

RUSSIA'S APPROACH TO ARMS CONTROL, PEACE MEDIATION AND NATIONAL DIALOGUES

Edited by **Pertti Joenniemi**



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FOREWORD

It is a widely accepted global norm that the international community has a responsibility to facilitate and support peace processes to prevent the continuation of conflicts and humanitarian crises. Thus, peace diplomacy and mediation has become one of the priority areas of the Finnish foreign policy agenda today. Conflict resolution and peace diplomacy, for Finland, is both a goal in itself and an opportunity to gain a role in constructive global politics.

Finland has actively contributed to creating mediation capacities within different international and regional organisations, including the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union. In these efforts, one goal is to raise awareness of the importance of mediation in conflict prevention and resolution.

Each conflict situation is unique by itself and there is no one model for organising an effective mediation effort. Nevertheless, in each case, useful lessons can be gained from past and ongoing experiences of different parties.

As a way to increase awareness of the Nordic experiences in mediation processes, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs supported a project *Peace Mediation in Nordic Countries, a Comparative Study*. The study was conducted by the Tampere Peace Research Institute and was published in 2014. The purpose was to investigate how mediation is organised in different Nordic countries. Is there a particular ‘Nordic model’ for peace diplomacy?

Similarly, it would be useful to know the role of and what type of peace diplomacy and mediation is carried by another Finnish neighbour — Russia. In this context even the interpretation of mediation as a concept may differ. Russia has frequently been labelled an unknown factor in international relations. What it wants and in which way is often questioned. Nevertheless, Russia has played a significant role as one of the mediators, for example, in the recent Syrian conflict, as well

as in the Iranian nuclear issue. Compared to these efforts, the role of Russia in various conflicts occurring within the territory of the former Soviet Union has been much more disputed.

Pertti Joenniemi, Senior Research Fellow, Tampere Peace Research Institute, was asked to organise a study that would examine the types and goals of Russian conflict resolution and mediation efforts. Accordingly, he formed a research group consisting of both Russian and Finnish researchers and specialists. This report reflects the results of their work.

The individual articles in this report represent the views of the respected author only. Each is an independent analysis and an account by the authors themselves.

As an introduction, Joenniemi probes Russia's approach to arms control, conflict settlement and mediation as one aspect of the conduct of foreign affairs more generally. He also situates arms control, conflict settlement and mediation as part of broader changes underway in the sphere of international relations, and aims at situating the Russian policies in this changing context.

Professor Alexander Sergunin describes Russian research and academic discussions on conflict resolution and mediation. His article explores different Russian social science schools and disciplines in this context. The similarities and dissimilarities, as well as inherent debates between various approaches, are studied.

Vadim Romashov, research fellow at Tampere Peace Research Institute, contributes by providing insight into the Russian experts discussion on arms control and conflict settlement, and in particular those pertaining to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At large, the Russian efforts and the discussion generated by that endeavour, are related to the aspiration of creating a security space in the Caucasus at large.

Dr Yulia Nikitina focuses her comparative analysis of Russian conflict settlement and mediation practices on the wars within the post-Soviet space. In particular, she addresses Russian conflict resolution strategies in relation to 'frozen conflicts' in the Southern Caucasus and Moldova, and to the only resolved post-Soviet war in Tajikistan. Her analysis also presents some reflections on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and on the Middle East.

In their study, Research Fellow Vadim Romashov and Professor Helena Rytövuori-Apunen cover Russian policies in view of the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict. The question they address is how the Russian foreign policy interests are met or not met in this conflict settlement or non-settlement.

Ambassador (ret.) Heikki Talvitie investigates Russian foreign and security policy needs and demands based on his personal experiences as a mediator. He focuses, in particular, on post-Soviet conflicts and inherent conflict resolution efforts in South Caucasus and Moldova, as well as on the recent crisis in Ukraine.

Overall, the report illustrates well how the foreign policy interests of Russia are met in its conflict resolution and mediation efforts. One might not agree with the respected means and goals, but at least it is useful to understand the underlying arguments in order to be able to address these issues constructively.

Kimmo Kiljunen

Special Representative for Mediation

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND ARMS CONTROL AS POLITICS: THE CASE OF RUSSIA

Pertti Joenniemi

INTRODUCTION

The meaning and weight of armaments, and therefore also that of conflict resolution as well as arms control and mediation, is not stable. It does not remain unaltered, but varies over time. Arguably, the changes have been quite distinct since the end of the Cold War with a significant number of previous consistencies undergoing change.

One of the crucial changes also impacting efforts at conflict resolution consists of alterations in the pattern of wars and conflicts. In the first place, a quite significant decline has occurred in the number of wars and deadly conflicts over the last two decades. Above all, major power political wars have lost their meaning and are no longer seen as serving any rational purpose. In addition, there has been a reduction in the intensity and utility as well as the impact of wars in terms of victims, and it also appears that the classical distinction of wars between states and intra-state wars has largely collapsed.

If nonetheless upheld, it seems that the proportion of intra-state conflicts to interstate conflicts has markedly grown. The latter consist either of civil wars, in which at least one of the warring parties is the government of a state, or battles between two or several armed groups of which none is the government of a state. In addition, wars

and violent conflicts have become quite asymmetrical in nature due to a basic shift in the relationship between states and societies in the use of force. There is, thus, the presence of both states and actors beyond state control with formal as well as informal elements co-existing and being intertwined.

Furthermore, with even small groups wielding large powers of destruction, there has been a decline in the monopoly of coercive power that was previously held by the states. In general, it also appears that territorial sovereignty as a norm guiding the conduct of violence has become less sacrosanct than it used to be, although the issue remains highly divisive also among the major states. In any case, the normative ground of the policies pursued has changed, as indicated among other things by the fact that international organizations, above all the UN, have also in some instances contributed to military interventions. They may do so once the aim can be defined as that of halting genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Importantly, the practice of intervention no longer stands out as it used to as a practice of statecraft reserved merely for the great powers, but serves increasingly as a tool employed also by international society at large. It also follows then that sovereignty is less associated with control of a particular territory and is instead increasingly viewed as a responsibility for maintaining and managing control in accordance with particular values and criteria.

Overall, wars and deadly conflicts – instead of being fought as a regular war through mass mobilization – seem to have become rather hybrid. The fight against non-state terrorism is a case in point. The ‘new’ wars and conflicts tend to elude any clear-cut categorization, and it has become increasingly difficult to identify the root causes of conflict for these then to be remedied even by broadly supported international measures of conflict management and peace-building.

To be certain, the various changes in the causes, dynamic, and type of actors as well as the consequences of wars rather profoundly impact the opportunities and ways of establishing peace. Among other things, the traditional role of state diplomacy has been under pressure, and has thus been complemented if not superseded by other approaches. In general, various forms of ‘soft’ power seem to have increased at the expense of the traditional ‘hard’ ones. This change includes the

fact that the various material forms of power, including arms, do not translate into political power in the way they used to. While some of the established approaches such as nuclear control and efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear capabilities remain valid, there are nonetheless also considerable discontinuities present. Among other things, far more attention has been paid to the local conditions as exemplified by the fact that peace mediation between the parties has grown in significance and also various forms of national dialogues have proliferated and turned into an approach frequently employed in the search for broadly acceptable solutions to conflicts.

In order to situate these changes and provide an insight into the various broader patterns of change present in the sphere of international relations, and hence also impacting the efforts of settling conflicts as well as arms control, I will initially draw on the work recently carried out by Barry Buzan and George Lawson.¹ The developments discernible in the policies pursued by Russia in the sphere of conflict resolution and arms control are then explored against the backdrop of the various arguments advanced by Buzan and Lawson pertaining to the key changes underway in the sphere of international relations. The key question addressed consists of the changes discernible in Russia's reading of conflict resolution and arms control as a particular sphere of politics. In particular, the aim here is to probe Russia's ability or inability to adapt to the changes presently also underway in both of these spheres as a consequence of global transformation.

TOWARDS INCREASINGLY DE-CENTRED INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In probing thoroughly the main contours of international relation over a longer period of time, and in particular the unfolding of the current international system, Buzan and Lawson note that there is considerable change in train. The post-1945 system, which consisted

¹ See Barry Buzan and George Lawson (2015), *The Global Transformation. History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

of a hegemonic core-periphery, one labelled by the authors as “the Western global international order”, is eroding and being substituted by “decentred globalism”. In essence, the change consists of the power cap that has been there mattering less. It may actually erode altogether. This is the case as the core expands with the differences between the former core and periphery evening out, they assert. Overall, the configuration that marks the global transformation – with a critical juncture consisting of the economic crisis in 2008 – is no longer concentrated on a small group of states, but is increasingly dispersed (274).

Buzan and Lawson further claim that, rather than standing for a rupture and reflecting a decisive break-through, for example in the field of technology, the outcome is premised on a continuation and an intensification of some earlier trends. The international system will remain highly interdependent and is likely to become even more so, the authors contend. Generally speaking, more states and peoples will acquire the configuration of power associated with global modernity. The core will, they argue, become bigger in absolute as well as relative terms, and it will also be less Western (275).

In general, the West will arguably lose its privileged position within international society and in consequence a wider dispersion of power implies that no single polity will be able to dominate international society. The level of capability sustaining such a position is no longer possible, the authors conclude, as their claims concerning the right to global leadership no longer rest on the vast superiority the West enjoyed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This then also implies that the position of the US will become more relative, although “no state will be able to replace the US as a sole, or even second, superpower” (276).² In sum, the world of decentred globalism will consist of several great powers and many regional powers, although it will not have any superpowers. Various Asian countries, and in particular China, will move closer to the core, whereas the authors are of the view that parts of Southern and Eastern Europe will remain relatively underdeveloped compared to the more globally distributed leading edge (277).

² For a somewhat different view, see Joseph S. Nye (2015), *Is the American Century Over?* Cambridge: Polity.

A crucial aspect of decentralization consists of the growing eminence of regionalization as already evidenced by the standing of polities such as the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, CIS, Mercosur, AU and SADC on the current-day international scene. Some regions, most obviously the EU and North America, already possess robust international organizations and practices that mediate such aspirations. Other regions, such as South America and Southern Africa, South Asia and the Middle East contain only thin institutional frameworks (293). The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with Russia at the core undoubtedly belongs to this latter category of formations.

Regionalization is also spurred by the fact that the great powers are inclined to invest in such configurations in order to gain their own local spheres of influence. Regional configurations may, Buzan and Lawson note, serve as bastions for retaining local distinctiveness, although they may also serve as fall-backs if global cooperation weakens, as well as platforms from which to practice pluralist international relations more effectively (302). In short, the great powers need to pay as much attention to their regions as to each other. They should prioritise the creation of stable, consensual and legitimate regional international societies, “although some, like Russia, might seek to construct regional hegemonies” (303).

The authors also posit that regionalization may actually figure as prominently as globalisation at large due to the lack of superpowers as well as a relatively wide distribution of power in the sphere of international relations (302). They note that it is driven by factors such as anti-hegemonic sentiments, increasing capacities held by formerly peripheral states, diversities in the way that capitalism is implemented and conducted as well as a sustained lack of consensus about issues as varied as human rights, freedom of sexual orientation and the role of religion in public life (291). All these factors contribute to the prominence of regional formations in current-day international relations.

CHANGES IN THE MODES OF POWER

As to the divisions present in international relations, the authors note that the ideological global bandwidth has been narrowed down to a significant degree. Capitalism has won out, although at the same time remaining politically quite diverse. Buzan and Lawson therefore find reasons to distinguish between two types of democratic capitalism, liberal and social democratic, and they also differentiate between two ideal-types of authoritarian capitalism by drawing a distinction between competitive authoritarian and state bureaucratic capitalism (282). At the same time, they note that many states are hybrids in containing features drawn from more than one of these categories. For example, contemporary Russia forms a mixture of state bureaucratic and authoritarian capitalism, they maintain (283).

Overall, the various distinctions notwithstanding, capitalism has turned into a near universal feature of contemporary international society, and there is, they note, therefore less space for any profound and system-based cleavages. This is so as almost all states organize their economy through market logics and take part in shared global regimes around trade, production and finance. In order to gain influence in an international context, states are obliged to compete on the international market, and also orient their economies not just towards trade in raw materials and industrial production, but also around information and services (284). And, what is crucial, the more or less universal acceptance of the market contributes to a shared international order, the authors note, and the operation of a global market then also creates pressures for shared standards in fields such as accounting, banking and monetary policy, trade and corporate governance. To some extent, transparency is necessary for markets to function effectively (290). The shared logic does, however, not axiomatically lead to stable international order, as the competition between the varieties of capitalist governance is likely to be with us for some time, Buzan and Lawson concede (285).

It seems in any case obvious that a rather significant change has taken place in the conduct of power. The authors describe it as a shift from geopolitics, i.e. territorial competition between states

in a military/political mode, towards geo-economic competition with the latter category pointing to a “competition for growth in an economic/political mode of relations among states where great power war is largely ruled out”. They further differentiate between soft and hard varieties of geopolitics and geo-economics, with hard geopolitics implying that “intentional war is legitimate and expected” (285). Soft geopolitics, in turn, points to conditions under which “intentional great power war is marginalized, but territorial competition and military balancing/hedging remains”. Furthermore, the hard version of geo-economics is taken to mean “a zero-sum competition for profit within a largely political/economic modality, while soft one is defined as consisting of “a mix of zero-sum and positive-sum relations within a largely political/economic modality” (285–6).

By pointing to the fact that all the main actors on the current-day international scene are firmly committed to the existing global institutions and regimes centred on issues such as arms control, climate change or counteracting terrorism, Buzan and Lawson also conclude that the pursuance of zero-sum type of hard geo-economics is a remote possibility. It is, in their view, hardly an option, because virtually every state is committed to global capitalism. “There is little or no reason to think that a world of decentred globalism will replay the conflicts of the 1930s, and as a result, a return can be ruled out” (286).

While ruling out the hard form of geopolitics, they find the pursuance of the soft forms far more plausible. It will be fuelled, the authors claim, by inter-capitalist competition: “At its heart, capitalism is a hardnosed competition over accumulation and profits” (286). Violence may, Buzan and Lawson concede, play a central role in the extension and maintenance of markets around the world. In addition, authoritarian forms of capitalism can become more extreme, abandoning the idea of separation between the economic and political spheres, they fear. The increased ideological and practical homogeneity prompted by the universalization of capitalism may not go sufficiently far in order for the subsequent moderation of political differences to stem the soft forms of geopolitical rivalry (288–289).

A yet more likely scenario for tensions, if not openly conflictual relations, lies, according to the authors, in the zone of soft geo-economics in which capitalist powers compete and cooperate with each other. The option of soft geo-economics is, in their view, far more plausible than the hard one, in particular if a ‘concert of capitalist powers’ emerges that is able to manage the inter-capitalist interaction. In general, they do not rule out the possibility of inter-capitalist competition fuelling soft geopolitics, particularly in East Asia. This is the case as “at its heart, capitalism is a hard-nosed competition over accumulation and profits” (286).

The decline of the meaning and weight of geopolitics and the attendant increase in the eminence of geo-economics implies, in one of its aspects, that there is crucial change in the modes of power. There is then also a far wider security agenda to be addressed with security having shifted from a narrow, contained sphere of military relations to a wide, everyday set of concerns. “There is a wider and, in some ways, more intrusive security agenda arising from the character of modern society itself”, Buzan and Lawson conclude (311).

INITIAL RUSSIAN DEBATES

Obviously, Russia has experienced considerable difficulties in adapting to the unfolding of international relations as outlined above. It was – in the period of the Soviet Union – integrally part of the core, but has since moved towards the periphery without being able to capitalize on trends pointing towards a less Western-centred configuration. Rather than accepting and reconciling itself with the dominance of soft geo-economics in current-day international relations, Russia has, it appears, been clinging to soft as well as hard geopolitics.³ This has been apparent also in the fields of arms control and conflict resolution.

³ For an excellent analysis of the Russian approach to arms control and particularly nuclear arms control, see Anne L. Clunan (2009), *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence. Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University press, pp. 176–202. She relates the approach applied above all to Russia's need to get recognition as a great power and shows the many problems that flow from such an approach.

Yet it is to be noted that the developments since the years of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union have been far from straight-forward. This is mainly due to the fact that the conceptions held by the conservative, liberal and centrist forces on Russia's essence and its position in the sphere of international relations deviate significantly from each other. There was broad agreement that Russia had to remain a great power, but yet the understanding of the concept varied considerably. Whereas the conservatives held military power and the recovery of the Soviet Union in high esteem, the liberals rejected both of these conceptions, and stressed instead the significance of economic recovery as well as the importance of working through various international institutions. The centrists, for their part, shared the emphasis on economic recovery as well as remaining in the orbit of international institutions, but at the same time they associated strength with military power and saw the recovery of the Union in a rather positive light. The complexities pertaining to the discourses containing different ideas about how Russia could maintain or regain its great power identity have been summarized by Ted Hopf (2005) as follows: ⁴

	Liberal	Conservative	Centrist
Military Power	No	Yes	Yes
Economic Recovery	Yes	No	Yes
International Institutionalization	Yes	No	Yes
Recovery of the Union	No	Yes	Yes

It is thus obvious in view of the constellations outlined in the summary that changes in the internal constellations of power within Russia yield quite different foreign and security policies. This is already evidenced by the fact that the liberal and conservative discourses are exact opposites. As such, the aspiration for a status of a great

⁴ For a more detailed description, see Ted Hopf (2005), 'Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia's Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia'. *Review of International Studies*, 31(1), p. 234

power figures as a shared departure, but profound disagreements exist concerning what it implies, how it is to be aspired for and more generally what is the meaning of power in the sphere of current-day international relations.

While the liberals had a fairly strong impact on how Russia was understood and what policies to pursue immediately after the Cold War, their weight has been significantly reduced over time. However, their initial strength contributed to Russia defining itself immediately after the demise of the Cold War as being on a par with the US, whereas the Soviet Union stood out as the significant Other for a return to be avoided. Yet, the liberal understanding of Russia as part of a universal civilization and modern liberal market democracy remained contested, and their identification with the West, and in particular with the US, was far from nationally shared. Above all, the conservative forces favoured a more traditional line aspiring to a Russia balancing against the US and the West more generally, whereas the centrists held more Europe-oriented views.

In general, Russia, at the beginning of the 1990s, was polarized between liberal and conservative views, with the liberals stressing the importance of making it in the sphere of soft geo-economics, while the conservatives stood for a reading premised on the prevalence of geopolitics concerning Russia's essence and the tasks at hand. The centrists were really centrist in the sense that their stance consisted of incorporating and employing any particular form of power, hard or soft, geo-economic or geopolitical, in the endeavours for preserving Russia's position as a great power.

FROM PRAGMATISM TO DEFIANCE

The initial pre-eminence of the liberals turned out to be short-lived, and they lost their standing largely because of failures on the internal scene. The collapse of the Russian economy, rampant and rising crime, corruption and violence associated with privatisation and democratisation discredited not just the liberal course, but these trends also undermined more generally the emphasis on soft

geo-economics.⁵ Externally, and with the increasing dominance of centrist voices, Russia was still seen as one among several great powers in the multilateral management of global affairs, while internally the dominant theme consisted of the disintegrative processes occurring within the country, and most graphically, in Chechnya.

As to external factors, the liberals were further discredited by feelings that Russia was not rewarded for its efforts to be a willing ally of the West. NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia intensified these grievances significantly, and the fact that it took place without consulting Russia further undermined the position of the liberals. It also aggravated relations vis-à-vis the West, and in particular undermined those with the US. Furthermore, it strengthened in general the view that Western intensions were hostile and, more generally, that hard geopolitics still forms the essence of international relations. Notably, the civic connotations underlying the policies pursued increasingly gave way to ethno-nationalist understandings with an emphasis on Russia's Slavic origins, and in this way Russia was also viewed as being unique and in a category of its own rather than being part and parcel of some broader international constellation. Yet, the overall aim throughout the 1990s consisted of restoring and maintaining the country's great power status through economic development at home, i.e. the pursuance of soft geo-economics, and the empowerment of multilateral international institutions such as the Council of Europe and Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe abroad.⁶

⁵ For a detailed and documented analysis of the trends, see Ted Hopf, "Russia's Identity Relations with Europe, the EU, and the United States 1991–2007", paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research Annual Meeting, Pisa 2007; Bobo, Lo (2002), *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era. Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking*. New York: Palgrave.

⁶ For a discursive mapping of the Russian debate in the 1990s, see Ted Hopf (2005), 'Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia's Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia'. *Review of International Studies*, 11(1): 225–243. See also Pål Kolstø (2000), *Political Construction Sites. Nation-Building in Russia and the Post-Soviet States*. London: Westview Press, pp. 208–13.

GOODBYE PRAGMATISM

The ascendancy of Putin in 1999 initially changed very little. The emphasis was very much on ‘pragmatism’ defining Russia’s approach in the sphere of foreign and security policies. Russia continued to search for recognition as a great power, although there was somewhat more stress on recognition in terms of democracy and the market economy. As to exterior influences, the terrorist attack of 9/11 also had a formative impact in Russia in the sense of providing the liberals with more credence, whereas the conservatives were for a while pushed into the discursive margins. The previous stress on multipolarity and counterbalancing the West was traded for efforts at returning to the very core of international relations as a close partner of the US, albeit this time with the aim of counteracting international instability and resisting terrorism, but also of managing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In general, the aim was one of demonstrating that Russia remained an indispensable player on the international scene.⁷

However, the efforts of establishing a US–Russia alliance turned out to be short-lived, in part because the US opted for efforts at making itself invulnerable largely through unilateral policies instead of relying on broad international cooperation. In addition to engaging in the war in Afghanistan in 2002, invading Iraq, supporting the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as approving a further expansion of NATO, the US chose to aspire to invulnerability by investing, among other things, in anti-ballistic missile defences. This latter aspiration entailed an abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty.

In consequence, and despite the efforts at counteracting terrorism as well as some measures in the field of nuclear arms control still remaining spheres of cooperation between Russia and the US, Russia gradually returned to its ambition to remain a great power in a multipolar world. Feeling rejected by the US, it searched for closer cooperation with various European states, above all Germany

⁷ See Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Schevchenko (2010), ‘Status Seekers. Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy’. *International Security*, 34(4): 63–95.

and France, in trying to moderate and restrain the behaviour of a unipolar hegemon. The attempt to remain at least within the broader core of international relations was significantly backed up by the Europeaness and a generally Eurocentric worldview quite deeply embedded in Russian daily life.⁸

The main trend, though, has more recently consisted of a gradual drift towards an 'authentic Russia with disengagement from the West. This has been accompanied by a rather selective engagement with international organizations, including the WTO and G7/8. As such, Russia participates in a wide range of international regimes, although the density still remains relatively shallow, particularly in the sphere of key economic institutions. It may also be noted that the overall total institutional and regime memberships remains considerably fewer than, for example, that of France.⁹ Moreover, with various value-based and normative approaches increasingly impacting the agenda as well as the outcomes in various international organizations, Russia has often found it difficult to play along, including various issues of conflict resolution. It has instead, on occasion, found it necessary to pursue an obstructionist line as exemplified by refusals to support the introduction of weapon embargoes or different forms of sanctions such as in the cases of North Korea, Iran and Syria. Instead of riding along, Russia has tended to wield its influence by veto rather than by initiative.

RUNNING AGAINST DOMINANT TRENDS

Generally speaking, Russia appears to have remained unable to capitalize on the trend of increasingly decentred globalism. This has been due largely to the increased prominence of centrist and conservative departures as well as the demise of the liberal ones in

⁸ For a comprehensive treatment of the theme, see Viacheslav Morozov (2015), *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹ On this, see Iver Neumann, 'Status is Cultural: Durkheimian Poles and Weberian Russians Seek Great Power Status', in Paul, T.V., Larson, Deborah and Wohlforth, William (eds.), *Status in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 109.

internal Russian politics. In consequence, Russia has then pursued externally various self-limiting policies as indicated, among other things, by its strong emphasis on the sovereign rights of the state¹⁰ as well as reservations vis-à-vis democracy and human rights if seen as universally valid values.¹¹ Moreover, the growing emphasis on hard geopolitics at the expense of geo-economic departures has contributed to Russia's marginalization, with various geo-economic trends pertaining to integration and increased international interdependence seen as threatening if not hostile intensions targeted specifically against Russia.

On the one hand, there is no way back for Russia to a core that consisted above all of two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and on the other hand, Russia seems unable to pursue policies that would make it integrally part of the new and broader core of current-day international relations. Rather than a great power, it is more often than not viewed as a 'semi-peripheral' actor, and seen as a declining one that is particularly reluctant to accept a decline in status.¹² Iver Neumann basically concedes and notes that Russia is once again applying a rationality of government that has its firm precedents in Western Europe, but that has since been abandoned by the Western European states and, according to Buzan and Lawson, in the sphere of international relations at large. He concludes that Russia's standing as a great power must remain seriously in doubt. What is required does not merely consist of material resources or coercive abilities, but also includes good governance and social compatibility. It is not enough to parade what Russia itself considers "strength" in order to be recognized as a great power, and it is an error to seek status according to criteria that the

¹⁰ As noted by Iver Neumann, among others, the Russian insistence of a strong state as a guarantor of the system of governance runs against the key liberal trend "where the question is always how the state may govern less". For an elaboration of this issue-area, see Iver Neumann, *ibid.*

¹¹ See Viacheslav Morozov, '*Russia and the West: Dividing Europe, Constructing East Other*'. Paper presented at the ISA Annual Convention, March 2007.

¹² For such and evaluations, see for example Clunan, Anne, L., (2009), *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; Ted Hopf, 'Russia's Place in the World. An Exit Option?' *PONARS Eurasia Political Memo*, no. 79, September 2009.

relevant circle of recognition does not find to be relevant. In short, Russia is arguably playing the wrong game.¹³

Similar problems appear also to be present in the way that Russia views regionalization and in the policies pursued in the post-Soviet area. Russia has in general found it difficult to capitalize on the increased importance of regionalization. In the first place, there is little left of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the construction of the Eurasian Union, although highly prioritised by Russia, has been proceeding slowly. The aspiration to restore its standing as a great power combined with an emphasis on hard geopolitics as well as hard geo-economics as basic approaches has contributed to the emergence of rather disintegrative dynamics in the post-Soviet sphere. The Baltic countries have, for their part, stayed aloof from Russia by joining the EU as well as NATO. As to the internal situation in Russia, order had to be restored in Chechnya through rather harsh measures, i.e. large-scale military operations. The relations with Ukraine have been more than strained, in particular after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and her support for dissident forces in eastern Ukraine. Overall, many of the conflicts in the region, both external, as in the cases of Transnistria, Georgia and Russia, Georgia and Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia and Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as internal on the part of Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kirghizia and Tajikistan, have stood out as serious obstacles to region-wide cooperation.¹⁴ Moreover, rather than being settled, virtually all of them can be described as 'frozen'.

The settling has been significantly hampered by Russia's increasing insistence on framing the post-Soviet area in terms of hard geopolitics, with this then leaving little space for the pursuance of soft geo-economics. Such a framing has also been conducive to a clash with the EU. Overall, and instead of siding with the EU's claim concerning the conduct of soft geo-economics, Russia has locked itself into a contest if not a conflict premised on the view that the policies of the Union also

¹³ Neumann, *ibid*, pp. 110–111.

¹⁴ On Russia's approach in regard to local conflicts in the post-Soviet space, see Stanislav Ivanov (2010), 'Russia and Local Conflicts on the Post-Soviet Territory', in *Russia, Arms Control and International Security*. IMEMO Supplement to the Russian edition of the SIPRI Yearbook 2010, pp. 104–115.

remain embedded in geopolitics, or at least hard geo-economics. It has been frequently argued that the EU's basic aim consists of contributing to wider Western efforts of encircling and isolating Russia. Importantly, the lack of a joint frame of interpretation between the EU and Russia has by no means been conducive to a meeting of minds, and instead the outcome has consisted of frustrations, serious quarrels and even open conflicts. In general, the security practices that have emanated from Russia's emphasis on hard geopolitics have, in addition to the widening conflict with the West, also seriously undermined Russia's ability to utilize the potential embedded in the increased importance of regionalization.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND ARMS CONTROL AS GEOPOLITICS

It appears that the Russian policies in the fields of conflict resolution and arms control were initially quite pragmatic and conciliatory in nature. They were in line with the changes that took place in the unfolding of wars and conflicts, above all the declining probability of power political wars, and hence also in tune with the changes discernible in the fields of conflict resolution and arms control.

Russia, for example, as a precondition set by the Western powers to their approval of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), completed the withdrawal of its military forces from Moldova and Georgia. Among other things, an active process of negotiation was initiated between Moldova and Transnistria in the mid-1990s, with Russia elaborating a complex proposal of conflict resolution. The country also found it quite possible to participate in multilateral talks such as those pertaining to the Kiev document negotiated in 2002 internationally and elaborated with the participation of Russian and American diplomats.

However, with increased stress on hard geopolitics and the assumed need to counter-balance the West and keep NATO out of Russia's neighbourhood, a different and more unilateral approach gradually took over. This change in the overall approach to international relations, with relations between states again predominantly seen as

a zero-sum territorial competition in a military/political mode, has subsequently impacted Russia's approach to conflict resolution and arms control. The reading has also been quite state-centred, thereby downgrading emphasis on various approaches that include or rest on the participation of non-state actors in the spheres of conflict resolution, arms control and peace mediation, including national dialogues. In short, Russia has stayed oblivious to the many changes and discontinuities present in the international efforts of conflict resolution. In fact, the line pursued has remained in many ways quite traditional, but it has also turned far less cooperative and become reactive instead of being proactive and innovative, although the reactions entail both efforts at preserving the status quo as well as changing it if it is regarded as necessary by Russia's geopolitically determined interests.

The preservationist approach, and in particular the aim of still remaining as one of the Big Two, has basically underpinned Russia's policies in the sphere of nuclear issues and nuclear arms control. The latter type of endeavours have, among other things, amounted to resistance to the US plans to move towards and implement measures of anti-ballistic missile defence, while Russia's decision in 2007 to suspend its obligations under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) stands for the latter type of change-oriented policy.¹⁵ The change in standing is quite crucial in the sense that the Treaty initially stood out, and did so particularly according to Russian interpretations, as one of the cornerstones of the European security system agreed upon and implemented after the demise of the Cold War.

Furthermore, the increased emphasis on hard geopolitics has also impacted Russia's approach to cooperation with various international bodies such as the OSCE or the EU in the field of conflict resolution and arms control. It has in general amounted to a decline in cooperation and increased stress on unilateral endeavours. For example, between 2003 and 2011 the EU made a

¹⁵ On nuclear issues, see Alexei Arbatov, 'Transition to Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament. Abstracts', in *Russia: Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security. IMEMO Supplement to the Russian Edition of the SIPRI Yearbook 2013*, pp.1–26.

series of attempts to break the status quo around the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria by suggesting a multilateralization of the efforts of settling their conflict. However, Russia's reactions were quite negative and amounted to rather harsh rhetoric about the EU aiming at installing an economic blockade. The reactions clearly indicated that there was little space for any broad and cooperative endeavours.¹⁶ The various proposals made by the US and the OSCE have equally been turned down by Russia and seen as unduly intrusive. More recently, the Meseberg process initiated in 2010 by the German and Russian leaderships has suffered a similar fate. The aim of the initiative was to make the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict into a kind of test case for the advancement of cooperation between the EU and Russia in general in order for Russia to be further integrated into European political space. In this vein, the Memorandum envisaged the creation of a Security Committee between the EU and Russia once substantial progress had been reached in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.

Notably, neither the offering of carrots nor the use of sticks seems to have been conducive to a more cooperative Russian stance. Instead, Russia has preferred to stay with its largely unilateral course as indicated among other things by the issuance of the Kozak Memorandum, which listed Russia's own preferences for the solution of the Transnistrian conflict.¹⁷ In general, Russia has pursued rather protective policies, and has therefore also favoured a status quo. It has in some cases opted for initiatives premised on soft geo-economics, as indicated by what has been labelled a 'humanitarian project' initiated in 2007 in Transnistria by contributing to the building of nursery schools, hospitals as well as school and university buildings. The project also added to the monthly retirement benefits of pensioners and entailed investments in small-scale business and agricultural projects. Yet, the policies pursued have remained mainly political and military in nature, and the soft aspects have arguably been framed by

¹⁶ See, Andrey Deviatkov (2014), 'Giving "Asymmetric" Responses to the EU-Russian Soft Power Experiment in Transnistria'. EU-Russia Paper no. 17. *Centre for EU-Russia Studies*. University of Tartu, p.5.

¹⁷ 'Multilateralization and Marginalization'. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 59(3): 53-62.

geopolitical aspirations, including efforts of geopolitical balancing.¹⁸ Although some success may have been achieved in Transnistria, the outcome has been the opposite for the side of Moldova, with Russia thus seen as having sided profoundly with one side in the conflict.

