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CAUCASIAN ETHNOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS

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List of Abbreviations

CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States

CISPKF - Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force

EU - European Union

HLPG - High Level Planning Group

IDP - Internally Displaced Person

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe

CiO - Chairman-in-Office

SSR - Soviet Socialist Republic

UN -United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Program

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNOCHA - United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UNOMIG - United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

USIP - United States Institute of Peace

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Abstract

This essay is primarily concerned with the eruption of ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus; the analysis of the practical and normative dimensions of international involvement and mediation efforts, in which international organizations such as the OSCE and the UN took the lead. The region has attracted increasing international attention and a great deal of effort has been directed at the resolution of the existing ethnopolitical confrontations. Therefore this essay will attempt to compare patterns of international involvement in the three cases of South Caucasian conflicts, identify what the general impact of such involvement has been and examine how it has varied across the cases and across time. Finally, although international involvement has significantly evolved and been enhanced over the past years, it has as yet failed to deliver concrete results. In this respect, the essay will argue that the incorporation of the social-psychological dimensions of ethnic conflicts, which appear to receive marginal importance both in scholarly discourse and actual resolution efforts, should be an integral part of the official diplomacy.

Introduction

The Caucasus, throughout its history, has long been a junction for rival interests; an area over which empires have competed and in which civilizations and religions met serving both as a bridge and barrier to contacts between the North and South, East and West. Traditionally, foreign powers have seen the region as an economic and strategic gateway to other parts of the world. Its crucial geopolitical location is further reinforced by once being lain between the historical Safavid and Ottoman empires as well as between the regional powers of the late twentieth century Iran, and Turkey-often referred to as "mixed blessing" for the states concerned. What this implies more generally is that historically the Caucasian states have been subjected to different forms of suppression, deportation, and artificial territorial annexations that, apart from serving the major needs of grand powers, also favored the geopolitical interests of one state at the expense of other. Today, despite the independence gained by the three South Caucasian states, many of the thorny questions of the past injustice and ensuing grievances not only comprise the political agenda of individual sovereign states, but also appear to be the major hindrance for regional cooperation and development.

Since the end of the 1980s, heightened ethnonationalism, ethnopolitical conflicts and warfare have become the most conspicuous aspect of the new political reality in the Caucasus, contributing significantly to the political instability, bleak development prospects and economic hardships. On the whole, the breakup of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of fifteen new states in the strategically important crossroads located north of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region, west of China, and south of Russia. Three of them-Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan-which constitute the major focus of this essay, occupy a particularly sensitive strategic position, close to the Persian Gulf, the Black Sea, and the Russian Federation thereby forming a geographical bridge between Turkey and Central Asia. Therefore, it is not surprising that the South Caucasus has also been at the center of post-cold

war geopolitical rivalries. In the Soviet lexicon, based on a Russo-centric viewpoint, this area was referred to as the Trans-Caucasus. A name for this subregion that is more neutral in connotation and reflects the political developments of the post-Soviet era—is South Caucasus.[1]

The South Caucasus region is clearly one of the most troubled areas of the post-Soviet space, with an unmatched level of ethnic and cultural diversity that is overwhelmed by internal contractions, societal and economic problems, and widespread suffering resulting from numerous ethno-territorial conflicts. In particular, there are three unresolved conflicts frozen along cease-fire lines: that between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Mountainous Karabakh; and those in Georgia between the central government on the one hand and the secessionist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Negotiations seeking political solutions to the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been underway, both with Russian involvement and international presence, in the form of the OSCE in Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia and the UN in Abkhazia. Despite the increasing international attention and a great deal of effort directed at the resolution of the existing conflicts, at present, none of them has found a negotiated solution, and the involvement of international organizations has not been successful in catalyzing settlement. A relapse to warfare is a distinct possibility in all three conflict areas as negotiations have so far yielded no positive results. There are already warning signs that this escalation, at least in rhetoric, is under way.

Given this brief outline of geopolitical location and major ethnopolitical conflicts challenging, above all else, the security dimensions of the region, the primary concern of this essay is the eruption of ethnic conflicts in South Caucasus; the analysis of practical and normative dimensions of international involvement and mediation in which international

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[1] The earlier name Transcaucasus reflected singularly the Russian geopolitical position and literally meant 'beyond and behind the Caucasus'. The term South Caucasus has come into use in order to more accurately describe the location of the region and de-link it from Russia.

organizations such as the OSCE and the UN took the lead as well as the deployment of CIS peacekeeping forces.

The region has attracted increasing international attention and a great deal of effort has been directed at the resolution of the existing ethnopolitical confrontations. Therefore this essay will attempt to compare the patterns of international involvement in the three cases of South Caucasian conflicts, identify what the general impact of such involvement has been and examine how it has varied across the cases and across time.

However, a closer look at the region reveals that the ethnopolitical rivalries are strongly intertwined and cannot be fully comprehended without an overlapping analysis of the intra-regional political dynamics and external involvement of great powers. A separation would be artificial since ethnopolitical struggles in the South Caucasus are closely intertwined with geopolitical considerations and are likely to have a significant impact on the final settlement of existing ethnic conflicts. The principal outside powers in the region pursue their own interests which are in general not conducive to peace and stability, since the motives driving these external actors are varied, and not necessarily complementary. This process may prove detrimental to peace and stability as the parties to a conflict see the possibility of seeking better terms for a solution either by binding their time or allying with certain external powers or forces. As such, it is of paramount importance to conduct the study of ethnopolitical conflicts in the south Caucasus with a clear understanding of the basic regional "security complex" to form a regional picture in which the security concerns between and among individual Caucasian states are well spelled out and understood in conjunction with major regional powers.

In addition to practical and normative aspects of international involvement, the paper will also attempt to analyze its ideational aspect, which has gained particular importance in regulating ethnopolitical tensions in the region but continues to be relatively

underemphasized. In this regard, the impact of western ideas such as self-determination, territorial integrity, group differentiation and power-sharing on the local political and social realities of the region will also constitute one of the major points of the analysis. Most of these ideas are highly contested and generate heated debates around the world, including in the West. However, despite a lack of consensus, some ideas have tended to gain greater recognition than others and have become translated into policy prescriptions of influential international agencies.

Finally, although international involvement has significantly evolved and been enhanced over the past ten years, it has as yet failed to deliver concrete results. In this respect, this essay will argue that the social-psychological dimensions and trust building measures in ethnic conflicts, which appear to receive marginal importance both in scholarly discourse and actual resolution efforts, are not merely an appendage, but should be an integral part of any viable international mediation and involvement. Therefore, the hypothesis postulated in this study is as follows:

The incorporation of the social-psychological dimensions and trust-building measures could significantly facilitate the settlement of the existing ethnic conflicts in South Caucasus.

Literature Review and Methodology

Although there is a large volume of scholarly literature dealing with the post-Cold War developments in the South Caucasian region and, consequently, drawing its focus on the analysis of ethnic conflicts, studies conducted within a comparative analytical framework are not abundant. For the most part, this tendency can be explained by the different structural arrangements and background developments that appear to characterize each of the conflicts in the region somewhat exclusively which, in itself, is a subject for a separate analysis. In this regard Hunter (1994) notes that the south Caucasian states have undergone complex, often contradictory development patterns against internal and external odds and "…because of their diverse geopolitical, economic, and social conditions-and their diverse histories- the challenges faced by each have been unique in range and character" (Shireen Hunter 1994, p. 1). However, despite the unique circumstances and conditions characterizing each of the three Caucasian conflicts, there are still remarkable similarities in their roots and immediate causes.

With regards to the external involvement and impact of outside players in the region, which is of particular interest to the present study, the scholar contends that while international organizations developed their own strategies of peacemaking, adopted different roles and positions in mediating, and proposed different solutions, their role in peacemaking remained highly influenced by regional and international powers capturing the direction of political developments in Caucasus and pursuing own interests in this region.[2]

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[2] For comparable arguments accounting for the failure of international involvement and mediation in the South Caucasian ethnic conflicts as a result of competing regional and international interests also see Alexander Rondeli. "Security Threats in the Caucasus: Georgia's View," in Journal of International Affairs, 2 (1998); Ghia Nodia. "The Conflict in Abkhazia: National Projects and Political Circumstances," in Caucasian Regional Studies, Special Issues, (1998); Shale Horowitz. "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts: Using Regime Type to Discern the Impact and Relative Importance of Objective Antecedents," in Nationalities Papers, 4 (2001); Vladislav Shorokhov. "Energy Resources of Azerbaijan: Political Stability and Regional Relations," in Caucasian Regional Studies, 1 (1996); Vitaly V. Naumkin. "Russian Policy in South Caucasus," in The Quarterly Journal, 3, (2002).

In his account on the crucial role of South Caucasian area especially after the September 11 events, Svante Cornell (eds., 2005) notes that "…international interest in the region has tended to increase the polarization of regional politics, entrench existing conflicts, and thereby make the region's road to stability more complicated" (Svante Cornell 2005, p 2.). The conflicting interests of external actors, according to the analysis, not only prevented speedy resolution of the three conflicts, but also, "cemented a no peace-no war situation," which, in turn, prevented the development of trade relations, the more pronounced democratization of the political system of the regional countries, and the economic recovery of the region. As a result, given the dramatically diverging security perception of the south Caucasian states, countervailing security alignments are built which not only intensify the zero sum character of the international relations in the region, but also, further complicate the mediation efforts of international organizations to forge a mutually acceptable conflict resolution settlement. Leila Alieva (2006), on the other hand, argues that the European structures at large had a positive impact on the region, since the OSCE framework not only helped to contain conflicting relations, but also, significantly, reduced competition between the leading powers. The integration of the Caucasus in European institutions, it is argued, allowed keeping conflicts under control and developing a peaceful framework for negotiations between the parties. However, in her reference to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict she further observes that "… the effect of an OSCE was twofold-it maintained the ceasefires for a prolonged period of time, but, on the other hand, it promoted frozenness of the conflicts" (Leila Alieva 2006, p 48.). In other words, although the major security threats in the region and in the area of conflicts in particular have significantly diminished, the status quo state of affairs cannot last indefinitely and with time, the resolution of the conflicts will represent a greater challenge. This can well be contrasted with the more systematic approach adopted by Natalie Sabanadze (2002), in which the scholar maintains that any evaluation of

international involvement in South Caucasian conflicts entails the clarification of what the initial objectives were and how many of them are met as a result. In this latter connection the scholar notifies of the absence of any consistent international agenda elaborated to systematically address the underlying issues in the region, let alone gauge the actual performance. This is contended to be largely a consequence of great many competing climes and diverging interests articulated both by Western and regional powers. More specifically, it is argued that "much of the international involvement in the ethnopolitical conflicts of the South Caucasus has been motivated by the geopolitical interests in the region and has evolved from passive acceptance of Russian supremacy to balancing Russia through greater diversification of the international presence" (Natalie Sabanadze 2002, p.34). However, despite the major role attributed to the international mediation, it is, according to the scholar, in no way sufficient to settle the conflicts without the will and determination of the parties to conflict.

