

Autonomy as a source of conflict

IREn5019 No War, No Peace: Frozen Conflicts in the Caucasus
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Historical Overview

The Caucasus: civilizations and regions met, bridge and barrier for communication between north and south.

- The Caucasus is the point where Russia, Iran and Turkey meet. For most of the 19th century, the three powers dueled for dominance of the region.

- Russia – main force which determined the development in the South Caucasus region for more than two centuries.

Historical overview

- Georgia under Russian control since 1783, Chechnya and Dagestan since 1859.
- In 1801 the Georgian protectorate - Georgia's annexation to Russia.
- Russian attempts to control over the region led to the conquest of a number of Khanates in 1806-1809 and ultimately to the first Russia-Persian war 1812-1813.
- The treaty of Gulistan 1813.
- The treaty of Turkmanchai in 1828 - Russia successfully achieved its control over the Caucasus.
- 1921-1991 Soviet period.

Russia's interests

Trade interests,

Colonization intentions

Strategic considerations.

In dealing with the Caucasus people Russia followed these guidelines:

1. Refrain from anything that could weaken their perception of our power.
2. Establish commercial relations so as to generate among them needs that they still do not feel.
3. Maintain continuous state of dissension among their diverse nations and never forget that their unity could be fatal for us.
4. Introduce among them the light of Christianity.
5. Absolutely prevent them from the possibility of links with Turkey and Persia.

Peter the Great - to transform Russia to a great European power.

Persian Territorial Losses after the Gulistan Treaty of 1813 and the Turkmanchai Treaty of 1828



Sovietization of the Caucasus

- During the latter part of the 19th century and for most of the Soviet period, the Soviet position in the Caucasus ran along the frontier with Turkey and Persia (later Iran).
- During the Russian revolution 1917 -Transcaucasian Federation was born (the Georgian Mensheviks, the Azerbaijan Musavat party and the Dashnaks).
- The South Caucasus separated from Russia and declare its independence in 1918. In 1918 three democratic republic were declared, Azerbaijan and Georgian and Armenian Democratic Republics.

Sovietization of the Caucasus

- By 31.05.1920, Azerbaijan was invaded by Sovietized by Russia's 11th Red Army.
- Four months later, Armenia was invaded by the Kemalist Army of Karabekir Pasa and partitioned between Turkey and Russia.
- The Soviet military campaign against Georgia was launched on February 11th, 1921.
- The region was the part of the Soviet union for 70 years.

THE CAUCASUS



Leninist nationality policy



Leninist “nationality policy”- hierarchical nationality-based territorial structure

→ ethnic identities through a federal state structure.

After 1917 Civil War in Russia the goal was to maintain integrity in the multiethnic RE.

Between 1925-1935 a new political map „territorialization of ethnicity“: administrative units were created: hierarchical-nationality based territorial structures – „the most important national groups were given the most meaningful administrative, constitutional and legal expressions of nationhood in the form of union republic status.”

Soviet ethnofederalism

- Central in content, federal in form.
- The communist party – main instrument to rule.
- The new Soviet states was an asymmetrical federation – ethnoterritorial units. The right of nations to self-determination.
- „The most important national groups were given the most meaningful administrative, constitutional and legal expressions of nationhood in the form of union republic status“.
- Union republics – Soviet Socialist Republics, SSRs (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)
- Autonomous republics – Autonomous Soviet Socialist republics, ASSRs (South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Ajaria, Nakhichevan)
- Autonomous oblast – autonomous regions, AOs. (Nagorno-Karabakh)
- Autonomous okrugs.

Soviet ethnofederalism

- The new politics of “indigenization” (Korenizatsiya) in 1923 – implementation of regional Communist party organizations , but also allowed ethnic groups to maintain and develop their culture and education in their self – rule territories.
- After 1932 the policy of indigenization was replaced with Russification : greater centralization, cultural Russification, enhancing Russian language and the repression of non-Russian national elites – Stalinist policy.
- De-Stalinization policies after 1953: more flexible Social order, rebirth of nationalism and patriotism in Khrushchev’s era, more power to local parties – Soviet nationalities evolved through “rasvet” (flourishing”) of ethnic culture “sblizhenie” (drawing together) of the nations until “sliianie” (complete merger).
- In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev – reform , “perestroika” and “glasnost” policies - led to expression of anti-government sentiment .

Autonomy

What is the role of autonomy regimes: solution or the source of conflict?

Autonomy

- Autonomy- to balance the conflicting territorial interests and reduce ethnic tensions.
- Autonomy – may lead to isolation of the minority from wider political and economic participation on a state level, conducive to secessionism, may lead to protests by other groups leading to a conflict.
- Autonomous regions – alike states have executive, legislative and judicial bodies, flags and coats of arms and have their own borders, group identity, state institutions, leadership, mass media and external support.