Regionalization has in some sense figured as a kind of fall-back option for Russia once the ability to pursue effective and successful geo-economics within the broader sphere of international relations has left much to be hoped for. However, the emphasis on hard geopolitics also in a regional context has implied that Russia has not been seen as consensual and legitimate within the international society at large or by many actors in the region. This has clearly hampered Russia's possibilities of advancing and utilizing the unfolding of decentred globalism as outlined by Buzan and Lawson. Setbacks have been encountered in international relations as well as in a regional context. As to the post-Soviet sphere, almost all of the conflicts remain unsettled, with the situation deteriorating rather than improving.

Generally speaking, the increasing emphasis on hard geopolitics has both ideologically and politically defined Russia's approach and interests also in the sphere of conflict resolution and arms control. As to the post-Soviet sphere, almost all of the conflicts remain unsettled, with the situation deteriorating rather than improving, and with internationalization as well as direct talks between the parties themselves being mostly excluded among the approaches to settlement, Russia's toolkit has remained far too traditionalist and narrow in view of the nature of the conflicts to be solved. Efforts to achieve results have continued in some traditional fields such as nuclear non-proliferation, and some new platforms for the settlement of conflicts have also been established, as evidenced by the recent Minsk-talks on conflict prevention and arms control in Eastern Ukraine. The results have been modest, though, and in particular the latter talks have been accompanied by a rather deep mistrust between Russia and the Western participants. It has become quite obvious that the parties do not disagree on matters of substance and clash because of divergent interests. Above all, they seem to deviate rather profoundly from each other in their framing of conflict resolution and arms control, with Russia largely in a category of its own.

¹⁸ For this conclusion, see Devyatkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3, 15.

THE RUSSIAN ACADEMIC DEBATE ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MEDIATION

Alexander Sergunin

INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution and mediation (CRM) is an important priority for the Russian scholarly community. This can be explained by the fact that in the post-Soviet era the Kremlin had to deal with numerous conflicts – both domestically and internationally – and, for this reason, badly needed academic expertise in this field. The lack of such expertise or poor expertise or the Kremlin’s deafness to experts’ recommendations – all this has led to Russia’s inability to prevent or successfully resolve ethno-religious conflicts in the Northern Caucasus and local conflicts in the post-Soviet space. In addition to the frozen conflicts of Transnistria, Nagorny Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Moscow has recently found itself amidst another dangerous conflict – in and around Ukraine.

Such a complicated situation dictates the need to develop both the CRM theory(ies) and practical methods and techniques that could be adequate for dealing with the existing and future challenges to Russian internal and external security and enable Moscow to contribute to stabilizing the international environment in the post-Soviet space. Moreover, Russia can be a valuable partner in CRM in some other regions, such as the Middle East, East Asia, Africa and Latin America where Moscow still has CRM authority and capabilities.

This study aims at examining different Russian social science disciplines' and schools' approaches to CRM. The similarities and dissimilarities between various approaches are studied. More specifically, this paper explores different schools' perceptions of issues, such as the causes of conflicts, the role of violence, key units of analysis and major actors, typologies of conflicts, CRM methods and techniques, and Russia's role – current and future – in CRM and peace-building in various regions.

In accordance with its research objectives, the paper is organized in three main parts: It starts from describing how various Russian social sciences interpret CRM. The second part is devoted to examining what kind of the CRM arsenal (methods and techniques) the Russian scholarship offers to the practitioners. Finally, an institutional dimension of CRM research is examined.

CRM AS AN INTRA- AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PROBLEM IN THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL SCIENCES

It should be noted that almost every social science in Russia has an approach to CRM of its own. However, to make this paper concise and, at the same time, policy-oriented, I'll focus only on three major approaches developed by law, sociology and political science (PS)/ International relations (IR).

The *legalist* approach, which was influential in the Russian CRM since the Soviet time, is based on the assumption that the sources of conflicts lie in the sphere of legal relations between people or states or other social actors and can be resolved with the help of law (Kudryavtsev 1994: 5–9 and 1995: 23–33; Levin 1977; Pushmin 1970). According to this approach, conflicts have either an interest-based or cognitive nature. In the former case some important interests of conflicting parties are involved. In the latter case a conflict emerges from the disagreement between the parties on whether their statements, concepts, judgments, postulates, beliefs, etc. are false or true.

According to this school, the first type of conflict can be managed and resolved by legal means. The second type of conflict is difficult

to solve by juridical instruments; other, non-legal tools should be used. These could include direct bilateral dialogue, public debates (in various forms), NGO-based mediation, etc. The legalist school is not really interested in this type of conflict because the law – national or international – cannot be implemented in full.

The so-called false legal conflict constitutes a class of its own. According to the legalist approach (Kudryavtsev 1995: 207), such type of conflict can be caused by a number of factors, including, first and foremost, misunderstandings and misreading of each other's intentions and legal positions. For example, the parties involved can wrongly believe that the other side allegedly has aggressive/expansionist intentions or be sure that the other side does not have a legitimate basis for its claims or, on the contrary, your own claims are legally grounded and solid. The legalist school believes that such type of conflicts can be successfully prevented or resolved with the help of qualified and timely legal assistance.

The legalist school differs from other approaches by its categorization of actors involved in conflicts. From this point of view, it is important to distinguish between legal and physical entities. If a conflict is generated by legal entities (organizations, institutions, states) it is of a juridical nature from the very beginning and, according to this doctrine, can be resolved only by legal means. If a conflict takes place between physical entities (individuals, groups) it can develop in either legal (if the conflicting parties are civilized enough or their conflict is of non-antagonistic character) or extra-legal forms. Hence, it is important to reduce the second type of conflicts between physical entities to the minimum and/or transform it to the legal form.

In solving conflicts, the legalist approach puts emphasis on the use of juridical instruments, bringing conflicting parties to the negotiating process (it is better to fight at the table rather than on the battle-ground), mediation, third party involvement, concluding binding agreements and creating reliable implementation mechanisms (Kudryavtsev 1995:287–299). This school believes that CRM should be based on the national and/or international law and legal entities – be it states or international organizations – should play a key role in these activities (although the role of civil society institutions and prominent individuals is not neglected).

With due respect to the legalist school's efforts to solve conflicts on the basis of national and international law and increase the role of law in regulating various forms of social activities, the following critical comments on this approach to CRM are made by the opponents:

- Most conflicts are generated not in the legal sphere; rather, they stem from those sectors of social life which are not covered by law.
- Most conflicts are of a mixed nature and generated by a combination of legal and non-legal causes.
- The legal system does not control the causes of a conflict and can only affect its current status. The implementation of the legal bodies' decisions often depends on the good will of the parties involved; the possibilities to establish an efficient enforcement mechanism are limited (especially in the case of violent/armed conflict).
- The law is often imperfect and lagging behind the reality. However, the legal doctrine cannot be changed at the moment when justice is administered. For this reason, many legal decisions are unsatisfactory for the conflicting parties and the causes of a conflict still remain (Dmitriev 2000: 40).

The *sociological* approach offers a broader understanding of conflict than the legalist school. This approach is based on the assumption that conflicts are a natural product of various contradictory processes in the society. The 'sociologists' do not reduce the causes of conflict to the legal ones; among the sources of conflict they identify the economic, social, identity, political, military, environmental, cultural, ideological, religious and other factors (Bikbulatova 2009; Dmitriev 2000: 76–93; Orlyanski 2007: 19–22).

Thereafter, the 'sociologists' do not limit the CRM methods and techniques to the legal instruments and procedures. This school believes that to resolve a conflict and preclude its reemergence, its causes should be eliminated first and foremost. For this reason, this school's CRM arsenal is much richer and more complex. In addition to the instruments that the 'legalists' suggest (e.g. negotiations,

cease-fire, truce and peace agreements, peace-keeping and peace-enforcement mechanisms, etc.), the ‘sociologists’ offer a broad agenda for post-conflict peace-building and development that envisage a radical transformation of the society and its institutions with the aim to eradicate the causes of the conflict (Stepanov et al. 2007; Stepanova 2003).

To prevent new conflicts the ‘sociologists’ suggest creating an early warning/monitoring mechanism. The latter should be based on a system of indicators that should monitor dangerous developments and identify conflict-prone areas. Such a system could be helpful in detecting and preventing conflicts at an early phase.

In contrast with the legalist approach which relates the CRM activities basically to the state and statist instruments, the sociological school believes that conflicts can be resolved and lasting peace is possible if not only governments but also societies talk to each other and develop non-hierarchical, horizontal contacts. That’s why the ‘sociologists’ welcome an active participation of non-state actors in the CRM activities: people-to-people, NGO-to-NGO, company-to-company contacts, the so-called ‘people’s’ or ‘civil diplomacy’.

The *PS/IR* approach is based on the sociological one but prefers to focus on political conflicts – domestic or international. Since this school is not monolithic, various paradigms differ by their views on CRM.

The Russian *realists* (like their foreign counterparts) tend to believe that the political conflicts are perennial and interminable ones because of the vicious nature of man and inevitable collision of interests in politics. The political actors, they underline, prefer to use power and violence rather than negotiations and other peaceful instruments to attain their goals. The realists are quite skeptical about the CRM activities because they believe that the opponents usually stick to the ‘zero-sum game’ logics and aim to achieve complete victory. The CRM efforts can be timely and efficient only if the situation is ripe enough. Normally, the realists maintain, it happens when the conflicting sides are exhausted and short of resources to continue the confrontation. Provided that there are authoritative and dedicated mediators, peaceful negotiations and further truce and peace agreements are possible.

If the adversaries are not ready for a compromise or there is no consensus among the mediators or there is a lack of trust among the parties involved, any CRM efforts are eventually doomed to failure. For example, the Russian realists point to the Minsk-1 (September 2014) agreements on the Ukrainian crisis as an example of inefficient CRM because neither of the conflicting parties was ready to stop hostilities and observe the cease-fire agreement. They are quite skeptical about the Minsk-2 agreements (February 2015) as well because they believe that Kiev simply needs a respite to rearm and regroup its armed forces and receive foreign military assistance to prepare itself better for a new round of fighting. Moreover, the Ukrainian leadership does not trust Moscow as a mediator and continues to publicly call Russia ‘aggressor’ and ‘enemy’ while the breakaway republics of Donbass do not completely trust Berlin and Paris, accusing them of being ‘biased’ and ‘pro-Ukrainian’.

It should be noted that the realist paradigm is the dominant one in present-day Russia and this precludes other schools from having a major say in Russia’s foreign policy making, including the CRM activities.

The *liberal* paradigm is less influential than the realist one in the Russian academic debate on CRM. The liberals believe that despite the conflictual nature of politics, cooperation and consensus are possible and preferable. Similar to the legalist approach, the Russian liberals assert that most conflicts are caused by the lack of proper legal regulations and legal culture among the people and states. They also favor CRM as a proper instrument to restore peace and stability and strengthen national and international law. But the Russian liberals admit that the sources of conflicts are not limited to the juridical ones only and offer a variety of CRM methods and techniques that aim for substantial socio-economic and political transformations (Lebedeva, 1999, 2010 and 2011).

The Russian liberals are quite critical about President Putin’s policies on Ukraine (see Sergunin 2014b). They believe that Putin has overreacted to the anti-Yanukovich “revolution” by annexing Crimea and supporting the pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine’s eastern regions. They think that Russia has violated all of its existing international legal obligations regarding Ukraine. Throughout

the past two decades, Russia has always recognized Ukraine as a sovereign independent state within its current borders. This recognition is codified within the framework of the UN, OSCE, CIS, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum as well as the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation signed in 1997. Now, the liberals stress, Russia has trampled on all of those treaties, agreements and guarantees under the false pretext of protecting Russian-speakers in Crimea and Donbass from “persecution” (Ryzhkov 2014a).

The Russian liberals believe that the Ukrainian crisis has multiple negative results for the European security system and Russia itself. Now Moscow has to face economic and political sanctions from the Western countries as well as NATO military build-up in its vicinity.

The liberals point out that by humiliating Ukrainian society and its political elites, Russia has created a hostile state on its Western borders. Ukrainians will not easily come to terms with the loss of Crimea and – potentially – eastern Ukraine. In turn, other former Soviet republics are watching Russia’s actions in Crimea and Donbass with great concern as their countries also have groups of ethnic Russians, which with the events in Ukraine may at any time serve as a pretext for Russian military intervention.

The annexation of Crimea and support for the separatists in eastern Ukraine may torpedo Russia’s plans to build the Eurasian Union. Even though Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia formally joined the Eurasian Economic Union, they will likely sabotage any plans to deepen its integration in order not to strengthen Russia’s role as a regional leader.

The liberals warn the Kremlin that by annexing Crimea and supporting the Donbass separatists, Moscow has violated the principle of the inviolability of its neighbor’s borders. This will prompt other former Soviet republics to revise their own military and strategic policies and to seek additional security guarantees from countries other than Russia. According to this school, with these acts Moscow has destroyed all faith in Russia as a guarantor of any other state’s sovereignty or territorial integrity. What’s more, the NATO countries that neighbor Ukraine and Russia now are seeking additional security measures from the alliance. The latter

has taken a respective decision at its September 2014 summit in South Wales.

The liberals believe that the Kremlin and the West should put pressure on the warring parties to fully implement the Minsk-2 agreements, including the cease-fire agreement and providing greater autonomy for Donbass which should stay with Ukraine. Moscow should agree to organize a ‘real’ referendum in Crimea under the international control and accept its results regardless of the outcome.

The *globalist* paradigm differs from the above schools by its interpretation of the causes of political conflicts and their nature. For the sake of brevity I focus on the only globalist school – *peace research*. It should be noted that Galtung’s (1964 and 1969) theory of structural violence is very popular among the Russian peace researchers (Vorkunova 2009). This school tries to explain why the violence is deeply embedded both in the society and international relations system. This group of peace researchers believes that the structural violence as a socio-political phenomenon is deeply rooted in the capitalist society and economy and constantly reproduced by the capitalist mode of production. They believe that the forms of contemporary exploitation are different from those depicted by Marx, Engels and Lenin but the essence of this phenomenon is still the same and it will continue to generate violence and conflicts both domestically and internationally.

It is interesting to note that along with the structural violence, its cultural variation is increasingly becoming a popular theme within the Russian peace research. The critical peace researchers believe that in the era of global communications the cultural violence can be even more effective than its direct or structural versions. They note that the so-called ‘color’ revolutions in the post-Soviet space and Arab countries were often generated or at least facilitated by the West with the help of public diplomacy based on the cultivation of liberal/democratic values among the local youth and political opposition. For this sub-school, the cultural violence can be even more dangerous than other forms of violence because it not only reinforces other ‘angles’ of the ‘conflict triangle’ (Galtung and Jacobsen 2000) but it can also have long-term negative and unexpected effects (Kubyshkin and Tzvetkova 2013; Sergunin 2014a; Stepanov 2014; Vorkunova 2009).

The Russian peace researchers note that different causes generate different types of conflicts. Some wars have their origin in domestic political weakness, others in a secure domestic political domination that allows free rein to an adventurous leader. Some are fought to establish domination over a weaker neighboring country, others to establish widespread hegemony, and others to defend oneself or to defend one's existing hegemony over others against a vigorous challenge (Konyshov and Sergunin 2013 and 2014).

The peace research school notes that in general usage 'peace' conveys the notion of 'the absence of war' and not any particular ideal condition of society. This broad consensus view of peace is, of course, unsatisfactory from the point of view of this peace research sub-school since we need to know more about the nature of a possible world without armed conflict. According to Galtung (1985 and 2006), peace seen merely as the absence of war is considered to be 'negative peace' and the concept of 'positive peace' has been used to describe a situation in which there is neither physical violence nor legalized repression. Under conditions of positive peace, war is not only absent, it is unanticipated and essentially unthinkable. A state of positive peace involves large elements of reciprocity, equality, and joint problem-solving capabilities. There have been many different proposals as to the positive definitions: integration, justice, harmony, equity, freedom, etc., all of which call for further conceptualization. Analytically, peace is conceptualized by the Russian scholars in a series of discrete categories ranging from various degrees and states of conflict to various states of co-operation and integration.

The dominant trend in the Russian peace research is to interpret peace as synonymous to the category of sustainable development (Samarin 2008; Stepanov 2014). Some scholars believe that 'positive' peace can be seen as a sort of a social order where not only violence, exploitation and major security threats are absent but also the favorable conditions for human creativity are provided (Sergunin 2012; Vorkunova 2009).

As far as this school's positions on CRM are concerned they are very close to the sociological approach. The Russian peace researchers put emphasis on the need to identify the causes of the conflict and eliminate them. They also pay greater attention to

conflict prevention and post-conflict peace building rather than to conflict management, peace keeping and peace enforcement which are seen as technical/instrumentalist in nature and of secondary importance (Stepanov et al. 2007).

The *postpositivist* paradigm is better represented by the Russian *social constructivism*. This school tends to agree with the sociological approach to the extent that most conflicts are identity-driven. The constructivists believe that if the identity-making process derails from the dialogic/cooperative way to the confrontational one ('we and they'-type perceptions) it almost inevitably results in a conflict (Barash 2012). For example, the Ukrainian search for its post-Soviet identity that had oscillated between the European and Eurasian ones has led to an open conflict with Russia which opposed Kiev's pro-European choice. The lack of dialogue between the parties involved and the rise of radical nationalist forces in Ukraine have provoked separatist movements in Crimea and eastern Ukraine and eventually led to an armed conflict in the breakaway regions and Russia's interference. Hence, to make CRM effective the constructivists recommend avoiding steps that can entail shaping the conflictual type of identity and favor measures to promote dialogue and mutual understanding between the conflicting parties.

The opponents, however, criticize the social constructivists for being too general, abstract and lacking specific political recommendations on both CRM and how make the identity-making process non-confrontational.

CRM METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The Russian academia distinguishes between several phases of CRM – conflict prevention, conflict de-escalation, conflict diagnostics, negotiations, mediation/third party involvement, international arbitration and track-II diplomacy – where various instruments are available. The Russian specialists try to build upon the international CRM experiences and focus on the following methods and techniques:

1. Conflict Prevention.

Most Russian CRM experts believe that it is preferable to prevent rather than manage or resolve conflicts (Dmitriev 2000: 231; Kudryavtsev 1995: 304; Lebedeva 2011: 215; Orlyanski 2007: 103–118). They believe that the following approaches can be helpful in detecting and preventing conflicts at their earliest phases:

- *Prevention through increased information/awareness, contact and exchange.* The Russian CRM experts believe that what is primarily needed is more information about the parties of a potential conflict, and more direct contacts between them, in order to dispel antipathies, prejudices, tensions, and misunderstandings. At the early stage (the 1990s), the Russian peace researchers felt that increased knowledge, personal experience and contact, as well as joint activities will result in an increase in mutual sympathy and understanding between the parties involved. As a result of intensive cultural exchanges the feeling of community and the intercultural sympathy thus generated will have a beneficial effect on political relations between different actors as well. As many Russian specialists pointed out, the vast majority of the post-Soviet conflicts have emerged because of the lack of information and proper communication between the parties involved. Some present-day Russian CRM experts also tend to explain the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine in early 2014 by the lack of knowledge about each other's intentions and miscommunications between Kiev and the Russian-populated regions of Crimea and Donbass. The former has wrongly interpreted autonomist aspirations of these regions. Instead of being engaged in negotiations with the alleged separatists and finding out what they want, Kiev has opted for the military operation. On the other hand, the breakaway regions have probably exaggerated the influence of extreme nationalists on the Ukrainian government and, for this reason they were too hasty to take anti-government positions. In sum, these misunderstandings led to a bloody conflict in East Ukraine.

The later and less naïve version of this contact/education hypothesis identified a number of preconditions to be satisfied: favorable prior attitudes; not-too-great socio-economic, political, cultural and religious differences between parties; majority/minority constellations not viewed by either side as threatening; adequate capacity to communicate; situations involving contacts and exchanges that foster proper learning, etc. It is easy to see that most of the post-Soviet conflicts do not fit these criteria and cannot be resolved by simply increasing awareness and providing better communications.

The Russian post-Soviet experiences show that in dealing with deeply rooted conflicts, increased contact and exchange alone are insufficient to overcome tensions and aversions. However, on the other hand, only on the basis of open channels of contact and communication is any settlement of a conflict conceivable.

- *Reconciliation through the reappraisal of historical entanglements.* As the Russian experts maintain, in a general sense, reconciliation evokes the notions of the overcoming of enmity, the forgiveness of wrongs, and the creation of a new, harmonious world. Examples of reconciliation are given by Germany, on the one hand, and France, Belgium and Denmark, on the other hand, Finland and Russia after the World War II. The primary task of the reconciliatory process is to examine the history of the conflict with the aim to establish a common basis on which to work out what can and should be reconciled with one another. A key role here is played by the collective identities of the actors involved in the situation, identities which have grown up in the course of history. Precisely because these identities have been shaped by the mutual competition and conflict, examination of them is central to the development of a reconciled approach to one another.
- *Overcoming prejudices and enemy images.* According to the Russian analysts, this is central to conflict prevention, since prejudices and enemy images are a major cause of the willingness to resort to aggression and violence. To overcome prejudices it is important to understand what kind of socio-economic, political, cultural, religious and psychological factors govern

perceptions of other actors. As with the first method, education and enhanced contacts play a key role in the efforts to overcome prejudices and enemy images. However, in this case education and communication go beyond the simple transfer of factual information on most dangerous stereotypes; they should bring knowledge about the background, mechanisms of generation, and functions of prejudices. Moreover, the simple idea that prejudice and enemy images must be taken away is therefore not sufficient. One must also make clear what is to take their place to avoid the rise of new prejudices and stereotypes.

- *The creation of supranational and transnational loyalties.* The most radical Russian peace researchers suggest going beyond national identities and developing transnational ones to prevent the rise of any conflicts on the inter-ethnic or inter-religious basis. This can be done by either all-embracing political entities (e.g. Europe, CIS, ‘Russian world’, etc.) or social movements that cut across the nations (e.g. peace or ecological movements). That’s why they encourage people-to-people contacts on the international level as well as various forms of cross- and transborder cooperation between local and regional governments and private/non-state actors.

The problem, however, is that the trend towards the development of transnational loyalties can be reversible. The fact that the transnational identities tend to regress to the ethno-national level during economically and/or politically tense phases was demonstrated by the anti-Western and anti-foreigner trend which emerged in Russia with the series of the ‘color revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space and especially with the start of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014.

That’s why the moderate versions of the Russian peace research school are quite cautious or even skeptical about this conflict prevention tool.

- *Creating an early warning monitoring system.* The Russian CRM experts (Kudryavtsev 1995: 287–288; Orlyanski 2007: 110–113) believe that to detect and prevent conflicts at the earlier phase a monitor system can be helpful. In turn, such a system should be

based on the indicators that identify conflict-generating factors and areas. Hence, it is crucial to select proper indicators that reflect the most important trends in the potentially conflictual areas. For example, in the 1990s the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Science, has tried to develop a monitoring system in the Russian ethnic regions which were most exposed to inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts. These activities, however, have stopped when the funding from international sponsors was halted.

2. *Conflict Stabilization and De-Escalation.*

If the efforts to prevent a conflict had failed and such a conflict has actually happened, the Russian CRM experts recommend focusing on stabilizing and reversing the situation as a precondition for an efficient conflict resolution process.

The Russian analysts note that unlike escalation, which often occurs rapidly and unintentionally, de-escalation tends to be slow and only happens intentionally through much effort. They believe that a variety of approaches are possible: the *gradual reciprocal reduction in tension approach* (GRIT), cooling off periods, media management, changing communication strategies and patterns, and others.

The GRIT approach (Charles Osgood) is especially popular among the Russian CRM specialists. The basic idea of this approach is that the disputant can initiate de-escalation by making a small, unilateral (one-sided) concession to the other side, and at the same time, communicating an expectation that this act will be matched with an equal response from the opponent. If the opponent does respond positively, the first party can make a second concession, and a “peace spiral” is begun. If the first initiative is ignored, the GRIT proponents suggest that it be followed by a second – or even a third – attempt. These concessions should be designed to build trust, but should not be terribly costly (materially or strategically), nor should they suggest weakness. However, they should indicate a willingness to transform the conflict to a more cooperative and less adversarial approach.

More specifically, the Russian experts (Kudryavtsev 1995: 295–296; Orlyanski 2007: 75–86) believe that the conflict will de-escalate if:

- Attention is focused on the problem, not the participants.
- There is a decrease in emotion and perceived threat.
- The parties to the conflict are able to listen to each other (when other parties think that you have not listened to their concerns, they will almost invariably see you as a threat).
- The parties were friendly prior to the conflict.
- They know how to make peace, or have someone help them do so.
- There is a desire to reduce conflict.
- The focus is on the future, not on the past (if you are talking about the future you engage both yourself and the other participant(s) in a problem-solving activity rather than a fault-finding exercise; you create hope, and you make yourself less threatening).

3. Conflict Diagnostics as a Prerequisite for Successful CRM.

Before entering the negotiations both the parties involved and mediators should develop their knowledge of the sources and previous dynamics of the conflict. In so doing the Russian CRM experts (Kudryavtsev 1995: 206) are based on two key assumptions. First, deeply rooted and protracted social conflicts generally have their roots in the denial of basic human needs in regard to security, identity and participation. These basic needs are universal and are not open to compromise. Conflict resolution must contribute to the satisfaction of such needs. Second, it is possible that a joint solution to the conflict will be found by fostering mutual empathy and by informing those involved of alternative modes of behavior open to them, and of the costs involved in these. In other words, by means of empathic and rational discourse, it is in principle possible to satisfy the basic needs of all parties to the conflict in regard to security, identity and participation.

The more concrete conflict diagnostic techniques include (Orlyanski 2007: 79–83):

- Identifying the causes of conflict. To successfully resolve the conflict it is important to know the factors that caused it. Since the parties involved cannot be objective a third-party intervention is desirable at this stage. It is equally important to invite experts who are qualified to professionally study the sources of the conflict and make recommendations how to remove the causes of the confrontation.
- Explaining the motivation of the conflicting parties. It is important for both the conflicting parties themselves and mediators to fully understand the motivation which drives the parties to dispute. It is necessary to identify any 'hidden agenda' if it exists as well as to distinguish between the 'real' and 'false' motives that can derail the future discussions and talks.
- Defining initial positions, SWOT-analysis. It is also important to clearly define initial positions of the parties in conflict before they start negotiations. It is equally important to make them realistic; otherwise the proposed talks can fail from the very beginning (or even before their start).

Some Russian experts suggest making a sort of SWOT analysis of the conflictual situation with the aim to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in a conflict resolution project. It is well-known that the SWOT analysis, which was born within the business administration discipline, can be carried out for nearly any project or undertaking and it involves specifying the objective of the project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective. Users of the SWOT analysis need to ask and answer questions that generate meaningful information for each category (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to make the analysis useful and find their competitive advantage.

In the case of the CRM activities, it is also quite helpful to identify factors that can facilitate or impede the conflict resolution process. Identification of SWOTs is important because they can help develop later steps in planning to achieve the CRM objective.

The Russian experts believe that the decision makers should consider whether the CRM objective is attainable, given the SWOTs.

If the objective is not attainable, a different objective must be selected and the process repeated.

- Risk-benefit analysis. The Russian peace researchers believe that the risk-benefit analysis (RBA) is one more business-like approach which could be useful for the conflict diagnostics. The RBM method seeks to quantify the risk and benefits and hence their ratio. Exposure to risk(s) is recognized by various actors as a normal aspect of everyday life. We accept a certain level of risk in our lives as necessary to achieve certain benefits. With most of these risks we feel we have some sort of control over the situation. When individuals, organizations and states are exposed to involuntary risk (a risk over which they have no control), they make risk aversion their primary goal. Under these circumstances, actors require the probability of risk to be significantly smaller than for the same situation under their perceived control.

In the case of conflict resolution, for the parties in dispute, it is very important to be sure that if they enter the negotiations with their opponent(s) they will get more benefits than risks or negative results in the end of the process.

The Russian specialists suggest the following categorization of the future risks in the CRM process:

- *Real future risk*, as disclosed by the fully matured future circumstances when they develop.
- *Statistical risk*, as determined by currently available data.
- *Projected risk*, as analytically based on system models structured from historical studies.
- *Perceived risk*, as intuitively seen by actors.

The CRM experts believe that ideally the perceived risks should match the real future risks otherwise the outcome of the conflict resolution process will be unclear.

4. Negotiations.

The next step after the conflict diagnostics is the negotiations. But, as the Russian CRM experts note, there should be a *pre-negotiation phase* which should create some favorable conditions for successful talks. They recommend before you enter the negotiations you should respond to several questions (Kudryavtsev 1995: 205–206; Lebedeva 2010; Orlyanski 2007: 89–90):

- What does this negotiation mean to you? According to the Russian negotiation experts, there are only two reasons why we enter into a negotiation. The *first* reason occurs when out of necessity, we have to. This could be due to either some immediate need, such as urgency to stop fighting, or it could be that we face severe problems in further financing of war/military conflict. The *second* reason occurs when we are seeking out an opportunity. This situation may arise simply because an opportunity has sprung up where we can solve the conflict to our benefit and/or improve our international positions and image at an opportune time.

The reason for entering into a negotiation will affect both negotiation approach and strategy, and also relative negotiating power of one participant in comparison to another one.

- The Ripple effect. The Russian CRM specialists believe that the conflicting parties also need to ask themselves whether the results of the negotiation they are conducting will affect other negotiations or agreements later. It's vital that they, as negotiators, consider the impact or consequences of an agreement in developing their negotiation strategy.
- Do we need to make an agreement? The Russian peace researchers underline that parties either enter into negotiations because they have to, or because they want to. Part of negotiation strategy will involve a careful analysis of participants' BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement). If an agreement is absolutely essential, and the parties in conflict have few alternative options, in the event of talks collapsing, this will affect their strategy. Or, if the negotiated agreement is not essential because parties have a strong option, and can walk

away with confidence, this also influences the approach to their strategy.

- Do other parties need to formally approve the agreement? Many agreements made during the negotiated process require formal approval, or ratification, before an agreement is official. And the outcome of the approval/ratification process is not one hundred percent predetermined. A head of the state or national parliament may need to review and ratify an agreement, before it comes into effect. They may not necessarily agree with text of the agreement that was worked out by the country's delegation at the negotiations. For example, to the resent of other countries, the U.S. Congress has a formal right to make amendments to, reservations on and interpretations of international treaties. There are numerous cases when the Capitol tried or managed to pass amendments to some international agreement. In some cases it led to the abrogation of treaties because the U.S. international partners did not agree with such amendments. This, for example, has happened with the U.S.-Soviet trade treaty of 1972 because of the Jackson-Vanick amendment that deprived the USSR from the most favored nation status. To give another, more recent, example: in contrast with what has been signed at the Minsk-2 summit (February 2015), both the Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko and Rada (Parliament) passed the legislation that provided more autonomy only to those Donbass regions that have been mentioned in the Minsk-1 agreement (September 2014) rather than to all the territories which are factually controlled by the rebels. Such a decision has put in jeopardy the whole peaceful process in East Ukraine because it was not accepted by the Donbass side.
- Is there a time constraint? Time has an impact on the course of negotiations from two perspectives. First, there are deadlines that might be imposed, to either make or break an agreement. Secondly, the negotiation participants all know that '*Time is money*'. Negotiations use up time, and if, for example, the gas supply from Russia to Ukraine is about to be stopped while the clock is ticking because of a disagreement on prices between Moscow and Kiev, then this is costing money. Or, it could be due

to some other resource issue, such as waiting for a badly needed IMF tranche, in order to revive the Ukrainian economy and financial system. The point to remember is that the longer the negotiations on, say, a cease-fire agreement between Kiev and Donbass drag out, the more negatively affected the bottom line.

- Is there a need for a third party? It is well-known that third parties have many different functions and roles to play in developing a negotiation strategy. They may act as agents, intermediaries, translators, consultants, or other specialists who have expertise that one or both parties require. There are occasions when a neutral third party will act as a facilitator or chairperson, to manage the negotiations. Then, there are the other occasions when a roadblock or impasse in negotiation should be hit. During these times the conflicting parties may use a neutral third party to act as a mediator or an arbitrator, to either facilitate an agreement or to impose an agreement.
- Who is going to start first? The Russian negotiation experts admit that there are situations when the parties involved have to decide how a proposal or offer is to be presented, or in deciding who is going to go first. Will they make an informal proposal before they start the negotiations, or wait until they meet face to face? Will they be prepared to make an offer after listening to each other's proposal, or do they need more information? Will they respond right away, or refer the matter to the experts for additional discussions? Will it be to one of the negotiating sides' advantage to be first in making an offer or proposal, to set an anchor around which the talks revolve? Or will it be better to hold cards tight to one's chest and let the other side go first? Of course, this will all relate to the issues, positions, goals and objectives that will determine a negotiation approach. These are very serious questions that the participants need to intelligently address, before they begin their talks.
- Who are the decision makers? Before the parties enter into the negotiations, they must establish who is going to make the decisions. What is their authority and who do they report to in their supreme body, if any? Similarly, what are the authority levels of their counterparts? Finally, can they make an agreement

in principle, or an unofficial agreement that will likely stand the test of scrutiny?