The regional importance of South Caucasus as well as the threats emanating from the unresolved enthnoplolitical conflicts is further reinforced by the 2004 EU enlargement which not only brought the region closer to EU, but also, made the definition of specific policies and instruments contributing to the broader international conflict resolution efforts a priority, given the spill over effects of any renewed outbreak of war for the Union's security. In this regard, to avoid insecurity on its borders as well as engage in a greater regional cooperation by ensuring access to Caspian oil and gas reserves, implies not only a projection of renewed interests into the south Caucasian region, but also the adjustment of the existing mechanisms to provide added value to the ongoing conflict resolution efforts.[3]

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[3] According to International Crisis Group, Europe Report N°173 – 20 March 2006, the EU is trying to redefine its role in a new neighborhood which is neither at war nor at peace and can do more to help resolve the conflicts in the region. The EU, the report observes, generally more comfortable with a post-conflict rehabilitation and peace building role, can offer valuable contribution to the efforts of OSCE and UN currently involved in Nagorno-Karabakh, south Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts respectively. The importance of European structures in south Caucasian regional policy as well as the contribution expected from the "diversification" of

Finally, in its account of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Crisis Group Report (2005) draws its focus on the importance of carrying out comprehensive confidence-building measures with a view to overcome hostility at the grassroots level and encourages a low-level dialogue toward mutual understanding. The analysis is based on the assumption that subjective factors play a significant role in the perception and interpretation of events and are a major obstacle for transforming the relationships between the parties. In conflict relations, such subjective elements, it is argued, may exacerbate the conflict by generating differences in the way the parties perceive reality and by imposing constraints on the rational pursuit of their interests. In particular, the report notes that "... the growth of primordial nationalism among Armenian and Azerbaijani populations poses serious obstacles to dialogue and reconciliation" (International Crisis Group, Europe Report No.166, 2005, p. 26). According to the analysis, the relationship between the respective societies is further complicated by "…Azerbaijan's refusal to allow any contacts with officials or common people living in Nagorno-Karabakh [since] Azerbaijani civil society activists who defied the government line faced harassment at home" (International Crisis Group, Euro Report No.166, 2005, p.24). Another implication of an intersocietal view of conflict is offered by Anthony Baird (1999) in his analysis of both Abkhaz and South Ossetian ethnic conflicts in Georgia, in which it is maintained that different sectors of the societies have to be fruitfully involved in a more elaborate, integrated process of diplomacy. More importantly, it is noted that any genuine attempt of conflict resolution should focus on transforming group psychology by probing behind their incompatible positions and explore the underlying needs and fears that engender theses positions. The conflict, particularly in the case of protracted ethnic struggles, becomes an inescapable part of daily life for the members of the opposite communities. The real test of

international mediation efforts is also stressed by Rouben Shugaryan in "From the Near Abroad to the New Neighborhood… The South Caucasus on the Way to Europe. A few Connotations of the Black Sea Context."

conflict resolution in deep-rooted conflicts, therefore, the scholar argues, is how much the process by which agreements are constructed and the nature of those agreements contribute to transforming the relationships between the parties. If negotiations at the issues level are not based on reconciliation at the values level, there will be a permanent need to militarily enforce the political settlement since the settlement is not based on a new, secure relationship based on trust[4]

What this implies more generally is that ethnopolitical conflict and its resolution must also be conceived as societal and intersocietal processes that come about through the actions and interactions of a large group of individuals who, in turn, function through a variety of organizations. Such approaches can make significant contributions to resolution and ought to become an integral part of a larger official effort. This interpretation allows to conceive conflict as an intersocietal process of mutual influence shaped by changing realities, changing interests and changing relationships between the conflicting parties, and not only an interstate or intergovernmental phenomenon based on the rational calculation of objective national interests on the part of official decision makers. What is required, in short, is a gradual process conducive to change in structures and attitudes, to reconciliation, and to the transformation of relationship between the two societies-the development of new relationship that recognizes the interdependence of the conflicting societies and is open to cooperative, functional arrangements between them.

As a whole, then, the difficult international as well as intersocietal relations in the South Caucasus pose actual and potential threats to the regional security of Eurasia, and by extension to international security in general. The region and its conflicts are nevertheless little known and poorly understood outside the immediate neighborhood of the Caucasus.

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[4] According to Crisis Group Euro Report No 167-11 October 2005, restoring confidence between Azeris and Armenians living in and around Nagorno-Karabakh will be a huge challenge, requiring transformation of the belligerent language, images and modes of dialogue they use with reference to the other. To prepare the population for a peace deal and implement it, new symbols and rhetoric with respect to the conflict are needed.

This is well illustrated by the fact that the conflicts have too often been squarely interpreted as merely ethnic or- for that matter religious- in nature, yet even superficial analysis of South Caucasian conflicts reveals the inadequacy of such simplistic account.[5]

In what follows the three major conflicts of South Caucasus will be defined with a brief historic background preceding each conflict which will hopefully enable to glean a better understanding of the particular aspects characterizing each individual case as well as highlight the underlying similarities, differences and inter-linkages of these conflicts. This will be followed by a comparative analysis and evaluation of international mediation and involvement in the region with an aim to assess the overall contribution of international efforts in brokering a negotiated political solution as well as the peacekeeping operations and services offered to conciliate the incompatible positions and lessen the start of a new offensive. Finally, an analysis of the region's strategic position and its linkages with surrounding areas, including how key regional and international actors perceive the significance of events in the South Caucasus partly for reasons related to the extraction and export of Caspian oil and its effect on the conflict resolution is also given.

The overriding concern of this paper, once again, is to compare the patterns of international involvement in the three cases of South Caucasian conflicts, identify what the general impact of such involvement has been and examine how it has varied across the cases and across time. The methodology applied in this study is derived, to a large extent, from the work carried out by Paul Pennings (eds., 1999) in which the scholars argue that "…comparisons are made across systems-which refers to any type of political and social system that has an organizational reference to territorial space." On the bases of this definition, the scholars interpret cross-sectional analysis as the one that analyzes the subsystems of a larger unit within the comparative framework or, by extension, when

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[5] Svante Cornell (1998) in his article "Religion as Factor in Caucasian Conflicts" defies the tendency of interpreting the south Caucasian conflicts as exclusively ethnic or religious in nature, arguing that they are, above all else, enthnopolitical and territorial in nature.

comparison is made on the bases of an identified system or phenomenon across the larger units, i.e. nation-states. Equally important in this regard is the use of time factor in certain cases which may, taken separately, also comprise the unit of the analysis with the comparative variation across time constituting the aim of the explanation.[6] In this case, however, the comparisons made are intended to observe patterned change over time (or, as cited in Pennings (eds., 1999) to use Castle's metaphor: we look at motion pictures).

A combination of the two, often referred to as "Pool Analysis," will be used in this study, since the variability of time and space is here the aim of the comparative method with country and years being the units of analysis. In other words, both time and space are important dimensions in this research design and cross-sectional variation will define the type of cases that are needed to organize the comparative data. Hence, given the underlying logic of the suggested study, comparative analysis methodology appears to be the best fitting framework both in terms of identifying and analyzing the cases of international involvement and peacemaking efforts in South Caucasian conflicts as well as discerning the underlying similarities and divergences.

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[6] The peculiarity of this research design is that it solely aggregates the information for a number of time units and replicates the cross-sectional analysis on the bases of the division over time.

Three Cases of Ethnopolitical Conflicts

The South Caucasus in the Post-Cold War Context

The balance of the two military alliances during the Cold War put hold or froze not only certain international dynamics, but also suppressed numerous smaller, but potentially explosive conflict situations, outbursts of nationalism and antagonism by creating artificial stability. However, those issues that did not receive timely solutions erupted at the end of the century with a fresh surge and a set of new peculiarities released by the aspirations for freedom throughout the Central and Eastern Europe, the countries of the former Soviet Union and other states with communist-supported domestic regime.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia emerged as new states only to experience the desstructions of armed conflicts and economic misery that overshadowed the high expectations coming with independence. In particular, with the demise of Soviet rule, political structures and economic practices that had long conditioned peoples' lives were undermined and long-suppressed aspirations unleashed. Hostility within and between communities degenerated into wars in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh that have yet to be resolved.

The fact that the Cold War balance has not been replaced by a sound security system generated uncertainty and created a favorable soil for a conflict outbreak. Conflicts, in other words, arise because old regimes, limits, principles break and new ones are being tried. The South Caucasus was one of the regions that fell under the "zone of turmoil" and was therefore heavily affected by the upsurge of the conflicts emanating as a consequence of major geopolitical shifts, particularly the Soviet Union's collapse. The demise of the Soviet Union has dissolved the existing links of subordination between the Union republics and the

political entities, which were incorporated into the "titular nations." Thus are the conflicts that emerged or reemerged in consequence of those major geopolitical rearrangements.

Whatever perspective one takes on the Post-Soviet political developments in south Caucasian region, difficulties in coordination, negotiating mandates, and often cautious diplomacy, in the face of a multiplicity of actors and precarious balances of power, have constrained the way in which mediation has operated in the different conflicts. Therefore, the remainder of this part will attempt to consider and evaluate the three south Caucasian ethnopolitical conflicts and their evolution as well as look at the factors motivating international involvement by states and multinational organizations and what light this sheds on the challenges of the peace processes.

