan in the World being the most eminent to this effect—ADA has gradually evolved to establish a public platform of vibrant communication and social intercourse in which knowledge and ideas of the country’s educated elite—of both local and foreign educational backgrounds—and competing understandings of the country’s future they espouse, come to be shared, exchanged and debated, and through which a coherent line of discourse on Azerbaijan’s

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17 A joint venture between ADA and Azerbaijan’s Public Television Network, ADA Majlis is a regularly scheduled televised discussion forum focusing on various issues of importance for Azerbaijan and its foreign policy. All the programs are filed and made available on the ADA Majlis website at ada.edu.az/majlis/programs/, accessed 28 March 2010.
18 Held twice a month, Global Perspectives is on-the-record discussion forum focusing on issues of foreign policy importance and featuring policy makers, scholars and distinguished guests of ADA. All the forums held within Global Perspectives are filed and made available on the Global Perspectives website at ada.edu.az/majlis/globalperspectives, accessed 28 March 2010.
19 Held under the Chatham House Rule, Friday Hearings is a regularly summoned discussion forum, which engages policy makers, representatives of civil society and academic community in a lively discussion addressing contemporary foreign policy issues. Brief summaries of the main points raised during the discussions held within Friday Hearings are filed and made available on the Friday Hearings website at ada.edu.az/majlis/fridayhearings, accessed 4 April 2010.
20 ADA’s online biweekly publication, Azerbaijan in the World seeks to promote the broadest possible discussion of issues concerning Azerbaijan and its foreign policy by both Azerbaijani scholars and practitioners and those from other countries. For the previous issues, explore ada.edu.az/biweekly, accessed 28 March 2010.
past, present and future could therefore be generated in an agreed-upon and consultative fashion. As important as this new public space is and as diverse as the voices it provides a platform for are, the Academy has nevertheless come short of ensuring the depth and the breadth of the range of opinions there are within the country on different aspects of its development, a fact that –by leaving some voices out– will unavoidably compromise the representativeness of the discursive line, which the exchanges within this public space serve to shape and in which they are meant to eventuate.

The Academy’s second key contribution to state- and nation-building is its scheme supporting Azerbaijani PhDs who study abroad, with financial support and an annual PhD workshop in Baku as its principal components. The program provides a solid and invaluable ground for communication, cooperation, and networking among the most educated but geographically dispersed Azerbaijani elite, as well as between the latter and the Academy. ADA has already held two PhD workshops –in December 2008 and December 2009– with each bringing together some 20 Azerbaijani PhDs and PhD candidates in different fields of social science. It is now planning on convening the third one in December 2010. One of the declared objectives of this scheme is to “reverse the brain drain and attract PhDs back to Azerbaijan and ADA,” a goal that the Academy has so far been realizing successfully, evidence of the latter being four western-educated Azerbaijani PhDs currently teaching at the Academy. The implications of the scheme, however, go far beyond this proclaimed mission of bringing young Azerbaijani PhDs “physically” back to their origins. Indeed, by working to establish personal and institutional linkages between the foreign educated Azerbaijani PhDs (or PhD candidates) and the Academy, ADA in fact serves as a bridge meant to bring those Azerbaijanis “mentally” back to the ideational realm of the nation and the state which they embody and which they belong to. The level of success of this visionary strategy will largely be contingent on the extent to which ADA itself will manage to have the evolutionary vision it embraces –and is guided by– spillover onto the broader society it is a part of and is meant to serve, rather than remaining an isolated locus of “alien” ideas few, if any, in Azerbaijan would fully internalize and stand by.

The State Program on Azerbaijanis’ Study Abroad (2007-2015) (hereinafter called “the Program”), adopted in October 2006 and approved by Presidential

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21 For more information on the PhD workshops, explore ada.edu.az/facultyresearch/events/, accessed 28 March 2010.
23 For more information on the program, explore xaricdeihsis.edu.gov.az/, accessed 28 March 2010.
If the back cover beauty is more important for you,
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THE CRISIS:

According to Freud,
a psychological depression manifested in an individual’s life.

According to the Prime Minister,
an economic undulation that would pass Turkey.

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a predicted and described event which would deeply affect Turkey.

The financial crisis shocked many, but not Referans readers. Since the beginning of 2007, Referans has been warning readers of the approaching economic turmoil, and has been the first to announce that mortgages would be the trigger. Again, it was Referans which raised the issue of the “seven earthquake story”. All details of the financial crisis were given exclusively in Referans from 2007 onwards.