- How far will the negotiators push it? As the CRM specialists note, negotiations can be a one-shot occurrence where one party comes right out and says “*This is a one-time offer – take it or leave it.*” On the contrary, there are some instances where haggling is not considered acceptable, and will not be tolerated by the other party. Other situations will drag out into the equivalent of a marathon ping-pong match, as each party bounces offers and counter offers, back and forth between them. The parties need to know who they are dealing with, before they get too cute and find themselves cut out of the opportunity altogether. It also depends on the offer and proposal, in relation to the circumstances such as time considerations, need, and many other factors.
- Are we strong or weak? The negotiation experts point out that two or more parties who are about to engage in a negotiation seldom operate from an equal power base. If one party has something that the other side desperately needs for its survival and it has no alternatives, then this side may find itself negotiating at a disadvantage. This all relates to the question whether the parties have alternative negotiation strategies and how they stack up against their potential counterparts. One side’s weakness can be countered by strengthening its alternative negotiation strategies, or even by finding allies to support its position and add to its strength. Also, one should seek ways to diminish the power base of the opposing party where possible, before the beginning of negotiations, or even during the negotiation process itself.

To sum up, the pre-negotiation strategies need to be developed by considering a whole host of factors, which might have a powerful impact on one’s success. It is also wise to remember that negotiation strategy has to be flexible and will need to be adjusted as the game plays itself out. The parties involved cannot know everything before they go into the first meeting, so they need to prepare to adjust their strategy and tactics, as the situations warps and changes shape. As the negotiation experts stress, flexibility is vital, but good preparation is essential.

As far as *negotiation strategies* are concerned the Russian CRM specialists distinguish between two main types of behavior – bargaining and joint problem-solving (Dmitriev 2000: 261–267; Lebedeva 1999: 70–74 and 2010; Orlyanski 2007: 90–94).

The bargaining strategy, in a sense, is a continuation of the conflict but at the negotiating table rather than on the battlefield. It is of competitive/confrontational nature where one of the parties or both aim at achieving maximal unilateral gains rather than conflict resolution as such. Parties in dispute understand that the ‘zero-sum game’ is hardly possible but hope to gain as much as possible. The bargaining strategy usually paves a bumpy way for negotiations and may involve the risk of interruptions, stalemates and even a complete failure. Since bargaining does not aim at achieving mutually beneficial solutions, even in the case of success, this strategy may lead to a (temporary) compromise rather than to a removal of the causes of the conflict, i.e. conflict resolution. There is always a high risk that the conflict can reemerge when the situation changes and one of the sides decides that it is in a better position to resume the conflict.

The Russian specialists differentiate between three types of the bargaining tactics:

- (1) The hard-line one, when the parties start negotiations from the deliberately ambitious claims and continue with permanent pressure on the opponent demonstrating the lack of flexibility. The aim of such a tactics is to get the maximum number of possible advantages and conclude an agreement with the vis-à-vis on its own conditions.
- (2) The soft-line tactic is based on the assumption that by keeping the competitive spirit of bargaining it is, however, more efficient and helpful to exchange by mutual concessions in the course of the talks.
- (3) The compromise tactic when the hard- and soft-line types of negotiation behavior are combined – depending on the specific situation.

The Russian peace researchers, however, favor the non-conflictual type of the negotiation strategy – *joint problem-solving*. In contrast with bargaining, this type of the negotiation strategy aims at building

a partnership with the other side and joint search for a mutually beneficial solution. For this reason, this kind of negotiation strategy is labeled as a partnership-type, cooperative or win-win strategy. Normally, such a strategy results in a real conflict resolution and establishing a lasting peace and stability. Both sides perceive an agreement resulting from the negotiations as fair and just and, hence, acceptable and satisfactory.

Unfortunately, the win-win strategy is rarely met in the international conflict resolution practice because the extent to which the animosity between the conflicting parties develops is so large and the sources of the conflict are so deep that the negotiators are often unable to see each other as potential partners and jointly seek the best solutions. For instance, there are only few examples of when Russia was able to promote the win-win type of the negotiation strategy among the post-Soviet states, mostly in those cases when the conflicts between the CIS countries were of economic/trade/financial nature. For example, despite numerous controversies between the potential partners, Moscow has managed to bring Belarus and Kazakhstan first to the three-partite Customs Union and then to the Eurasian Economic Union. Moreover, Armenia has also joined the EEU in early 2015 and Kyrgyzstan has expressed its interest in this integrationist project. From the very beginning, negotiations between these countries were based on the win-win approach.

Along with the above two 'classic' negotiation strategies some Russian experts believe that in some cases the BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) can suggest an alternative type of negotiating strategy (Lebedeva 1999: 33–35). BATNA is an alternate plan when the talks start to wobble out of control. The experts believe that are several ways to determine the best alternatives to a negotiated agreement. First, the negotiator has to dissect both his/her position and his/her interests. Then, he/she should look at the sum of these parts relative to all the alternative options available and pick the best option. Finally, the negotiator should do the reverse from the counterparts' perspective. A well-prepared negotiator looks at the whole picture.

The specialists advise that some of the most crucial factors which should be considered by the BATNA strategy users include:

- The cost – The negotiators should ask themselves how much it will cost to make the deal relative to the cost of their best alternative. Cost estimation may entail both the short term and the long term. It boils down to figuring out which of the options is the most affordable.
- Feasibility – Which option is the most feasible? Which one can be realistically applied over all the rest of the available options?
- Impact – Which of the options available will have the most immediate positive influence on the BATNA strategy user's current state of affairs?
- Consequences – What do you think or estimate will happen as you consider each option as a possible solution?

As some Russian CRM specialists note, it is very difficult to find a 'pure', 'ideal' type of any kind of the negotiation strategies in reality (Dmitriev 2000: 245; Lebedeva 1999: 73). In real life, the negotiation strategies can vary and tend to be applied in a combination or alternatively, one after another – depending on the circumstances and parties' negotiating skills and capacities. It is impossible to suggest the best universal recipe for negotiation behavior and strategy.

5. Third-party involvement.

The Russian CRM experts believe that in the most complicated cases conflict resolution through third-party involvement can be efficient. The third-party's main job is to ensure an atmosphere conducive to engaging the conflicting parties into a dialogue and providing stimuli for a joint resolution of the problem by them.

The Russian specialists (Grishina 2008: 363–371; Lebedeva 1999: 48–49 and 2010; Orlyanski 2007: 95–97) distinguish between two types of the third-party intervention: firstly, legalistic-authoritative approach where the third party more or less determines the outcome of the conflict; and, secondly, voluntary approach where the third party merely mediates between the participants in the conflict and advises and supports them in reaching agreement.

The first approach includes different methods which range from arbitration and legal settlement of disputes to the monopoly on

force exercised by the third party which has at its disposal measures of sanctions that it can use to lend weight to its intervention (Kudryavtsev 1995: 296; Lebedeva 1999: 51–55).

In the case of voluntary approach, the Russian experts make further distinction between, on the one hand, third party's own preferred approaches, namely, consultation and facilitation, and, on the other hand, mediation in the narrow sense of this word. In mediation, the third party itself puts forward suggestions as to how the conflict might be solved. It works out compromises and assesses the suggestions of the parties to the conflict to see how susceptible they are to consensus.

The Russian CRM specialists note that there could be a problem of choosing a proper mediator because of the lack of either authority or trust to a potential third party. For example, for the Ukrainian side, it was very difficult to accept Russia as a mediator at the Minsk talks because Kiev considered Moscow as an active participant of the conflict rather than an impartial actor. For the same reason, the Donbass delegations were quite skeptical about France and Germany as third parties suspecting Paris and Berlin of being biased towards/favoring Kiev. In turn, the lack of trust between the negotiating parties and mediator(s) can result in the failure of talks or inefficiency of an agreement, if concluded.

To select a proper mediator the Russian CRM experts suggest the following procedures:

- The negotiating parties should make a voluntary choice of a third party; nobody should put pressure on them or impose on them a mediator.
- A potential third party should demonstrate and prove its neutrality, objectiveness and impartiality regarding the conflict to be mediated.
- A candidate for a mediator should have enough clout to bring the conflicting parties to an agreement and enforce such an agreement's implementation, including its economic/financial capabilities.

According to the Russian peace researchers (Grishina 2008: 357–358; Lebedeva 1999: 56–61), the mediator should contribute to the solution of the conflict by:

- Initiating the conflict resolution process by carrying out a detailed analysis of the area of conflict, setting up the necessary infrastructure, and raising the necessary funds.
- Selecting proper participants and seeing to their preparations for negotiations.
- Taking measures to assure the parties to the conflict of the honest intentions of the initiators.
- Defining basic rules for communication and interaction during the talks.
- Selecting and structuring the themes to be tackled over the negotiations and, at the same time, being flexible in terms of the agenda and prepared for a 'rolling program', in which the themes can be later changed in consultation with the participants.
- Intervening in such a way as to help participants become aware of the dynamics of the conflict and to enable them to work constructively at the solution of a problem.

The most important precondition for the third-party efforts' success is that there should be some willingness and ability on the part of those involved in a conflict to communicate with each other in a non-violent manner. The first step will then be to expose and deal with the distorted perceptions and barriers to communication, which have arisen as a result of the dynamics of the conflict. Methods to overcome prejudices and enemy images that have been mentioned earlier offer suitable means of achieving this.

It should be noted that this phase is probably one of the most difficult parts of the whole process, since participants still feel a lot of mistrust and skepticism in regard to the project. In addition, the most common rules of communication during the talks, namely the appeal for 'openness' and 'empathy', can be felt to be one-sided or unbalanced in the case of majority-minority conflicts (like between Ukraine and Donbass 'separatists'). For example, if it is part of the survival strategy of a minority to keep 'openness' to a minimum in its conduct vis-à-vis the majority, this kind of demand in a negotiation situation will put it under considerable pressure. Conversely, the empathy rule can 'privilege' the minority, since it is generally forced to a much greater extent than the majority to put itself in the opposite

position, and therefore has fewer difficulties with this demand than does the majority.

As the Russian peace researchers underline, the final, but decisive phase in the mediating process aims to secure a solution that is beneficial to all. The solution is conceived of not as a final state, in which all problems have been solved, but rather as an intermediate stage in the quest to do justice to the basic needs of all the parties involved. Of decisive significance at this point, the Russian experts maintain, is the idea that the classical ‘zero-sum game’ resulting from a heightened conflict (one side’s gain is the other side’s loss) is transformed into a configuration that produces a positive total. In the case of ethno-national or majority-minority conflicts, this involves a readiness to take the basic needs of the other groups related to their security, identity and participation as seriously as one’s own. Working on this basis, various methods designed to promote creativity can be used to aid the CRM process in relation to the particular issue in hand.

The Russian CRM experts (Lebedeva 1999: 48–50; Pushmin 1970) distinguish between different types of the third-party activities and strategies:

- ‘*Good services’ missions* (GSMs) which were included to the CRM arsenal as early as in the 1907 Hague Convention. The GSM’s main aim is to create favorable conditions for conflict resolution by providing its territory for peace negotiations or assistance in establishing contacts between the warring parties and organizing talks between them. Generally speaking, the GSM is a rather passive conflict resolution method that helps to create pre-conditions and a favorable environment for the negotiation process rather than suggests any active role for the third party. The Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko’s role in providing the contact group on Ukraine and the Normandy-4 summits with premises for their meetings in Minsk exemplifies the most recent case of the GSM activities.
- *Neutral observer to the negotiations*. This type of strategy presupposes even a more passive role for the third party than the previous one. The observer can only monitor the negotiation process but it is not supposed to intervene in the talks themselves.

However, the observer's role is positive nonetheless because the very fact of its presence over the negotiations can pacify the conflicting parties, make them more moderate and create the conditions conducive to a compromise.

- *Mediator*. In contrast with the two previous cases, the status of a mediator implies an active rather than a passive role of the third party in the peace process. The mediator not only assists in facilitating contacts between the conflicting parties or creating favorable conditions for negotiations but also can set up the framework for negotiations, intervene in the negotiation process, put pressure on the participants to bring them to a consensus and even enforce the implementation of a concluded agreement. In contrast with the GSM-type of the third party which can in principle act on behalf of one of the conflicting parties, the mediator's candidature should be approved by all the parties involved. Otherwise its role will be useless or inefficient.
- Arbitrator forms the class of its own (see the next section).

It is, needless to say, the same third-party actor that can combine or change different roles – depending on a situation.

6. *Arbitrage.*

Arbitrage is a form of alternative dispute resolution, a technique for the resolution of disputes outside the courts. The ability to resolve disputes in a neutral forum and the enforceability of binding decisions are often seen by the Russian CRM experts as the main advantages of international arbitration over the resolution of disputes in domestic courts. There is solid legal support for this view. The principal instrument governing the enforcement of commercial international arbitration agreements and awards is the UN Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards of 1958 (the New York Convention). This convention was drafted under the auspices of the United Nations and has been ratified by more than 140 countries, including most major countries involved in significant international trade and economic transactions. The New York Convention requires the states that have ratified it to recognize

and enforce international arbitration agreements and foreign arbitral awards issued in other contracting states, subject to certain limited exceptions. These provisions of the New York Convention, together with the large number of contracting states, has created an international legal regime that significantly favors the enforcement of international arbitration agreements and awards.

The theme of arbitrage as a means of mediation is studied by mainly the Russian legalist school. Depending on the degree of institutionalization of international arbitrage the Russian experts point out institutional and *ad hoc* arbitrage (Shevchuk 2009: 67). The institutional arbitrage is an arbitration done by the permanently functioning body on the basis of its statute and regulations. The examples of the institutional arbitrage bodies in the commercial sphere are the International Chamber of Commerce, International Center for Dispute Resolution, London Court of International Arbitration, Arbitration Institute of the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce, etc.

As far as the interstate conflicts are concerned some institutionalized arbitrage mechanisms are also available. The 1899 and 1907 Hague Conferences addressed arbitration as a mechanism for resolving state-to-state disputes, leading to the adoption of the Hague Conventions for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes. The Conventions established the Permanent Court of Arbitration and a rudimentary institutional framework for international arbitration of inter-state disputes. The PCA is still functioning although Russia did not apply for this court's mediation. At the same time, similar to other maritime powers, Russia regularly deals with another interstate arbitrage body – the UN Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf to solve disputable questions concerning its Pacific and Arctic shelves.

The *ad hoc* arbitrage is done on the basis of specially established organs and procedures of temporary nature. *Ad hoc* arbitration allows the parties to tailor the arbitration process to the specific circumstances of their dispute. The parties decide the seat of the arbitration proceedings. Where the procedural rules are silent, the laws of the seat will govern the procedure. As far as the international commercial disputes are concerned, the UN Commission on

International Trade Law Arbitration Rules, adopted in 1976 and revised in 2010, are among the most popular rules for this purpose. While some Russian companies were involved in the *ad hoc* arbitration over the last two decades (Shevchuk 2009: 67), Moscow has never used this legal mechanism to solve interstate conflicts.

Using the arbitration methods as a criterion the Russian legal experts (Dmitriev 2000: 242–244; Kudryavtsev 1995: 300–302; Orlyanski 2007: 95–96) identify the following types of international arbitrage:

- *Binding arbitration*: the conflicting parties nominate the neutral and authoritative arbitrators whose decisions have a decisive and binding character.
- *Recommendatory arbitration*: this type of arbitration is similar to the previous one but its decision is of a recommendatory rather than mandatory character. The parties in dispute can either accept the arbitrator's decision or bring the case to the binding arbitrage or international court.
- *Pendulum arbitration*, otherwise known as final offer arbitration (FOA), being a variation of the binding arbitrage, is a type of interest arbitration in which the arbitrator chooses one of the parties' proposals on each (or perhaps all) disputed issues.
- *Limited arbitrage* is another variation of binding arbitrage where the conflicting parties reach an agreement on the limits of the arbitration's scope and powers even before the start of the arbitration process itself. It is done to limit potential risks for the sides involved, particularly to prevent the arbitrator's undesirable decisions and keep the *status quo* situation.
- *Intermediary arbitrage* is a mixed form of arbitration where the third party should play a role of both arbitrator and mediator. The third party is supposed to find a solution to the problem which could be acceptable for all sides involved.
- *Arbitral tribunal*. The arbitrators which determine the outcome of the dispute are called the arbitral tribunal. The composition of the arbitral tribunal can vary enormously, with either a sole arbitrator sitting, two or more arbitrators, with or without a chairman or umpire, and various other combinations. In most jurisdictions, an arbitrator enjoys immunity from liability for

anything done or omitted whilst acting as arbitrator unless the arbitrator acts in bad faith. The decisions of the arbitral tribunal are final and mandatory.

7. Track II diplomacy.

In addition to the ‘official’ (Track I) diplomacy there are diverse international activities exercised by common people and NGOs (Kudryavtsev 1995: 302; Lebedeva 2011: 215). This type of activities is called ‘citizens’ diplomacy’ or ‘Track II diplomacy’. As a rule, such activities are conducted by idealistically-minded, committed individuals or/and groups who do not identify exclusively with any one party. Unlike official, inter-state diplomacy, Track II diplomacy can operate outside the conflictual structure dominated by power politics.

In Russia, the Track II diplomacy is in its embryonic phase because the civil society and its institutions are still in a creative stage. Very few Russian NGOs were involved in the CRM activities. For example, ‘Soldier Mothers’ served as intermediaries in contacts between the federal government and Chechen rebels in the two Chechen wars to release prisoners of war. The Russian, Georgian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches served as informal channels during the conflicts between these countries and helped their governments to establish contacts and start negotiations between them.

The Russian peace researchers believe that the Track II diplomacy should not only help to solve day-to-day problems; rather, it should aim at developing a civic culture of peace and non-violence both in Russia and world-wide. This school refers to the UNESCO Program of Action for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence (1999) as a relevant strategy for achieving this goal (Stepanov et al. 2007).

THE INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION

The CRM studies – in its embryonic form – have emerged in the late Gorbachev era. A number of research institutes within the Soviet Academy of Sciences (SAS), such as the Institute of World Economy

and International Relations (IWEIR), Institute of the U.S. & Canada (IUSC), Institute of Europe (IE), Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences (ISIS) as well as some universities, such as Moscow State University (MSU), Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MSIIR), Diplomatic Academy, etc., have been involved in the conflict, arms control and disarmament/conversion studies (Busygina-Thranert 1994; Politika Sily ili Sila Razuma 1989). The same institutions were invited to develop the New Political Thinking (NPT) that to a larger extent has incorporated the CRM agenda (Gorbachev 1987; Gromyko and Lomeiko 1984; Sergunin 2007: 21–22).

In 1989, the SAS established a Peace Research Institute led by Dr. Alexander Kislov. However, this institute, which had been created on the basis of the IWEIR, has always lacked finance, resources, staff and attention from the government. In the 1990s, its activities were eventually stopped.

In 1990 the Russian Conflict Resolution Center, headed by Dr. Andrei Shumikhin, was established within the IUSC. It managed to conduct several research seminars on conflict resolution with its American counterparts. Its activities were undertaken in close contact with the Russian Parliament and some local governments in different parts of Russia (Kremenyuk, 1994: 40).

It should be noted that from the very beginning, the Russian CRM took a syncretic form and this made it difficult to identify which centers belong to the peace research tradition and which can be attributed to its opposite – security studies. Sometimes the dividing lines can run within the same institution. For example, the MSU's Faculty of World Politics develops the CRM research as a part of security studies while the faculties of political science and sociology offer a peace research approach to the same field.

In the post-Soviet period the Russian CRM has been developed within four major sectors – the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS); university/higher education system; NGOs/independent think tanks/public policy centers, and professional associations (see figure 1).

Similar to the Gorbachev period, in the post-Soviet era the RAS has again pioneered in developing the CRM studies. In 1991, the

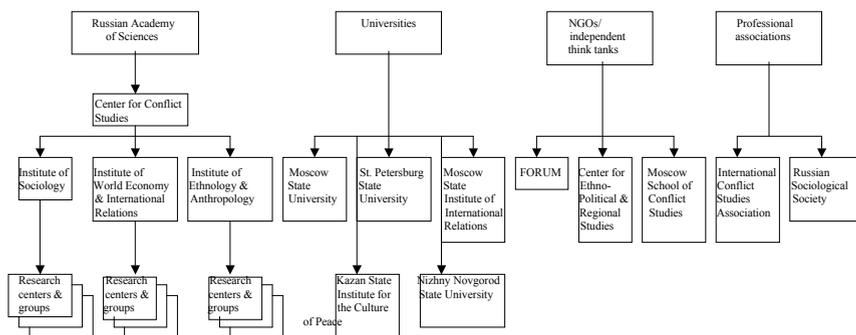
Center for Conflict Studies has been established within the RAS Institute of Sociology (IS). The center eventually developed a network of conflict studies centers in the Russian regions, such as Astrakhan, Nizhny Novgorod, Stavropol and Yoskar-Ola (Republic of Mari-El) (<http://www.conflictolog.narod.ru/OldSite/>). The center's research is based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the classical peace research (Galtung's structural violence theory, culture of peace, etc.) although it prefers to focus on Russia's internal socio-political and ethno-religious conflicts. International conflict resolution and peace-making is mainly studied in the context of globalization's contradictory implications and of minor significance for this institution (Stepanov 2014). As a result of the IS's radical reorganization in 2006 the status of the center was reduced to a working group (task force) on sociology of conflict within the Center for Regional Sociology and Conflict Studies. The group led by Prof. Yevgeny Stepanov, however, still manages to publish occasional papers and the *Conflictology* (Conflict Studies) journal (in cooperation with the International Conflict Studies Association and St. Petersburg State University).

The same – domestic – focus of conflict research is characteristic of the RAS Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, headed by Academician Valery Tishkov. The IEA has managed to develop a number of theories to explain inter-ethnic and religious conflicts and offer some conflict resolution methodology. Moreover, as it was mentioned, in the 1990s it tried to establish a monitor system in Russia's conflict-prone regions to detect potential conflicts at an early phase. Moreover, Tishkov has suggested creating a State Committee on the Nationalities Affairs to become its first minister in March 1992 (Kremenjuk, 1994: 40).

The IWEIR is the leading RAS institution in the field of international CRM. It has several research units dealing with these issues. For example, the Peace and Conflict Research Group (part of the institute's Department of International Political Problems), headed by Dr. Yekaterina Stepanova, covers issues, such as peace and conflict theory, conflict resolution and mediation methodology, conflict comparative studies, peace-keeping and peace-enforcement operations, responsibility to protect doctrine, etc. (<http://www.>

imemo.ru/index.php?page_id=587). The group edits the IWEIR’s journal *Ways to Peace and Security*. The Department of Arms Control and Conflict Resolution, led by Dr. Andrei Zagorsky, focuses on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, non-traditional (soft) security threats and challenges, conflict management and resolution, etc. (http://www.imemo.ru/index.php?page_id=589). The Regional Problems and Conflicts Research Unit – being a part of the Department of European Political Studies – deals with specific conflicts on the Balkans, East Europe and Black Sea/Caspian area (http://www.imemo.ru/index.php?page_id=603).

Figure 1. Russian CRM research network



To coordinate its peace and conflict research, the RAS has established a Center for Conflict Studies in the early 1990s. However, with the beginning of the RAS reform in 2013 it was abolished because of a lack of funding (http://www.ras.ru/win/db/show_org.asp?P=.oi-852.vi-.fi-.id-852.oi-861).

There are also some CRM-related bodies under the auspices of the RAS Presidium: the Scientists’ Committee on International Security and Arms Control (http://www.ras.ru/win/db/show_org.asp?P=.oi-2096.vi-.fi-.oi-2354) and the Russian Pugwash Committee (<http://www.pugwash.ru/>). These bodies’ main function is to coordinate the multidisciplinary research and political activities in areas such as arms control and disarmament.

It should be noted that the ongoing RAS reform that aims at its streamlining is not conducive for the further development of CRM research within the Academy. Because of structural changes and lack of funding some centers are being closed down while others are being merged or transferred to other units.

The *university*-based CRM studies centers have been developed in a more dynamic way than the RAS ones. For instance, the inter-faculty Centre for Conflict Studies was organized at the MSU in early 1990s. The center has dealt mainly with the theoretical and methodological aspects of CRM studies. By mid-1990s the MSU conflict studies were divided between the sociology and political science departments. Currently, the Department of International Relations Sociology and the Department of Political Sociology and Psychology deal with the theory of conflict and conflict resolution while the Department of Comparative Politics and Public Policy Department focus on examining specific domestic and international conflicts. The Department of Russian Politics is charge of running the recently established Conflict Studies B.A. program (<http://polit.msu.ru/conflicts/>).

The MSIIR traditionally focuses its research both on conflict resolution theory and methodology (Khrustalev 1991 and 2008; Lebedeva 1999, 2010 and 2011; Tyulin 1991 and 1994) as well as on specific international conflicts (Bogaturov 1997; Borishpolets 2005; Davydov 1993; Solodovnik, 1995; Strel'tsov 2013; Torkunov, 1995; Torkunov and Mal'gin 2012; Voskresensky 2008; Zagorski and Lucas, 1993).

The Department of Conflict Studies has been established at the St. Petersburg State University (SPSU) in 1999. This department runs B.A. and M.A. programs in Conflict Studies and publishes the *Conflictology* journal together with IS and ICSA. A number of other SPSU departments (International Relations Theory and History; World Politics; Post-Soviet Studies, etc.) conduct research on international security, conflict resolution, territorial disputes and arms control (Achkasov and Lantsov 2011; Achkasov and Yermeev 2009; Konyshev and Sergunin 2011, 2013 and 2014; Smorgunov 2012).

In 1993 a Center for Peace and Conflict Research was established at the Nizhny Novgorod State University (NNSU) by a group of

local scholars who were inspired by the Scandinavian peace research activities. This center has dealt with issues such as international security, regional conflicts, peace-keeping, conversion, arms trade, regionalism and history of peace research (Kolobov et al. 1992; Kolobov 1995; Kornilov 1996; Makarychev 1997; Sergunin 1994 and 2007; Sergunin and Subbotin 1999; Kolobov, Kornilov and Sergunin 1991; Malhotra and Sergunin 1998). At the peak of its activities in the 1990s the center published the *Nizhny Novgorod Journal of International Relations* and a newsletter *Angelos* (Peace Herald) on an occasional basis. Together with some other organizations the center has co-organized a series of seminars and conferences on international security, Russian and American foreign policies, divided nations, NATO enlargement and so on (Kolobov and Makarychev 1998). In the 2000s, the center's activities were absorbed by various units within the NNSU Faculty of International Relations.

In 1999 the UNESCO and the Republic of Tatarstan jointly established a Kazan State Institute for the Culture of Peace of UNESCO. The institute runs the training courses for mediators and civilian peace-keeper on the regular basis. It helps the Russian universities to design course and program curricula on conflict studies. In terms of research activities, the institute develops the projects on inter-civilization cooperation and the role of Islam in promotion of the culture of peace (http://kazan.culture-peace.ru/ikm_unesco_eng.html).

Currently, several dozen Russian universities run B.A. and M.A. programs in conflict studies.

Along the RAS and universities, the *civil society institutions* and *independent think tanks* are engaged in peace and conflict research in post-Soviet Russia. In 1991, a Center for Ethno-Political and Regional Studies (CEPRS) was established by the Foreign Policy Association. Since 1993 the center has become an independent think tank led by Emil Pain who was a presidential advisor from 1996–1999. Although the center's research is mostly on Russia's domestic conflicts, the CEPRS has implemented a series of projects on international security, conflict resolution and migration processes in the post-Soviet space (<http://www.indem.ru/Ceprs/Sphera.htm>).

In early 1990s, Olga Vorkunova established two NGOs – a Center for Development and Peace Studies FORUM and a Russian Academy of Peace that tried to promote peace culture and preventive diplomacy (Vorkunova 2008 and 2012). These institutions established extensive international contacts, including the International Peace Research Association (IPRA).

In 1997 the Moscow School of Conflict Studies was created with the aim to organize training in conflict resolution and mediation. The school strives to study and sum up the Russian higher education institutions' experiences in developing conflict studies programs.

As far as the *professional associations* are concerned the Russian CRM specialists failed to establish a branch of the IPRA or European Peace Research Association (EuPRA) although the Russian peace researchers are represented in these organizations, including their executive committees.

The International Conflict Studies Association was established in 1992 to coordinate both research and educational activities in the field of conflict studies (<http://www.confstud.ru/>). The Russian Sociological Society has a Research Committee on the Sociology of Conflict (http://www.ssa-rss.ru/index.php?page_id=22&id=87). These associations, however, unite only sociologists while most Russian political scientists and international relations experts remain uninvolved. It should be noted that the two leading professional associations in the field of international relations – the Russian International Studies Association and Russian Political Science Association – do not have any units either on peace research or conflict studies. The lack of a specialized peace research association remains a serious obstacle to the further development of the Russian CRM studies.

To sum up, the Russian CRM research is not properly institutionalized: there is neither a coordinating center nor specialized professional associations; research and educational activities are rather chaotic; few higher education institutions train experts in conflict resolution, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

The Russian academia made great strides in studying issues such as causes of war, history of specific conflicts, conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, peace-keeping and peace-making, humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect, the role of the UN and other international organizations in conflict management and resolution, etc. In terms of theory and methodology it has overcome the dominance of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and become open to the dialogue with other social science paradigms.

However, presently, the Russian social sciences face serious intellectual and institutional challenges. Theoretically, it is still unable to produce concepts and research approaches of its own, being heavily dependent on foreign (Western) schools. The Russian CRM research has in fact stuck at the 'negative peace' stage being unable to develop 'positive peace' theories. It has difficulties with developing an early warning/conflict prevention system either domestically or internationally. This school is not properly institutionalized either in terms of having a professional association (like IPRA) or being embedded in university curricula. It is unable to seriously affect neither the Russian national security doctrines nor the decision-making system.

Despite the above-mentioned problems, the vast majority of Russian social scientists acknowledge an increasing importance of conflict resolution at the present-day world. They believe that conflict and crisis management, aimed at preventing, containing, and terminating acute wars, once again assumed a central position in international politics. The end of the Cold War has created a new international environment with entirely new requirements for conflict resolution. This offers scholars an opportunity to engage in policy-relevant basic research to generate findings that can assist policy-makers to arrive at sound diagnoses of conflicts and effective policy actions. There are numerous basic phase models for the analysis of conflicts which identify stages such as early warning, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, mediation and post-conflict peace-building.

The CRM research continues to provide the Russian scholarship with innovative approaches and useful insights into basic IR issues

such as causes of war and conflict, nature, sources and manifestations of violence, essence and ways of achieving both ‘negative’ and ‘positive peace’, transformation of the international relations system in the post-Cold War era and so on. In addition, this type of research continues to challenge Russia’s predominant IR paradigms, thus forcing them to develop their concepts, argumentation and research techniques.

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RUSSIA'S CONFLICT SETTLEMENT AND MEDIATION PRACTISES: PROBING THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Yulia Nikitina

RUSSIAN INTERNATIONAL *VERSUS* REGIONAL MEDIATION EFFORTS: DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS

Russia is an important international mediator in the Syrian conflict, a participant in P5+1 negotiations on the Iranian nuclear dossier, and also a member of the Middle East Quartet and the Six Parties talks¹. However, Russia's own experience of conflict resolution and mediation in the post-Soviet space, especially in the 1990s, is often described as biased. While Russia's international efforts have been seen as an important contribution to international as well as regional security and stability, the contributions to regional mediating and peacekeeping in the post-Soviet space has not been viewed as a "good model".

The problem might lie in one of its aspects pertaining to the perception that the international community has in general on the

¹ Geographic priorities in Russian mediation efforts are presented in Table 1 (Annex) and discussed below in this chapter.

role of external actors and their neutrality. External actors can, on the one hand, be neutral, as they do not have “a direct stake in the outcomes of the process”². Yet, and on the other hand, this detachment and lack of insight into the local and regional processes can amount to ineffectiveness concerning external involvement in conflict-settlement. A key question in this case is thus whether peacekeeping and mediating is carried out by a neutral and external actor or a biased internal one, or perhaps even a party to the conflict.

Overall, there does not appear to be any international consensus on the role of regional mediators and regional peacekeepers. In the 2009 report on enhancing mediation, the UN Secretary General states the following: “Regional politics can play either a positive or a negative role. In some cases, regional influence may have more impact on the warring parties than international influence; in others, the opposite may be true. While regional approaches are often effective, vigilance is required in situations where regional rivalries and cleavages cause Governments to take sides, thus leading to a wider conflict.”³

Thus, one of the questions in the analysis of Russian mediation and peacekeeping in post-Soviet conflicts is whether to analyze Russia as a neutral external or biased internal actor? Is the Russian regional peacekeeping practice of the 1990s a success or failure case? Obviously, perceptions differ in Russian and Western expert communities.

The post-Soviet space after the collapse of the USSR: Legal and political frameworks for conflict-settlement

The collapse of the USSR was proclaimed in the Agreement on the creation of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) signed by Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian leaders on 8th of December 1991 in the Belovezhskaya pushcha. The document was premised on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other’s affairs, as well as the right to self-

² National Dialogue and Internal Mediation Processes: Perspectives on Theory and Practice. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2014. – P. 36.