Nagorno-Karabakh

It is worth noting at the outset that the so-called "controversy" over the ancient history of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as its state affiliation frequently boil down to the debates over the origins of the Armenian and Azerbaijani people. This being the case, politically driven Azerbaijani historians "…are confronted with the problem of much older and continuous Armenian presence in Transcaucasia, including Nagorno-Karabakh, and a much older tradition of statehood that was not established for Azerbaijan until 1918" (Chorbajian 2001 p. 34). The dispute on historical grounds is further fuelled by the fact that as opposed to Armenians, the Azeris cannot master a similarly direct linkage to the past and are therefore forced to concoct different accounts of their national stock as an heir to Caucasian Albanians- a no longer extant people once living in Transcaucasia- thereby instigating historical inconsistence and oddity.[7] This is probably one of the major reasons why many western scholars and academicians avoid addressing the importance of early history in political struggles of today and instead focus on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since the inception of 1988 protests which, however, does not necessarily coincide with the perceptions of the immediate parties to conflict.[8] Rather than attempting to cover the entire history of Nagorno-Karabakh in a few pages, this essay will consider several key issues and turning points that underscore the importance of past developments.

To begin with, Nagorno-Karabakh (historically Artsakh) constitutes the eastern, mountainous portion of the Armenian plateau. The political form which Nagorno-Karabakh

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[7] The response of Azerbaijani historiography is to claim as Azerbaijani progenitors the Caucasian Albanians and, on this basis, lay claim to all Caucasian Albanian territories, including Nagorno-Karabakh. In order to represent themselves as an old, quasi-indigenous people of the Caucasus, Astourian argues, the Azeris "…had to juggle with their Turkic ethnic and linguistic roots…and their assertedly Caucasian ethnic and even linguistic origins." (cited in Chorbajian 2001, p. 35).

[8] According to Aivazian 2001, many western observers view the Armenian-Turkish conflict of the 1894-1923 period and the most recent Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Karabakh as separate and distinct developments. In stark contrast, it is argued, the Armenians, the Azerbaijanis and the Turks join together in viewing the current Karabakh crisis as the continuation of the earlier conflicts.

took throughout the history lent itself to small autonomous kingdoms. In the first century B.C., for example, it formed a part of Tigran the Great's kingdom, constituting part of the ancient Armenian provinces of Artsakh and Utik. At various times throughout the recorded history the territory had been conquered by the Seljuk Turks, Arabs, Mongols, Ottoman Turks, and Safavid Persians, and, in the 19th century, the Russians. Nevertheless, the Armenian presence in the territory is ancient and continuous and is characterized by the tradition of autonomous Armenian rule, often made possible by the rugged terrain. The traditional Armenian rule over the territory had been realized by autonomous Armenian nobles (at that time called meliks by Persians) from the late first millennium up until the end of the 18th century, when Nagorno-Karabakh was incorporated into larger empires. A century before the Russia's entry into the Transcaucasus, the right of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to remain under the rule of their local Armenian princes was affirmed by the Persian Shah. The Armenian claim to Mountainous Karabakh is further strengthened by the architectural remains of Armenian monastic complexes such as Dadivank and Gandzasar (13th century) as well as many churches, fortresses and khatchkars discovered in recent archeological findings in Tigranakert.

By the Treaty of Turkmenchai 1828, concluding the second of the two early 19th century wars between Russia and Persia, the Russia gained control of the entire Transcaucasus.[9] However, the 1917 Russian Revolution put an end to the Tsarist rule and, as a result, in 1918 there emerged briefly independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the first Azerbaijani state in history.[10] The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh between the Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians and Azerbaijan on whose side the Ottoman Turkish army intervened and in 1918 and 1920 invaded Armenia dates from this period. The anti-Armenian policies of Azerbaijan

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[9] Beginning in 1805, the Russia annexed Karabakh (the transfer was ratified by the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813) thereby putting an end to the persecutions and massacres of Armenians by the Persian troops.

[10] According to Tadeusz Swietochowski, "in 1905 Azerbaijan was still merely a geographical term describing a stretch of land partitioned between Russia and Persia [and] the only articulated group identity was that of Muslim…" (cited in Chorbajian 2001, p. 34).

and Ottoman Turkey, illustrated by the series of atrocities against the Armenians beginning from 1915 genocide in Ottoman Turkey and further continued in Baku and elsewhere in 1918, ceased with the Sovietization of the Transcaucasian republics in 1920 and 1921. Armenian distrust of Azerbaijani intentions and a refusal to compromise on any settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute that leaves the territory within Azerbaijan can also be traced back to 1919. To cite but one example, in August 1919, under the threat of invasion and massacre, the exhausted members of the 7th Congress of Karabakh Armenians agreed to submit to provisional Azerbaijani rule in return for Azerbaijani agreement to certain provisions. These included, among other things, an Armenian assistant governor, all movements of the Azerbaijani garrisons by the consent of the council half of which was Armenian, no discriminating of the population, and guarantees of cultural autonomy and freedoms of assembly. These provisions, it is contended, were immediately violated, since shortly after it Azerbaijan is held responsible for invading Zangezur in an attempt to forge a direct link from Nagorno-Karabakh through Nakhichevan to Turkey.[11]

The brief tumultuous period of 1918-1921 set the foundation for the later conflicts in the region that erupted in 1988, and was further exacerbated by the Stalin's "nationalities policy" and the strategy of "divide and conquer" that sow seeds for later discontent. Specifically, it is noted that "considering the necessity of peace between Muslims and Christians as well as the economic link between Nagorno-and Lower Karabakh and their ties with Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh was left within the borders of Azerbaijan" (Zverev 1994, p. 21). This decision, the scholar argues, was motivated by regional politics, such as the relations between the higher authorities of Moscow and Turkey, the vision of the vast Muslim world as a fertile soil for the communism expansion and the desire to please Muslim East, as well as the strategy of securing the Soviet borders by preventing them from serving as invasion corridors

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[11] The meticulously detailed history of these events is found in the work of Richard Hovannisian, "The Armeno-Azerbaijani Conflict over Mountainous Karabakh, 1918-1919", The Armenian Review, vol.24, pp. 3-39, 1971.

and supply routes for enemies. In an understated way, this interpretation is confirmed by the statement that "… the Bolsheviks were seeking rapprochement with Turkey and therefore tended to support Azerbaijan rather than Armenian claims…," and it is in this period that the Armenians were misled by the representatives of Bolsheviks concerning the future of disputed territories (Zaslavski 1998, p. 29). In the end, only Znagezur of the disputed territories went to Armenia.

The dispute, then, began when the Soviet-era borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan were being defined. On July 7, 1923, the Soviet Azerbaijan's Revolutionary Committee decided to dismember Nagorno-Karabakh and created on part of its territory an Autonomous *Oblast* of Nagorno-Karabakh. Since then, the separation became the subject of continuous resistance to the Soviet Azerbaijan's authority and petitions to Moscow, which ultimately culminated in declaring the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic independent in 1989 and further strengthening it by referendum.

The conflict, which began in the then existing Soviet Union, was considered by the international community as an internal conflict and was largely neglected by outside powers. The United Nations, at large, has remained on the periphery of the conflict, limiting its role to issuing Security Council resolutions condemning the fighting in general and expressing a "… serious concern at the deterioration of relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijani Republic [that] endangers peace and security in the region," thus abstaining from a more productive engagement.[12] It is contended that the result of such neglect was the de facto acknowledgement of Russian dominance in the area, which led to a very limited international involvement in the active phase of the war or, as Cornell neatly puts it, "…the efforts of international community to bring an end to the war that raged between 1992 and 1994 were half-hearted at best and exiguous at worst" (Cornell 2001, p. 61). The scholar

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[12] The UN Security Council Resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh included resolutions 822 (30 April 1993), 853 (29 July 1993), 873 (14 October 1993), 884 (11 November 1993), as well as a General Assembly resolution of 19 November 1993.

further contends that the UN was more than happy to not to take on a complicated conflict in the former Soviet Union, especially given the overload in conflict resolution in the post-Cold War era. [13]

The international mediation efforts increased over time, particularly when both Armenia and Azerbaijan joined the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe[14] in 1992 which took the lead in mediating the conflict, so far mostly in vain, to negotiate a treaty resolution to the struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh. One of the major reasons accounting for the OSCE failure in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is argued, is that the Minsk Group:

> addresses only the immediate time and territory of the hostilities… confining itself to the narrowest framework possible- 'to the tip of the iceberg'- leaving out of the agenda the deeper conflicting patterns of behavior and strategic thinking of the immediate parties to conflict" (Aivazian 2001, 204).

Equally important, in this regard, is the fact that the Minsk group was originally dominated by smaller, neutral countries being "too large and too low level for serious negotiation" and, as a consequence, they had neither incentives, nor "carrots or sticks" to convince the parties to conflict to adopt a more compromising attitude. It is worth recalling, however, that although the OSCE was the organization in charge, Nagorno-Karabakh is the first and only high-level, lengthy negotiation that the OSCE has become involved in and only there has it established a separate institution with the mandate to carry out negotiations.[15] A co-chairmanship system developed in 1994 was revisited in 1997 to include France, Russia and the United States whose representatives currently work together, facilitating the negotiations, drafting discussion documents, and conducting shuttle diplomacy. After a decade of unsuccessful talks, however, a new format of meetings, the Prague Process, involving direct bilateral contact between the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan

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[13] It is also noted that by entrusting the CSCE with the Karabakh conflict, it would make possible the exclusion of one country the West wanted to keep out of the Caucasus: Iran.