Soviet nationality policy Abkhazia

Stalin's administration: the political history of Abkhazia was greatly influenced by the policies of Stalin and Lavrentii Pavlovich Beria. Beria was Stalin's close associate and a Mingrelian born in Abkhazia near Sukhumi, who headed the party in Georgia from 1931 to 1938 and chaired the Transcaucasian Communist Party Committee from 1932-1937. The Transcaucasian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic was dissolved in 1937, and Beria became the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs (head of the NKVD, Stalin's secret police) in 1938. This position provided him a great influence over Transcaucasia.

From 1933 and until the death of Stalin in 1953, Beria gradually implemented an anti Abkhaz policy (Suny, 1994, p. 289). In 1931, the union republic status of Abkhazia was reduced to that of an autonomous republic under the Georgian SSR. Beria initiated a purge against Abkhaz officials, who were accused of planning to assassinate Stalin.

Soviet nationality policy Abkhazia

The Abkhazians had fought against Georgian rule in the years of an independent Georgia (1918-1921).

Later under Stalin's rule: forced collectivization of lands, persecution of intellectuals, and indoctrination in the Georgian culture and language.

In 1932, the status of Abkhazia was demoted from that of a Soviet Socialist republic to that of an autonomous republic. Abkhazian rulers and elites resumed efforts to promote Abkhazian identity. Abkhazian rulers and elites initiated efforts to make the republic more Abkhaz. In 1956, The Abkhaz language was restored in schools and media. In 1978, Abkhaz rulers on several occasions tried to convince Moscow to annex them to Russia (Suny, 1994).

National Abkhaz identity had already been developed over the centuries, but the idea of independent statehood had been gradually developed among Abkhazians during the implementation of Soviet nationality policy. The policies of the Gorbachev era (glasnost and perestroika) opened up a space in which such aspirations for independence for Abkhazians could be powerfully expressed.

Ethnic composition in Abkhazia

Year	Abkhaz	Georgians	Russians	Armenians
1926	27.8	33.6	6.2	12.8
1939	18	29.5	19.3	15.9
1959	15.1	39.1	21.4	15.9
1970	15.9	40	19.1	11.4
1979	17.1	43.9	16.4	15.1

Table 1: Ethnic Composition of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic in the Soviet Period (%) Source: Slider (1985).

Year	Abkhaz	Georgians	Russians	Armenians
1923	10	40,4	35	4,6
1926	25,4	33,3	24,8	6,7
1929	28,3	24,9	24,5	8,8
1931	18,5	25,3	36,8	9,1
1935	17,6	25	35,2	11,4
1936	21,8	26,3	29,1	11,2
1937	19,7	26,8	26,1	11,4
1938	16,9	27,2	28,1	11,8
1939	15,6	36,2	22,1	13,2
1940	16,7	42,7	16,7	15,2
1945	14,8	45,2	17,8	12,7
1950	13,3	51	15,5	14
1955	13,3	54,8	13,7	12,9
1960	14,4	51,3	15,6	12,4
1965	15,5	50,5	15,1	12,4
1970	16,8	50,5	14,4	11,9
1975	17,6	50,3	14,5	11,3
1978	18,2	50,9	14,2	10,5
1979	18,2	51	14,1	10,5
1980	18,5	51,2	13,8	10,3
1981	18,9	51,2	13,8	10,1

Table 2: Ethnic distribution of the Abkhaz Communist Party in the Soviet Period
(%) Source: Slider (1985).

Soviet policies in South Ossetia

Two trends: the social conflict between the Ossetian peasants and their Georgian landlords, second social tension concerning the land question and literacy levels which led to ethnic confrontations.

Atmosphere of euphoria after the breakdown of Russian empire, dramatic social change.

First Ossetian rebellion in 1918, the conflict had *no revolutionary or nationalist connotation* – appeared to be a social conflict: appropriation of land, refused to pay taxes.

Ossetian National Council 1917 “to create in South Ossetia an independent administrative-political unit”, first signs of separatism by reinstating demands for national autonomy.

In 1919 second Ossetian rebellion, supported by Bolsheviks - declared soviet authority in several Ossetian districts - suppressed by Georgian troops.

April 1920 a spontaneous rebellion = soviet authority established, desire to separate from Georgian and join Russia. Large part of Ossetian population were expelled into North Caucasus.

The conflict started as *an unorganized social movement* for land redistribution among Ossetian peasants. Ethnic dimension- landowners were Georgians, turning conflict in to antagonism between Georgians and Ossetians. Ossetian found support in Bolsheviks in the North Caucasus, thus giving a conflict a political dimension.

Sovietization of Georgia in 1921 : South Ossetia integral part of Georgia, granting Ossetians autonomous status was the Bolshevik way of solving the conflict.

1925 Ossetians attempts to join North Ossetia.

Soviet policies in Nagorno Karabakh

The 19th century: confrontations between Armenia and Azerbaijan started.

Clashes in 1905 resulted into indiscriminate mutual massacres in 1907.

Armenian genocide by Ottoman Empire 1915.

“The South Caucasus Confederation” 1918-1920 were turbulent, marked with armed conflict and violence.