³ Report of the Secretary-General on Enhancing Mediation and its Support Activities, 8 April 2009 S/2009/189 <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/278/78/PDF/N0927878.pdf?OpenElement>

determination and an obligation to respect the rights of national minorities and assurance of equal rights concerning representatives of all ethnic groups. Adopted in January 1993, the CIS Charter stipulated the same principles: respect for sovereignty of CIS member-states and inalienable right of peoples to self-determination and to decide their own fate without external interference; inviolability of frontiers and territorial integrity; peaceful settlement of all disputes. All these principles, including both the principle of territorial integrity and the right to self-determination, were seen as “interdependent and equal”, which inevitably led to mutually exclusive interpretations of these principles by the parties to separatist conflicts in the post-Soviet space⁴.

Furthermore, in the case of a threat to sovereignty, security or territorial integrity of a member-state, CIS heads of states have been granted the right to start immediate consultations in order to coordinate their position and undertake measures to eliminate the threat. The measures taken could also include peacekeeping operations. Individual or collective self-defense, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, is also mentioned as a legal basis for the use of force needed to counter threats. A decision concerning a joint use of forces can be taken either by the Council of the Heads of States, which consists of all CIS member-states, or it can be taken by “interested states”. The approval of all member-states is hence not required for the conduct of a CIS peacekeeping operation.

It may yet be noted that the discipline as to implementation in the CIS has since its start remained quite low. In fact, only about 10 percent of the approved documents have entered into force and this is then also why concrete practice has remained important despite the fact that these practices do not always fully correspond to international standards. Peacekeeping is a case in point. This may, however, also entail that the practices of peacekeeping and conflict-settlement in the post-Soviet region amount to some new patterns of conflict settlement. This is an issue to be explored further in what follows.

⁴ The term “post-Soviet space” is used in Russian expert community to designate 12 former Soviet republics out of 15, except for three Baltic states that later became members of NATO and the EU and, thus, became part of another region.

On the eve of the collapse of the USSR and after its breakdown in 1991, altogether five military conflicts emerged in the post-Soviet space: in Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan), Transnistria (Moldova), South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Georgia), and a civil war in Tajikistan. Russia participated in four peacekeeping operations in the post-Soviet space after the collapse of the USSR (there was no peacekeeping operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, although Russia took part in the mediation process). Notably, operations in Abkhazia and Tajikistan were conducted under the mandate of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Russia was the major funding and troop contributor to these two regional operations, while other CIS members were reluctant to participate. Operations in Transnistria and South Ossetia were legally based on multilateral agreements between Russia and parties to the conflict, with this then implying that Russia figured as the only “external” peacekeeper. No full-scale UN or OSCE peacekeeping operations took place as these actors restricted themselves to the conduct of political and observer missions.

It may be noted that various Western commentators often regard Russian and CIS peacekeeping as biased towards the government in case of Tajikistan and towards separatist republics in cases of Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. For example, Dov Lynch compares the practice of Russian regional peacekeeping in the 1990s with UN norms of peacekeeping and concludes that Russia broke all the UN norms in its conflict-settlement activities. He therefore prefers to refer to Russian actions “peacekeeping” in inverted commas⁵. Russia, in turn, perceives its role in conflict-settlement in the post-Soviet space in the 1990s as a neutral one and that of a third party in the sense of acting completely in line with UN norms. Russia thus views itself as an external actor. It may be noted, though, that this approach is not favorable for Russia. The underlying motives can be questioned, and Russia’s willingness to lead peacekeeping operations in the post-Soviet space can be viewed as part and parcel of a neoimperialist strategy aimed at restoring its status as a great power. The question thus emerges whether there are any alternative and different explanations for Russia’s motives.

⁵ Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

STATE-BUILDING AND NATION-BUILDING AS ASPECTS OF CONFLICT SETTLEMENT IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

The strategies pursued by Russia during the first half of the 1990s have clearly been related to the stages of state-building and nation-building in new independent states and may also be analyzed as such. The collapse of the USSR is often analyzed in the field of International Relations research by separating between the process that took place prior to December 1991 and the *fait accompli* unfolding after this date with the emergence of 12 independent CIS states. In IR as a discipline there has been the inclination to analyze relations among the newly independent post-Soviet states as *inter-national* in nature despite that for the first two or three years after the collapse these relations still largely retained their nature of *intra-state* relations due to the incompleteness of state-building in former Soviet republics. The central Soviet government has frequently been blamed for inaction in late years of the USSR in view of the revival of ethnic conflicts. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia played the mediating and peacekeeping role that had been expected from the central Soviet authorities, but since Russian actions were undertaken in a situation of interstate relations, Russia has frequently been criticized for interference. In sum, the policies pursued by Russia have been perceived as biased in the framework of *international* relations, although they can also be perceived as neutral and seen as aiming at creating the conditions conducive to a status quo from the point of view of *intrastate* relations.

There is, however, a kind of middle road available in the interpretations applied. It is possible to draw on the concept of incomplete sovereignty as introduced by Alexander Cooley and Henrik Spruyt⁶. In general, once empires collapse, mixed forms of sovereignty tend to emerge. They further note that when “the sovereignty-related underlying sources of conflicts among states—

⁶ Alexander Cooley & Hendrik Spruyt. *Contracting States: Sovereign Transfers in International Relations*. Princeton University Press, 2009.

contested assets, territory, borders, and functions—can all be split, shared, and reapportioned in a mutually beneficial manner”⁷. Incomplete agreements concerning the sharing of sovereignty generate political uncertainty, but such uncertainty is accepted by contracting parties as they prefer to postpone any final arrangement and preserve the option of renegotiating the amount of their sovereign rights.

The state of incomplete sovereignty lasted among the CIS states till the end of 1993. For the part of the economic sphere, the end of this stage was marked by the collapse of the Russian ruble zone in August 1993, whereas in the security sphere it took place in the form of the transformation of the General Headquarters of the CIS Joint Military Forces into the CIS Military Cooperation Coordination Headquarters in December 1993.

At large, it appears that Russia’s approach changed after the two first years of shared responsibility towards an increased emphasis on its own national interests. In fact, Russian relations with the newly independent states had basically features of international relations after 1993. This implies that there have been two different stages of Russian peacekeeping and mediation in the post-Soviet region in the 1990s. Firstly, there was the stage of incomplete sovereignty during the years 1992–1993, and secondly, the one based on the pre-eminence of national interests since late 1993. The most disputed period of Russian peacekeeping consists of the early 1990s and pertains to the situation of incomplete sovereignty.

NATION-BUILDING: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONFLICT-SETTLEMENT

Notably, the approach applied by Russia in the sphere of nation-building has been inherited from the USSR-period. As pointed out by Terry Martin, there existed a conflict during the Soviet rule. On the one hand there was the desire to promote centralization and on the other hand the need to cope with the national consciousness of

⁷ Ibid. p. 7.

various ethnic minorities⁸. Sergey Markedonov points similarly to Russia's need to build a nation-state while simultaneously aiming at gaining control over the subjects (regions) of the Russian Federation and to obtain their loyalty⁹.

It is further to be noted that after the collapse of the USSR no broadly shared understanding on what the Russian nation actually is emerged either among the political elites or within the Russian society at large. In consequence, the beginning of the new stage in state- and nation-building was marked by a constitutional crisis in September-October 1993 until the adoption of the Constitution in December 1993. This was the first official document based on the concept of a unified Russian nation. In hindsight, several Russian scholars disagree with the approach applied and argue that Russia's political elites actually failed to choose properly among many possible variants of Russian macro-identity. This missing of the opportunity has then restricted a further consolidation of the Russian society¹⁰.

In any case, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia opted for a civic nation-building premised on a model based on a macro-identity that could also possibly encompass the whole CIS region. The other CIS states opted in general for a more ethno-centric model of nation-building.

The fact that Russia inherited largely the Soviet approach to nation- and state-building has three different, albeit rather practical, implications. The first one concerns the Soviet-time conceptual opposition of “good” defensive local nationalism and “bad” offensive imperial nationalism. After its emergence in 1917, the Soviet government had to deal with the decolonization of the Russian Empire by creating Soviet Republics and autonomous republics. Rising nationalism during the civil war (1917–1922) was of surprise to Bolsheviks, in particular as they had failed in devising any coherent strategy concerning the different nationalities. They erroneously assumed that class identities would surpass national identity after

⁸ Martin T. *The Affirmative Action Empire*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

⁹ S. Markedonov. *Turbulent Eurasia. Interethnic, civil conflicts, xenophobia in the new independent states of the post-Soviet space*. Moscow, Academia, 2010. p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

the proletariat revolution. The strategy that they developed included a specifically understood right to self-determination within the framework of a unitary Soviet Union¹¹. As such, nationalism was seen by Lenin and Stalin as an unavoidable phase on the historic path leading to internationalism. It was thought that the granting of some form of nationhood would prevent the emergence of claims concerning independent statehood¹²: “Nationalism will be disarmed by granting the forms of nationhood”¹³. Overall, the Bolsheviks used policies of indigenization (korenizatsiya) as a way to tackle the imperialism of the Russian Empire. They kept apart the nationalism of the oppressing nation (offensive great power nationalism) and the defensive local nationalism that was officially justified in Soviet years¹⁴.

AN ALTERED APPROACH

Also President Boris Yeltsin’s famous slogan “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow” has the same conceptual and ideational background and it may equally be noted that Russia’s sympathy for separatist territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria had initially similar roots, although the rise of separatist movements in the country itself has then over time altered Russia’s approaches to nation- and state-building.

Yet another implication for the settling of conflicts that flows from the nation-building strategies consists of the distribution of Russian passports as well as attempts since 1993 to introduce double citizenship with CIS states. The passport policies conducted by Russia in separatist republics have usually been analyzed in the framework of conflict-resolution rather than applying the framework of the

¹¹ Martin T. *The Affirmative Action Empire*. Cornell University Press, 2001. – 528 p.

¹² Ibid. p. 5.

¹³ Ibid., p.8

¹⁴ S.Markedonov. *Turbulent Eurasia. Interethnic, civil conflicts, xenophobia in the new independent states of the post-Soviet space*, p. 7. Moscow: Academia, 2010 – C. 7).

wider Russian policies of nation-building, i.e. policies that started in the 1990s. For example, passportization of South Ossetia and Abkhazia has been portrayed as an action that subverted Georgian sovereignty and undermined Russia's efforts to act as a mediator in these conflicts¹⁵.

Yet also another and broader interpretation is conceivable. It can be assumed, departing from the wider context of Russian policies of passportization and double citizenship, that these were actually Russian attempts to coin and contribute to the emergence of a regional macro-identity that would, inter alia, be conducive to the incorporation of the Russian-speakers left in the new independent states after the collapse of the USSR. As Dmitry Furman formulated it in 1997, "Russians and Russian-speakers are a divided nation", because 17% of all Russian live in the "near abroad"¹⁶. In any case, the effort to introduce double citizenships failed with some exceptions in Turkmenistan and Tajikistan¹⁷. Views have in general remained critical as also indicated by Russia's search for a unifying macro-identity as a substitute for its not yet formed civil nation identity has often been seen as containing 'neo-imperialist' connotations, and in consequence also Russia's engagement in peacekeeping has been regarded as biased.

The third implication of the inherited Soviet strategies has been that the search in the other CIS states for a durable national identity ended with the prioritization of an ethnically premised model of nation-building with the so-called "titular" ethnic groups "usurping" all power¹⁸. This contrasts with Russia's choice and in the post-Soviet political and academic circles there exists a widely-shared perception that an acknowledgement of the civic nation would imply

¹⁵ Scott Littlefield, 'Citizenship, Identity and Foreign Policy: The Contradictions and Consequences of Russia's Passport Distribution in the Separatist Regions of Georgia'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 8, October 2009, p. 1473.

¹⁶ Interethnic Relations and Conflicts in post-Soviet States. Annual report of the Network of ethnologic monitoring and early warning of conflicts, 1998, p..32.

¹⁷ I.Zevelev. 'Compatriotes in Russian Politics on the Post-Soviet space'. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2008, Issue 1, http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_10265

¹⁸ V.Tishkov, Yu.Shabaev. *Ethnopolitology: Political Functions of Ethnicity*. Moscow: MGU Publishing House, 2011, p .91.

a negation of ethnic nation as a concept¹⁹. This conceptual approach is problematic as to the definition of ethnic minorities. According to Tishkov and Shabaev, the difference between understanding of the concept of national minority in the post-Soviet states and the Western understanding consists of minorities in the Western states being included in the entire nation, while minorities in post-Soviet states are perceived as a separate group not really belonging to the titular nations²⁰. Overall, it appears that the inertia in mentality as well as lingering influence of ethnic nationalism makes it quite difficult to move over from the concept of ethnic nation to civic one in the post-Soviet states.

Interestingly, it appears that the post-Soviet leaders expected interethnic and interfaith conflicts to prevail over other types of conflicts in the CIS-region. Article 16 in the CIS Charter, adopted in January 1993, proclaims that CIS member-states will take all possible measures to prevent conflicts, first of all, between different ethnic and confessional groups (“na mezhnatsionalnoy i mezhhkonfessionalnoy osnove”) that might lead to an infringement of human rights. Such a pledge does not cover Transnistrian and inter-Tajik conflicts, because these pertain to other reasons than the interethnic or interfaith ones. Notably, no other types of conflicts have been brought up in the Charter.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INCOMPLETE SOVEREIGNTY IN THE YEARS 1992–1993

Russian involvement in the regional conflicts in the post-Soviet space has been partly induced by the fact that after the collapse of the USSR, Russian troops have been stationed on the ground from the very outset. This has been due to the reorganization of the Soviet Army as well as transfer of these military forces to Russia. The Russian President officially established the Russian Armed Forces only in March 1992, but until the 7th of May 1992, they were assigned to the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, pp.91–92.

General Headquarters of the CIS Joint Military Forces, and became national Russian Armed Forces only after this date. Other former republics also decided to create their national armed forces instead of the CIS Joint Military Forces. Not surprisingly, partition of Soviet military heritage between former republics was a thorny process. For example, in 1992 Russia and Ukraine had a dispute over the Black Sea fleet stationed in Sebastopol, as both states pretended to include the fleet in their respective national armed forces. Until 1995, during the so-called transition period, the fleet was simultaneously subordinated to both Presidents, and later it was transferred to the Russian Armed Forces.

Moreover, quite frequently, Russia has been unable to control what was happening on the ground, and on occasions Russian military units have also been left to themselves and have been forced to get along without financing from Moscow. Sometimes military equipment and armaments were seized by local illegal armed groups.

For example, in Tajikistan both the central government and the opposition endeavored, throughout 1992, to win over the 201st division in order to gain access the stocks of weapons. Arguably, the general attitudes on the ground were in this sense instrumental rather than political. The instrumental reasons disappeared once the division was manned with more contingents from Russia, and it gained the capacity to protect itself.

Various plans to create a unified command, and pool CIS military forces existed up to the year 1993. This implied among other things that also the Russian military forces remaining in Tajikistan, which used to be Soviet military forces, were mainly perceived as future components of a joint CIS force²¹. Moreover, Russia and Tajikistan proclaimed in their Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, signed on 25th May 1993, that they opt for a “joint defense policy” as part of joint CIS Military Forces²². This treaty then also provided the basis for the Russian troops (201st division) to engage themselves legally in the protection of Tajik borders and efforts of infiltrations by Tajik opposition groups based in Afghanistan.

²¹ Alexander Nikitin. *Peacekeeping operations: Doctrine and Practice*, 2000, p. 80.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS

The incomplete sovereignty and lack of efficient law enforcement institutions on the ground implied that Russian troops and Russian peacekeeping contingents had to frequently perform various functions that actually belonged to local institutions. This was also impacted by the fact that after the collapse of the USSR, representatives of the peacekeeping contingents on the ground continued to perceive the citizens of the newly independent states as their compatriots.²³ It was hence natural for them to contribute to local affairs.

Similarly, towards the end of 1992 and early 1993, the Russian 14th Army based in Moldova usurped law enforcement functions and partially functions of peacekeeping force in Transnistria. This was, as such, welcomed by the local population, but nonetheless quite illegal²⁴.

The same pattern was also present in South Ossetia in 1992–1993. The Russian peacekeeping contingent in South Ossetia engaged itself in law enforcement. It did so as the Ossetian and Georgian peacekeeping contingents were unable to perform such a function in being allegedly, and according to various reports, mainly staffed by former participants to armed conflict as well as local criminals. In some cases, the Russian peacekeepers gradually shifted from their initial function to economic tasks. Thus, after the consolidation of political regimes in Georgia and South Ossetia in December 1994, all peacekeeping contingents on the ground were united under the control of the Russian General Anatoly Merkulev. This took place with the consent of all the parties. Later in 1995 this contingent switched from law enforcement to restoration of local economy. Among other things, they organized weekly meetings between Ossetians and Georgians in order to address local economic problems.

²³ A.Sokolov. Russian peace-keeping forces in the post-soviet area, in: *Restructuring the global military sector. Vol. I: New wars*, (ed.), M. Kaldor and B. Vashee on behalf of The United National University / World Institute for Development Economics Research, Pinter, London, GB, 1997, pp. 207–230. <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/peace/peacekeep.htm>

²⁴ Ibid.

In the economic sphere, Russia also shared some responsibilities of the Georgian state: in September 1993, Russia and Georgia signed an intergovernmental agreement (expired in 1997) stipulating that both sides assumed responsibility for the financing of reconstruction work in the zone of the conflict.

RUSSIA AS PARTY TO CONFLICT? LEGAL ISSUES

The agreement on the principles concerning settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, signed in June, 1992,²⁵ stated that the Mixed Control Commission established to monitor the implementation of this agreement was to consist of the “parties involved in the conflict”. This implied that also Russia, along with North Ossetia, was viewed as party to the conflict.

The Agreement reached between Moldovan and Russian governments and signed in July 1992 created a similar constellation. It was further endorsed by Igor Smirnov, the head of the Transnistrian republic. It amounted to the creation of a joint trilateral Control Commission that aimed at controlling the implementation of the agreement. This then also included Russia²⁶. The agreement stipulated, among other things, that the 14th Army had to observe neutrality. Alarmed by the independent position held by the Commander of the 14th Army General Lebed, Moldova insisted that the Russian peacekeeping contingent should not be recruited from the 14th Army, because the 14th Army consisted

²⁵ Agreement on the Principles of Settlement of Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict of June 24, 1992. <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/1902246>

²⁶ On Principles of Peace Settlement of Armed Conflict in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova on July 21, 1992 http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/1651~v~Accord_de_cessez_le_feu_entre_la_Transnistrie_et_la_Moldavie_du_21_juillet_1992_-_document_en_russe_anglais_roumain.pdf

mainly of inhabitants of the Transnistrian region²⁷. Russia agreed and acted accordingly. Thus, an agreement on the withdrawal of the 14th Army from Moldova within a period of three years was signed in October 1994. In addition, the withdrawal was linked to the search for a political settlement to the Transnistrian conflict, which allowed for recurrent postponement of withdrawal in absence of political settlement. The issue of Russian troops' withdrawal appeared later on the agenda of the OSCE Istanbul 1999 summit.

Debates about Russia's role in the settlement of the conflict circulated around the question whether Russia was a party to the conflict or if it was instead to be viewed as a neutral third party. In cases of South Ossetia and Transnistria peacekeeping operations were premised legally on multilateral agreements. As these did not correspond to the norms set by the UN, the operations could not be considered as proper forms of peacekeeping. However, if the same multilateral agreements are analyzed with an assumption that relations between states remain incomplete as to their sovereignty, these agreements can be considered as legitimate, because incomplete sovereignty allows for agreed involvement in domestic affairs without considering it a break of sovereignty. Of course, from the point of view of the UN Charter, an incomplete sovereignty situation contradicts the universal value of sovereignty. Nevertheless, the voluntary nature of agreements on conflict settlement in the post-Soviet space makes them legitimate at least for regional actors.

²⁷ The Commander of the Russian 14tg Army in Transnistria Alexander Lebed': "They can scream under my window as long as they want, this will change nothing...", *Zerkalo nedeli*. Ukrain 28.10.1994. http://gazeta.zn.ua/POLITICS/komanduyuschiy_14-y_rossiyskoy_armiye_v_pridnestrovie_aleksandr_lebed_pod_moimi_vorotami_mozhno_vizz.html

RUSSIAN APPROACHES TO NATION-BUILDING: SHIFTS IN SUPPORT TO THE PARTIES OF THE CONFLICT

Initially Russia's supporting of separatist territories was accounted for by pointing to the fact that Russian troops were stationed in the regions of conflict. They had thus developed close ties with local populations. Moreover, Russia then still believed in "good" local nationalisms and approved, if not encouraged the taking of as much sovereignty as possible. Therefore, also the support provided by the Russian contingents on the ground for separatist parties to the conflicts was left without proper attention by the central Russian authorities who, in the early 1990s, were more preoccupied with Russian domestic political economic developments. Yet, somewhat later Russia shifted its position in order to support territorial integrity of the new independent states. Thus, a shift took place as Russia was confronted with a possible collapse of the Russian Federation and in consequence centralization as well as the preservation of territorial integrity pushed aside the Soviet-time inertia, i.e. the idea of supporting some forms of local nationalisms as a means to avert state collapse. The change was epitomized by the address of President Yeltsin to the Federal Assembly in 1995. He insisted in his speech that state integrity is primordial, and that separation from this "civic organism" is legally conceivable only under quite special conditions. As a case in point he approved the use of force against the Dudaev regime in Chechnya in order for Russia's territorial integrity to be re-instated²⁸.

Another change in Russia's conceptual approaches to regional peacekeeping has evolved since 1995 with Russia requesting various international institutions to get involved in the conflict-settlement process in the CIS region. In his address to the Federal Assembly, Yeltsin blamed the UN and the OSCE for their "unduly modest"

²⁸ Address of the President of Russia to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation "On the Effectiveness of State Power in Russia", 1995. http://www.intelros.ru/strategy/gos_rf/psl_prezident_rf_old/72-poslanie_prezidenta_rossii_borisa_elcina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rf_o_dejjstvennosti_gosudarstvennoj_vlasti_v_rossii_1995_god.html

practical support to the CIS and Russian peacekeeping activities in the post-Soviet space. He complained that “the conduct of full-scale operations under the UN flag, namely in Georgia and Tajikistan, has been restrained by a number of UN Security Council members”²⁹. Another document on the “Strategic course of Russia with CIS member-states”, approved in September 1995, stipulates that Russia should undertake efforts to make regional peacekeeping truly collective. Among other things, other CIS states should be invited to participate more actively. In addition, Russia should aspire for real and extended participation of the UN and OSCE in conflict-settlement in the CIS³⁰. This was called for as the UN and the CSCE/OSCE remained disinterested during the years 1992–1994 in any full-scale international peacekeeping operations covering the CIS region.

Transnistria

The 14th Army, based in Transnistria, was transferred to Russia only in April 1992. It was, as a contingent, inclined to favor Transnistrians while the region then also preferred to utilize the Army as de facto peacekeepers, although formally the 14th Army was not part of peacekeeping contingents. In fact, the Head of the 14th Army, General Alexander Lebed, openly supported Transnistria against the central Moldovan government and promised to intervene in case the armed conflict continued. Notably, a declaration along these lines was neither coordinated with Russia, nor was it disavowed by Moscow.

However, Transnistria opting for Russian troops made Moldova search for more neutral assistance. Thus, prior to accepting Russian peacekeeping, the government aspired for the formation of an international peacekeeping contingent. It would have consisted of peacekeepers from Bulgaria, Belarus, Romania, Russia and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Strategic Course of Russia with CIS Member-States, September 14, 1995. <http://www.mid.ru/bdcomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/4e3d23b880479224c325707a00310fad!OpenDocument>

Ukraine³¹. Once this attempt failed, and before entering into an agreement with Russia in late July, Moldova's President Snegur called in early July 1992 for a CIS peacekeeping mission consisting of Moldovan, Russian, Ukrainian as well as Belarusian troops. However, this request was turned down and hence Russia became the only actor ready to provide peacekeeping services at that time.

However, there were budgetary constraints that had to be taken into account. Russia decided to retrieve some peacekeepers stationed abroad to economize on their allowances. Thus, in 1995 Moscow decided to reorganize its forces in Moldova by renaming the 14th Army into an Operational group of Russian troops in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. It was also concluded that there was no longer any need for a Head of the 14th Army. Overall, the influence of the Army on the local developments declined due to these measures. As part of this reorganization, part of these renamed forces was re-trained as peacekeepers in order for them to step into the place of the Russian peacekeeping contingent that returned to Russia. This policy may, on the one hand, be perceived as some kind of support for Transnistria, because the former 14th Army mainly consisted of inhabitants of Transnistria. However, on the other hand, a wider context of reorganization of the Russian army explains that this, most probably, was an unintended consequence of economization strategy.

Georgia

The Russian troops in Abkhazia that arrived after the collapse of the USSR were stationed in the conflict zone and unofficially supported the Abkhaz side of the conflict. This did not resonate with the position of the Russian government, as the government aimed at staying neutral and endeavored at introducing sanctions against both parties to the conflict.

³¹ Gribincea. *Politica Rusa a Bazelor Militare: 'Georgia si Moldova'* [The Russian policy of military bases: Georgia and Moldova]. Chisinau: Civitas.1999, 156–57, quoted in: 'The Transnistrian conflict – new opportunities and old obstacles for trust building (2009–2010)', Stanislav Secieru *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* Vol. 11, No. 3, September 2011, pp. 241–26

The agreement on the principles regarding settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, reached in June, 1992, included a provision that stressed the necessity to deprive the Russian forces of any option of involvement in the conflict. In line with this provision, Russia withdrew two regiments located in the conflict zone. Russia's official policy on the Georgian conflict with Abkhazia was proclaimed in August 1992, with Russia deciding to support the territorial integrity of Georgia.

In line with this, Russian troops supported Georgia's President Eduard Shevardnadze by taking control over major transport networks in Georgia, thereby also preventing the supporters of the former Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia from approaching Tbilisi. As part of the deal, Georgia entered the CIS³² and allowed Russian bases to be located on Georgian territory. Georgia also joined an agreement concerning the initiation of CIS peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia. The UN, in turn, decided to abstain from sending UN peacekeepers to the region due to a lack of conditions required for a peacekeeping operation, although the Secretary General expressed his view that Russian troops could proceed as peacekeepers. Likewise, the option was kept open for these Russian troops to be included in a UN peacekeeping contingent.

Crucially, the mandate for the operation in Abkhazia was more in line with the international peacekeeping norms than other Russian peacekeeping operations conducted within the CIS. It is also to be noted that in contrast to other operations in the region, Russian peacekeepers exceeded their powers only once. This took place in early September 1994, with Colonel-General Georgy Kondratiev, head of the Russian peacekeeping contingents, threatening to start unilaterally a returning of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia and fending off any efforts of intervening in this process. Yet, the initiation of this operation was cancelled from Moscow, and Russian Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev visited Georgia as a mediator in Georgian-Abkhaz consultations on refugees. At large, the unwillingness of the Abkhaz side to cope with Georgian refugees was settled politically and not militarily.

³² Georgia was accepted as a member of CIS in December 1993.

Furthermore, the Georgian authorities, since spring 1995, called for a change in the mandate of the peacekeeping contingent advocating that they also receive police functions to have more control over Abkhazia region, whereas the Abkhaz representatives would like to reduce the powers of the Russian peacekeepers. Basically the aim of the Abkhaz representatives was that security-related services unfold only within their own law enforcement structures.

Tajikistan

The first CIS document on conflict in Tajikistan, issued in October 1992, proclaimed that the CIS was ready to send peacekeepers on the basis of an official request from the Tajik government³³. In the same document, the heads of states supported “peacekeeping activity initiated by the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, and efforts by other CIS states to stabilize the situation in Tajikistan”. The issue of Russia’s role on the borders with Afghanistan was not brought up.

Yet, CIS initially refrained from intervening in order to support the Tajik government. The policies pursued changed only with Emomali Rakhmonov becoming the new president in the aftermath of the so-called People’s Front having defeated the forces of the opposition. The logic applied by CIS in supporting the new Tajik government and the regime of the newly elected President Rakhmonov pertained to the idea of avoiding a failure and collapse of the state.

The first step in the internationalization of the operation in Tajikistan took place in September 1993 with the signing of three agreements pertaining to CIS Collective peacekeeping forces. The agreements were signed by five CIS states, i.e. Russia and four Central Asian states except for Turkmenistan.

Further steps were taken once the Council of the CIS heads of states took, in February 1995, a decision to support an appeal of these same five states to the Chairperson of the UN Security Council.

³³ Declaration of the CIS Council of Heads of States on October 9, 1992 (Заявление Совета глав государств СНГ от 9 октября 1992) http://docs.pravo.ru/document/view/19381323/?search_query=%D0%A2%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B6%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD&from_search=1

They pledged for a full-fledged peacekeeping operation in Tajikistan under UN mandate³⁴. They further announced that the parties to the conflict were ready to accept international assistance in their endeavors. In order to facilitate the launching of a full-fledged UN peacekeeping mission, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were ready to submit their contingents already based in Tajikistan and allow them to function as CIS Collective peacekeeping forces to be used in a capacity of UN peacekeepers during “the first stage of the operation”³⁵. However, the plan did not materialize as it did not get the required support in the UN Security Council.

Russia did not sign the cease-fire agreement (Protocol on the Fundamental principles of establishment of peace and national reconciliation in Tajikistan of August 1995) as it did not consider itself as a party to the conflict. Signing would have implied that Russia does not merely contribute to the cease-fire but also lends support to the Dushanbe government. Russian position was that it was only responsible for the border security of the external borders of the CIS as an organization.

It is notable in this context that the idea of providing military assistance to Tajikistan was strongly opposed within domestic Russian policies. It was resisted as it had strong connotations of the Soviet Afghan experience. Similar feelings existed also in other CIS states. Therefore, when the Commander of the Collective peacekeeping forces in Tajikistan addressed the Council of the CIS ministers of defense in April 1995 and requested that the number of troops in Tajikistan be increased with up to 16,000 soldiers to assist the border guards, the request was turned down.

Finally, in January 1996, Boris Yeltsin declared that Russian troops would not be used in military operations in Tajikistan. He stressed that their mandate only entails a safeguarding of the Tajik border with Afghanistan.

³⁴ Protocol Decision of February 10, 1995 on Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, of the President of the Russian Federation, of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Conduct in Tajikistan of a Full-Scale Peacekeeping Operation under the Auspices of the UN <http://docs.pravo.ru/document/view/17355596/15005871/>

³⁵ Ibid.

RUSSIAN STRATEGIES OF MEDIATION AND SETTLEMENT OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS: CONTINUITY AND COHERENCE

It seems that the current Russian strategies of mediation and conflict settlement are quite coherent and comparable across different cases, both regionally and internationally. However, recent developments on the post-Soviet space (Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014) seem to point to Russia having returned to the beginning of the era of incomplete sovereignty and support provided for “good” nationalisms against “bad” nationalisms. In fact, many of Russia’s current-day approaches appear to be grounded in the experiences of the regional peacekeeping pursued in the 1990s, i.e. experiences rooted in Russia’s domestic strategies of state- and nation-building rather than the requirements set by the dominant external conditions. Yet another factor consists of Russia’s self-perceptions as a global great power. It then follows that on occasions these two set of approaches, the first one based on domestic strategies and the other one on strategies of “greatpowerness” (*velikoderzhavnost’*)³⁶, may clash with each other.

The identification of influences and tracking changes in the conduct of foreign policy has significantly improved as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started to publish detailed yearly reviews in 2007. Considerable shifts in Russia’s self-perception and attitudes towards the West towards more assertive ones took place in 2006–2007. The turning-point was marked by President Putin’s speech at the Munich Security Conference³⁷.

The foreign policy reviews also cover, as part of the section on multilateral diplomacy, Russia’s activities in the sphere of conflict

³⁶ For Russian “greatpowerness”, see in: M.Y.Urnov, ‘Greatpowerness’ as the Key Element of Russian Self-consciousness under Erosion’. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. 2014. Vol. 47. No. 3–4. pp. 305–322.

³⁷ Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy February 10, 2007 http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml

settlement and crises management. This then allows for a tracking of changes in the Russian priorities over time in these fields (see Annex 1).

Overall, the Middle East seems to have been constantly prioritized in the Russian efforts of mediation and conflict settlement, whereas regional conflicts such as those of Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria have a bottom rank. However, in the “Geographic directions of foreign policy” section, the CIS region gains a top ranking while the Middle East is positioned in 6th place. The explanation might be that the conflicts in the Middle East do not present an immediate threat to Russian national security, in contrast to the nuclear issues connected to Iran or North Korea.

One may further note that the two nuclear dossiers have gained a low place on the list of conflicts where Russia actually has a mediating role. The explanation could possibly be that Russia prioritizes conflicts where it has influence as a great power instead of having to confine itself to the role of a regional one. The conflicts with Russian mediation fall in general in three groups: 1) conflicts where Russia inherited its role as a mediator from the USSR or is able to build on good relations with former Soviet allies or satellites; 2) nuclear security issues; 3) regional conflicts in the post-Soviet space with internationalized mediation. At large, the first two types of conflicts present Russia with an opportunity to display its international influence and act as a global power, whereas the third type of conflicts are problematic in the sense that issues part of domestic state-building and strategies pertaining to nation-building frequently clash with great power ambitions.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF THE UN AND OSCE

The UN is presented in all Russian foreign policy documents and official statements as the cornerstone in the global and regional security architecture. Much emphasis is thus placed on the UN system, not least because of the permanent seat in the Security Council inherited from the USSR. It furnishes Russia with the stance of a great power. It is, however, broadly claimed that the US and NATO endeavor at a usurping of the role of the UN in conflict settlement

by introducing and highlighting the principle of responsibility to protect.