[14] Until 1995 the OSCE was called the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

[15] The OSCE mission to Georgia has been involved in negotiations between Georgia, Russia, North and South Ossetia in the framework of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) since 1994 but its mandate is not to facilitate and organize the negotiations directly.

was initiated in 2004. Until recently, the participants and the OSCE co-chairs alike have publicly expressed optimism that a deal can be reached soon, yet there is an urgent need to translate that generalized optimism into a specific agreement and action. The main political cause of the conflict, it needs to be mentioned, is the contradiction between Azerbaijani's demand for territorial integrity and the aspirations of the majority of Nagorno-Karabakh residents for self-determination. This is a reflection of the contradiction between two principles of international law: the sanctity of international borders and the right to self-determination.[16]

It is also worth noting that since 1994, the High Level Planning Group (HLPG) was established with the aim of intensifying action in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the primary goal of which was to make recommendations on developing and multinational peacekeeping force. However, the peacekeepers have not been deployed and Karabakh remains the only conflict in the south Caucasus where neither Russian nor international peacekeeping operations are conducted. The HLPG has continued to function as a planning body, though it plays no role in the negotiations and may not be fully aware of what is needed today on the ground since for several years it has been unable to carry out "... a much needed operations and logistics reconnaissance mission to the conflict area" (OSCE "2004 Annual Report", p. 29.). In addition to the HLPG, a Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO) was appointed to work on creating conditions for the deployment of an OSCE peacekeeping operations and to facilitate "…a lasting, comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in all its aspects" (OSCE Mission Survey 2001, p.1).[17] On the

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[16] Both sides have used the 1975 Helsinki Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe to justify their claims. Armenians state that their case is based on human rights and the right of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination, pursuant to Principle VIII of the Final Act's Declaration of Principles. Azerbaijanis, on the other hand, counter that the crucial issue is the sanctity of international borders pursuant to Principle III.

[17] According to Edward Walker 1998, Baku opposed the deployment of Russian-dominated peacekeeping forces, insisting that Russian troops constitute no more than 30 percent of any peacekeeping contingent and be answerable to the OSCE, while Armenia objected to the inclusion of Turkish troops. The agreement reached at

ground, its main task is to represent the CiO on issues related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including monitoring the line of contact and the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. The headquarters of the PR is located in Tbilisi, Georgia, and consists of five Field Assistants.

Apart from mediation efforts, international involvement also consisted of more general assistance schemes to Armenia and Azerbaijan aimed at democratization, economic restructuring and the successful transition of these countries from centrally planned authoritarian regimes to market democracies. Even though most of these assistance programs did not target the conflict zone specifically, the general understanding was that efforts exerted at democratization and the development of the rule of law and civil society would eventually contribute to the peaceful settlement of the conflict. Among the main donor agencies were the UNDP, UNHCR, UNOCHA and other UN agencies, as well as numerous USAID funded programs and international and local NGOs.

It is worth mentioning that the international community generally and Russia and the United States particularly were becoming increasingly interested in the Caucasus and the Caspian littoral as the extent of the region's oil and gas reserves became clear. Even though the share of the United States was quite significant in the overall international assistance, its standing toward the parties to conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, just as in the case of Russia, was quite controversial and subject of intense debates both in the United States and in the South Caucasus. Increasing interests of the United States Government and the US oil companies in the Azeri oil recourses of the Caspian basin brought to the fore the contradiction in US policy towards the region, which, it is argued, "…consisted on the one hand of satisfying the powerful American-Armenian lobby and on the other the pursuit of oil-related interests in Azerbaijan" (Shorokhov 1996, p.6). Starting from 1997, the US got increasingly engaged in the exploration and transportation of Caspian oil, which boosted the

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the OSCE summit stipulated that the deployment of peacekeeping forces would have to wait for a political settlement, at which point its composition, financing, and chain of command would be determined.

confidence of the Azeri government in the US to the extent of requesting US co-chairmanship of the Minsk Group. More specifically, it is observed that "Azerbaijan's perception of US policy had grown in such confidence that Baku actually demanded Washington's participation in the Minsk Group, something that had hardly been imaginable a few years earlier" (Cornell 2001:378). Increasing US interests in the region, especially related to oil resources, correlated with greater participation in the conflict-resolution process. Currently much pressure is applied on both sides to reach an agreement, as Karabakh has acquired significance against the background of ongoing oil politics. President Bush organized talks in Florida for the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan and reportedly related that "…he considers peace in South Caucasus as a top priority of his administration's foreign policy" (Olcott 2001, p. 64). Some observers now believe that the Karabakh conflict is getting more attention from the international community, which has increased the likelihood of reaching a political settlement when compared to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Even though other conflicts in the South Caucasus receive less attention, the scholar maintains, a settlement reached in Karabakh would set an importunate precedent and have significant implications for similar ethnopolitical conflicts in the region.

It becomes conceivable at this point that various states and international mediation organizations have expended recourses, both driven with partial and impartial interests, to negotiate a lasting solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The success of the future conflict settlement, however, will not only be predicted on the determination of the Nagorno-Karabakh status, but also finding solutions to other entrenched disagreements and misunderstandings. Among these, it is argued, what often appears to be marginalized or merely forgotten is that " dialogue and confidence building between Armenians and Azerbaijanis may help speed up a political solution and provide basis for coexistence" (Crisis Group Report 2005, p.27). Indeed, the post-war years have created a huge gulf between the

Azeri and Nagorno-Karabakh communities. This is primarily due to the complete lack of progress on negotiations and is further compounded by Azerbaijan's intransigence and refusal to set up direct contacts between the communities and to carry out comprehensive trust-building measures with a view to overcome hostility. It is observed that "for many historical, geopolitical and economic factors, Azeris and Armenians living in and around the conflict zone are dependant on each other. Yet they are deeply divided by mistrust" (Crisis Group Report 2005, p.1.). Among Armenians, the report further notes, "…the ethnic prejudices are based on long-standing stereotypes that equate Azeris with Turks and attribute to them the ultimate aim of a new genocide (p. 25). Clearly, the fear of victimization and deprivation of basic needs like security and sense of justice marked by mutual deligitimization and dehumanization that are frequently voiced by both sides take on an existential character and promote the perpetuation of the conflict. The causes of conflict, as it becomes clear, combine objective and subjective factors, which are related to each other in a circular fashion. Conflicts focusing, for example, on issues like territory and resources almost invariably reflect and further magnify underlying concerns about security and identity. But, whatever their role in the causation of a conflict, subjective forces linked to basic needs and existential fears contribute heavily to its escalation and perpetuation. Such needs and fears create a resistance to change even in situations in which both parties, or significant elements of both parties, have concluded that it is in their best interests to end the conflict. Despite this perceived interest, the parties are often unable to extricate themselves from the escalatory dynamic in which they are caught up. Therefore genuine conflict resolution must address these needs and fears. If a conflict is to be resolved, in the sense of leading to a stable peace that both sides consider just and to a new relationship that is mutually enhancing and contributes to the welfare and development of the two societies, the solution must satisfy the fundamental needs and allay the deepest fears of the affected populations.

Abkhazia

The conflict over Abkhazia has both ethnic and territorial components and has been present in some form for a number of decades, but became particularly acute during and after the rule of Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whose pro-ethnic Georgian tendencies alienated the autonomous regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Adjaria. Although there is no opportunity here to consider the entire history of Abkhazia and its changing relationship to Georgia in a detailed form, it is important to emphasize one point: the Abkhazians and the Georgians refer to quite different historical phases to support their arguments for this or that status for Abkhazia. While the Georgians stress certain periods during the pre-Soviet era, in which Abkhazia was frequently integrated with parts of contemporary Georgia, the Abkhazians mention primarily the Soviet period, during which Abkhazia possessed the status of an autonomous republic, with its own governing structures and special quotas to ensure the participation of ethnic Abkhaz in the political system to an extent greater than that implied by their percentage in the population.[18] Thus both sides manipulate history for their own purposes, and arguments can be found for a variety of arrangements by making reference to different historical phases.

The demographic issue is a touchy one and deserves separate comment. While the Abkhaz made up only around 17% of the population in their autonomous republic, they argue that this situation is due to a number of historical injustices, not least the "Georgianization" carried out under Stalin and therefore insist on greater than proportional representation in political and cultural life.[19] This demographic weakness is one principal reason for the extreme

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[18] For a brief, relatively pro-Abkhaz account of the history of Abkhazia see Gueorgui Otyrba, "War in Abkhazia: The Regional Significance of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict" in Roman Szporluk (eds) <u>National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia</u>. Armonk, N.Y./London: Sharpe, 1994, pp. 281-309.

[19] As of January 1990, according to Ghia Nodia 1998, "…out of 537,000 inhabitants of Abkhazia, 44% were Georgian, 17% Abkhaz, 16% Russian and 15% Armenian. See "The Conflict in Abkhazia: National Projects and Political Circumstances" by Ghia Nodia 1998, in <u>Caucasian Regional Studies, Special Issues</u>, p. 7.

Abkhaz opposition to significant IDP return, which, as the analysis will reveal, is one of the major goals of UN involvement in the conflict.

The focus of this brief history is on the Soviet era and the initial years of Georgian independence. The beginning of the Soviet period was characterized by political and social turmoil in which, from March to December 1921, Abkhazia was an independent Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). At the end of 1921, the Abkhazian SSR united with the Georgian SSR under a Treaty of Union, which lasted for ten years. In 1931, Abkhazia's status was reduced to that of an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR. Thus by 1931 the situation had stabilized into the constellation which lasted until the end of the USSR in 1991. The degree to which pressure was exerted on Abkhazia to accede to the final change in status remains controversial; what is certain is that throughout the Soviet period cultural and political figures in Abkhazia consistently raised the question of granting the republic a higher status.[20]

In 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia actually proclaimed Abkhazia a full Union republic, which happened against the background of an extraordinary upsurge of nationalism in the rest of Georgia. Georgian nationalists at that time perceived Abkhazia as a threat to Georgian territorial integrity that could easily be manipulated by Russia. A dialogue, therefore, took place occasionally and was inconceivable with both sides adhering to extreme positions. Nationalist forces that came to power in Georgia further exacerbated the situation by taking a more aggressive stand toward the minorities and autonomous regions in the country by "…proclaiming [Georgia] an independent unitary state with no internal

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[20] According to Susan Steward 2003, in 1956, 1967 and 1978 Abkhaz party officials, supported by intellectuals in the republic, petitioned Moscow for a separation of Abkhazia from Georgia in exchange for incorporation within the Russian SFSR. Although unsuccessful in their primary aim, these efforts clearly pinpoint to the tradition in Abkhazia of protesting for a higher territorial status and more participation in political and cultural affairs.

boundaries and autonomous regions" (Tarkhan-Mouravi 1998, p.6). In July 1992, just as a ceasefire agreement in South Ossetia had been brokered due to the mediation efforts of Russian Federation, the Abkhazian legislature restored the draft of Abkhazian constitution of 1925, which did not consider Abkhazia a part of Georgia.[21] The following month Georgian troops entered Abkhazia on the pretext of protecting the rail lines and highways in light of pro-Gamsakhurdia (Zviadist) insurrection in Abkhazia and bordering regions, and encountered resistance by the Abkhazian militia. This constituted the beginning of a war which was to last more than a year.