Take reality as your reference.
Executive Order in April 2007, is a crucial step toward finding a compromise between the urgent need for qualified professionals as supported by international education programs and efforts of nation- and state-building. The Program envisages financing the study of 5,000 Azerbaijanis abroad between 2007 and 2015 with subsequent recruitment of those individuals by the public or private sectors in Azerbaijan. The Program promises to establish solid governmental control over foreign education for Azerbaijanis and diminish the potential for especially divisive views on national identity. It is financed by the State Oil Fund, administered by the Minister of Education and overseen by the specially established Commission under the President of Azerbaijan. The government scholarship is conditioned on the candidate’s committing to five years of work in the public or private sector in Azerbaijan upon the completion of studies. This is intended to establish a social contract (also formalized in a legal document) between student and the state. Some 460 Azerbaijanis are currently studying in different universities all around the globe under the governmental scholarship. It is likely that the period of the “marriage” between the state and the alumni will in many cases go beyond the five years envisaged by the contract, as the legal obligation may often transform into emotional attachment to the state and national identity advocated by the state. However, the Program will only produce desirable results if the government approaches the issue with due consistency, diligence and responsibility. For the obligatory period of work in the country to translate into emotional attachment to the state, the government needs to make a sustained effort to attract as many alumni as it possibly can digest to work in the public sector rather than “losing” them again to the private sector. If the latter becomes the case, the Program will lose its relevance in terms of helping alleviate the challenge of a segregated civil society. The following measures ought to be taken by the Azerbaijani government to that effect.

First, a more open working environment needs to be created in governmental institutions. Current working conditions are perceived to allow little freedom of action and discourage taking initiatives as well as independent and critical thinking. Hence, a position in the government does not seem attractive to many of today’s best educated youth.

Second, a reasonable salary needs to be provided (and certainly can be provided given Azerbaijan’s oil wealth). The uncompetitive salaries throughout much of the government are another reason young people seek job employment elsewhere.
Third, the position offered to the alumni should be carefully considered to better match the individuals’ intellectual capabilities and educational background. It is, of course, true that recent graduates have a great deal to learn. But being relegated to clerical duties and dead end positions is no way to train the leaders of tomorrow. Doing so results in the alienation of a well educated new employee.

Fourth, national goals need to be more clearly communicated by governmental institutions. This is a crucial component for young people who will have just returned from a totally different culture with its distinct set of values and beliefs.

Finally, apart from the moves attached to the projects already launched and ongoing, yet another initiative the Azerbaijani government might consider pursuing is setting up a number of independent, or semi-independent, professional associations providing consultation and training for the society at large, each focusing on and working within a particular domain, e.g. engineering, medicine, business and economics, law, among others. Serving as powerful focal points for the best minds that exist in Azerbaijan, such associations would bring together outstanding alumni of different international, as well as local programs based on their educational background and professional expertise rather than the country in which they have graduated. With their members united around a common agenda, such associations would have the youth develop the commitment to give back to society of which they are a part, something that would gradually evolve into a sense of common identity among the members.

**Conclusion**

Azerbaijan has in some sense been a target for external influence since the end of Cold War. The Western focus on political Islam has done nothing to dilute this attention. One manifestation of this focus has been for external players to provide education opportunities to Azerbaijaniis. Unfortunately for Azerbaijan, the diversity of educational opportunities has led to a deep and growing division within Azerbaijan about Azerbaijani identity in the 21st century. This article set forth a construct useful for understanding the role of international education in nation and state-building in Azerbaijan. It examined one particular set of relationships within this context: between the U.S. and Azerbaijan. We have argued that since the outlines of the early 21st century world order are beginning to become clearer, it is in the interests of both the U.S. and Azerbaijan to review their respective goals and methods.
The United States, for its part, should be less heavy handed, providing Azerbai-
jani students with the tools to adapt liberalism to Azerbaijan’s unique charac-
teristics, rather than insisting on the adoption of mirror U.S. institutions and
policies designed in Washington. The U.S. could also provide a wider range of
opportunities and more local control over programs it supports. This approach
would allow Azerbaijan to reach conclusions on the merits of liberalism and
probably yield a Western-friendly alternative to political Islam that encourages
economic growth and supports human rights.

Azerbaijan, for its part, can also take steps to reduce the gap among its citi-
zens educated abroad and between those educated abroad and those educated
domestically. For example, Azerbaijan’s government should expand its support
of education abroad and creating opportunities for returning students. The ADA,
too, has an important role to play. It has created a space for just the sort of public
discourse necessary to build a strong Azerbaijani identity in the 21st century,
while taking advantage of those things offered by education abroad. In effect,
the ADA can provide a forum for identifying those elements of identity brought
from abroad, and through internal dialogue bring together those elements useful
to Azerbaijan.