In general, Russia supports the principle of responsibility to protect, while questioning Western approaches to implementation of this principle. Syria figures as the most recent example of the clash of Russian and Western approaches. Russia managed, perhaps even to its own surprise, to promote an agenda of conflict settlement based on Russia's preferred normative approach: direct talks between the parties to conflict without any prior international intervention and regime change. At the Geneva II conference on Syria in January 2014, differences between U.S. and Russian views on the role of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a transitional government remained. There was change, though, in the sense that his resignation was no longer viewed a precondition for direct talks between the Syrian opposition and government. Russian diplomacy turned out to be successful, albeit the outcome may in part also pertain to an "intervention fatigue" on the side of the U.S.³⁸

Apart from the UN, Russia recognizes the importance of the OSCE in the settling of regional conflicts. According to a speech by Foreign Minister Lavrov, delivered at the OSCE ministerial meeting in 2014, the OSCE has a unique opportunity to take the lead in the security processes in the Euro-Atlantic space. It may harbor the competence to overcome negative trends and work out a positive agenda³⁹. Whereas disagreements prevail in many fields, the OSCE appears to remain a more trusted international structure and is by Russia viewed at least as less biased than NATO and the EU.

When comparing formats of international mediation on Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, Minister Lavrov stated that the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs was "an exemplar of international mediation". It stood for good coordination among mediators, while

³⁸ The ideas on the responsibility to protect were earlier published as part of my PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo: Yulia Nikitina. *Russia's Policy on International Interventions: Principle or Realpolitik?* *PONARS Eurasia policy memo* No. 312. February, 2014. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russia%E2%80%99s-policy-international-interventions-principle-or-realpolitik>.

³⁹ Speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V.Lavrov at the 21st meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Basel, 4th of December 2014. http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/9D9EB8C37342D1C1C3257DA400446D54

the Transnistrian 5+2 model had a lot of pitfalls as each mediator and observers tended to pushed forward their own ideas⁴⁰. As to Transnistria, the role of the US is not viewed as a constructive one as the US has, according to Russian perceptions, “usurped” the position of the OSCE representative on Transnistria settlement for almost 20 years. Moreover, the US has refrained from signing a joint US-Russia declaration regarding principles to be applied in settling the Transnistrian conflict, i.e. principles suggested by the Russian side in March-April 2014⁴¹.

While critical in view of the US involvement in Transnistrian mediation, Russia perceives its own role in the post-Soviet space as quite special. Along these lines, President Putin believes that Russia has special relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan due to common history, with this then allowing Russia to be engaged in a sincere exchange of views concerning a settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh issue⁴². Overall, Russia appears to respect international formats of mediation but it also holds the view that these formats do not allow for the same level of openness that Russia has achieved in its bilateral dialogues with former Soviet republics. That is exactly the case where Russian global and regional ambitions clash with each other. As a global power, Russia should prioritize international mediation formats to confirm its status of a center of global influence. However, in such multilateral international formats Russian authority is often perceived by the parties to the conflict as less important than authority of, for instance, the US or the EU. Thus, Russia tries to establish its authority on the regional level through exclusive formats of bilateral cooperation with parties to the conflict.

⁴⁰ Speech and answers to the questions by media representatives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V.Lavrov during the press-conference on his participation in the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, Basel, 5 December 2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/E0A75921311AFD98C3257DA5004B253A

⁴¹ Open lecture by S.V.Lavrov on actual questions of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 20 October 2014, <http://interaffairs.ru/read.php?item=11949>

⁴² President Putin, ‘The Russian Federation supports international mediation in Nagorno-Karabakh’, *RIA Novosti*, 10 August 2014, <http://ria.ru/politics/20140810/1019495204.html#ixzz3PSD74TCw>

EXTERNAL MEDIATION, NOT PARTICIPATION IN CONFLICTS

In the case of Ukraine, the West and Kiev claim that Russia should be considered as a party to the conflict, whereas Russia denies involvement in the separatist conflict in South-Eastern regions of Ukraine. Russia does in general not consider itself a party to the existing frozen conflicts on the post-Soviet space and this approach has also been applied to the Ukrainian conflict.

For the part of Georgia, Tbilisi hold the view, based on the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan signed on 12 August 2008, that Russia is a party to the conflict. Foreign Minister Lavrov does not share this stance and stresses that the first version of this document in Russian contained a preamble in which Russia and France called upon the conflicting parties to stop violence. Russia does hence not recognize itself as a conflicting party⁴³. However, when President Sarkozy brought this version of plan to Tbilisi, President Saakashvili crossed out the preamble and this is why the Russian and Georgian sides proceed from different versions of the plan⁴⁴.

Russian unwillingness to be considered a party to the conflict is more generally grounded in a desire to remain above the fray and present itself as an international mediator, not a regional actor.

ISSUES OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

The Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008 seems to prove that Russia changed its stance on territorial integrity and self-determination. In 1999, Russia vehemently protested against the NATO operation in

⁴³ The Russian version of plan in a format of UNSC resolution draft presented to the UNSC on 21 August 2008 <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Georgia%20Blue%20draft%20resolution.pdf>

⁴⁴ Speech and answers to the questions by media representatives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V.Lavrov during the press-conference on his participation in the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, Basel, 5 December 2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/E0A75921311AFD98C3257DA5004B253A

Kosovo, and Russia still does not recognize Kosovo's independence. Moreover, Russia continues to support Serbia in all international forums where Serbia protests against Western recognition of Kosovo. However, in the same year of Western recognition, Russia itself recognized South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence. Thus, there seems to be a shift in Russian logic. Meanwhile, if in 2008 Russia really intended to create a precedent that was more accepting of interventions and separatism, then it would have altered its position on other frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space. Notably, this did not happen because in cases of Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia continues to insist on the principle of territorial integrity.

For example, in the framework of the Transnistrian "5+2" mediation process, Russia holds that Transnistria should be furnished with a special status in the framework of a sovereign and neutral Moldova whose territorial integrity should be respected. This approach implies that if Moldova becomes part of Romania or gains membership in NATO, Transnistria would have a right to make an independent decision regarding its own status, without taking into account Moldova's position.

Another evidence of Russia's support for territorial integrity consists of Russia having no intentions to invite separatist territories to formally participate in Eurasian economic integration formats. Sergey Lavrov clearly stated that the current status of Transnistria does not allow it to enter the Customs Union or the Eurasian Economic Union⁴⁵. Yet, and according to the Memorandum of 1997 on the freedom of external economic activity of Transnistria, this republic has a right to have economic relations with any external actors. As to Armenia's accession to the Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union, both the Russian and Armenian sides have confirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh will not be included in this process⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ 'Lavrov: the EU elaborates for Moldova and Transnistria the Ukrainian "scenario"', *News Agency Regnum*, 21 October 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1858602.html#ixzz3PZvFdfu>

⁴⁶ 'Lavrov: the situation in Karabakh will not influence Armenian accession to the Customs Union', *RIA Novosti*, 10 August 2014, <http://ria.ru/world/20140810/1019502429.html>

Palestine stands out, however, as an exceptional case in view of the Russian international mediation practices. Whereas the latest Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 is premised on the principles of territorial integrity and non-interference in domestic affairs, and this principle is taken to apply also in the case of Russia's activities in the Middle East and Northern Africa region, the goal for the part of the Israeli-Palestine conflict Russia has been to promote the creation of an independent Palestinian state. It should be independent but co-exist with Israel in peace and security. The way to achieve this solution consists of negotiations between the parties to the conflict. The negotiations should be assisted by the international community, including the League of Arab states.

This background to Palestine forming an exception to the general Russian attitudes to territorial integrity consists of the fact that the USSR officially recognized the independence of Palestine in 1988. As the legal successor to the Soviet Union, Russia stays with the previous stance, and this is also reflected in the approach towards mediation.

THE FREEZING OF CONFLICTS

One of the Russian mediation strategies in the post-Soviet space pertains to the freezing of conflicts. The only settled conflict consists of the civil war in Tajikistan. Thus, the question is whether this lack of additional cases is due to a conscious strategy or just shortage of political will and resources. The West commonly suspects for its part that the freezing of conflicts may stand for a strategy aimed at preserving a status quo until various separatist territories succeed in gaining independence.

It goes without saying that non-recognized states or partly recognized states endanger stability and are conducive to security-related problems. It may, however, also be noted that the only settled conflict in Tajikistan is the longest and has the most significant death toll out of all conflicts in the post-Soviet space: the costs amount to more than 60,000 human lives and include also hundreds of thousands of refugees. The death toll in other post-Soviet conflicts was significantly lower because Russian or CIS mediation helped

to freeze these conflicts early in their military stage and allowed for further political negotiations. Thus, the strategy of freezing could against this background be considered as a realistic pattern of coping with conflicts. As such, this view is to some extent broadly shared. Thus, in Syrian conflict, the plan discussed in late 2014 at the UN to freeze the conflict in Aleppo, was called “concrete and realistic”⁴⁷. Moreover, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Syria Mr de Mistura called this plan “a new way for approaching the de-escalation of violence”⁴⁸.

SECURITY GUARANTEES

At large, some patterns of continuity seem to be present in Russia’s approach to security guarantees in the settlement of frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space. One of these consists of Russia frequently presenting itself as a major guarantor providing peacekeeping contingents with the aim of preventing attacks against the weaker side. More often than not that tends to be the separatist side.

In some cases, active involvement in mediation and conflict resolution has fuelled the conflict rather than the other way around. Thus, Russia’s military response to the actions of Georgia towards South Ossetia was accounted for not only by pointing to the right to self-defense. It was also argued that it followed from Russia’s obligations as the mediator in the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia. The recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is hence viewed as a form of security guarantee, a guarantee provided as other inroads have been blocked due to the refusal of the President Saakashvili to sign a legally binding agreement on the non-use of force.

THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVE NATIONAL

⁴⁷ Plan to ‘freeze’ conflict in Aleppo ‘concrete, realistic,’ says UN Syria envoy, UN News Centre, 11 November 2014 <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49308#.VMCnACx6T48>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

DIALOGUES

According to the Foreign Minister Lavrov, Russia's approach to the settlement of frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space consists of encouraging the parties to the conflict to reach agreement. This is mandatory as only those who started a conflict can solve it, and external actors can only assist them⁴⁹. As to the Ukrainian crisis, Russia's position is that significant results can be achieved only through a direct dialogue between the conflicting parties. The exclusion of the representatives of Luhansk and Donetsk separatist republics is in this perspective counterproductive. It is claimed that national reconciliation and restoration of trust calls for an open and unbiased investigation of all war crimes, including the tragedies that took place during Maidan protests as well as in Odessa and Mariupol. The crash of MH17 also belongs to the issues to be investigated.⁵⁰

Russia holds a rather similar view on international mediation. In May 2011, Russia aspired to add to the unity of Palestinian political forces by organizing an inter-Palestinian meeting between mid-level representatives of Fatah, Hamas and five other political factions. All participants signed a declaration stating that they agree on the frontiers of the future Palestinian state within the borders as to 4 July 1967⁵¹. For the part of conflict mediation in Syria, Russia has contacts and meetings with Syrian opposition groups operating inside and outside Syria. In general, Russia argues that Syrians themselves should peacefully solve their conflict on the basis of inclusive dialogue without external interference.

⁴⁹ Speech and answers to the questions by media representatives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V.Lavrov during the press-conference on his participation in the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, Basel, 5 December 2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/E0A75921311AFD98C3257DA5004B253A

⁵⁰ Speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V.Lavrov at the 21st meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Basel, 4 December 2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/9D9EB8C37342D1C1C3257DA400446D54

⁵¹ On the situation in the Middle East settlement process, 6 October 2011, <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rkonfl.nsf/90be9cb5e6f07180432569e00049b5fb/c32577c-a00173e57c32578f40030438c!OpenDocument>

THE OPTION OF FEDERALIZATION

In addition to stress on territorial integrity and inclusive national dialogues, Russia has frequently favored federalization as an instrument of conflict-settlement for separatist conflicts. The latest case is Ukraine. From the very beginning of the conflict in the south-eastern regions of Ukraine in spring 2014, official Russian representatives several times brought up federalization as a solution for this conflict. Being a federation itself, Russia considers that it is the only strategy that allows for peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups as part of civic nation-building.

Notably, the federalization of Moldova was in 2003 actually not that far from realization. Russia's initiative was based in the so-called "Kozak Memorandum", i.e. a plan advocating the coining of asymmetric federation. On the eve of the signature procedure, the Western partners allegedly persuaded Moldova to withhold its consent. The problem consisted of the Kozak Memorandum including a provision pertaining to the full demilitarization of a federalized Moldova. Prior to the completion of demilitarization, the Russian peacekeeping contingent of 2,000 peacekeepers would have remained in Moldova (although their precise location was not specified in the draft) in order to prevent any military attempts to change the status quo⁵². The Memorandum also included a clause that allowed subjects (regions) of this future federation to leave the federation after a referendum. This clause could have provided Transnistria and Gagauzia the option of becoming independent even without consent of the other federal regions. Russia did, however, not aspire for the creation of independence of separatist republics, but the aim was instead one of allowing Moldova and Transnistria to gain experience of peaceful co-existence in a format of federation that, in case of success, could preclude further separatism.

Similarly, according to Russia, the only working solution as to the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis consists of a constitutional reform in Ukraine. Such an approach was agreed upon between

⁵² "Kozak Memorandum: the Russian plan of uniting Moldova and Transnistria", 23 May 2005 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/458547.html>

former president Yanukovych and the opposition in February 2014⁵³ and in the Geneva Statement from 17 April⁵⁴. According to Russian views, the Ukrainian crisis pertains to problems part of an unstable unitary system of government as well as a lack of a constitutional balance as to the representation and division of interests between the various regions.

Reintegration of Crimea into Russia arguably allows Moscow to demonstrate to Ukraine and the West in general that the Russian state- and nation-building models are more effective. If so, it will also reassure Russia itself that it is on the right track of development.

CONCLUSIONS

Since Russia gained independence in 1991, its conflict settlement and mediation practices have been heavily influenced by the processes of its national development strategies, and in particular, by Russia's nation- and state-building strategies and evolution of its self-perceptions as a great power.

The Russian practices in the sphere of regional conflict settlement in the post-Soviet space in the 1990s are quite specific and should not be compared for example with those of the UN. They also seem to vary over time. Thus, the early years of independence of former Soviet republics pertained to incomplete sovereignty, i.e. conditions originating in general with the dissolutions of empires. The newly independent states that endured conflicts on their territory, and were yet short of the resources required for solving the conflicts, had to compromise on sovereignty. They shared their sovereignty with Russia in order to gain assistance in the processes of stabilization.

In addition to this Soviet legacy, Russia continued to hold on to the idea of "good local nationalism" as a way of averting state collapse. This forms the background to the policies pursued in the

⁵³ Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine – full text, [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), 21 February 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/21/agreement-on-the-settlement-of-crisis-in-ukraine-full-text>

⁵⁴ Geneva Statement on Ukraine, Geneva, 17 April 2014 http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140417_01_en.pdf

years 1992–1993 with support to separatists. However, in the mid-1990s Russia shifted its positions as to the support of nationalism, and this appears to have occurred mostly due to internal factors. Instead of the previous emphasis on nationalization, an internationalization of the conflicts became priority for Russia in 1995. It was realized that the “burden of peacekeeping” is too heavy and should be shared with the international community.

It further appears that Russia’s policy in the sphere of regional and international conflict settlement rests on a variety of approaches that undergird Russian mediation practices. The UN and the OSCE are seen as important in facilitating conflict settlement and in providing the ground for efforts of mediation. Mediation should remain as external in nature and not amount to engagement in conflicts.

Furthermore, there is emphasis on territorial integrity as a core principle, the freezing of conflicts at an early stage in a situation of balance of forces, as well as the supporting of the weaker side in a conflict in order to give the conflicting sides more or less equal chances in political negotiations. The providing of security guarantees stands out as one favored option and this goes also for inclusive national dialogues between the parties to conflict. In addition, federalization stands out as an approach favored by Russia.

The incoherence that is arguably on occasions present in the international and regional mediation and conflict settlement practice pursued by Russia seem, in some of their aspects, to be related to the Soviet legacy such as attitudes towards nationalism, but pertain also in some regards to great power ambitions. More recently the policies have been impacted by the strategies part of the post-1991 national development in Russia, including those pertaining to civic nation-building and problems with separatism. Overall, Russia still has to find a balance between different strategies and merge them into a more coherent one, and this is obviously related to Russia’s search for durable national identity and viable national development strategy.

RUSSIAN EXPERT DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RECENT TRENDS IN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

Vadim Romashov

INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of the Soviet Union left the Eurasian continent with numerous spots of tense inter- and intra-state relations. Many of these spots exploded during the process of disintegration of the state and were neutralized, as is in the case of civil war in Tajikistan, and some were “frozen”, as in the case of conflicts in Transdniestria and the South Caucasus. Furthermore, the collapse of the USSR planted ‘delayed-action bombs’, such spots of tension that did not develop to full-scale conflicts in the early 1990s due to various circumstances. Nevertheless, the source of tension in these zones has not been eliminated, and the development of the conflict has continued, although at a much slower pace. However, aggregating internal and external destabilizing factors have rapidly awakened such conflicts, an example of which we have witnessed in Ukraine since the end of 2013.

The foundations for conflict developments in the territory of the former Soviet Union were laid within the unified economic and political space. The preservation of close relations between new

independent states and Russia, as their main unifier, determined the interconnectivity of conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The manifestation of a crisis in any of these states has a serious negative impact on conflict zones in other parts of the former Soviet Union. In addition, the involvement of these countries as ‘pawns’ in geopolitical confrontation between Russia and other centers of global and regional influence reinforces the chain reaction. The so-called “frozen conflicts” have become a litmus paper for transformational developments in the post-Soviet space and in the relationship between Russia and the Western countries. The Nagorno-Karabakh issue is certainly one of such conflicts, which is sensitive to the changing political situation in Eurasia. The conflict is defined as frozen, because the status quo has remained unchanged for the last twenty years (in May 1994, in Bishkek, with the assistance of Russia, the conflicting parties signed a ceasefire agreement). However, judging the actual implementation of this agreement, the conflict can hardly be called “frozen”: shootings and diversions regularly occur in the Line of Contact and on the Armenia-Azerbaijan state border, which result in military and civilian casualties.

The mediation activity of Moscow in resolving this, perhaps ‘hottest’, frozen conflict in the former Soviet Union is directly affected by changes in the security environment along the borders of the Russian Federation. The progressive worsening of the security situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 2004 was followed by a radical change of the status quo in these conflict zones in 2008 that resulted in the sharp deterioration of relations between Russia and Western countries and triggered the mediation efforts of Moscow in Nagorno-Karabakh. In 2009, the then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev held three trilateral meetings with his Armenian and Azerbaijani colleagues, Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev. Simultaneously, the work of the Russian delegation in the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE MG) intensified. In the aftermath of the war with Georgia, Moscow diplomats realized the need for the earliest possible peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The maintenance of the status quo cannot continue indefinitely, and under certain circumstances, another explosion may occur at

Russia's Caucasus border. At that time, the Minsk Group 'updated' the Madrid principles for the peace settlement, but their practical implementation has not started thus far. Furthermore, the summers of 2010 and 2012 were marked with violent armed clashes between the conflicting parties.

In 2013, the face-off between two alternative integration projects for the countries of the former Soviet Union, the Eurasian Customs Union and the Association with the European Union (EU), has reached its peak. The South Caucasus direction seemed to be unsuccessful for Brussels: Azerbaijan decided to refrain from participating in the Association Agreement, and the Russian government managed to sway Armenia to join the Eurasian integration instead of the European path. However, a more significant loss for the EU was Ukraine, when in October 2013 President Viktor Yanukovich decided to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement. The decision became a trigger for a serious political crisis in the country, which eventually led to the development of a 'deferred conflict' on the axis dividing the country into "Eastern" and "Western" parts. The influence of the Ukrainian crisis on frozen conflicts of the former Soviet Union requires comprehensive and systematic studies.

This article's research task is to provide an analysis of the views of the Russian expert community on potential developments in Nagorno-Karabakh in light of conflict in Ukraine. Focusing on Russia's role as an intermediary between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the emphasis is placed on such issues as Russia's use of the Eurasian integration processes in its efforts to establish cooperation between Baku and Yerevan, and furthermore, the implications of the 2014 Crimean precedent for the settlement of the conflict. A serious escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict took place in late July – early August 2014 with numerous casualties on both sides and was followed by the increase in peacekeeping efforts of the mediators. In November, a military helicopter was shot down in the conflict zone. These recent developments in Nagorno-Karabakh and the continuing violent trend in 2015 add to the necessity of this analysis.

Thus, it is important to understand the consequences of the worsening of diplomatic relations between the mediators and what Russian analysts anticipate for the continued functioning of

the negotiation mechanism on Nagorno-Karabakh, and Moscow's ascribed role in the conflict settlement. The expert discussions create certain pressure on Moscow's negotiating position, as the Russian diplomats have to take into account domestic expectations for the country's place in regional and world politics. The environment in which Russia's mediation efforts operate is affected by deliberations regarding developments in international affairs, the geopolitical situation, security challenges, and integration processes in the post-Soviet space. This article analyses the opinions of leading Russian experts in the field of security, foreign policy, and international relations research, which seem to have an impact on Russia's policy-making towards the South Caucasus and, particularly, the mediation process in Nagorno-Karabakh. The sample of experts includes those analysts who both criticize and support Moscow's line of conduct in the region. The article accounts for the discussions of experts that can be attributed to pro-Armenian or pro-Azerbaijani lobby as well as of those who take a 'neutral' stand between the two camps. The objective is to identify trends and prevalent discourses in a variety of Russian analytical discussions on the topic by examining policy-oriented material produced by the expert community such as reports, articles, interviews, and comments.¹

EXPERT VIEWS ON THE MINSK GROUP FORMAT IN THE CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The organization of the post-Soviet borders has been continuously reshaped. In 2008, Moscow recognized independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and in 2014, Crimea de-facto became a part of the Russian Federation. Officials from Western countries and Russia interpret the events in opposite ways: the former condemn the unilateral border reconsiderations, while the latter insist that the decisions are justified by prevention of threat to the safety of local

¹ The main sources of information are Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani media and research organizations' accounts and social networking websites.

population, who are mostly Russian compatriots and co-citizens. Following the Georgian events in 2008, the expert community in Russia anticipated serious difficulties for international peace mediation efforts in Nagorno-Karabakh because of increased geopolitical confrontation. Nevertheless, with hindsight we can observe that the worsening of relations between Moscow and Western capitals did not extend to the OSCE Minsk Group: in 2009, the co-chairs managed to develop a common approach to the conflict settlement, which was embodied in the so-called “updated Madrid principles”.

However, the conflict that followed in Ukraine has far-reaching consequences for European security and has become a stalemate between Russia and Western states. A large number of experts express serious concerns that, unlike in 2008, the contemporary geopolitical conjuncture may affect peace mediation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Sergei Markedonov, Associate Professor at the Regional Studies and Foreign Policy department of the Russian State University for Humanities, notes that the conflict can ‘unfreeze’ in case of the “Ukrainization” of Russia-U.S. relations on the Karabakh issue, while the current limited diplomatic dialogue between the mediators is not conducive to the effective functioning of the settlement mechanism.²

Russian experts traditionally link mediation processes with geopolitics around the post-Soviet protracted conflicts. Andrei Kazantsev, Director of the Analytical Centre of Moscow State Institute of International Relations of Russia’s Foreign Ministry (MGIMO), notes that the Karabakh problem is intertwined with “a number of other unresolved problems in Central Eurasia and in the world, which generate Russian-Western confrontation”.³ The experts who follow the neorealist agenda commonly find the U.S. approach

² Sergei Markedonov, “Armyano-azerbaidzhanskii konflikt kak test na effektivnost’ posrednikov”, *RIA*, 4 Aug 2014, <http://ria.ru/analytics/20140804/1018749328.html>, and “Vozobnovlenie voyny v zone Karabakhskogo konflikta maloveroyatno, schitayut eksperty”, *Kavkazskii Uzel*, 8 Aug 2014, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/247133/>.

³ Andrey Kazantsev, Interview, *minval.az*, 14 Feb 2014, <http://minval.az/news/38052/> (translation by the author).

to the conflict resolution destructive, while mediation practices of Russia are seen as either positive or weak. Aleksandr Dugin, a Russian political scientist who is regarded as the main ideologist of “neo-Eurasianism”, repeatedly argues that it is in interests of Western states to activate the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to undermine Russia’s position in the South Caucasus, while Moscow’s goal is to maintain stability in this strategically important region by all possible means. Therefore, the main task of Russia’s policy toward Nagorno-Karabakh, as Dugin sees, is to exclude Western states from the settlement process as destabilizing external forces. As a way of achieving this objective, he proposes the regionalization of the conflict settlement by including only the surrounding powers who have “vital interests” in the region, namely Russia, Iran, and Turkey.⁴ Maksim Shevchenko, an expert on ethno-religious issues and a member of the Presidential Council on Interethnic Relations, supports the idea of regionalization of the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, which can be achieved only by the neighbors of the conflicting states. He asserts that Western states “are interested in [prolonging] the conflict, as they need leverages of influence on the South Caucasus”.⁵ Dugin believes that despite difficulties in finding a balance between interests of the regional powers, compromise is possible, unlike between Western states and Russia, whose level of mutual distrust is extremely high.⁶ From his point of view, the interests of Russia, Iran, and Turkey are not antagonistic and all of them are interested in the minimization of the U.S. and EU presence in the region. Thus, he notes that if the U.S. was isolated from the region and the interests of Russia, Iran, Turkey, as well as of three small states, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were taken into account, a new geopolitical context would emerge, in which the problematic issues could find their solutions.⁷

⁴ Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, newspaper *Zerkalo*, 21 Jul 2011.

⁵ “Maxim Shevchenko presents his view on Nagorno-Karabakh settlement”, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 6 Nov 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/articles/politics/61837.html>.

⁶ Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, *Nakanune.ru*, 30 Oct 2008, <http://www.nakanune.ru/articles/13696/>.

⁷ Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, *Noev Kovcheg*, 1–15 Jul 2014, No.12 (242): 1–2.

Proceeding from this view the experts and observers with ‘realpolitik’ thinking alleged that the unprecedented escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Summer 2014 was an attempt to open a “new” or “second frontline” against Russia at its southern borders.⁸ However, they do not specify the sources and channels of U.S. influence on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is unclear how Washington can persuade Baku and Yerevan to resume warfare. Nevertheless, these experts are convinced that Russian diplomacy must be more active to resist U.S. regional policy in all directions, including in the Middle East and Ukraine. Dugin argues that only decisive actions of Moscow, “Iron Hand” as he calls it, in Ukraine can demonstrate Russia’s strength capable to counter the U.S. efforts to destabilize the South Caucasus.⁹

The presented opinion of a large part of the Russian expert community supports Moscow’s one-sided actions in Nagorno-Karabakh. From the perspective of the existing format of the conflict settlement, the approach can be called *unilateralism*. Even though it underlines importance of involvement of Iran and Turkey in the peace mediation, the idea of regionalization of the conflict settlement implies the promotion of Russia’s actions separately from the OSCE Minsk Group based primarily on Russia’s bilateral relations with the regional powers and the conflicting parties. However, there is a contrasting trend within the Russian expert opinion, which promotes cooperation within the Minsk Group and therefore can be referred as *multilateralism*.

The futility of long-standing official peace negotiations has constantly challenged the latter approach. Therefore, the ‘cooperationists’ are also critical to the functioning of the Minsk

⁸ The ‘first frontline’ is considered to be on the Western direction, namely in Eastern Ukraine. For example, see Dmitrii Nefedov, “Boevaya trevoga vokrug Nagornogo Karabakha”, *Strategic Culture Foundation*, 4 Aug 2014, <http://www.fondsk.ru/news/2014/08/04/boevaja-trevoga-vokrug-nagornogo-karabaha-28760.html>; Anton Krivenyuk, “Kavkazskaya ‘razgermetizatsiya’”, *Regnum*, 11 Aug 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1834674.html>; Irina Jorbenadze, “Karabakh poka ne stal vtorym frontom”, *Gorchakov Fund*, 13 Aug 2014, <http://gorchakovfund.ru/news/12226/>.

⁹ Aleksandr Dugin, “Zheleznaya Ruka Moskvyy: Karabakh i Donbass – dva teatra odnoi voiny”, post on VK, 3 Aug 2014, https://vk.com/wall18631635_3640.

Group and unconstructive political dialogue between the mediators. Against the backdrop of a crescent geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the West, the experts often express a pessimistic view on the prospects of conflict settlement in the near future. An analyst from the Center for Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga-Urals at the Institute of Oriental Studies of Russian Academy of Sciences, Aleksandr Skakov, considers that “for real progress toward resolving the conflict, the mediators need to put consistent pressure on the parties to the conflict”, and due to the absence of a “common tactic of the settlement” the region eventually “will be reformatted by one of the centers of power upon its own models and interests”.¹⁰

The experts who promote a multilateral approach underline that the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement differs from other international peace mediation arrangements in the post-Soviet space because the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the U.S. is not salient in this conflict. Andrei Kazantsev believes that Moscow, Washington, and Paris have always had “if not fully similar then [at least] compatible positions” under the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group.¹¹ This belief is shared by the Russian former co-chairman of the Minsk Group, Vladimir Kazimirov, who notes that the present co-chairs (Igor Popov, James Warlick, and Pierre Andrieu) have a unified approach based on the inadmissibility of attempts to solve the conflict with military means and are working with good coordination, which was lacking in his time.¹² In much the same way, Sergei Markedonov does not see an “antagonistic conflict” amongst the co-chairs whose concerted action continues, doing so at least because they themselves speak about the consensus on Nagorno-Karabakh between the states they represent and emphasize the need

¹⁰ “Russian experts talk about Karabakh settlement”, *News.az*, 17 Feb 2014, <http://news.az/articles/karabakh/86577>.

¹¹ Andrei Kazantsev, Interview, *VAKinfo*, 30 Jun 2014, <http://www.vakmos.org/ru/ekspert-r-yi/13554-andrej-kazantsev-razvitie-imeyushchegosya-mezhdu-moskvoj-i-baku-strategicheskogo-partnerstva-v-polzu-rossii-intervyu> (translation by the author).

¹² Mikhail Sheinkman, “Ukraina razbudila Karabakh? Armeniya i Azerbaidzhan priblizilis’ k voine”, *RIA*, 4 Aug 2014, http://ria.ru/radio_brief/20140804/1018750069.html.

for a peaceful resolution and express an optimistic view of the peace process.¹³

However, the experts who support cooperation with the West stress that the peacekeeping rhetoric is not enough and “real attempts” to resolve the conflict are required. They believe that in a situation when a military solution is impossible, the only effective method to solve the issue is an agreement between Moscow and Washington to put consistent pressure on Yerevan and Baku that they should refrain from hostilities and make mutual concessions.¹⁴ Yet again, the overall geopolitical variance between Russia and the U.S. is impeding the drawing up of such an agreement. The Russian experts and media analysts highlight an “alarm signal” that may indicate the beginning of a “war of mediators” in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, which might grow from a diplomatic confrontation to actual warfare in the South Caucasus, as it happened in the Georgian breakaway regions in 2004–2008. The experts draw attention to the statements of James Warlick made in the Washington Center of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on 7 May 2014, where he presented the key elements of a “well-established compromise” between the Minsk Group co-chairs and the conflicting countries.¹⁵ Despite his references to the unified approach of Russia, France, and the U.S. and, in essence, repetition of the well-known “basic principles”, many Russian experts regarded the statement as an attempt of Washington to take the initiative and unilaterally exert pressure on Armenia and/or Azerbaijan bypassing Russia.¹⁶ In particular, the Russian experts disliked that the Madrid Principles, which were jointly elaborated

¹³ Sergey Markedonov, “Ne teryat’ pul’s nagorno-karabakhskogo protsessa”, *Noev Koucheg*, 1–15 Jul 2014, No.12 (242): 1–2.

¹⁴ *News.az*, 17 Feb 2014.

¹⁵ James Warlick, “Statement of U.S. policy on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 May 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/07/nagorny-karabakh-keys-to-settlement/ha7v>.