In the course of fighting much resentment was created by the behavior of both sides, leading to a loss of trust between the Abkhaz and Georgians that is still a major stumbling block both to official negotiations and to reconciliation on the ground. The mainly ethnic Georgian IDPs which fled Abkhazia at that time and have since resettled under difficult conditions in other parts of Georgia have helped spread this mistrust of the Abkhaz within the broader Georgian population. The final Russian-brokered ceasefire came into effect in later October 1993, which has so far endured, albeit with several violations, with CIS peacekeeping forces deployed. A resolution of the conflict is not even in sight with Abkhazia insisting on full independence and Georgia proposing autonomous membership in the asymmetric federation. An additional problem is that of refugees, since Georgia refuses to negotiate on Abkhazia's status without a prior return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia. The Abkhaz on the other hand, demand that the definition of their status be addressed before the return of refugees.

International involvement in the conflict of Abkhazia started out on a very limited level and has increased over time. In the active phase of the conflict the main mediator, and to

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[21] According to Sabanadze 2002, the 1925 constitution defined Abkhazia as an independent state united with Georgia on the basis of a special union treaty.

some extent participant, of the conflict was the Russian Federation. The first goal of Russian involvement, it is maintained, was to force Georgia into the CIS and to guarantee long-term stationing of Russian bases on Georgian territory. After the humiliating defeat of the Georgian army near Sukhumi, both goals were achieved. Russia brokered a ceasefire with Georgia entering the CIS and signing an agreement on military bases.[22]

Although the UN was present in Abkhazia as early as September 1992 with a fact-finding mission, it is clear that the main international role in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict in the early stages was played by the Russian Federation. The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was established in 1993 by UN Security Council Resolution 858, just as the war between Georgia and Abkhazia was coming to a close and was originally limited to verifying compliance with the ceasefire agreement reached by the Georgian government and the Abkhaz authorities. Although heavy fighting ceased by this time, a viable ceasefire accord was not achieved until 1994, under Russian auspices. Thus by the time the UN became involved in serious attempts at conflict resolution, the Russian Federation had already established itself not only as a co-mediator, but also as a participant in the conflict with an extremely ambivalent role that posed a particular challenge to UN structures. To a large extent, it is maintained, "the UN was forced to play second fiddle to the Russian Federation and to attempt to incorporate the agreements the latter reached with the parties to the conflict into its mediation process" (Nodia 1998, p. 11.). The May 1994 ceasefire accord is a clear illustration of this phenomenon, the scholar argues, as it established a

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[22] The Georgia's entry into the CIS, Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi 1998 notes, as well as the opening of Russian military bases on Georgian territory (including one in Abkhazia) was achieved under pressure from the Russian Federation due to Georgian difficulties both in Abkhazia and with pro-Gamsakhurdia insurgents which jeopardized the integrity of the Georgian state. See Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi 1998, "The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict in a Regional Context" in Caucasian regional Studies, Special Issues, pp. 1-15.

Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force (CISPKF) agreed to by the parties and the Russian Federation without consulting the United Nations.[23]

In an attempt to integrate the Russian Federation into the UN peace process under consideration of its special role in the region a mechanism was devised which continues to characterize the constellation of actors at present. The Russian Federation, it is noted, received the role of 'facilitator', with UNOMIG officials, first in the form of a Special Envoy, then of a Special Representative to the Secretary General, representing the UN in negotiating efforts. The OSCE was also granted a small role in the process, often with observer status, but this organization has not played a significant part in mediation efforts.[24]

A number of UN agencies other than UNOMIG have been active in Abkhazia, particularly in the provision of humanitarian aid. UNHCR has the longest history of involvement, dating back at least to the Quadripartite Agreement of April 1994, because of the importance attached to a safe and voluntary return of refugees and IDPs. Later on UNDP, UNOCHA became involved to differing degrees in supplying assistance to Abkhazia, particularly the Gali region.[25]

Prior to the ceasefire agreement two other documents were signed, this time with the direct participation of UN mediators: a "Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement" and the so-called "Quadripartite Agreement" establishing a commission consisting of representatives from the parties, UNHCR and the Russian Federation. This agreement

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[23] Although this force continues to function under the aegis of the CIS, the military units provided have been primarily or exclusively Russian. Nonetheless, the CIS must periodically approve an extension of the peacekeepers' mandate.

[24] It was agreed that the UN should take the lead in the peace process in Abkhazia and the OSCE in South Ossetia, and this decision has been largely adhered to, although the OSCE is present in a joint UN/OSCE human rights office in Sukhumi. See Olivier Paye and Eric Remacle, 1996 "UN and CSCE Policies in Transcaucasia", in Bruno Coppieters (ed.) Contested Borders in the Caucasus. Brussels: VUB Press, pp.103-136.

[25] Due to UN respect for Georgian territorial integrity, even UN humanitarian aid has been provided inadequately to Abkhazia proper, which has, especially in the 1990s, been primarily the province of international NGOs. The main UN assistance efforts have been concentrated on the Gali region, to which most (ethnic Georgian) refugees and IDPs were returning.

stipulated that conditions would be created for the rapid return of Georgian refugees and IDPs to Abkhazian territory. Although the Agreement was to become a cornerstone of UN activity in Abkhazia, its implementation has consistently been thwarted by the Abkhaz side, and aside from spontaneous repatriation, the number of refugees and IDPs to return to Abkhazia has been small. The necessity of working with the Russian Federation and the CIS has continued throughout the last decade and The Secretary General places this cooperation in a positive light:

> This [expanding the mandate of UNOMIG to include monitoring the CIS peacekeeping force] will be a further step in the new direction of cooperation in peace-keeping activities between the United Nations and regional organizations and alliances, as has already been done with the organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I am confident that the first joint venture between the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Independent States will enhance the effectiveness of efforts by States to promote peace and security in a troubled era. (UN Document S/1994/818, 1994, 6-7.)

While there is something to be said for the Secretary General's argument in general terms, it is nonetheless doubtful whether or not this cooperation has indeed increased effectiveness in the promotion of peace in the Abkhazian case. On the one hand, the coordination between the UN and the CISPKF appears to have gone fairly smoothly. It also seems safe to argue that communication between the UN and the Russian Federation has been significantly enhanced by this coordination as well as by the joint negotiating mechanism with Russia as facilitator, since without this special role devised for the Russian Federation, the two negotiating tracks would likely have become more polarized and less integrated than they currently are. On the other hand, this structure has not kept Russia "…from engaging itself in the conflict on a variety of levels, which has complicated the constellation of forces involved and has prevented negotiation efforts from being centered on one forum" (MacFarlane 1999, p. 19). This arrangement has been viewed by a number of outside observers as hindering an ultimate resolution.

It became clear early on with regard to UN activity relating to Abkhazia that the question of establishing the region's political status was to be given utmost importance. In this regard the results of negotiations held in Geneva in February 1994 are still typical for the discussion today in that there is still a "...significant difference of opinion over the issue of the territorial integrity of Georgia and the relationship of Abkhazia to Georgia" (Tarkhan-Mouravi 1998, p. 19). The Abkhaz side, it is argued, declined to sign any document that included recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity and this has therefore been a key obstacle throughout the negotiation process. Moreover, since the UN is comprised of states and primarily recognizes their territorial integrity, it has been unable to retreat from this position to arrange negotiations on the political status of Abkhazia beginning from a neutral standpoint rather than assuming the territorial integrity of Georgia. As a result, the scholar postulates, the UN is distrusted by the Abkhaz due to its stance on territorial integrity and has therefore become the victim of attempts at manipulation by the Georgian government, which continues to hope that by increasing the UN role in the peace process it can turn the negotiations in its favor.[26] The Abkhaz, on the other hand, while fully aware that the Russian Federation is only a partial ally, still prefer it to the UN, since although Russia has repeatedly supported Georgian territorial integrity, its actions on the ground often belie official statements.

In other words, the initial period of UN activity in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict illustrated both the necessity of and the difficulties involved in coordinating UN efforts with the Russian Federation, as well as the UN tendency to place the question of political status in the forefront of the negotiations. This tendency proved to be extremely problematic for the UN role as mediator, given its bias in favor of Georgian territorial integrity.

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[26] Tarkhan-Mouravi 1998 further notes that the Georgian strategy has recently shifted away from the UN toward the USA, in hopes that the latter might be willing to intervene on the side of Georgia in the conflict over Abkhazia.