Soviet period no large scale violence.

Bolshevik conquest of Azerbaijan in April 1920 and Armenia in December 1920 violence in N-K subsided.

The political decision to create the autonomy for Armenians in N-K July 5, 1921 – end of political dispute between Soviet Armenia and Soviet AZ.

AZ to retain N-K but to provide autonomy to the Armenian population.

Soviet policies in Nagorno Karabakh

The Karabakh region is disputed on mainly historical grounds by both Azeris and Armenians. The Azeris claim that the region has always been under Azeri rule in recorded history; on the other hand the Armenians advance the claim that Karabakh was originally an Armenian site of residence and that Azeri rule was illegitimate.

At this point, the political struggle for Karabakh began, and was to last for a long time, as it took the Soviet leadership three years to settle the issue. Initially the pendulum seemed to swing in favour of Armenia. In December 1920 the revolutionary committee of Soviet Azerbaijan, under Soviet pressure from central authorities, issued a statement that Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhchivan were all to be transferred to Armenian control. Stalin (then commissar for nationalities) publicised the decision on 2 December, but the Azerbaijani leader Narimanov later denied the transfer. Four months later, the pendulum swung back. The 'Treaty of Brotherhood and Friendship' between the Soviet Union and republican Turkey included a provision that both Nakhchivan and Karabakh were to be placed under the control of the Azerbaijani SSR.

On 4 July, a meeting of the Kavburo (Caucasian section of the Soviet Communist party) voted in Stalin's presence to include Karabakh in the Armenian SSR. The following day, Narimanov protested against this decision and the Kavburo once again reversed its decision, agreeing to Karabakh's remaining in the Azerbaijani SSR, although the region was to be granted substantial autonomy.

During 1922, while unrest was still being reported in Karabakh, discussions took place concerning the potential status of Karabakh within the Azerbaijani SSR. Finally, it was decided to give the region the rank of an autonomous oblast.

Soviet policies in Nagorno Karabakh

In 1924, Nakhchivan received the status of an autonomous republic (ASSR) within the Azerbaijani SSR, despite the fact that the region had no land connection with mainland Azerbaijan. Nakhchivan's belonging to the Azerbaijani republic was actually decided at the same time as the discussions on Nagorno- Karabakh.

Already by the 1930s the Armenians were attempting to regain control over both Nagorno- Karabakh and Nakhchivan.

In 1963, with the more open climate created by Krushchev's destalinization, a petition signed by approximately 2,500 Karabakh Armenians was submitted to Krushchev, protesting the Azeri attitude towards the region and claiming the Azeris were intentionally economically neglecting the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast. Moscow kept its silence, acted as if nothing had happened, and unrest erupted in Karabakh, leaving eighteen casualties. Troubles broke out in 1968 as well. Another important event with respect to the survival of Armenian nationalism occurred in conjunction with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on 24 April 1965.

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- Do all regime transitions, whether democratizing or not, increase the risk of war?
- Why should transition toward democracy exert a stronger effect than other kinds of transitions?

Democratic transition

- Instability of the political elite, which may be characteristic of various kinds of transitions, combines with the expansion of mass political participation in democratizing states in distinctively explosive ways.
- This situation creates strong incentives for elites to mobilize popular support through *nationalist appeals, which tend to raise the risk of war.*

Democratic transition

1. Countries undergoing incomplete democratization with **weak institutions** are more likely than other states to become involved in war.
2. Countries undergoing **incomplete democratization** are more likely than other states to initiate war.
3. Incomplete democratization where institutions are weak is especially likely to lead to war when powerful elites feel threatened by the prospect of a democratic transitions.

?

- Do increases in ethnic tensions coincide with democratization? Are the differences in ethnic unrest among democracies due to variations in political institutions?
- Are presidential systems more prone to ethnic conflict than parliamentary democracies? Does the electoral system matter? Does federalism cause more problems than it solves?

Political system

Nature of the executive, type of electoral system and distribution of power.

Presidentialism vs. Parliamentarism

- Ethnic conflict is more likely in Parl. than in Pres. system

Electoral system

Plurality system causes ethnic conflict

Federalism

Depends of the size of ethnic group

Political conflict

- Causal chain of political conflict is following:
 - Political system of the state is going through a transformation state. Most dangerous time for bad government is during the period when it tries to transform itself.

Causal mechanism

- The conflict becomes violent through following mechanism:

The **lack of elite legitimacy** results in discriminatory and weak political institution leading to instability.

When **authoritarianism collapses** and is followed by **ineffectual efforts to establish democracy**, the interim period of relative anarchy is ripe leadership confrontation.

Countries that have undergone a **recent political transition** are more likely to experience violent conflict.

Conclusion

- The bigger is the **decline of state power** the more significant are the incentives of the elites to provoke ethnic conflict as a strategy to maintain in power.
- The more some groups are **excluded from state power**, the greater is the risk of ethnic tensions.
- The likelihood of ethnic war in **semi-democracies** remains higher than in other regime types, even after a regime change.