¹⁶ For example, see Sergey Markedonov, 4 Aug 2014; “Andrei Areshev: Obostrenie konflikta v Nagornom Karabakhe negativno skazyvaetsya, prezhde vsego, na Rossii”, *LraTVAKAN.COM*, 14 Aug 2014, <http://lratvakan.com/news/107059.html>; Irina Jorbenadze, “Nagorny Karabakh: tsvety zapozdalye”, *Gorchakov Fund*, 14 May 2014, <http://gorchakovfund.ru/news/11310/>.

by the Minsk Group, were presented as the U.S. policy on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

At the same time, there is a less suspicious opinion of the actions of the U.S. diplomats in the settlement process. Stanislav Chernyavskiy, Director of the Centre for Post-Soviet Studies at MGIMO, believes that because of the formally coordinated positions of the co-chairs, accusations against the U.S. that they use the Nagorno-Karabakh issue to complicate Russia's relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia are unfounded.¹⁷ In general, many experts doubt that anyone from the international community is interested in a radical change in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁸ They believe that the resumption of war in this region is not beneficial for either foreign actor due to the great risks and uncertain outcomes it would bring for the international community. After all, the crisis in Ukraine in 2013–2015 shows that conflicts in the post-Soviet space involving international actors with competing geopolitical interests cannot have a clearly marked “winner” – all the rival forces have gains and losses typical of a zero-sum game.

PARALLEL PLATFORMS FOR THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

Following the aggravation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in late July and early August 2014, Russia made a statement that urged “the parties of confrontation to exercise restraint, to renounce the use of force and to take immediate measures aimed at stabilizing the situation”. A lower ranking official from the Russian foreign ministry, Maria Zakharova, the Deputy Director of the Press and Information

¹⁷ Stanislav Chernyavskii, Interview, Eksperty MGIMO, 18 Jun 2014, <http://www.mgimo.ru/news/experts/document255449.phtml>.

¹⁸ “Rossiya zainteresovana v ustanovlenii rovnykh perspektivnykh otnoshenii s Azerbaidzhanom – ekspert”, *Trend*, 24 Nov 2014, <http://www.trend.az/azerbaidzhan/karabakh/2336371.html>; Aleksei Malashenko, Interview, *First Armenian news and analyses*, 24 Nov 2014, <http://ru.1in.am/1070911.html>.

Department, signed this document.¹⁹ The official position of Moscow on the most serious, according to expert assessments, escalation of the conflict in last two decades, was expressed a day later than an analogous statement of the U.S. State Department.²⁰ These two facts induced agitation among Russian experts and media analysts, who were afraid that Russia may ‘surrender’ Nagorno-Karabakh to the West. They called for the Russian government to mobilize political and diplomatic resources and decisively repel the claim of Washington as the leading actor in the peace settlement.

The situation calmed on 4 August, when a meeting of the Presidents of Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in Sochi was announced. Generally, the Russian expert community expected certain stabilization as a result of the talks.²¹ The media emphasis was on the fact that, traditionally, it was Moscow, and not Washington or Paris, who had assumed a role of “fireman to extinguish the flame of new escalation” in Nagorno-Karabakh.²² The timely Russian diplomatic intervention prompted the conclusion in expert circles that “only the diplomatic potential of Russia can bring peace to the Karabakh process and help the sides to reach a satisfactory agreement”.²³ In a more reserved way, Vladimir Kazimirov noted that such meetings are not “a panacea” but “a momentary and relative relaxation of tensions”.²⁴ A large number of analysts did not

¹⁹ The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Zayavlenie zamestitelya direktora Departamenta informatsii i pechati MID Rossii M.V. Zakharovoi v svyazi s obostreniem situatsii v zone nagorno-karabakhskogo konflikta”, 2 Aug 2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newline/66C2EC7960740FE944257D28003B1CDA.

²⁰ U.S. State Department, “Statement By Deputy Spokesperson Marie Harf on Escalating Violence along the Line of Contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”, 1 Aug 2014, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2014/08/20140801304767.html#axzz3P0YW45ux>.

²¹ Mikhail Sheinkman, 4 Aug 2014.

²² Mikhail Agadzhanian, “Karabakhskii konflikt i ‘zlopoluchnyi’ avgust”, *Regnum*, 4 Aug 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1832593.html>.

²³ Yurii Glushkov, “Russia pacifies Karabakh”, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 6 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/politics/58482.html>.

²⁴ Vladimir Kazimirov, “Pervoprichinoi krizisa v zone karabakhskogo konflikta yavlyaetsya ‘topornya politika’ Baku”, *Regnum*, 5 Aug 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1833104.html> (translation by the author).

expect a breakthrough and prognosticated that the preservation of the status quo would be the maximum result of the meeting, which itself is not sufficient to significantly reduce hostilities and bring a stimulus for the conflict settlement. Thus, in the situation of strained international relations, new risks would continue to occur.²⁵ At the same time, the experts noted that as Russia's diplomatic efforts were distracted by the conflict in Ukraine, preserving the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh would still be an achievement.²⁶

Eventually, the best possible result of the talks in Sochi, namely a return to the status quo, was achieved. The experts positively assessed the role of Moscow in preventing the escalation of the conflict. Various media accounts presented the meeting's output as one that consolidates Russia's active and leading position in the OSCE Minsk Group, on which the conflicting parties agree. The lessening of the tense situation in the region was also shown as a personal success of President Vladimir Putin in a very difficult geopolitical situation.²⁷ The analytical community indicated several attainments of this diplomatic intervention. Firstly, Moscow at least in the short-term achieved stability in the conflict zone and demonstrated interest in sustaining stability in the region and readiness to invest time and resources for peace mediation. Secondly, Russia took the U.S. and French initiative in settling the conflict in the context of deteriorating geopolitical environment and made it clear that it will not give up its leading positions in the South Caucasus and will monitor the conflict-ridden processes in the entire post-Soviet space. Thirdly, the talks proved that Russia has great influence on the conflict settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh, and that the conflicting parties are confident in Russian mediating efforts and regard Moscow as a guarantor of peace in the region. Finally, the long-awaited meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents has shown that the sides

²⁵ Gai Borisov, "Obostrenie protivostoyaniya v Karabakhe 'obostrilo' i 'tyrskuyu solidarnost'", *Regnum*, 7 Aug 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1833793.html>.

²⁶ "Mukhanov: RF mozhet ubedit' Baku i Yerevan ne obostryat' konflikt", *RIA*, 8 Aug 2014, <http://ria.ru/world/20140808/1019329189.html>.

²⁷ For example, see Gai Borisov, "Zapad nedovolen tem, kak Putin ostanovil frustratsiyu Zakavkaz'ya", *Regnum*, 25 Aug 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1839828.html>.

of conflict have a willingness to talk and understand the need for a peaceful resolution.²⁸

Certainly, the trilateral meeting in Sochi was not a breakthrough for the peace process: no solutions to the conflict were proposed and no substantive compromises were reached. Therefore, the risks for the resumption of military clashes remain. However, those experts who urge for Russian pro-active and unilateral actions in the peace settlement noted that the distancing from the OSCE MG format may initiate a parallel negotiation mechanism based on Russia's close ties with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and that "gives a hope for some progress in the future".²⁹ As mentioned above, the belief in Russia's capability to bridge Baku and Yerevan and thus solve the issue without involvement of other international actors is widely shared within the Russian expert community. The conviction is grounded in the interpretation of Russia's historical role in the region as a pacifier and unifier of the Caucasian peoples that contributed to a good neighborly relationship also between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the 19th century and during the Soviet time. It has been argued that the conflicting parties trust Russia more so than France and the U.S. because Moscow "better understands the problem", "respects the neighbors", and is "ready to consider and accept the logic of each of the parties" in order to find the most

²⁸ This part of the analysis is based in part on the following sources: "Vstrecha Putina, Alieva i Sargsyana v Sochi: itogi", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 11 Aug 2014, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/news/Vstrecha-Putina-Alieva-i-Sargsyana-v-Sochi-itogi.html>; Victoria Panfilova, "Putin's peacemaking", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 11 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/politics/58663.html>; "Ekspert: Putin predotvratil nachalo voyny v Karabakhe", *Regnum*, 11 Aug 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1834891.html>; "Rossiya nashla zolotuyu seredinu v Nagornom Karabakhe", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 12 Aug 2014, No. 168 (6216): 2; Victoria Panfilova, "Armenia's lost opportunities", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 12 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/politics/58686.html>; "Rossiya garant mira v Nagornom Karabakhe", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 17 Aug 2014, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/articles/Rossiya-garant-mira-v-Nagornom-Karabakhe.html>.

²⁹ Mikhail Belyayev, "Only Moscow can defuse 'Karabakh bomb'", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 13 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/politics/58743.html>.

suitable and accommodating solution for them.³⁰ Such an advantage stems from the fact that Azerbaijanis and Armenians have closer relations with Russians than with French and American people. As a result, it allows Moscow to conduct a multi-channel mediation and make concrete proposals for solving the conflict, and Russia in itself represents a unique negotiation platform for Baku and Yerevan, which enables the establishment of a good personal contact between the leaders of conflicting parties.³¹ The shift from escalation to political settlement, as the output of the 2014 Sochi meeting, was presented to be evidence that this platform is effective and must continue its work. However, recalling trilateral presidential meetings held by Dmitry Medvedev in 2009–2011, such a platform was not effective enough to bring the conflicting parties to compromise, and eventually Russian diplomats had to once again prioritize the OSCE MG format. Hence, some Russian experts are searching for a more solid basis for Moscow’s unilateral peacemaking efforts.

A number of experts present the Eurasian integration processes initiated by Moscow as an opportunity to resolve the long-lasting Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Armenia’s accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the simultaneous intensification of Russian-Azerbaijani military and economic cooperation are seen as the first steps towards this direction.³² The experts note that due to strategic importance of both Armenia and Azerbaijan in cooperating with them, Russia must keep the balance between their divergent interests, which requires systematic efforts aimed at bridging the positions of Baku and Yerevan.³³ The statements of Sergei Glazyev,

³⁰ Vasiliu Birkin, “Karabakhskaya Andorra”, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 7 Aug 2014, <http://www.vestnikavkaza.ru/analytics/Karabakhskaya-Andorra.html>; “Karabakh: Russia participates in negotiations as a neutral party”, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 18 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikavkaza.net/articles/politics/58861.html>.

³¹ Pavel Ivanov, “Nagorny Karabakh: bez posrednikov ne oboitis’”, *RIA*, 22 Aug 2014, <http://ria.ru/radio/20140822/1020984818.html>.

³² For example, see Maksim Shevchenko, Interview, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 4 Dec 2013, <http://vestnikavkaza.net/interviews/politics/48267.html>.

³³ See Gai Borisov, “Rossiya vser’ez beretsya za Zakavkaz’e kak za edinyi geopoliticheskii organizm”, *Regnum*, 24 Jun 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1817897.html>; and Andrey Kazantsev, Interview, *Day.az*, 2 Jun 2014, <http://news.day.az/politics/494803.html>.

an advisor to the Russian president, demonstrate that, in practice, Moscow attempts to bridge the interests of the conflicting parties by articulating the fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict complicates Russia's cooperation with the states in conflict, and furthermore the absence of a broader cooperation in the South Caucasus hinders economic development of the region.³⁴ Vyacheslav Kovalenko, Russian ambassador to Armenia in 2009–2013, explains the logic of this approach:

A settlement may happen as a result of economic development, formation of an economic zone, a common market, when economic ties are so intertwined that people will prioritize the [economic] interests and [this approach will...] form a public opinion that would gradually transform from hostility to mutual trust.³⁵

The Director of the Business Club of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Denis Tyurin, highlights Russia's "unifying and integrating power" in the post-Soviet space and peacebuilding efforts associated with the establishment of economic ties and humanitarian contacts between the conflicting parties.³⁶ His argument is somehow based on a liberal approach, namely the creation of an integrated international peaceful system, which would satisfy basic social needs:

The long-term objective of all governments is to increase the well-being of the population, to increase living standards, to make the life of people better. It is in this framework that we need to talk about the future ways of resolving the

³⁴ "Sergey Glazev: Rossiya zainteresovana v nagorno-karabakhskom uregulirovanii", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 26 Jun 2014, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/news/Sergey-Glazev-Rossiya-zainteresovana-v-nagorno-karabakhskom-uregulirovanii.html>.

³⁵ Vyacheslav Kovalenko, Interview, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 1 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/politics/58344.html>.

³⁶ "Rossiya vseгда vystupala v kachestve provodnika idei mira", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 14 Aug 2014, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/articles/Rossiya-vseгда-vystupala-v-kachestve-provodnika-idei-mira.html>.

conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh... [I]t makes sense to open up opportunities for economic cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Certainly, there are many possibilities for that in the framework of the single Eurasian economic space and it would be very impractical not to use them.³⁷

Tyrin's opinion about the importance of joint commercial projects, business and cultural contacts³⁸ reflects what can be referred to as Russia's Track Three approach to conflict resolution,³⁹ which played a crucial role in establishing a dialogue between the conflicting parties in the early stages of the conflict. Anatolii Karpov, who was the President of the Soviet Peace Fund, points out that the meetings of Azerbaijani and Armenian civil society actors held by the Fund in the early 1990s facilitated the meetings of the politicians who in 1994 signed a ceasefire agreement.⁴⁰ However, according to some experts, recently public diplomacy in the region has faced challenges, associated with the domestic policies of Azerbaijan aimed at suppressing autonomy of non-state actors in expressing their independent opinions on the settlement of the conflict. Vladimir Kazimirov believes that the arrests of journalists, human rights activists, and political experts, by Azerbaijani authorities in 2014, are attempts to "suffocate" public diplomacy as an alternative channel for the conflict settlement based on direct contacts between the neighboring peoples.⁴¹

³⁷ *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 18 Aug 2014.

³⁸ "No unresolved problems in Russian-Azerbaijani relations", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 21 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/politics/59069.html>.

³⁹ Unlike Tracks One and Two, which include interaction between traditional state and non-state actors in order to achieve a peace, Track Three diplomacy implies talks between various civil society actors and commercial and business-related contacts. (See, Pertti Joenniemi, "Conflict – Transformation through Dialogue and Mediation: Keeping Pace with the Times" in "National Dialogue and Internal Mediation Processes: Perspectives on Theory and Practice" ed. by Charlotta Collén, Publications of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 4 / 2014).

⁴⁰ "Chess Champion Karpov wants conflicts to be resolved through negotiations", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 10 Jul 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/politics/57477.html>.

⁴¹ Vladimir Kazimirov, "Novyi front v karabakhskom konflikte", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 Jun 2014, No. 113 (6161): 6.

Within the ‘Eurasianist’ community, there are also experts who do not share the belief in the primary role of economic relations in resolving the intricate Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and consider such an approach too simplistic. Grigory Trofimchuk, vice-president of the Center for Modeling of Strategic Development, argues that the way out from the conflict rests in political rather than economic solutions. In his opinion, an approach based on the mutual acknowledging of common and real threats posed by external actors to Caucasus and the Caspian region could bring closer positions of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia and allow them to depart from opportunistic motivations.⁴²

Still, the main problem of the ‘Eurasianist’ approach is not the divergence in expert opinion regarding what should be the basis for the conflict resolution – mutual economic benefits or shared security space. It seems that economic, political, and security incentives are equally important and together can serve as an aggregating driver for the conflicting states and Russia, as an intermediary actor, to generate a consensus. The key question is whether Russia alone is able to create a platform that would enable parties to establish a sustainable dialogue leading to a comprehensive compromise. An incident with an Armenian combat helicopter shot down by Azerbaijani forces on 12 November 2014, and the continued violations of the ceasefire in January 2015 demonstrated that the trilateral talks in Sochi had only a short-term effect. Thus, the political assistance of Russia in maintaining the status quo and building peace in the region has again been challenged. At the same time, although Moscow made no question of the updated Madrid principles and cooperation within the OSCE Minsk Group, the worsening of relations with Western countries led Russia’s leadership to the conviction to use all possible platforms to keep the situation in the South Caucasus stable.⁴³ In addition to the trilateral talks, some Eurasianist experts, in particular Vladimir Lepekhin, the Director of the Institute of the Eurasian Economic Community, suggests a “2+2 format”, in which

⁴² “Ekspert: Vstupleniyu Armenii v TS nichego ne ugrozhaet”, *Regnum*, 30 Apr 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1797264.html>.

⁴³ Sergei Markedonov, “Evraziiskaya integratsiya dlya Armenii”, *RIA*, 1 Oct 2014, <http://ria.ru/analytics/20141001/1026476238.html>.

“Kazakhstan will be the guarantor of Azerbaijan’s participation in the negotiations and Russia will be the guarantor of the participation of Armenia”.⁴⁴ He believes that this format would help the countries to solve the Karabakh problem and normalize relations between Baku and Yerevan.

In spite of the experts’ hopes that the post-Soviet integration processes initiated by Moscow creates new opportunities to resolve protracted conflict under an alternative negotiation format, it is doubtful that the ‘Eurasian platform’ can be viable. Indeed, the accession of Armenia to the EEU has complemented its security system formed jointly with Russia in the frame of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). This development points to Moscow’s cementing inadmissibility of a military approach to the conflict resolution and the fact that the Russian diplomats will continue their mediating efforts following this guiding light. However, Armenia’s accession to EEU can be perceived in Azerbaijan as a way to consolidate the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh, and this scenario is unacceptable for Baku.⁴⁵ Moreover, the participation of Armenia in an organization of deep economic integration have brought about ‘technical’ issues related to the position of business agents of “the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” (NKR) within the EEU common market. The analytical discussions regarding the issues associated with the stalemate question surrounding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh have gained a new momentum against the backdrop of the Crimean events in spring 2014. The Crimean precedent has also revived the expert deliberations on the role of foreign military presence in a conflict area.

⁴⁴ *Vestnik Kavkaza* (18 Aug 2014).

⁴⁵ See Sergei Markedonov, “The Caucasian Factor in Eurasian Integration”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 21 March 2014, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Caucasian-Factor-in-Eurasian-Integration-16500>

'Post-Crimean syndrome': status of Nagorno-Karabakh and foreign military presence

During the process of Armenia's accession to the EEU the possible alterations in the status of Nagorno-Karabakh have been widely discussed. Even though Russia's officials have underlined that Armenia joins the EEU "within the framework of the borders recognized by the UN",⁴⁶ pro-Azerbaijan observers predict that Yerevan will "push" products produced in Nagorno-Karabakh to the common market of the EEU countries, and eventually the region will be included into the Eurasian economic space without Baku's permission.⁴⁷ In their turn, pro-Armenian experts are concerned that due to the increased Russian influence on Armenia, Moscow may try to conclude a deal with Baku and start the economic detachment of the NKR from Armenia, for example, by setting up customs checkpoints on the border between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, which has now become the EEU external border. Either way, nearly all experts agree that in this new situation, Moscow faces a dilemma of how to balance between the interests of the two strategically important partners in the South Caucasus so as not to undermine the status quo in the conflict zone until a compromise between them is reached.

The dilemma requires a neutral approach to such sensitive issues as the status of "the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic". The debates in the expert community over a question of whether Moscow shall recognize the NKR have intensified following Russia's unilateral reconsiderations of the post-Soviet borders. In 2008, the majority of Russian experts concluded that the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh would not be a step in the right direction at

⁴⁶ Sergei Lavrov, "Speech and answers to questions from the mass media during the joint press conference summarising the results of negotiations with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov, Baku, 18 June 2014", The Russian Foreign Ministry, 18 Jun 2014, http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/Brp_4.nsf/arh/9A84F8CE51F0F48144257CFC004478F1?OpenDocument.

⁴⁷ See "Preferences for Yerevan's participation in integration projects are not expected from Karabakh separatists", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 4 Jan 2015, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/politics/64208.html>.

this time when it is important to develop strategic relationships with Azerbaijan and Turkey, restore cooperation with Western countries, and generally, cool off the heated situation in the South Caucasus. However, the Crimean events in 2014 became a turning point in the attitude towards the conflict settlement processes in the post-Soviet space. Stanislav Tarasov, a Russian political scientist, believes that “the reunification of Crimea with Russia and, in general, the Ukrainian crisis, bring new opportunities for the political and diplomatic practices in the settlement of territorial conflicts”.⁴⁸

Following the Crimean events, some pro-Armenian experts tried to fit the ‘Crimean scenario’ to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Vigen Akopian argued that the Crimean precedent creates a situation which opens up wide perspectives for Nagorno-Karabakh with “a chance to organize a new referendum for unification of NKR and Armenia”. He notes that if Russia will support this scenario, then it will be “the beginning of the end for Azerbaijan”.⁴⁹ However, it is doubtful that the recognition, and above all the entry of Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia, would suit Russia’s contemporary strategic plans for the South Caucasus. There is a widely shared conviction amongst Russian experts that the recognition of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic will result in the deterioration of relations with Azerbaijan, Moscow’s strategic partner in the region, who may finally turn to the West, and eventually the war may be resumed.⁵⁰

Besides noting the poorly thought-out decisions of the USSR’s planners, who had demarcated the Soviet republics in such a way that in the post-Soviet time have led to violent conflicts, the Russian

⁴⁸ Stanislav Tarasov, “Chto predlozhit Frantsiya Alievu i Sargsyanu po Karabakhu v novykh geopoliticheskikh usloviyakh”, *Regnum*, 18 Oct 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1858074.html> (translation by the author).

⁴⁹ Vigen Akopian, “Postkrym: Zakavkaz’e”, *Regnum*, 10 Apr 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1789461.html>.

⁵⁰ For example, see Dmitrii Kiselev, Statement at a meeting of the Russian-Armenian Parliamentary Club, *A1 plus Youtube channel*, 11 Jun 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TON7UnxGLA>; Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, *First Armenian News and Analyses*, 17 Apr 2014, <http://ru.1in.am/42966.html>; Aleksandr Dugin, 1–15 Jul 2014.

analysts have not indicated significant similarities between the Crimean and Nagorno-Karabakh issues. On the contrary, many experts do not support searching for similarities between the two issues as they represent different conflicting processes, which develop in their own way according to their own algorithms and logics.⁵¹ There is no premise from which to reach a conclusion that in the aftermath of the Crimean events, Moscow will change its policy toward Nagorno-Karabakh. Sergey Markedonov argues that the developments in Crimea will not affect the settlement process in Nagorno-Karabakh simply because Moscow's positions toward the Crimean issue and the Karabakh conflict are unlike.⁵²

The non-recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh and the simultaneous preservation of the status quo have helped Moscow to develop cooperation with both Baku and Yerevan. Nevertheless, an important condition for the Kremlin to reconsider the status of NKR was pointed out: if Azerbaijan or Armenia starts conducting 'anti-Russian policy', the factor of Nagorno-Karabakh can be handled as a diplomatic 'weapon' to ensure Russia's interests in the region.⁵³ According to Dugin, this 'weapon' is based on Russia's special role as the main guarantor of the territorial integrity of the post-Soviet states:

The guarantor of the territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan is Russia, and the guarantor of Karabakh is Russia. If we imagine that Russia disclaims these functions, territorial integrity... will not be guaranteed... [T]he countries in the zone adjacent to Russia can preserve their territorial integrity exclusively through neighborly relations

⁵¹ For example, see "Edinogo zagovora prisoedineniya territorii net i byt' ne mozhet – ekspert o krymskom pretsedente", *Regnum*, 17 March 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1779145.html>; "Govorit' o vkhozhenii Karabakha v Armeniyu ili Rossiyu echo rano: eks-posol RF v Armenii", *Regnum*, 18 March 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1779614.html>; Sergei Markedonov, Interview, *Regnum*, 26 March 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1782564.html>.

⁵² "Markedonov: 'Obnovlennyye' Madridskie printsipy – ne okonchatelnyy dokument karabakhskogo uregulirovaniya", *Regnum*, 15 May 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1802344.html>.

⁵³ Markedonov, 26 March 2014.

with Russia. That is, either neutral or close relations. In the case of conducting anti-Russian policy while being in the post-Soviet space, territorial integrity can be questioned.⁵⁴

This statement on Moscow's policy in the post-Soviet space represents a view of those Russian experts who believe that Russia is under attack from Western states, and the ex-Soviet republics are the country's "frontline". From this perspective, the transformations of state borders in the region are seen as a way of Russia preserving its geostrategic interests in the situation of immediate security threat.

The decisive role of the Russian military presence in Ukraine during the 2014 Crimean events prompted expectations in expert circles that Russia's 102nd military base in Armenia could be involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement if the security situation in the region rapidly deteriorated. Speculation surrounding Russia's military involvement considerably increased since October 2013, when the commander of the base, Colonel Andrei Ruzinskii, stated in an interview that if Azerbaijan decides to restore its jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh through military means, Russian soldiers under his command might enter into the armed conflict on the Armenian side in accordance to the Collective Security Treaty.⁵⁵ This statement was interpreted as proof from Russia's officials to an assumption that despite the fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is *de jure* a part of Azerbaijan, the Russian military could step in should there be a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

This assumption proceeds from several dominant premises in the Russian analytical sphere based upon the interpretations of the actual state of affairs in the conflict zone. First, the resumption of conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh rapidly and inevitably will develop into a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, because Yerevan is the security guarantor of Nagorno-Karabakh in much the same way as Russia is the security guarantor of Armenia. Second, the incidents between military forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan constantly occur on the border between the two states, and they frequently appear to be on a larger scale than the clashes in the

⁵⁴ Aleksandr Dugin, 17 Apr 2014 (translation by the author).

⁵⁵ Andrei Ruzinskii, Interview, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 10 Oct 2013, No. 185 (26404): 6.

Line of Contact in Nagorno-Karabakh. Third, a large number of servicemen at the Russian military base in Gyumri are ethnic Armenians with Russian citizenship, and they might be willing to help the Nagorno-Karabakh people as volunteers. Fourth, if Moscow in this situation will refrain from supporting Yerevan with military, such a decision might turn out to be a serious blow to Russia's reputation as a reliable ally not only for Armenia but also for other members of the CSTO, and as a result, the solidity of the alliance would be undermined.⁵⁶

At the same time, a countervailing opinion within the expert community suggests that Russia's military will not intervene into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict due to serious geopolitical costs for the country. Dugin argues that in the case of war between Azerbaijan and Armenia there are no favorable scenarios for Russia: it cannot support Armenia because then the U.S. will assist, and so control, Azerbaijan, neither can it support Azerbaijan because Armenia is Russia's strategic ally, and to stay neutral means that Washington will strengthen its influence on both Baku and Yerevan.⁵⁷ From this perspective, Russia can use the factor of its military presence for only one end – to deter the conflicting parties from resuming the war. Shevchenko notes that even though Moscow has military commitments in the frame of the allied relations with Armenia, Russia remains *prima facie* a guarantor of the absence of war in the region and will act accordingly.⁵⁸ This interpretation of Russia's military role against the backdrop of conflict in Eastern Ukraine and

⁵⁶ This part of the analysis is partly based on Aleksandr Hramchikhin, "Kavkazskoe minnoe pole", *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 17 Jan 2014, http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2014-01-17/1_kavkaz.html; Markedonov, 4 Aug 2014; "Vozobnovlenie voiny v zone karabakhskogo konflikta maloveroyatno, schitayut eksperty", *Caucasian Knot*, 8 Aug 2014, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/247133/>; Gai Borisov, "Nagorni Karabakh – yubilei peremiriya na fone ugrozy novoi volny", *Regnum*, 6 May 2014, <http://regnum.ru/news/1798977.html>.

⁵⁷ Dugin, 3 Aug 2014. Some experts also believe that if Russian soldiers will participate on the Armenian side, the war between Russia and Turkey is inevitable (for example, see Malashenko, 24 Nov 2014).

⁵⁸ "Maksim Shevchenko: azerbaidzhantsy dolzhny vernut'sya v Karabakh", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 24 March 2014, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/news/Maksim-Shevchenko-azerbaidzhantsy-dolzhny-vernutsya-v-Karabakh.html>.

the rise in violence in Nagorno-Karabakh has revived the proposal to introduce peacekeeping forces into the conflict zone.

In 2008, when Moscow's peacebuilding efforts in Nagorno-Karabakh reactivated, some experts argued that the Kremlin had developed a plan, which implies the substitution of the Armenian armed forces in Nagorno-Karabakh by Russian peacekeeping troops and thereupon return of the internally displaced persons and refugees to their former places of residence. Dugin was convinced that the main background idea of plans to introduce Russian peacekeepers in the region was to eliminate U.S. influence in the region.⁵⁹ The aforementioned statement of the U.S. co-chair in the OSCE MG, James Warlick, in May 2014 heated up the discussions on the advisability of a peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. Warlick called for "a well-designed peacekeeping operation that enjoys the confidence of all sides" as a necessary element of international security guarantees in the region.⁶⁰ In Russia's expert circles, the statement raised speculation about Washington's intention to propose NATO troops for the role of peacekeeping forces. Vladimir Evseev, head of Caucasus Department of the Commonwealth of Independent States Institute, stressed that the peacekeeping operation would decrease the risks of military conflict but the participation of NATO peacekeepers is unacceptable for Russia.⁶¹ It has been argued that Moscow will not allow Western countries to introduce their peacekeepers because this contradicts its goal of pressing out rival forces from the region, in which Russia sees itself as a privileged peacekeeper. If Azerbaijan on its own decides to let a Western peacekeeping contingent into its territory, then relations between Moscow and Baku will become so strained that eventually it may provoke a new war in the region.⁶² There are expert reports that denote the fact that Russia

⁵⁹ Dugin, 30 Oct 2008.

⁶⁰ Warlick, 7 May 2014.

⁶¹ "Lavrov letit v Baku ozhivit' nagorno-karabakhskoe uregulirovanie", *Vestnik Kavakaza*, 17 Jun 2014, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/news/Lavrov-letit-v-Baku-ozhivit-nagorno-karabakhskoe-uregulirovanie.html>.

⁶² Irina Jorbenadze: "Ekspertnaya diskussiya: Chuzhie v Karabakhe", *Gorchakov Fund*, 10 Jul 2014, <http://gorchakovfund.ru/news/11920/>.

has not given up its plans to send its own peacekeeping mission to the region, which now are paralleled with increased pressure on Armenia to vacate at least some Azerbaijani territories around Nagorno-Karabakh and with the attempts to engage Azerbaijan in the Eurasian integration processes.⁶³ Either way, there are doubts that the presence of peacekeeping forces would in itself bring a sustainable peace; it would rather keep the confrontation within the mode of ‘no peace and no war’.⁶⁴

Russia’s efforts to deter the conflicting parties have long been manifest in maintaining the balance of power in the region, which is considered by Russian experts as an important guarantee of the non-resumption of war. The balance of power is based on Russia’s close military cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and supply of arms to both of them. By doing this, it is believed that Russia keeps the arms race in the region under control.⁶⁵ However, this approach is a double-edged sword given the fact that for the last decade the region has been significantly boosted up with modern and destructive weaponry, which at some juncture could be used in a new war, potentially involving the Russian army. This situation is complicated by the uncertainty of the actual military capabilities of Armenia and Azerbaijan due to confidentiality of their military supplies. Therefore, the disputes about the military superiority of one conflicting party over the other are permanently present in the expert discussions. Whatever the case, the maintenance of the balance of power is a part of Russia’s policy to prevent the escalation of the conflict. The Russian ex-ambassador to Yerevan, Vyacheslav Kovalenko, describes this practice,

[The] emphasis is placed on forming some balance in the military potential between the two countries, in their standoff. This holds back the start of military actions... because both sides understand that a war would be destructive. The military potentials are about the same, despite the growing

⁶³ Ismail Agakishiyev, Interview, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 8 Aug 2014, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/analysis/politics/58567.html>.

⁶⁴ Jorbenadze, *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Markedonov, 1–15 Jul 2014.

purchases of weapons by Baku. [Perhaps] the Armenians are losing in the quantitative aspect, but in qualitative terms, the balance keeps them at peace, not war.⁶⁶

The suspended status of Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia's military presence in the forms of the 102nd base in Gyumri and the large-scale military cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan are important factors of regional developments, which Moscow has operationalized in its relationships with Baku and Yerevan. The operationalization of these factors for foreign policy purposes requires a careful approach as not to upset Armenian and Azerbaijani interests and not to undermine the status quo. Russian analysts are almost unanimously convinced that the resumption of war will bring substantive political and economic costs for Russia, and the military intervention into the conflict is a last resort for Moscow, which will be used only when all other possible means to enforce peace are exhausted. It is believed that the direct participation of the Russian armed forces in the conflict between its two strategic partners is fraught with serious geopolitical consequences for the entire Caucasus and beyond, including the Middle East, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea regions, and involving various international actors. These developments might completely destabilize the contemporary organization of international relations.

CONCLUSIONS: THE BALANCE BETWEEN IMMEDIATE AND (GEO)STRATEGIC GOALS

Generalizing Russian expert opinion, one notices that Moscow's policy in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement pursues both immediate and strategic goals, which are closely connected. The immediate goal is to keep the situation in the conflict zone within the state of 'no-war' by all possible means at the disposal of Russian diplomatic, economic, political, and military arsenal. However, the increased frequency of violent clashes in the Line of Contact and at the state

⁶⁶ Kovalenko, 1 Aug 2014.

border between Armenia and Azerbaijan points to the fragility of the status quo and further consolidates conviction among Russia's experts and decision-makers that this frozen conflict as a potential "hot spot" at the country's southern borders must be resolved without delay. In this situation, establishing a sustainable dialogue between Baku and Yerevan that would be effective in reaching a comprehensive compromise is an additional immediate goal.