It is also worth noting that in 1996 the so-called 'Friends of Georgia' were introduced into the mediation process, later renamed 'Friends of the Secretary- General on Georgia', as the previous name was considered a to imply a pro-Georgian bias. This group, consisting of the Russian Federation, the USA, France, Germany, and Great Britain, is called to "…consult and advise the Secretary-General on specific issues, usually related to a crisis" (Stewart 2003, p. 15).The name change meant little, however, as the Group of Friends was still viewed by Abkhaz authorities as supporting the UN line of territorial integrity, and not without reason, as it was indeed a mechanism created under UN auspices. One noteworthy development during this period was a decision in 1997 by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides to set up a coordination commission to deal with practical matters. This commission has contributed a great deal of support for small humanitarian and development projects in Abkhazia, and is frequently praised by the UN for its activity.[27] Nevertheless, while the Georgian authorities supported development projects which would link Abkhazia more securely to the rest of Georgia, their Abkhaz counterparts backed initiatives which they believed would make Abkhazia more self-sufficient. As a consequence, the UNOMIG was criticized by various Abkhaz officials and by a negative Abkhaz media campaign which increased angry sentiments among the Abkhazian population. Further criticism came from IDPs who accused UNOMIG of doing too little to reduce hostilities in Gali. In light of the developments described above, this statement of the Secretary General in July 1988 must be met with significant reservations:

> Not only does the Mission's presence continue to be a stabilizing factor in the area and to provide useful support for the political process, but it also helps to create a sense of confidence and security among the local population of the Gali district, to which most of the refugees and internally displaced persons are expected to return. (UN Document S/1998/375, 11 May 1998)

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[27] According to Stewart 2003, it also serves as a reminder that the parties, rather than the UN, are the actors which appear most likely to have a significant impact on developments in the peace process.

The period 1995-98 thus delivered one disappointment after another in the Georgian-Abkhazian peace process. Despite the introduction of various new mechanisms to ease the path toward a political settlement, the UN did not manage to achieve any noteworthy results. This, as it is clear, was primarily due to UNOMIG's insistence on emphasizing the issues of Abkhazia's political status and IDP return to the Gali district, since in neither of these spheres were attractive offers made to the Abkhaz side. The continued insecure situation in the Gali district as well as the periodic crises there and in the Kodori valley suggest that genuine progress in increasing stability has not been achieved. If there is a justification for a continued UNOMIG presence in the region, however, it would seem to lie more in the area of stabilization measures than in that of mediation.

Finally, in 2003 a high-level brainstorming session was held in Geneva with the participation of senior representatives of the Group of Friends. However, the goal of generating fresh, innovative ideas for dealing with the conflict was not achieved. Instead, it is argued, "old mechanisms and principles were recycled and upgraded, creating the impression that the Group of Friends either failed to generate any imaginative ideas or was not overly concerned about introducing a new dynamism into the settlement efforts" (Stewart 2003, p. 20). Although the mere fact of participation both by Georgian and Abkhaz sides in the meeting with the Group of Friends is contended to represent a success, the content which emerged during the meeting pointed to the continued difference in concerns between the two sides. While the Georgians emphasized IDP return to the Gali district, the Abkhaz stressed issues of security and the need to ensure that violence would be rejected as a method of conflict resolution.

On the whole, then, it becomes conceivable that no tangible success has been made so far along the conflicting lines in Abkhazia and the hostility and rejection of the other side still govern the interactions of the afflicted societies. Clearly, the dynamics of conflict

interactions, as was evident from the meetings and negotiations held under the UN auspices, tend to entrench the parties firmly in their own hostile perspectives which, apart from failing to contribute to a revision of the enemy image, actually help to reinforce and perpetuate it. Interactions guided by such hostile images of the enemy impose severe constraints on the ability of leaders to explore peaceful options and, instead, induce the parties to conflict to engage in antagonistic actions by seeing the peace process as leading to an agreement that in no way addresses their particular needs which, among other things, involves the acute security concerns constantly articulated by the Abkhaz side. In protracted conflicts, of course there is a strong tendency to see the security concerns as a zero-sum in nature and assume that one's own security and identity can be protected or enhanced only by depriving the other side of them. But since these needs are not by nature exclusive, addressing them may offer possibilities for a mutually satisfactory solution. If the parties can probe behind their incompatible positions and explore the underlying needs that engender these positions, they may be able to contribute to a transformation of the conflict, both preparing the respective societies for an eventual reconciliation and improving relations among the political actors in order to increase the conflict's ripeness for settlement.

South Ossetia

South Ossetia is another autonomous region in Georgia which has become the scene of ethnopolitical struggle triggered by the heightened nationalist movements that characterized the Georgian preparations for independence from the Soviet Union and nation-state restoration. Since the formation of the Soviet Union, according to Cornell 2001, the Ossetians have been divided between the Russian Federation and Georgia in two autonomous units, the North Ossetian ASSR and the South Ossetian AO. With the annexation of Georgia by Russia, the two component parts of the Ossetian people were united under the same state. Georgia's separation from Russia in 1918 meant that the South Ossetians were cut off from their compatriots in the north and "…the Ossetian fears were hardly eliminated when the Georgian leadership pledged to guarantee all political and social rights for the minorities living in Georgia…" (Cornell 2001, p. 151). Interestingly, these concerns were justified later on, since the South Ossetians became particularly angered by a law enacted in 1988 which strengthened the position of the Georgian language throughout the entire territory and was perceived by the latter as an overt threat to their cultural identity and security.[28] Entrenchment in the relations took the form of belligerent declarations and manifestations and eventuated in South Ossetians responding to this perceived threat by seeking greater autonomy, and eventually separation from Georgia.

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[28] In August 1989, Nodia 1992 notes, the Supreme Council of Georgia put forward a Georgian language program. Though Georgian at this time already was the state language of the republic, with some of the minority languages having equal status in minority areas, this was a tightening stressing that Georgian should be used in all public spheres of society. This program involved not only increased use of the Georgian language, but also, for example, a Georgian language test for entry into higher education, programs for the promotion of Georgian history, the institutionalization of previously unofficial Georgian national holidays, creation of republican military units comprising only Georgians, and the resettlement of Georgians in areas dominated by minorities. These measures, although understandable in the process of Georgian state building, increased the insecurity felt by the minorities.

The first explicit tensions thus date back to 1988-89, when nationalist movements in Georgia were gaining strength and, consequently, straining relations between Georgia and its autonomies. As a result, Cornell 2001 notes, South Ossetia demanded to be upgraded from the status of Autonomous Region to Autonomous Republic-the status previously enjoyed by Abkhazia- and sent a petition to Moscow asking for the unification of North and South Ossetians. When Gamsakhurdia came to power, one of the first decisions he made was to abolish the autonomous status of Ossetia, thus triggering further escalation of the conflict. In retrospect, Shevardnadze would acknowledge that "the conflict in South Ossetia had been the grossest mistake of the former Georgian leadership" (cited in Cornell 2001, p. 153). Shevardnadze's regime showed a more conciliatory approach to the South Ossetian problem but was unable to stop the fighting that continued throughout 1992 with Georgian artillery attacks on Tskinvali. At this point relations with Russia deteriorated significantly and the gravity of the situation was instrumental in engineering a rapprochement between Shevardnadze and Yeltsin who signed a ceasefire agreement in 1992. The same year, peacekeeping forces were set up consisting of Russian, Georgian and Ossetian forces. The ceasefire has held ever since, and even though a negotiated solution to the conflict is yet to be found, there has been some progress made on the grassroots level.

The main international agency involved in the South Ossetian conflict was the OSCE. In 1993, MacFarlane 1999 contends, the UN and OSCE agreed that the international lead on resolving the conflict in Abkhazia should be taken by the UN, while that in the South Ossetia should be managed by the OSCE. The main task of the OSCE was to monitor the ceasefire protected by the tripartite peacekeeping forces headed by the Russians. However, given the relatively well-functioning ceasefire, the mission was extended to include measures for conflict resolution. In particular, it was decided to expand the OSCE mission to Georgia and to complete the original objectives by a number of development-oriented proceedings such as

the promotion of respect for human rights, free media, democratization and institution-building. In relation to the Georgian-Ossetia conflict, the objectives included the creation of a broader political framework, in which a lasting political settlement could be achieved, as well as the organization of round tables and discussions in order to identify and eliminate sources of tension and extend political reconciliation (OSCE Mission Survey 2001, p. 2-4). In Ossetia, both through formal and informal channels, progress has been made on issues such as trade, return of refugees, demilitarization, exchanges between Georgian and Ossetian NGOs and reconstruction. It is pointed out that, unlike in Abkhazia, the economic and humanitarian programs here have not been made conditional on a final political settlement but have been supported by the injection of international funding. The EU and the UNDP have allocated several million dollars for the economic development of South Ossetia, while the OSCE and international NGOs such as Links and Vertic have facilitated direct contacts between Georgian and Ossetian NGOs, journalists, academics, business and government representatives (MacFarlane 1999, pp. 27-29). Moreover, the UNDP country office in Georgia has developed a special program for the rehabilitation of the Tskhinvali region with the objective to assist the Georgian government in finding a rapid and peaceful solution to the conflict by supporting the normalization of relations. Among the activities performed, the scholar mentions, are the repair of basic infrastructure in selected villages, restoration of telephone lines, rehabilitation of roads and bridges, as well as the support of newly returned local farmers and families. It should be noted that the UNDP attempted to undertake a similar rehabilitation program for Abkhazia and sent its first needs assessment mission in 1998. A number of donors, including the USA and the EU, committed several million dollars for reconstruction and other assistance program, but the initiative failed because the two conflicting parties could not agree on its implementation.

Another important factor contributing to the relative normalization of Georgian-Ossetian relations, according to Cornell 2001, is the role of Russia. From the ceasefire agreement up until the present, the scholar observes, neither the Russian government nor the peacekeepers on the ground have obstructed the return of refugees and the relative stabilization. In particular, from 1997 to 1998, the UNHCR together with the Norwegian Council of Refugees helped almost 800 families return to the conflict zone. Although the trade links and transportation have indeed intensified significantly between Georgia and Ossetia, the latter has also become the main route of smuggling and illegal trade. Economic support of the Ossetian government from Russia has also diminished substantially partly owing to Russia's increasing preoccupation with its own problems in the North Caucasus. If Georgia were in a stronger economic position, the scholar notes, this would be the time to make a greater contribution to the restructuring and rehabilitation of South Ossetia and thus its reintegration into the Georgian economy. However, economic difficulties in Georgia proper do not allow for such engagement in the region and leave South Ossetia more dependent on international aid. In short, although South Ossetia has shown more promise of conflict resolution, any settlement there seems tied to the Abkhazia conflict where, despite the signing of framework agreements early in the peace process, there has been little meaningful trading of benefits and concessions, and the irreconcilability in the public positions of the parties has not been dented.

<u>Stages of International Involvement</u>

The analysis of international responses to ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus suggests that the international community has largely perceived the South Caucasus as a single unit and has developed a pattern of involvement with very limited variations across the cases. The two main international agencies tasked to perform mediation and conflict resolution functions have been the OSCE and the United Nations. In addition to mediation efforts much of the humanitarian and development-oriented assistance has been provided both to the conflict zones directly and to the South Caucasian states more broadly. The variations across time, however, have been quite significant. It has started with the complete acceptance of Russia's special rights and interests and evolved into the acceptance of region's strategic importance to the international community. In this connection, three broad stages of international involvement in the South Caucasus are set down by Subanadze 2002, which can roughly be characterized as the following: the first stage of Russian dominance and international neglect lasting from 1991 to 1994. The second stage of international organizations roughly corresponding to the period 1994-97, during which international organizations took a more active stance both in terms of conflict resolution and in general support of the newly independent states. The third and current stage characterized as that of balancing Russia and increasing US involvement.[29] It is worth pointing out, however, that there is much overlap of the three stages. For instance it is hard to draw a strict line between the first and the second stages and identify the exact time and extent of activation of international organizations. At the same time, the decrease of Russian dominance is a relative

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[29] Somewhat different division, it should be noted, is suggested by Cornell 2001, in which the scholar classifies the international involvement in the South Caucasus into four broad phases: beginning with the Western predominance and Russian weakness; reassertion of Russian interests in the region as a shift underlying the second stage; the third phase being characterized by increasing co-operation and confidence-building between the Western institutions and Russia; and, finally, the current stage as that of balancing the Russian and US interests.

term and one has to keep in mind that Russia has continued to be an important player throughout all three stages of international involvement. The division above, however, is mostly employed for analytical purposes to illustrate the evolving pattern of international engagement and identify the changing real or perceived obstacles to settling ethnopolitical conflicts in the region.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the period of 1991-94, Sabanadze 2002 notes, international organizations and Western powers started to slowly enter the former Soviet space by opening up regional offices and local representations. However, apart from symbolic and rather limited activities, the international community did not take great interest in the fate of the newly independent states. On the contrary, the persistent Soviet legacy contributed to the "…perception of these emerging new states as Russian satellites that belonged to the Russian sphere of influence and required no external interference in their internal trouble" (Sabanadze 2002, p. 20). Michael Lund in his East-West Institute report well summarizes the position of the United States towards the South Caucasus in the early 1990s, which largely corresponds to the general Western position towards the region:

> The US did not take an active interest in the Caucasus region and tended to regard it as lying within a Russian sphere of influence that implicitly accepted the Russian notion of the so-called "near - abroad". As the 1990s unfolded, however, several factors led the US increasingly develop a more explicit set of goals and policies towards the Caucasus and to build the bilateral relations with each of the three independent governments there. (Lund 1996, 6)

The above position of the international community, the scholar argues, coincided with the active phase of ethnopolitical conflicts in the region, allowing Russia to step in as the only "legitimate" power to mediate the conflicts and "…even use them for furthering its own strategic interests" (Lund 1996, p.17). The reason, as noted, is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was preoccupied with the possible loss of her military presence in the southern tier states and a restriction of her access to the Black Sea. By the beginning of 1993, neither Georgia nor Azerbaijan had agreed to join the CIS. Azerbaijan also

refused to allow Russian troops on its territory and despite heavy pressure from Moscow continues to remain the only state in the South Caucasus free of Russian military presence. Under these circumstances, the scholar observes, "maturing ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus presented an opportunity for Russia to pressure the newly independent states back into its sphere of dominance" (Lund 1996, p. 22). In both Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, Russia also tried to organize mediation talks in parallel to those of the OSCE and the UN often without cooperating or even informing the international participants. According to the American representative of the OSCE in Karabakh, John Maresca:

> At first, Russia fully supported the Minsk Group. But in 1993 Russia reactivated its earlier independent mediation effort… Russia wished to reestablish its dominance in the region and to exclude outsiders, namely the US and Turkey… Moscow would like to re-establish control of the former (Azerbaijani) Soviet frontier with Turkey and Iran, and to share in Azerbaijan's oil riches… For leverage, the Russians have used an implicit but dramatic threat if Azerbaijan does not comply, Russia will step up its backing for Armenia… with disastrous military results for the Azeris. (cited in Cornell 2001, 113)

The patterns of Russian involvement in the conflicts of South Caucasus, it is further argued, suggest that Russians used the conflicts in order to exert pressure on the South Caucasian states and force them into accepting its rules and preferences. To be more exact, the "…classic example here was the manipulation of Georgia's conflicts to secure Georgia's accession to the CIS and long-term leases on military facilities in Georgia" (Cornell 2001, p. 114). After the humiliating defeat in Sukhumi, Georgia agreed to join the CIS and prolong the Russian military presence on its territory, while Russia recognized the territorial integrity of Georgia and imposed economic sanctions on Abkhazia. Both Georgia and Azerbaijan had been extremely disappointed with the passive, observer role of the international community, which has effectively pushed them back into the sphere of Russian influence. Both countries, it is argued, had made significant concessions and thus saved their recently acquired independent statehood and nominal territorial integrity. Russia, on the other hand, succeeded

in temporarily weakening South Caucasian states and restoring its influence over the region. On the positive side, Russian mediation did stop the fighting on the ground and brokered a fragile peace, which later enabled the greater involvement of international and non-governmental organizations. From 1994, both the UN and the OSCE had their mandates expanded in the conflict zones and the overall role of international organizations in the region increased. This development, to follow the division suggested by Sabanadze 2002, marks the second stage of international involvement in the South Caucasus, coinciding with the attempts of the local governments, especially of Georgia and Azerbaijan, to pursue a strategy aimed at increasing international involvement in the conflict. In 1995, for example, UNOMIG in Abkhazia increased from 40 to 136 members and received an extended mandate to monitor the activities of the peacekeeping force and verify that troops of heavy military equipment remained outside of the security zone. Similarly, it was tasked to investigate reported or alleged violations of the ceasefire agreement and attempt to resolve such incidents (UNOMIG mission survey 2001, pp 12-13). At the same time, the range of general assistance programs to Georgia and Armenia increased significantly by growing US interests in the region. The US Agency for International Development launched a number of development-oriented programs and even though the United States did not follow an explicit and integrated policy toward conflict prevention and resolution in the Caucasus, the concern over these conflicts did underlie the array of US government activities. According to Michael Lund, "the programs such as economic reform to marketwise economies and assistance for building democratic institutions are themselves the best antidotes against the emergence of violent conflicts" (Lund 1999, p. 7). In particular, the position of the United States has become more focused on conflict resolution activities in the recent years, especially since the US discovered strategic and oil-related interests in the region. A 1997 speech of Deputy State Secretary Strobe Talbott, for example, marks the turning point in the US policy towards the

South Caucasus and, following the division above, the beginning of the third stage of more active international involvement to an extent of balancing and challenging Russia's dominant position. In his speech, Talbott made it clear that:

> It matters profoundly to the Unites States, what will happen in an area that sits on as much as two hundred billion barrels of oil. That is yet another reason why conflict-resolution must be the job one for US policy in the region: it is both the prerequisite for, and an accompaniment to, energy development. (cited in Cornell 2001, 52)

The oil riches of the Caspian basin, it is argued, put the region in the spotlight of great power interests and consequently intensified international efforts to resolve the conflicts. As pointed out in the USIP report by Patricia Carley, "the current fever over oil pipeline routes elevated the existing ethnopolitical conflicts from obscure regional strife to a significant source of concern for international political and business leaders" (Carley 1998:1). The positive results from the increasing US involvement in the region, however, are yet to follow. What is clear is that the ongoing oil politics has brought further complications to the region by deepening the existing political divisions and turning the region into a scene of intensified regional and great power rivalry. More specifically, Azerbaijan and Georgia find themselves on the same side as the United States, supporting exploration and transportation of Caspian oil through non-Russian routes. These projects are expected to diminish their dependence on Russia and consequently to loosen Russia's grip on the region. Armenia, on the other hand, continues to be Russia's main ally in the region given its traditional fear of Turkey and has therefore sided with Russia and Iran, creating an alternative and opposing alliance. Such intra-regional divisions significantly complicate the possibility of constructive regional cooperation both in political and economic spheres, which in turn could have provided ground for the resolution of ethnopolitical conflicts. In spite of the clear shift in US policy towards greater involvement in the South Caucasus and the alleged retreat of Russia's dominating power, the question of ethnopolitical conflicts remains unresolved.

Types of International Involvement

Traditional analysis of international involvement in conflicts focuses on the mediation efforts, peacekeeping operations, as well as on rehabilitation and assistance programs provided by the international donors. As such, international efforts in the South Caucasus have been directed at the liberalization of economies and the democratization of civil and political activities, with an underlying assumption that liberal democracies are inherently stable and peaceful. It is maintained that support of democracy is an element of security policy and therefore the prime objective of US policy in the Caspian area was "…the formation of democratic institutions, because they are the guarantors of stability and prosperity" (MacFarlane 1999, p. 3). In terms of conflict resolution, it is argued, international involvement brought to the South Caucasus recently developed ideas in the West with regard to "power-sharing systems," respect of ethnic minorities, "group- differentiating rights," as well as multiculturalism and cultural tolerance. Some of these ideas and norms are new to the region and are waiting to be implemented and tested as proposed solutions to the ethnopolitical conflicts in the newly independent states of the former Soviet space with the international backing and support. It is a commonly held assumption that democracies do not go to war with each other and open trading economies also see no incentives in waging wars. Therefore, democratization of the emerging states, according to the analyst, serves Western interests in their stability as trading and political partners. However, in other cases geopolitical considerations come into conflict with liberal commitments and undermine the coherence of the international agenda. One obvious example of the above inconsistence in the South Caucasus, the scholar observes, is the case of Azerbaijan. Clearly, Azerbaijan is not a model democracy and "…special efforts have to be made in order for Azerbaijan to avoid oil inflicted inequality and authoritarian underdevelopment" (MacFarlane 1999, p. 8). Yet, given the pro-American attitude of the current Azerbaijani government and the US interest in

Caspian oil resources, democracy and respect for human rights has stopped being the top international and especially American priority over the past few years. Similarly, the commitment of the United States to prevent Iran from emerging as a significant regional player in the Caucasus is strong enough to sacrifice some elements of the liberalization agenda.