The strategic objectives require that the compromise and the resolution of the conflict would not happen at the expense of Russia's interests and presence in the South Caucasus. Against the backdrop of intensified confrontation with Western countries, Moscow's suspicions toward the mediating activities of the U.S. and France are growing. Based on them, some Russian observers interpreted the prompt and unexpected diplomatic actions of Moscow to settle the escalation in summer 2014 as an attempt to take the initiative from Washington and Paris in the mediation process and to create an alternative platform for peace negotiations. However, the argument of the emergence of a new platform is ambiguous. Russia's diplomatic practices in Nagorno-Karabakh have traditionally included trilateral meetings of Moscow, Baku and Yerevan, and if to recall Medvedev's mediation in 2009–2011, they were not an alternative but rather complementing platform to the Minsk format, and the two other mediator-states openly supported the efforts from the Kremlin. The U.S. and France practice trilateral talks as well. The most recent of such meetings followed the August 2014 talks in Sochi. In early September, the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia met in Newport with the U.S. State Secretary John Kerry, and in late October, French President François Hollande hosted counterparts from Baku and Yerevan in Paris.

A number of Russian experts have neglected the fact that the officials from the mediator-states continuously stress the importance of the Minsk Group work and underline their adherence to this platform of negotiations. Many analysts concluded that the consequent trilateral meetings organized by Russia, the U.S. and France may point to the beginning of "war of mediators", competing for the leadership in the peace negotiations to shape agenda in accordance with one's own strategic interests. However, the parallels

drawn with the developments in the mediation processes in the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts are questionable. Unlike the situation in Georgia, where the government chose a pro-Western foreign policy direction and the separatist leaders favored Russia, the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is more complicated and there is no clear pro-Western versus pro-Russian division between the positions of Baku and Yerevan. Moreover, Stepanakert does not have an unequivocal foreign policy direction except the pro-Armenian one. In addition, both Armenia and Azerbaijan are important strategic countries in the region, and therefore the external actors cannot support only one side at the expense of the other.

The idea of the “war of mediators” stems from the belief that the interests of the Western states and Russia are mutually uncompromising and that this situation has been recently reinforced in the light of tensioning international relations. The widely shared assumption among Russian experts is that Russia is in the position of defense trying to preserve its presence in the South Caucasus and to repel attacks of the “Atlantists”, who seek to increase their influence on the region. From this point of view, Moscow needs to maintain the status quo and actively facilitate the negotiations in order to reach a comprehensive compromise as soon as possible, while the Western states strive for the destabilization of the region to complete a process, which began in Georgia, of cutting off the South Caucasus from Russia’s sphere of influence. However, there is also a contrasting opinion among Russian experts suggesting that there have never been considerable elements of the ‘West-Russia’ confrontation in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement and therefore it is ungrounded to view the peace process only from the perspective of incompatible geopolitical interests.

Sergey Markedonov notes that the settlement process in Nagorno-Karabakh has recently become “too ideologized” and risks being “a prisoner” of the Ukrainian crisis and the surrounding geopolitical conjuncture. He urges the saving of the established negotiation platform on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, as currently it is one of few areas of successful cooperation between Russian and Western diplomatic and expert communities.⁶⁷ To preserve the cooperation,

⁶⁷ Markedonov, 15 May 2014; and Markedonov, 1–15 Jul 2014.

it is necessary that diplomats and international experts continue discussions on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, monitoring regional developments and proposing unbiased and pragmatic ways out from the conflict. It is important to prevent the extension of the informational confrontation between Russian and Western experts to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, which without this have been always affected by the media war of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Certainly, the contemporary set of relations between Western states and Russia is strained due to the Ukrainian crisis and has created a negative background factor for the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement which may bring about a 'formal approach' of the mediators. The clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces that continued escalating in the beginning of 2015 point to the fact that the future of a "Big Agreement" about which the mediators have recently spoken is still unclear. It seems that the search for a compromise will require additional time and further effort. In this situation, the skepticism within the Russian expert community on the prospects for conflict resolution is growing. The activity of the Minsk Group has been criticized for its inconsistency, the absence of concrete results, and general inefficiency. There are concerns that the infinite protocol meetings without tangible outcomes and the negotiations for the sake of negotiations will eventually become useless and incapable to fulfill even their main function to maintain stability in the conflict zone.⁶⁸

The continuous ceasefire violations against the background of conflict in Ukraine have become a common challenge for the mediators and a test for the effectiveness of their work. Even though the prospects for conflict resolution are still ambiguous, the mediators must show their willingness to generate positive dynamics in the settlement process. This can be achieved by the minimization of ceasefire violations in the conflict zone through the international investigation of incidents, a joint reaction of the mediators condemning armed clashes, and creation of a punishment mechanism for the party responsible for ceasefire violations. On the 'battlefield', the Minsk Group must ensure withdrawal of heavy

⁶⁸ Stanislav Tarasov, "Kto vyholostil sammit Olland-Aliev-Sargsyan", *Regnum*, 28 Oct 2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1860890.html>.

arms and snipers from the Line of Contact. The experts believe that the unified firm position of the mediators backed by diplomatic and economic tools of influence could force Armenians and Azerbaijanis to accept these 'rules'.

The Russian experts increasingly tend to associate a possible resolution of the conflict with the post-Soviet integration processes initiated by Moscow. This approach to conflict resolution has two apparent trends aimed at approximation of Baku's and Yerevan's positions. The first one can be viewed within the term of 'cooperative security' as Moscow seeks to create an indivisible security space in the Caucasus, a space which would include the Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Against the background of the contemporary geopolitical situation, Moscow is persuading Baku and Yerevan to take joint efforts to counter extra-regional threats. The second, 'integrationist' trend is connected with the Eurasian initiatives and conceptually is similar to the EU's approach to the resolution of the Balkan conflicts, which is based on the integration of new independent states of the region, including Kosovo, into the common European society. There is a belief among integration-supporters in Russia that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict cannot be solved by the two nation-states and has better chances for the settlement at the level of a supranational organization or an interstate association.⁶⁹ However, the joint participation of Armenia and Azerbaijan in an association of deep integration seems too unrealistic for the near future. Understanding this situation and following a liberal approach to international integration, Russian analysts urge Moscow to develop economic, social, and cultural cooperation to induce the chain reaction that would lead to political cooperation. Eventually, pragmatic reasons of cooperation would drive public opinion towards a peaceful community, and these positive dynamics in the interaction between Armenia and Azerbaijan would create the conditions for a stable regional order and would decrease the likelihood of the resumption of military conflict between the states.

⁶⁹ For example, see Pyotr Akopov, "Yuzhnyi flang", *Vzglyad*, 15 Sept 2014, <http://vz.ru/politics/2014/9/15/705762.html>.

Obviously, Azerbaijan will not join the EEU without clear guarantees that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would be resolved taking into account the interests of Baku. At the same time, Russia cannot disregard the interests of Armenia, its only ally in the region. Most likely, in this ‘in-between’ situation, Moscow will continue making efforts to bring closer the positions of Baku and Yerevan by taking new steps to engage Azerbaijan directly and indirectly into the work of the Eurasian Economic Union, at least in the form of partnership in selected areas. However, the ongoing transformations of the global and regional geopolitical situation and changes of the post-Soviet borders may dissolve the chances for a sustainable dialogue between the conflicting parties.

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NAGORNO-KARABAKH: STEPS OF SETTLEMENT MARKET OUT BY RUSSIA'S INTERESTS

Vadim Romashov & Helena Rytövuori-Apunen

INTRODUCTION

Russia has never been on the side of Armenia in the Karabakh conflict. Similarly, it has never been on the side of Azerbaijan in this conflict. In the Karabakh conflict, Russia has been on the side of Russia (Aleksandr Dugin).¹

Western discourses often leave unnoticed the complexities which Russian policies encounter in the conflict concerning Nagorno-Karabakh. The common interpretation is that Russia has little real interest in the final settlement of the conflict but, instead, utilizes the situation in order to expand its domination in the South Caucasus region. According to this view, Russian diplomatic activity is ultimately interested only in the preservation of the status quo between the conflicting parties. The reasoning is that, because of the equal importance of Baku and Yerevan for the Kremlin's strategy to increase its influence in the region, Moscow is not willing to exert any real pressure on either one of the states, and thus to press for a compromise. The parallel supply of Russia's modern weaponry to the conflicting parties is presented as the

¹ Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, *Vesti.az*, July 22, 2013, <http://vesti.az/news/166557> (translation by V.R.).

main evidence of the absence of any genuine interest in Moscow in resolving the conflict.

Viewing Moscow's policy in the region against such background assumptions is common not only to observers outside Russia, but also for Russia's domestic experts. In 2011, Aleksandr Dugin, a much-debated figure among Russian political scientists and a writer considered to be the key ideologist of "Neo-Eurasianism", explained the absence of Russian interest in the normalization of Armenian–Azerbaijani relations by referring to the lack of a solution which could satisfy all parties to the conflict. At the same time, Dugin, like most analysts of this conflict, emphasized that any radical change in the status quo could easily provoke the resumption of war. Dugin's argumentation pivots around the belief that the actors interested in the destabilization of the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh are the Western states. Therefore, the "task of the day" for Moscow's diplomacy is to maintain the status quo while at the same time keeping a keen eye on the conflict developments in the region.²

However, the reasoning according to which the maintenance of the status quo is the only way by which Russia can ensure its influence in the South Caucasus is by no means the final answer among Moscow's analysts. Three years later, in 2014, Dugin emphasized that Russia's long-term goal is to reshape Armenian–Azerbaijan relations in such a way that would consolidate its position in an integrated South Caucasus region with minimized external (that is, Western) influence.³ From this point of view, Moscow must try to find a solution to the protracted conflict from the perspective of the advances made in the integration process, which is expected to generate a more peaceful regional order. This process is believed to create a positive environment for the realization of energy and infrastructure projects and, more generally, for economic development of the entire Caucasus, and is thus thought to be the scenario to best reduce the risk of the involvement of the Russian military in a war between its strategic partners in the region. This reasoning is the "root" from which branch out such initiatives as regionalization of the peace process (implicating some degree of substitution of the

² Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, *Zerkalo.az*, July 21, 2011.

³ Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, *Noev Koucheg*, July 1–15, 2014, No.12 (242), 1–2.

Western mediators in the Minsk Group format by representatives from the neighbouring countries, Iran and Turkey) or, alternatively, creating altogether different or complementary platforms for the negotiations. The political significance of such changes goes beyond the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and gives new operative meaning to the dynamics of Eurasian economic integration.⁴

The conclusion that Moscow either has or does not have an interest in a final settlement is too simple when we try to make sense of Russia's policies and actions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The two perspectives rather point to the dilemma which Russian diplomacy faces when trying to balance its strategic and immediate goals, i.e. to strengthen its political influence in the region and at the same time prevent the resumption of an openly military conflict and war over Nagorno-Karabakh. The fact that the military dimension of policy plays a crucial role in Russia's efforts to counter this dilemma is demonstrated by Moscow's emphasis on two military factors meant to keep Azerbaijanis and Armenians from resorting to open war, namely conventional deterrence and the balance of threats.⁵ The presence of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in the region is a significant policy instrument to serve these goals.

The dilemma described is the point of departure of this paper to analyse the possibility of a compromise between the perspectives of the "Armenian sides" (Yerevan and Stepanakert) and Azerbaijan on grounds that also take into account the interests of Russia, which has reserved itself the role of principal intermediary in the conflict. We examine the positions of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the conflict and ask what opportunities there can be to start opening the steadfast deadlock of the conflict when we also take into account the fact that Russia's strategic interests define its position on the negotiation process and promote certain conditions for settlement. These conditions recognize Russia's existing military presence in the

⁴ See Vadim Romashov, "Russian expert discussions about recent trends in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict", paper prepared for the research on peace mediation supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Spring 2015.

⁵ See Sergey Minasyan, "Quest for Stability in the Karabakh Conflict," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1, January-March 2012.

region as well as the political and economic influence embedded in its Eurasian integration projects. For obvious reasons, we cannot speak of conditions acceptable to any of the parties, but merely look for the possibility of opening a path of compromises in the frame of the basic elements of settlement which have been identified in the Minsk process as the elaboration of the “Madrid Principles”. This thinking exercise, we hope, can facilitate seeing how a path could be cleared to negotiate the conflict in cooperation with Russia. We do not advocate any parties’ interests, but ask readers to think how the process could be opened so that a world political antagonism – an antagonism between Russia and the West – is not embedded in the process from the start.

The backdrop of our discussion is the worsening security environment in the Eurasian political space generated by the confrontation between the Western countries and Russia, especially since the conflicts over Ukraine flared open in 2014. The Ukrainian crisis was the backdrop against which the occurrence of the unprecedented (since the ceasefire regime was established in 1994) armed clashes in the late summer of 2014 in the Line of Contact and on the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan became possible. In early 2015, the violent trend continued. These developments show that the conflict potential in Nagorno-Karabakh remains very high. The tension, together with the accumulation of weaponry on both sides of the Line of Contact in recent years, makes the risks involved in any radical changes in the status quo in this conflict more evident than ever before. In this situation, the question of how escalation can be prevented and a move towards resolution of the conflict can be facilitated is equally relevant for the conflicting parties and the mediator-states who are the co-chairs in the Minsk Group, i.e. Russia, the United States and France.

While the empirical task of this paper is to look for the possibility of compromise in the tripartite frame explained above, the question whether this could be acceptable also to the Western states and how they in this process could have their own interests satisfied has too many contingencies to be discussed here. It is beyond the scope of the present paper and opens another chapter in the same research problem. Our task is more limited, empirical and hypothetical:

Is there a possibility to start building a compromise between the conflicting parties, and to do so in such a way that does not exclude Russia's interests in the process? Our study proceeds by analysing official documents, speeches, expert opinions and media accounts from Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN: TWENTY PLUS YEARS OF "NO WAR, NO PEACE"

Since a ceasefire agreement was signed in May 1994, the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies have developed post-war interpretations of reality based on their mutually opposed and incompatible interests. Whilst the two ethnic societies had lived side by side with some tension and occasional communal violence throughout the Soviet decades and earlier during the rule of Imperial Russia, the post-war years sparked a "conflict of identities" in which Nagorno-Karabakh for both parties, in the context of their newly founded state building, signifies mutually antagonistic identity projects. According to Laurence Broers, the identities of the conflicting parties are grounded on "competing understandings of historical justice tightly interwoven with national ideologies."⁶ The Armenians and Azerbaijanis have created two alternative and incompatible national versions of Karabakh history. Thomas de Waal argues that, based on these versions of history, the conflicting parties believe "that to be without Nagorny Karabakh is to have an incomplete national identity, that Armenian or Azerbaijani nationhood is a stunted and wounded thing without it".⁷ The identities of the conflicting parties

⁶ "Introduction" by Laurence Broers in his edited work "The limits of leadership: Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process," *Accord*, No. 17, 2005. The conflict discourse has created a self-reproducing social discourse of "othering" and "demonization". About these exclusionary politics, see Hratch Tchilingirian, "New structures, old foundations: state capacities for peace" in Broers, op. cit.

⁷ Thomas de Waal, "The Nagorny Karabakh conflict: origins, dynamics and misperceptions" in Laurence Broers (ed.) "The limits of leadership". For a comprehensive history of the conflict see, for example, Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

that have been constructed in the situation of “no war, no peace” are a major obstacle to the settlement of the conflict in the social and political processes of both countries. Because Nagorno-Karabakh has been made a constituent part of the new national identity, undermining this part becomes self-defeating for any politician in the election process.

Although the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is a division on ethnic lines, ethnic or national identities as such cannot be held to be the sources of the conflict. Instead, the problem is that the conflict over Karabakh has been made a key issue of national identity in both countries, and this element of identity has become so deeply rooted in both societies that a change can only come with either a major disruption of the power of the present elites or as a long-term process. Because the war (1992–94) flared up during the first years of independence, the state-building processes were started in the situation of war. Consequently, the national processes of identity building today would no longer be the same if they were not affected by the two different “no war, no peace syndromes” (as denoted by Laura Baghdasarian and Arif Yunusov), that is, the syndromes of a “victor” and a “victim” (Armenians and Azerbaijanis, respectively).⁸ In Azerbaijan, the idea of revenge and the inevitability of returning Karabakh is an element of state-building and the ideological basis for national consolidation, whereas in Armenia the movement in support of Karabakh is the foundation of Armenian independence and statehood. The sense of historical victimhood (the genocidal tragedies of the early twentieth century) gives Karabakh a significance which is far greater than the territory and land (in spite of the fact that this land is exceptionally fertile in the region and does have agricultural significance). In Stepanakert, the bitter pride of being part of the Armenian “victor” connects with the syndrome of being a “besieged fortress”. The politicians in Stepanakert appeal to the idea of people’s unity facing a permanent external threat in order to ensure the national consolidation without which the tiny polity

⁸ Laura Baghdasarian and Arif Yunusov, “War, social change and ‘no war, no peace’ syndromes in Azerbaijani and Armenian societies,” in Laurence Broers (ed.) “The limits of leadership.”

of “Artsakh”, the “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” (NKR), with its population of less than one hundred thousand, could hardly exist. The fact that Karabakh is able to increase its political weight by being an integral part of Armenian politics is indicated by the number and influence of the activists of the Karabakh movement in the Armenian political and military elite.⁹ While the military confrontation continues, finding a balance in which all these sentiments do not result in a backlash with action that further accelerates the violent conflict is extremely difficult.

Self-censorship and state control over the information space in both countries contribute to building mental walls, which bar communication between the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. In this situation, the negotiation agenda crafted in connection with the Minsk Group remains detached from the social and political processes of both countries, and arguably needs mechanisms to curb the distance. In creating such mechanisms, the experiences of other countries about post-war conciliation and peace-building can be useful. However, the first and primary task is to look for the possibility of agreement in the elements that have been identified in the Minsk process.

⁹ On the role of the Karabakh activists in contemporary Armenian politics, see Sergey Minasyan, “The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Foreign, Military and Domestic Politics of Armenia: an Assessment” and Alexander Iskandaryan, “From Totalitarianism via Elitist Pluralism: Whither Armenia”, both in Mikko Palonkorpi and Alexander Iskandaryan (eds), *Armenia's foreign and domestic politics: development trends*, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute and Aleksanteri Institute, 2013. Although Armenia represents the position of Nagorno-Karabakh in official negotiations, the political influence of Yerevan on Stepanakert is limited because of the sensitivity of this issue in Armenian society and the influence of the Karabakh activists in the economic, political and military spheres of life in Armenia. Political pressure from Armenia on Nagorno-Karabakh or unilateral decisions concerning a peace agreement may end the political career of decision-makers in Yerevan. An example is the resignation of the former president Levon Ter-Petrossyan in 1998.

BASIC PRINCIPLES TO BRIDGE THE GAP OF COMMUNICATION

The proposals known as the Madrid Principles were presented to the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs at the OSCE ministerial meeting in Madrid on 29 November 2007. They laid the basis for the Basic Principles for the renewed negotiations geared towards the conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement. These principles were outlined in six main points: return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan's control, an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance, a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh, future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will, the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence, and international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.¹⁰ The work begun in Madrid was continued in 2009 (after the break caused by the Russia-Georgia war) by the Minsk Group co-chairs on the side-lines of major international conferences.

Despite the formal acceptance of the agenda of the principles by Yerevan and Baku, progress was hampered by the “devils in the details” and the question of the mutual hierarchy of the principles (which consequently was ruled out). The contemporary agenda of the negotiations is about “updated Madrid Principles” where the basic elements remain the same. The key issues are status and territory. While the Armenian side in the conflict refrains from disputing the demand of the international mediators and Azerbaijan to vacate the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, they also link this process to granting independent status to Nagorno-Karabakh. This scenario is unacceptable to Baku, which agrees to provide Nagorno-Karabakh with maximum autonomy while the area at the same time would be strictly under Azerbaijani jurisdiction. In order to untie the knot, the mediators have elaborated a settlement design in which an interim status would be provided to Nagorno-Karabakh to guarantee

¹⁰ CSS Analysis in Security Policy, No. 131, April 2013.

its security and self-governance. This design is meant to move the negotiation process forward and begin a gradual transformation of the status quo. Under this scenario, the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan de jure is not violated, but Nagorno-Karabakh remains de facto beyond its control. However, Stepanakert does not support this option and sees the status of the territory as nothing less than “a question of survival”. The Armenian side remains convinced that the return to Azerbaijan of the seven districts around Nagorno-Karabakh would weaken both their advantageous strategic positions for military defence and their political arguments in the peace negotiations. Sergey Minasyan (Caucasus Institute, Yerevan) notes that the Armenian public opinion “holds that any change in the geography of the frontlines would only upset the balance in favour of Azerbaijan, giving Baku a new motive to resume war.”¹¹ This reasoning is demonstrated by the categorical statement expressed by Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian in July 2011 on the interim status of Karabakh as a “status quo plus”, that is, “all that Nagorno-Karabakh has today, plus the international recognition of that status”.¹²

Another disputed issue in the frame of the Madrid Principles is the way the expression of popular will should be organized so as to be legally binding and thus to lay the basis for the international recognition of the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Baku objects to the idea of organizing any referendum exclusively among the population now living in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Azerbaijani party to the negotiations has argued for two alternatives. The first is a referendum, which would have to include the entire population of Azerbaijan. This is in accordance with the provision which Azerbaijan introduced into its Constitution in 1995: any change of the state’s borders requires a nation-wide referendum. Popular

¹¹ Sergey Minasyan, “Armenia in Karabakh, Karabakh in Armenia: living with a conflict” in Alexander Iskandaryan (ed.) *Identities, Ideologies and Institutions. A Decade of Insight into the Caucasus: 2001–2011*, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2011, 146.

¹² The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The visit of the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs to London,” Press Releases, July 13, 2011, <http://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/item/2011/07/13/london/>.

opinion provides a back door exit for any compromises that the negotiations may achieve, and can nullify at a stroke the results of the peace process, including all that the international community may have invested in building an interim administration. Another alternative acceptable to Azerbaijan would be organizing a plebiscite in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh after the return of Azerbaijani displaced persons and refugees to their former places of residence. In this alternative, the status can be determined only if the will expressed by both the Armenian and the Azerbaijani communities match; if not, the search for a mutually acceptable solution would continue.¹³ The reasoning in this option is that the decisions made in Karabakh by both ethnic groups should instruct Baku and Yerevan in the peace process and commit them to achieving joint goals. From Armenia's point of view, the first alternative of Baku is a political tool and the second breaks down into a dispute about numbers: the number of IDPs in Azerbaijan including the new generations can easily more than double the present population of Karabakh, and thus decide the status question in advance.¹⁴ In addition, such mobility would create enormous economic and social strain in Karabakh, a strain that no amount of assistance from the international community can prevent.

A third acute problem concerns the width and operation of a land corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh through the Lachin district. Yerevan would like to keep this corridor as wide as possible, while Baku would restrict it to a road for joint Azerbaijani and Armenian use, preferably to continue to Nakhichevan in the south to connect Azerbaijan with its exclave district at the Iranian border. The joint road would enable Armenia through the territory of Azerbaijan to connect with Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan through the territory of Armenia to connect with Nakhichevan. While such a parallel structure has the advantage of looking like an

¹³ Rasim Musabekov, "Karabakhsii faktor vo vneshnei i vnutrennei politike Azerbaidzhana" in Alexander Iskandaryan (ed.) *Caucasus Neighborhood: Turkey and the South Caucasus*, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2008, 86.

¹⁴ The war left approximately one million IDPs, of which 750,000 for Azerbaijan (Azeri population from Karabakh and the seven occupied regions) and 230,000 for Armenia.

ideal peace structure, it is not a sufficient connection for Yerevan. Although Yerevan, for the sake of contributing to the peace process, must be prepared to negotiate on the return of at least parts of the territories, Lachin is likely to be the piece in which little will be conceded. A corridor will hardly be enough, and several points of access on the map are demanded.

While these bundles of issues remain open and the future for Stepanakert is undetermined, it too is not ready to agree to discuss any interim status that might set some frame for the future. The syndrome of the victory with heavy costs maintains this attitude. Sergey Minasyan notes that “the Karabakh authorities affirm that there is no precedent in history, when a nation, having won a war for independence and successfully built its statehood for more than two decades, of its own free will renounces the fruit of these hard-won achievements.”¹⁵ Whereas Stepanakert argues to be included in the official negotiations in the Minsk frame Baku has consistently objected restoring the three-party structure of negotiations which existed for a short time after the ceasefire, arguing that the military achievements of Nagorno-Karabakh were possible only because of Armenia’s direct involvement (“Armenian aggressive expansionism”). The participation of Nagorno-Karabakh in the peace talks is feared to weaken the negotiation positions of the Azerbaijani diplomats, who would then have to repel “diplomatic attacks” from “two Armenian parties”. Azerbaijanis are concerned about the balance in the negotiations where they already claim to see the Russian and French co-chairs inclining towards supporting the Armenian party.

STRATEGIES OF THE CONFLICTING PARTIES

The mutually exclusive identity projects and the victor–victim syndromes are manifest in the strategies of the conflicting parties and their policies for achieving the maximum of their goals in the negotiation process. David Petrossyan argues that there are two confronting “asymmetrical doctrines”– “the ‘deferred revenge’

¹⁵ Minasyan, “The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.”

(Baku) and the ‘retention of territories’ (Yerevan, Stepanakert)”.¹⁶ Baku supports its doctrine by its diplomatic, information and military resources. Azerbaijani officials exert diplomatic pressure on Armenia by using the platforms of international organizations and meetings at which they emphasize the inadmissibility of “the Armenian occupation” and their right to restore the territorial integrity of their state by means not excluding military force. The state-controlled media in Azerbaijan supports the often aggressive rhetoric of politicians by explaining Baku’s position in more detail. In Armenian expert circles again the opinion seems to be that, in order to support its threats to return the territories by force, Baku maintains a permanent tension by provoking incidents in the Line of Contact and at the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹⁷ While there is no international investigation of these incidents, it is impossible to form any reliable conclusions about the source of these incidents. Simultaneously the continuing tension in the conflict zone attracts the attention of the international community, and the conflicting parties are able to use it instrumentally to gain political and economic dividends in international connections.

The arms race is another military means by which Azerbaijan is seen to use threat policies towards Armenia. Baku has increased its arms acquisitions since the mid-2000s when the revenues from the export of oil and gas allowed the political leadership to raise the allocations budgeted for military modernization. Rasim Musabekov (independent expert, Baku) notes that the widely held belief in Azerbaijani society is that the main goal of the arms race is to “wear out” Armenia’s economy. Combined with the economic blockade and the consequent isolation of Armenia from regional projects (in which policies Azerbaijan is supported by Turkey), the arms race is expected to overstrain the country’s budget, increase social risks and

¹⁶ David Petrossyan, “Precedents and prospects: the de-facto states of the South Caucasus in 2008” in Alexander Iskandaryan (ed.) *Identities, Ideologies and Institutions. A Decade of Insight into the Caucasus: 2001–2011*, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2011, 163.

¹⁷ See Larisa Deriglazova and Sergey Minasyan, “Nagorno-Karabakh: the paradoxes of strength and weakness in an asymmetric conflict,” *Caucasus Institute Research Paper*, No. 3, June 2011.

stir up public discontent. The reasoning is that this policy will force the Armenian politicians to make concessions on the Karabakh issue.¹⁸

For the time being, the conclusion in Armenia is that it has been able to counter these efforts with assistance from Russia. Sergey Minasyan argues that, owing to Russia's free and discount supplies of armaments within the frames of bilateral agreements and the cooperation in the CSTO, Armenia has been able to maintain an asymmetric parity in the arms race with Azerbaijan. Additionally, Armenia's military potential of deterrence includes the fortified line of defence in the conflict zone which has been significantly strengthened during the past two decades.¹⁹ Moreover, David Petrossyan notes that while "Azerbaijan has to [...] sustain its defence capabilities in other directions from which potential threats may come, especially on the border with Iran and [...] the Caspian Sea", "Armenia is blocking the threat from the western, Turkish, direction with support from its strategic ally, Russia", whose troops conduct security control in this sector of the Armenian border.²⁰ In addition, Armenia participates in the system of collective defence in the CSTO frame, and the presence of Russia's 102nd military base in Gyumri is an important element of the Russian-Armenian strategic alliance. The base is part of a joint air defence system of the Commonwealth of Independence States and contributes to the defence of Armenia's airspace. As a result of all of this, the aggregation of the military, political and geographic factors have helped Armenia to maintain an asymmetric parity with Azerbaijan in its military capabilities.

The preservation of such an overall balance in the conventional military capacities in the region has prompted some experts to argue that a mechanism of mutual deterrence is being developed.²¹ The Armenians, unlike the Azerbaijani who seek for "revenge", have no interest in resuming large-scale hostilities because of the

¹⁸ Musabekov, "Karabakhskii factor," 94.

¹⁹ Minasyan, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 25–26.

²⁰ Petrossyan, "Precedents and prospects," 163–164.

²¹ See Sergey Minasyan, "Nagorno-Karabakh after Two Decades of Conflict: Is Prolongation of the Status Quo Inevitable?" *Caucasus Institute Research Paper*, No. 2, August 2010.

advantageous positions they gained in the war before 1994. Against this backdrop, it makes full sense that Yerevan prefers a policy of “conventional deterrence” as its strategic guideline. This means preventing the enemy from starting combat operations, and doing this by the means of “intimidation, imminent retaliation and risk of irreparable harm” provided by conventional weapons. Minasyan argues that, despite the large military offensive potential of Azerbaijan, “the Armenian forces are capable of inflicting significant damage on industrial, infrastructural and communication facilities deep inside Azerbaijan’s territory, which in the long term would have a negative impact on its economic and political development”. The logic of conventional deterrence here is that “the asymmetric arms race in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone raises the threshold and reduces the likelihood of an outbreak of hostilities”, and that this evolving “balance of threats” maintains the military stability and prevents the outbreak of war.²²

The strategies of the conflicting parties are also influenced by their perceptions of time. Dov Lynch notes that a long-lasting status quo plays in favour of the de-facto states and that, therefore, “these states will hold out as long as they possibly can” and stand with their non-recognition and isolation.²³ In much the same way, Minasyan argues that for unrecognized states time is a power resource that they use to strengthen their political de-facto existence and status.²⁴ Consequently, there is a widely shared belief within the Armenian and Karabakh political elites and societies that “every day of the existence of Nagorno-Karabakh outside of Azerbaijan serves to reinforce its sovereignty.”²⁵ Baku in turn seeks by diplomatic and propaganda means to counteract the development that a lapse of time would make the Azerbaijani people and the international community accept the established status quo.

In 1994, Azerbaijan had to agree to a ceasefire because of its military losses and in order to gain time. Lynch notes that Baku

²² Minasyan, “Quest for Stability in the Karabakh Conflict.”

²³ Dov Lynch, “Separatist states and post-Soviet conflicts,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4, 2002, 848.

²⁴ Minasyan, “Armenia in Karabakh, Karabakh in Armenia,” 150.

²⁵ Minasyan, “Nagorno-Karabakh after Two Decades of Conflict,” 63.

initially, like also many other “post-Soviet metropolises” with similar problems, saw the status quo as “a window of opportunity in which to gain external sources of support”.²⁶ Azerbaijan anticipated that its strategic geographic position and oil resources would attract the leading world powers to support it, and that this would help to promote Azerbaijan’s interests in the conflict settlement.²⁷ However, the continued build-up of a functional state in Karabakh and the lack of progress in the negotiation process brought the Azerbaijani leadership to the conclusion that the continuation of the status quo diminishes the prospects for restoration of the country’s territorial integrity, and that it is harmful for its authority because the confidence of its population about the return of the territories is declining. At the same time, several factors, among them, arguably the “balance of threats”, and also the unified opinion of the international mediators in the Minsk Group about the inadmissibility of renewed hostilities, hampered developing incentives in Baku to launch offensive military activities against Nagorno-Karabakh. In such circumstances, military modernization and the promotion of the arms race remain the way to make use of the status quo. However, Azerbaijan’s efforts to overstrain Armenia’s economy and to change the balance of military power in its favour can only gain limited results insofar as Armenia can count on its side the Russian military capacity in the region.

RUSSIA’S RELATIONS WITH ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

In the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, there was no direct involvement of the Russian military, although equipment and manpower from the Soviet bases in the region were used to support both parties. The fact that Nagorno-Karabakh itself remained outside of direct Russian involvement and that Russian diplomacy brokered a ceasefire agreement in 1994 facilitated Russia’s role as the main intermediary in the peace negotiations. For reasons related both to the deadlock

²⁶ Lynch, “Separatist states and post-Soviet conflicts,” 845.

²⁷ See Musabekov, “Karabakhskaa faktor,” 86.

in the conflict and the wish to increase the international normative weight of its mediation efforts, Moscow agreed to the OSCE Minsk Group as the frame of the negotiation process. However, Russia's mediation efforts in Karabakh were not very active before the war with Georgia in 2008. Immediately after this war, President Dmitry Medvedev organized a meeting with his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts, Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev, and several trilateral meetings followed in the format established in Russian diplomacy. Simultaneously, the work of Russian diplomats intensified in the OSCE Minsk Group. It was important to send the message to the West that Nagorno-Karabakh was a case different from Georgia's separatist regions, and anxieties had arisen in Moscow about the possibility of another explosion developing on Russia's Caucasus border. The support given by the U.S. and France to Medvedev's efforts is indicative of the wish for some breakthrough based on the Madrid Principles.²⁸ However, this was also the time when Aleksandr Dugin argued that Moscow must replace the Armenian forces with Russian peacekeepers and begin the return of the displaced persons, and that the idea in the background of this plan was to eliminate the U.S. influence in this region.²⁹ Whatever the main motive, Medvedev's active efforts failed, and by 2011 the conflict settlement resumed its previous standoff.