Furthermore, given the proliferation of ethnic conflicts on the basis of conflicting rights of self-determination and territorial integrity, some Western scholars and practitioners started to "…reinterpret self-determination not as independence, but rather as a recognized autonomy based on principles of cultural protection, self-government, and other mechanisms that ensure the protection of collective identity" (MacFarlane 1999, p. 12). This new interpretation of self-determination, the scholar argues, provides the basis for the proposed solutions to the existing ethnic conflicts and minority related problems both in the South Caucasus and in other parts of the world. Moreover, acceptance of these ideas is often a precondition for membership in international organizations and supranational institutions such as the EU and requires a change of perceptions with regard to minority-majority relations, identification with a particular state and an understanding of shared statehood. This, it is noted, can be characterized as an "ideational aspect of international involvement" which has created further complications and impediments regarding the final settlement of the conflicts.

It is worth noting that the example of the former Soviet Union, including that of the South Caucasus, is often evoked as an illustration for the need of greater respect for group identity, autonomy and culture. Previously, it is argued, the major emphasis was put on individual human rights and only later on has it become increasingly clear that "ethnopolitical conflicts cannot be resolved simply by ensuring the respect of basic individual rights" (Kymlicka 1996, p. 3). The extreme individualism of the liberal tradition has come under increasing

attack since it "…failed to recognize rights of minority cultures and grant due importance to group identification in the contemporary world of globalization and ethnopolitical struggles" (Kymlicka 1996, p. 3). As a result, the international organizations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the UN have all adopted different declarations on the rights of national minorities, minority languages, and indigenous rights. The protection of ethnic minorities through different forms of political recognition is also a guiding principle for the settlement of ethnopolitical conflicts in which organizations such as the OSCE and the UN are actively involved. Moreover, according to Alexander Rondeli, the post-Communist states inherited a political culture that "…lacks democratic traditions, elements of civil society, mutual trust and a culture of dialogue" (Rondeli 1997, p. 21). Under such circumstances state building turned out to be a painful and conflict-ridden process, and has "…revealed the extreme weakness of civic elements of nationhood and the corresponding emphasis on ethnicity" (Rondeli 1997, p. 23). In the context of collapsing state structures and social security, it is noted, the identification with one's ethnic kin became extremely important and further strengthened the role of ethnicity as a prime source of personal identification.

Finally, it is worth noting that the interpretation of self-determination as based on principles of cultural protection, self-government, group differentiation and other concepts often referred to as conflict-preventing appears to be too simplistic to be squarely applied in all ethnic conflicts, including those of in the South Caucasus. A good example is the Basque country, which enjoys one of the widest cultural and political autonomies available to an ethnic group in Europe, but the violent struggle of the Basques for independence has not ended. Similarly, even if the Karabakh Armenians had been granted extended autonomy within the independent Azerbaijan, the conflict would have occurred nevertheless.

Conclusion: Implications for Conflict Resolution.

In order to evaluate how much has been accomplished by the international involvement in the South Caucasus, it is important to clarify what the initial objectives were and how adequately the mediation efforts were tailored to the fundamental needs and concerns of the conflicting societies. As such, it is difficult to identify a coherent international agenda, since it involves Western states and institutions as well as regional powers with competing claims and interests. Much of the international involvement in the ethnopolitical conflicts of the South Caucasus has been motivated by the geopolitical interests. The result has been a greater integration of the South Caucasian states into the international community, as well as increasing confidence in the sustainability of their political independence. More targeted international assistance has also contributed to the resolution of refugee crises especially in Georgia and to the alleviation of humanitarian consequences of internal destruction and warfare. If, however, the prime objective of international involvement was the resolution of ethnopolitical conflicts in a sustainable way, then not much has been accomplished.

On the whole, then, no tangible success has been made along the conflicting lines and the hostility and rejection of the other side still govern the interactions of the afflicted societies. The conflict, particularly in the case of south Caucasian protracted ethnopolitical struggles, becomes an inescapable part of daily life for the members of the opposing communities. The conflict pervades the whole society and its component elements not only when it takes the form of explicit violence, but also when the violence is muted. Hence, without denying the importance of objectively anchored national interests, the primacy of the state in the international system and the role of power in international relations, the cognizance of the social-psychological dimensions underlying the south Caucasian conflicts entails that these conflicts must also be conceived as societal and intersocietal processes that come about through the actions and interactions of large numbers of individuals who, in turn, function

through a variety of groups and organizations and who are propelled by collective needs and states of consciousness with deep historical roots, security and identity threats. These needs include not only obvious material ones such as shelter, resources physical safety but also, and very centrally, psychological needs such as identity, security, recognition and a sense of justice. Closely related to these basic needs in the three conflict situations are fears about the denial of the needs-fears focusing, for example, on perceived threats to security and identity that are clearly articulated in Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts. In Karabakh conflict, such fears often take existential character, turning the conflict into a struggle over group survival, in which each side sees its very existence as a national group at stake. Therefore, although the parties may recognize that it is to their advantage to find a negotiated solution, they are afraid to go to the negotiating table. Or, having reluctantly gone to the table, they are afraid to make the necessary concessions or accommodations for the negotiations to move forward. They worry that once they enter negotiations or-having entered negotiation-once they make certain concessions, they will find themselves on a slippery slope, and will inexorably be moving, concession after concession, toward an outcome that will leave their very existence compromised. In other words**,** identity, security, and similarly powerful collective needs and fears and concerns about survival associated with them, are important factors in Caucasian conflicts which appear to receive marginal importance both in scholarly discourse and in actual conflict resolution efforts.

The analysis also reveals that the conflicting parties have strong tendencies to find evidence that confirms their negative images of each other and to resist evidence that counters these images. Expressions in word and action of hostility and distrust toward the enemy greatly contribute to the escalatory dynamic of conflict interaction and are not just spontaneous manifestations of the conflict, but are normatively prescribed behaviors. Both leaders and publics operate under norms that require them to be militant and unyielding

against the other side, accuse the other of misdeeds, remain suspicious of their intentions, and deny all justice to their cause. Political leaders assume that their public's evaluation of them depends on their adherence to these norms and may go out of their way to avoid appearing weak or susceptible. These tendencies are also reflected in the leaders' tactical and strategic decisions, the way they approach negotiations with the other side, their public pronouncements, and, ultimately, the way they educate their own publics. For the publics, in turn, adherence to these norms is often taken as an indication of group loyalty, since those who acknowledge that there may be some justice on the other side or propose a conciliatory posture may expose themselves to accusations of treason. Thus interaction not only fails to contribute to the revision of the enemy image, but actually helps to reinforce and perpetuate it.

It follows from this view that if the South Caucasian conflicts are to be resolved, in the sense of leading to a stable peace that both sides consider just and to a new relationship that is mutually enhancing and contributes to the welfare and development of the two societies, the solution must satisfy the fundamental needs and allay the deepest fears of the affected populations. Conflict resolution, in other words, does not imply that past historical grievances and security threats have been forgotten and consistently harmonious processes have all of a sudden been put in a place. It simply implies that a process has been set into motion that addresses the central needs and fears of the societies and establishes continuing mechanisms to confront them.

A parallel assumption, at the level of practice, underlies interactive problem solving or similar social-psychologically based forms of unofficial diplomacy. These may include interactive problem solving workshops that provide opportunity of forming coalitions across the conflict lines. Problem solving workshops, for example, are governed by a "non-fault principle," which evades efforts to establish who is right and who is wrong from a legal or a

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moral standpoint. Although the parties' differing views of rights and wrongs must be discussed since they contribute significantly to the dynamics of the conflict, the assumption is that the parties cannot find a solution by adjudicating these differing views. Rather, they must move toward a solution by jointly discovering mutually satisfactory ways of dealing with the issues that divide them. Insofar as they arrive at a solution that addresses the fundamental needs of both parties, justice is being done, not perfect justice, but enough to ensure the prospects for a durable peace. Thus, commitment to a solution that is responsive to the basic concerns of the two parties is of paramount importance for reaching a durable peace.

Furthermore, involvement of opposition elements of conflicting societies into dialogue might be another option for reducing the tensions between the parties to conflict, since opposition elements are often effective in appropriating the definition of group loyalty and are able to appeal to the collective memories and fears of wide segments of population. Clearly, the leaders perusing a policy of accommodation have to consider the reaction of opposition elements, who may accuse them of betraying the national cause or exposing to risk the nation's existence. Also, they have to be responsive to the anxieties and doubts within the general population, which opposition elements foster and from which they draw support. In all these ways, internal divisions introduce severe constraints on efforts at conflict resolution.

Finally, "pre-negotiated and reciprocated acknowledgements," widely used throughout the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, might also be particularly relevant for the Karabakh conflict, since the national narratives of the conflicting parties, just as in the former case, powerfully clash. Within this framework, the parties to conflict engage in a process of formulating jointly balanced statements, by acknowledging the other's humanity, grievances, or commitment to peace in which the initiator is expected to receive a visible return. Such acknowledgements

do not constitute acceptance of the other's position or accession to its claims, but at least serve to recognize that there is some legitimacy to these positions and claims and some basis for them in the other's experience. The overall import of agreed acknowledgements is that under complicated conditions, the parties may feel safer about entering negotiations, despite the risks and uncertainties.

The central argument is that such approaches can make significant contributions to the resolution of south Caucasian conflicts and ought to become integral parts of a comprehensive model of diplomacy. They do not, however, provide an alternative to official diplomacy or a substitute for binding negotiations. Their value, again, depends on identifying the appropriate points of entry into larger diplomatic process. What is needed is to address such assumptions systematically as well as develop a synergy between the official and unofficial levels of diplomacy in which a problem-solving workshop can be through of as a laboratory where a product is being created for export.

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