When the ceasefire was negotiated, Azerbaijan had objected to the proposal, then coming from the Russian Ministry of Defense, to establish Russian peacekeepers in the Kelbajar district which Armenia had occupied. A feature to be noticed in the current discussion is that Armenian experts and official statements demonstrate an unwillingness to accept international peacekeepers, apparently because in such case their forces would be obliged to leave the fortified territories, which again would be perceived as changing the status quo to the favor of Baku. The Armenian experts vaguely explain why the peacekeeping operation as an international security

²⁸ "Medvedev momentum falters in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Strategic Comments of the International Institute for Strategic Studies*, Vol. 17, Comments 27, August 2011.

²⁹ Aleksandr Dugin, Interview, *Nakanune.ru*, October 30, 2008, <http://www.nakanune.ru/articles/13696/>.

guarantee cannot be effective.³⁰ In August 2014, the Armenian Defence Minister Seyran Ohanyan stated that the Armenians themselves can solve the issues they are facing, and that “there is absolutely no need for the deployment of peacekeeping forces”.³¹ Thus, the Armenian Ministry of Defence seems to have chosen not to consider the preliminary agreement included in the Madrid Principles that the peacekeeping contingent is to be discussed as the main form of the international security guarantee.

Since Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008, these entities have been formally connected to the economic, social and political space of the Russian Federation by the bilateral Agreements of the Allied Relations and Integration signed in 2015. The Armenian population currently living in Nagorno-Karabakh have hopes of a similar future together with Armenia. However, Moscow’s policy on Nagorno-Karabakh remains unchanged. The Russian diplomats continue to call for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and do not draw parallels between Nagorno-Karabakh and the breakaway regions in Georgia and Ukraine. Unlike in these other conflicts, Russia does not provide direct support to the NKR. Russia is the security guarantor of Armenia, which in turn is the security guarantor of Nagorno-Karabakh. This structure of relations would be violated if Moscow were to recognize the NKR ahead of Yerevan.

A reason which is by no means less important for Moscow’s restrained relations with Stepanakert is Baku. Azerbaijan is Russia’s important strategic partner in the South Caucasus. In 2013, Baku refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, which Moscow considers as a rival project to its own integration initiatives

³⁰ For instance David Petrossyan emphasizes that “there is *a priori* distrust towards hypothetical peacekeepers among all the conflicting parties” (Petrossyan, “Precedents and prospects,” 164). Sergey Minasyan again argues that “the experience of other countries shows that peacekeepers are no guarantee against war in the conflict zone in the case of external pressures” (Minasyan, “Armenia in Karabakh, Karabakh in Armenia,” 146).

³¹ See “Armenia’s Defence Minister sees no need for deployment of peacekeepers in Karabakh zone,” Armenpress, August 6, 2014, <http://armenpress.am/eng/news/771794/seiyran-oganyan-ne-vidit-neobkhodimosti-v-razmeshchenii-mirotvorcheskikh.html>.

in the former Soviet areas. Nor do Azerbaijani officials currently indicate any further willingness to deepen cooperation with NATO. Thus, there are no apparent reasons for Russia to use Nagorno-Karabakh to influence Azerbaijani policy-makers, in whose eyes any moves to alter the formal status of Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes an act of offence. The recognition of the NKR would be an unwise step to take when Moscow in the contemporary geopolitical conjuncture is searching for support from its strategic partners and trying to create new incentives to intensify cooperation.

Moreover, there is a widely shared understanding in Moscow that a radical change of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh can result in the resumption of warfare. A war could hardly be kept within the Karabakh area, but could easily spread over to the territory of Armenia, and thereupon the Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty on mutual defence would enter into force.³² In this situation, Russia would face a dilemma about sending its troops into a war between its two strategic partners in a geopolitically important region. Direct participation of the Russian military on the side of the Armenian forces would result in a rupture of the relations with Azerbaijan. However, if Moscow would refrain from supporting Yerevan, its reputation, as a reliable ally – not only for Armenia but also for the other members of the CSTO – would suffer a serious blow. If Russia shows such reluctance, pressures would emerge in Armenia to demand closing down the Russian military base, and Moscow would risk losing its major ally not only in the South Caucasus but also in the CSTO.³³

Due to the weaponry accumulated in the arms race between Azerbaijan and Armenia, a possible war would have a destructive potential far greater than the war in 1992–1994. On the Armenian side, the increase of armaments is aimed at maintaining the asymmetrical balance of power and the deterrent potential of the Armenian military. Although Russia's assistance to Armenia includes discounted and free supply of weapons, its ally image in Armenia is tarnished by the criticism, voiced especially by the political opposition, of Russia's simultaneous military sales to Azerbaijan.

³² Romashov, "Russian expert discussions."

³³ Deriglazova and Minasyan, "Nagorno-Karabakh."

From Russia's point of view, the parallel cooperation is a way to keep the arms race under control. If Baku were to purchase armaments from other countries, Moscow would possess less information about the military potential of Azerbaijan. An additional reason for the export of arms to Azerbaijan is that these sales are commercial, and to some extent compensate for the financial loss of supplying weapons to Armenia on preferential terms. Moreover, the arms race helps to legitimize the ongoing modernization of the Russian military base at Gyumri, which considerably raises its combat capability. The growing destructive potential of a possible war with Azerbaijan and the permanent threat of resumed warfare justify Russia's military presence in the eyes of the Armenian citizens. Finally, in spite of all the criticism that the parallel military cooperation raises, it would be far more difficult for Moscow to support its image of a mediator if it had cooperation only with Armenia.

STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE CONFLICT SETTLEMENT

Moscow has set two immediate goals for its policy in Nagorno-Karabakh. The first is to keep the situation in the conflict zone within the state of "no-war" by all possible means – diplomatic, economic, political, and military. The second is to maintain the dialogue between Baku and Yerevan. In early August 2014, when the violent military encounters between the two parties reached the peak of the past two decades, the Russian foreign ministry organized a high-level diplomatic intervention. President Vladimir Putin held bilateral meetings with Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev on the 8th and 9th of August, and these were followed by trilateral talks. The military escalation of the conflict, which had been developing in the geopolitical conjuncture unfavourable to Russia, was brought to a halt, and the meeting demonstrated that a willingness to negotiate and speak for a peaceful resolution still prevails in Baku and in Yerevan.

The positive results of the meetings realized Russia's immediate goals, which serve its strategic interests in the South Caucasus and

beyond, including the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea regions. In 2014, the geopolitical configuration in the Black Sea region had been complicated by the crisis in Ukraine. One result of the activation of Moscow's policies in the region is the emphasis given to strategic cooperation with Turkey. In early December 2014, President Putin visited Ankara with a large delegation to intensify bilateral economic relations and to discuss regional issues. The Russian and Turkish representatives reached an agreement on the creation of the so-called "Turkish stream" gas pipeline, which is meant to meet Turkey's aspirations to become a hub bringing energy to Europe and to replace the South Stream project, which had turned out to be problematic in the EU. The new moment in the Russian–Turkish relations developing since 2013 has raised speculations about the emergence of a strategic alliance with similar political agendas opposing Western aspirations for domination in the region of the Black Sea and the South Caucasus.³⁴

Due to the close relations of Turkey and Azerbaijan and the firm support which Ankara gives to Baku on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan cannot remain outside of the Russian-Turkish cooperation. Moreover, Azerbaijan, which plays a crucial role in the energy geopolitics of the Caspian Sea region, is a key partner for this cooperation. At the same time, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the isolation of Armenia from the regional projects create obstacles for developing the trilateral cooperation of Ankara, Baku and Moscow. Because Russia does not have diplomatic relations with Georgia, which actively collaborates with NATO and the EU, the inclusion of Armenia in the Russia–Azerbaijan–Turkey axis has great importance in Moscow, both principled and practical. These aims are an additional reason for Moscow to seek a way out of the stalemate in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The years of President Dmitry Medvedev's mediation efforts (2009–2011) coincided with the reconciliation efforts of Yerevan and Ankara to establish diplomatic contacts based on the so-called "Zürich protocols". Russia supported this dialogue, which was

³⁴ On the political aspects uniting Russian and Turkish interests, see Toni Alaranta, "Turkey's new Russian policy: towards a strategic alliance," *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Briefing Paper*, No. 175, March 2015.

anticipated as taking some steps towards the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Turkey plays a conditioning role in the process, because the question of re-opening the Turkish border with Armenia is a negotiating chip for Azerbaijan. Although a dialogue between Yerevan and Ankara presents a chance to ease the Nagorno-Karabakh deadlock and to involve Armenia in Russia's cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan, a breakthrough in this process seems unrealistic in the foreseeable future. The year 2015 is the centennial commemoration of the genocide of the Armenian people and not in Armenian society a moment conducive to the resumption of dialogue with Ankara.³⁵ Moreover, in early 2015 tensions emerged between the main political forces in Armenia, President Serzh Sargsyan and his ruling party, the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) and the second largest political force in the country, the party Prosperous Armenia led by the oligarch Gagik Tsarukyan. If these tensions mobilize nationalist sentiments, they will undermine the possibilities of developing a favourable atmosphere for the resolution of the conflict.

In order to facilitate the dialogue between Baku and Yerevan, Moscow relies on the working platforms provided by the Minsk Group and the trilateral meetings between Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani high-level officials. The last-mentioned platform has been used to realize immediate goals, i.e. to quickly stabilize the situation in the case of conflict-escalating events. The trilateral platform is also needed in order to discuss Russian's conditions for settlement (to ensure strategic goals) in a confidential environment without representatives from the U.S. and France. Although there is no publicly available reliable information about the concrete proposals which the Russian diplomats have put on the table, Russia has no reason to deviate from the Madrid Principles, which

³⁵ In February 2015, President Serzh Sargsyan made a decision to recall the Zurich protocols (signed in October, 2009) from the parliamentary agenda explaining the measure by "the absence of political will, distortions of the letter and spirit of the protocols by the Turkish authorities and continuous attempts to articulate preconditions". President of the Republic of Armenia, "Armenian President recalls Armenian-Turkish protocols from National Assembly," Press Release, February 16, 2015, <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/02/16/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-National-Assembly/>.

it has helped to craft, and which are only the basic elements agreed for discussion. The real issue concerns the practical implementation and, while there is a stalemate, it is difficult to argue that Russia's efforts would not have positive impacts on the prospects of resolution.

The fact that several rounds of mediation have failed to bring concrete results show that such efforts must be combined with measures which reshape the environment around the negotiation process. While this approach requires a range of inducements for the conflicting parties to make concessions, the use of any coercive power on behalf of Russia is fraught with the risk that Baku or Yerevan may turn to the Western states for support. Having experience of the acute conflict since the last years of the Soviet Union, Russian diplomacy seems to have settled on the conclusion that there is no possibility of resolving the conflict peacefully in the immediate future. In this situation, the line of action which has repeatedly been suggested by a number of Russian experts on security policy is to transform the Armenian–Azerbaijani relationship from a zero-sum conflict to a relationship of at least some compatibility of interests.³⁶ From this perspective, the task of diplomacy is to construct an environment of common interests in line with Russia's strategic interests in the region and promoting the Eurasian integration.³⁷

The refusal of Baku and Yerevan to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the simultaneous intensification of Russia-Azerbaijan cooperation are all developments that correspond with Russia's aims in bringing the interests of the parties closer to each other. Although Baku is cautious about Russia-dominated integration initiatives in the post-Soviet space, Azerbaijan's participation in selected areas of cooperation under the EAEU seems possible. Positive signs in this respect include the mutual discussions of Ankara and Moscow on the formation of a free trade zone between the EAEU and Turkey. The success of these

³⁶ Romashov, "Russian expert discussions."

³⁷ See Sergey Markedonov, "The Caucasian Factor in the Eurasian Integration," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1, January-March, 2014.

plans can give Armenia a chance to resume direct trade contacts with its neighbours.³⁸ One piece in this puzzle is Kazakhstan, which, because of its ethnic Turkic connection, can build bridges with Azerbaijan within the EAEU.³⁹

There is a range of potential projects that interest Azerbaijan, Turkey, Armenia, Russia and Kazakhstan in the fields of trade, transportation, communications and, above all, energy; however, these projects cannot be fully realized unless the Armenian borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan are opened. This requires at least some positive dynamism in the transformation of the status quo. As a minimum, the return of some of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, combined with concrete security guarantees for the NKR, can be a step to facilitate the abolishment of the economic blockade of Armenia. While the return of some of the territories is the most obvious starting point for the implementation of the Madrid Principles, the obstacle, as always, is that from the point of view of the conflict parties the overall package should be basically defined and agreed before they are prepared to make concessions about individual items.

KEY ISSUES AND PROCESS DRIVERS

Of the six Madrid Principles two touch mainly upon Russia's strategic interests. These are the questions of an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh and international security guarantees, including a peacekeeping operation. The remaining principles appear to be more technical issues, although they do have significance as parts of the comprehensive process. From Moscow's point of view, being more technical means that it is prepared to agree to any compromise which Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert

³⁸ "Turkey May Create Free Trade Zone with Eurasian Customs Union – Development Minister," *Sputnik*, July 19, 2014, <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20140719/191039085.html>.

³⁹ President Nursultan Nazarbayev has twice (in May and October 2014) made statements confirming the inadmissibility of including Nagorno-Karabakh in the EAEU upon the accession of Armenia.

is able to achieve on the issues. By contrast, the questions about the interim status and the international security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh relate to the strategic goal of Russia's policies in the South Caucasus to limit the influence of Western countries in the region and to consolidate its own presence. The uncertain future of Nagorno-Karabakh which the agreement that there will be an interim status renders possible (although this does not follow from the concept and its definition in the process) is in line with Russia's interests, because it allows Moscow to continue using the Nagorno-Karabakh issue to influence decision-making in Baku and Yerevan. While such uncertainty prevails, Armenia needs Russian security guarantees, and Azerbaijan seeks for approaches which bring Moscow to its side of the conflict.

On the question concerning international security guarantees, Moscow has clearly signalled that a peacekeeping contingent from NATO or the EU is not acceptable. Because a Russia-dominated composition is unacceptable in the West and certainly for Azerbaijan, Moscow has to come up with a proposal that at least the three conflict parties – Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert – can accept. Candidates include other member states of the CSTO, notably Kazakhstan, and the countries influential in the region, notably Turkey. While Turkey may be a good candidate from the point of view of Azerbaijan, for Russia the NATO connection is problematic. The involvement of the CSTO and NATO in the same peacekeeping operation on opposite sides can create a dangerous “face off” of the two politico-military blocs. Moreover, this situation would draw Azerbaijan closer to NATO. However, it is also possible to stress the fact that Turkey does not support NATO activities in the Middle East and that it currently declines to deepen military integration with the organization.⁴⁰ The recent developments make it possible to reason that the participation of Turkish peacekeepers

⁴⁰ See Nural Ege Bekdil, “Turkey Won’t Link Air Defense System to NATO,” *DefenseNews*, February 15, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/land/weapons/2015/02/19/turkey-missile-defense-nato-integrate-china-cpmiec-aster-patriot/23667183/>.

does not automatically bring in NATO.⁴¹ In addition to Turkey, Iran too is a power in the region. Iran's participation in the peacekeeping operation is less probable due to its still problematic position in the international community, modest experience in peacekeeping⁴² and, above all, its strained relations with Azerbaijan, including the borderland issue to which Azerbaijanis refer to as "Southern Azerbaijan" because there are widely scattered Azeri-populated areas in northern Iran.

The efforts to settle the conflicts in South-Eastern Ukraine during 2014–2015 demonstrate that Russia has some confidence in the peacekeeping of the OSCE. The organization is the frame for the Nagorno-Karabakh peace negotiations and has since 1995 conducted a monitoring mission in the conflict zone.⁴³ Thus, it is not excluded that Russia could agree to a mandate of the OSCE to organize a peacekeeping operation in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, such an agreement is not the same as agreeing to the specifics of its implementation. The fact that the organization, which is recognized to have experience in monitoring a ceasefire regime, lacks practical skills in conducting a full-fledged military peacekeeping operation may be seen to leave space for a large contribution from Russia. However, Russia's pursuit of a dominant role would probably

⁴¹ These developments have prompted speculation about whether Turkey will eventually remain in the alliance. See Jonathan Schanzer, "Time to Kick Turkey Out of NATO?" *Politicomagazine*, October 9, 2014, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/time-to-kick-turkey-out-of-nato-111734.html#.VRLMdmOw_mY, Bernard-Henri Levy, "Shame on Turkey for Choosing the Islamic State Over the Kurds," *New Republic*, October 12, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119803/kobane-syria-will-fall-islamic-state-and-its-turkeys-fault>, Metin Gurcan, "Is NATO membership shackling Turkey?" *Almonitor*, October 29, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/10/turkey-nato-polarized-membership.html#>, Conrad Black, "Get Tough with Turkey," *National Review*, October 30, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/391337/get-tough-turkey-conrad-black>, Semih Idz, "No chance Turkey will be 'kicked out of NATO,'" *Almonitor*, November 11, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/11/turkey-syria-diplomats-nato.html#>.

⁴² Peacekeeping troops from Iran have been deployed in Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.

⁴³ The mission was established when the war broke out in 1992 but it did not become operative until the CSCE became the OSCE in January 1995.

block the entire effort, which is what happened in the 1990s, when peacekeeping for Nagorno-Karabakh, provided that it would be supported by a UN Security Council resolution, was considered in the frame of the CSCE. The alternative deployment of military peacekeepers under the aegis of the United Nations does not make this question any different. Moreover, the UN lacks a political momentum after the mission in Abkhazia (1993–2009) did not achieve much and ultimately crumbled into conflict in the UN Security Council. The only success story of UN participation in mediation and peacekeeping efforts in the conflicts of the former Soviet territory is the civil war in Tajikistan (1992–1997). In this conflict, the UN supported the peace plan which was brokered by Russia and implemented in the country's domestic process.

The political momentum, which for the time being, can be attached to the OSCE, is crucially dependent on the conflict in Ukraine. Also for this reason it is premature to consider the institutional frame of peacekeeping until there is a basic agreement between at least Russia, the U.S. and France – the states which are also the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. The Minsk Group is more than a frame for discussions: it is the symbolic and practical “bottleneck” for the solutions which can have a chance of being effective because of a basic agreement among the major powers of the Northern hemisphere. The Minsk Group has great symbolic political value for Russia and discontinuing it would signal the burial of any hopes about security cooperation “from Vancouver to Vladivostok”. Simultaneously, the credibility of the work in the Minsk Group requires that it must draw the consequences of the failures which have to do with the distance of the international negotiations from the realities on the ground.⁴⁴ In Baku and in Yerevan, the conflict is deadlocked in political processes which make Karabakh an integral part of foreign and domestic policies. Because the ruling political elites have become prisoners of their political

⁴⁴ During April–July 2001, the US State Department, led by Colin Powell, sought a new breakthrough in the negotiations arranged in the frame of the Minsk Group in Key West, Florida. While these negotiations were carried out in an amenable atmosphere, the diplomatic effort failed to produce any results in Baku and in Yerevan.

rhetoric, any compromise that they may wish to pursue will not find public support without a complete change in the information environment. This is difficult while the domestic opposition is at the same time prepared to exploit contradictory situations.

Because there is very little chance that a political momentum can be developed to bring together the interests of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the path available is to promise economic and political dividends from cooperation. A new opening with an emphasis on economic matters may find some chances in the contemporary situation which in both Armenia and Azerbaijan require proactive action from the governments. Due to the economic crisis in Russia, the fourth quarter of 2014 brought a sixty-nine percent decline in the private remittances from Russia to Armenia.⁴⁵ In recent years, these remittances have been the main economic driving force in Armenia. As the *dram* falls, prices rise and economic and social risks increase. The Azerbaijani government again devalued the national currency by 33.5 percent in February 2015. The decline in the oil price, the main source of Azerbaijan's export revenues, ultimately made this measure necessary in order to maintain the competitiveness of the Azerbaijani economy on international markets.⁴⁶ The devaluation of the manat caused the inflation rate to rise. In this situation, Azerbaijan might have to correct its budget allocations for "military needs". It did so during 2008 and 2009, which were also times of low oil prices and economic crisis. Azerbaijan's state budget for 2015 has been composed with the estimated average price of oil at \$90 per barrel, which is far from the present price (floating around \$60). In the difficult economic situation, the leadership of both Armenia and Azerbaijan may be willing to consider the opportunities in regional cooperation. Of the two, Armenia is far more vulnerable because of its limited access to global trade. While Armenia most urgently needs to have the blockage ended, Russia's challenge in relation to

⁴⁵ The Central Bank of the Russian Federation, "Cross-border Transactions of Individuals (Residents and Nonresidents) in Breakdown by Countries", 2014, http://www.cbr.ru/eng/statistics/?Prtid=svs&zch=Par_17101#CheckedItem.

⁴⁶ Georgii Peremetin, "Azerbaidzhanskii manat za sutki podeshivel k dollaru na tret'," RBC, February 21, 2015, <http://top.rbc.ru/economics/21/02/2015/54e8865b9a79473d21ca14b6>.

Azerbaijan is to demonstrate not only the economic but also the political benefits of cooperation, and hence remain sensitive about Karabakh.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

During the longstanding stalemate in the conflict, people on both sides have learned to live in the situation of “no war, no peace”. Nationalist narratives have supplanted the shared history of co-existence, which shrinks with each generation as the past is interpreted in the frame of the present conflict discourses. The presentation of Karabakh as a constitutive value of national unity not subject to compromise is used to raise patriotic sentiments on both sides. The norms of the international community are subject to similar political uses whenever the conflict is seen in mutually exclusive perspectives: either “national liberation” and “self-determination” (Armenia) or “liberation of occupied territories” and the “respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Azerbaijan). Although experts, public figures, and diplomats have pointed out the impasse in which the conflicting societies are caught, very little has been accomplished to turn the tide. Against the backdrop of all of this, the idea of cooperative security propelled by mutually beneficial economic relations may not look very plausible. Certainly, the Russian diplomats and experts promoting the idea do not expect any quick resolution of the conflict. They do not have a design for the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is the main issue in the conflict, nor can they outline a post-conflict future for the region.

However, bringing the conflict to its final resolution is not as important for Russia as the support of Baku and Yerevan is for its strategic aspirations in the region. This makes it necessary to create some positive dynamism in the settlement process associated with specific benefits for both parties in the conflict. For this reason, the goal is not to preserve the status quo, but to maintain the situation open and flexible although firmly on the track of only peaceful solutions, while at the same time preserving the balance between Armenian and Azerbaijani interests. Thus, the political uncertainty about the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, which the Madrid Principles agenda item about

the “interim status” renders possible, suits Russia’s interests. It does so for two reasons: first, Russia, like the other crafters of the Madrid Principles reasons that an interim status helps to avoid the disputes about the final status, which would be likely to hamper the resolution process from its start; second, leaving the question of the final status to the future enables Moscow to continue using this issue as a tool of influence on the foreign policies of Baku and Yerevan in order to gain their support for the cooperation it pursues in the region, or at least prevent them from engaging in Western cooperation, which would exclude developing relations with Russia.

While the strategic goals are set for a long-term perspective, the immediate objectives are to retain stability (not synonymous with the status quo, as explained above). Stability in the conflict zone together with a consistent diplomatic work aimed at a peaceful and gradual change of the status quo is supposed to best ensure a smooth transition from the conflict-ridden relations to a cooperative environment between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this long-term perspective, Nagorno-Karabakh is to a great extent a pawn in the game, and it has good reason to be concerned about the undetermined future that the definition of its interim status in the process may bring. In the present situation, the frustrations of the NKR can be alleviated by providing assistance in the build-up of its state capacity. In this respect, the diaspora donations which are sustained irrespective of political discord are functional in a dual sense. They are crucial for the survival of the NKR, where the intention persists that the tiny polity will develop in spite of the international environment which keeps it a “besieged fortress”. By helping to stabilize the present uncertain situation, they also help Moscow to work in its long-term perspective. As far as the outburst of violent conflict can be avoided, Nagorno-Karabakh itself remains a relatively stable element in the game, and Moscow can focus on the economic and political dividends by which Armenia and Azerbaijan can be brought to cooperate.

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RUSSIA AND ITS BEHAVIOUR

Heikki Talvitie

INTRODUCTION

First, the Russo-Georgian war and then the Ukraine crisis. These recent events have made Western countries search for answers to the following questions: What is Russia, what is it trying to do, and how should we react to it? These themes have also occupied centre stage in Finland, whose territory has been in contact with Russia in various ways for more than a thousand years. Many issues that are taken for granted, even if only looking at Finland's period of independence, are not certainties at all, when political decision-makers do not show interest in anything that happened before their own term of office. Without retrospection, everything is new, and such decision-makers are easy targets in an information war.

My personal starting point is that Russia is a superpower; it always has been, through both frightening periods of weakness and terrifying periods of power. For most of the time, however, it has been positioned somewhere between these two extremes. Another aspect that should be taken into account is that mainland Russia is not only the size of a continent, it is a continent of its own. With this in mind, geography cannot be helped. Russia's national security interests are directed at the boundaries of its geographic territory. This also applies in times when the country has fallen into a state of weakness due to internal crisis – or perhaps during such times in particular.

Written accounts of history have provided us with information on Russia during its periods of power and weakness. We have

empirical evidence of a weak Russia (Soviet-Russia) in the 1920s, and a powerful Russia (the Soviet Union, 1944–1985). It is also fascinating to study how Russia has behaved during the times when its position of power has been weakening or strengthening. Our recent experiences could be classified as follows: weakening Russia, 1985–1991; weak Russia, 1992–2006; and strengthening Russia, 2007–2014.

Russia's actions are often interpreted to be aggressive even when they are counteractions to external aggression against it. In general, Russia's states of weakness have given its external opponents an opportunity to spread to the borders of Russia or even invade its core areas. Here is one example. In the 1990s, a large and impressive exhibit on the king of Sweden, Charles XII, and the czar of Russia, Peter I "the Great", was displayed in Livrustkammare in Stockholm. However, the exhibition was completely ruined by the main title which stated that Russia had been aggressive all the way from the 12th century to the 18th century, while Sweden had remained defensive that whole time. In actual fact, during that period, Sweden conquered Southwest Finland, the Häme region and Karelia. Through its settlement activities, Sweden created the Savo region and pushed Russians and Karelians out of the usufruct areas of Ostrobothnia and Lapland. An otherwise wonderful exhibition was completely ruined by the misrepresentation of power relations. After the Battle of Poltava, and after having gained back its strength in relation to Sweden, Russia became the aggressive party, taking back its position of power in those areas of Finland and around the edges of the Black Sea that it had lost during its period of weakness.

Due to the nature of Russia's land area, at its best, Russia is a regional superpower – by which account, in certain respects, also the Soviet Union was a regional superpower. Russia has always competed for access to the world's oceans, but in every direction, there are waterways controlled by others, which has made gaining access to the main sea areas difficult.

Throughout history, border areas have been problematic to Russia; the country has been invaded from the East, the West and the South. In most cases, whenever Russia has expanded its border regions, it has done so as a countermeasure against its invaders.

Their defeat in the vast Steppes of Russia has created vacuums that Russia has then filled.

In Russia's periods of weakness, vast areas of land have been occupied by its adversaries: by the Mongolians from the 14th century to the 16th century, by Poland in the early 17th century, and by Sweden from the 14th century to the 17th century. The vacuums that have put Russia in a position of power in relation to its invaders include the vacuum following the collapse of Mongolian rule in Siberia, and the vacuums created by Sweden's Charles XII in the land areas of Finland, by Napoleon in Western Europe, and by Hitler in Central Europe.

RUSSIA'S PROBLEMS AND THE WAY IT HAS REACTED TO THEM

How has Russia reacted to the problems that have emerged in its border regions? It is a long continuum, covering the eras of the Russian Empire, the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and the Russian Federation. I doubt that many doctoral dissertations have been written about it. Some references might be found in the words of Paasikivi, or perhaps Mannerheim, who stated after the Continuation War that he did not have much faith in the borders of the Treaty of Tartu. According to Mannerheim, they were negotiated at a time of weakness for the Soviet Russia, and therefore could never be thought to hold once it gained back its power.

I myself have studied this problem in Russia's history, and I have later had the opportunity to follow the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the period of a weakened Russia. The weak Russia inherited the ethnic conflicts of several post-Soviet regions, which include Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan, and two partially recognised states within Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. To certain extent, Transnistria, which is a breakaway state within Moldova, is in the same situation. Crimea, a peninsula on Ukraine's Black Sea coast, and East Ukraine are also included in this category. A large Russian population was left in these regions after the declaration of independence by Ukraine.

Basically, I have defined these issues as Russia's problems myself, and divided them into different stages. When a problem arises, it is first latent. If the problem evolves into a crisis, it becomes acute. It is of course in the best interest of Russia to solve any acute problems, leading to the formation of an action plan. But an action plan cannot be formed before favourable conditions necessary for solving the problem have been created.

Of course, this is all just a theory, but it can be tested by studying how Russia has reacted to the above-mentioned ethnic conflicts over the years.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

The beginning of the unrest in the Nagorno-Karabakh region dates back to the late 1980s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union was approaching. With Azerbaijan trying to strengthen its hold on Nagorno-Karabakh, the region's Armenian population started a rebellion, supported by Armenia. In the beginning, the USSR/Russia tried to remain impartial in order to achieve a ceasefire, but it was obvious that its sympathies were mostly on Nagorno-Karabakh's side. Ever since the occupation of several provinces in Azerbaijan by Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia has not only tried to achieve a ceasefire, but also to reach a solution in which Armenia would give back all the provinces, apart from Nagorno-Karabakh, the Kalbajar district and the Lachin corridor. Special agreements would be concluded for these three regions that both sides of the conflict would have to approve.

No peacekeeping forces have been used in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the 1990s, the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) started its own peace process to aid Russia in the cessation of the armed conflict. The idea was born for the Minsk Conference, to be prepared by the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group.

A ceasefire was achieved in 1994. The Minsk Group's Co-Chairs at the time were Russia and Sweden. The competition between these two Co-Chairs was rather fierce, i.e. for the most part, they had different ideas of how the armed conflict could be ended. The

successful achievement of the ceasefire has been generally attributed to Russian diplomat Vladimir Kazimirov.

Finland acted as a Co-Chair with Russia from spring 1995 to the end of 1996. Finland's main objective was to get the Co-Chairs to act in unison in order to reduce the effect of the tactical game among Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh on the crisis mediation process. Therefore, only joint visits to the region of conflict were included in the Mandate of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Conference. Kazimirov was also President Boris Yeltsin's special envoy on this issue, in which capacity he also visited the region on his own. The balance between Russia and Finland, when they acted as Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, was based on Finland being backed by the EU, the US and Turkey.

The negotiations were then attended by all three parties to the conflict and the key states of the Minsk Group. An OSCE High-Level Planning Group had also been formed in preparation for the possible use of peacekeeping forces.

The negotiations were not going anywhere and Finland's Co-Chairs (Talvitie and Nyberg) fairly quickly arrived at the conclusion that the President of Armenia, Ter-Petrosyan, was "held prisoner" by the leader of Nagorno-Karabakh, Kocharyan, and could not act as a representative of Nagorno-Karabakh when meeting with the President of Azerbaijan, Aliyev. The Americans agreed with this conclusion, which was proven to be correct after the forced resignation of Ter-Petrosyan from the presidency and the subsequent election of Kocharyan, the leader of Nagorno-Karabakh, as the new President of Armenia.

Finland also started directing its efforts towards ensuring that the next country to Co-Chair with Russia would be the US. The US was showing interest towards Azeri oil production, and the first investments were made at that time by the Americans and the British. At first, the representatives of Russia stated that Russia was not interested in co-chairmanship with the US, so the matter was left to rest. At the end of spring 1996, the Russians said that they would accept the US as the next Co-Chair after Finland. One can only speculate why Russia was all of a sudden willing to accept the US as co-chair. I myself have come to the conclusion that the US'

interest in the region and its energy production was genuine and, in its weakened state, Russia saw it best to tie the US to the joint conflict resolution efforts aimed at bringing peace to the region. And so, a key goal of Russian politics, the ability of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) to resolve post-Soviet conflicts, had also come to the end of the road in Nagorno-Karabakh.

On the other hand, the decision concerning co-chairmanship was not an easy one to make for the US. At the OSCE Lisbon Summit in December 1996, Finland passed its co-chairmanship to France. In early 1997, however, the US expressed its interest in the co-chairmanship, and that is why we now have three Co-Chairs.

At the beginning, the US was the most active Co-Chair, leading the OSCE sponsored Key West formula, for example. The peaceful resolution sought at Key West would have technically forgotten the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The President of Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev, and the President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, had to take a stand. The three Co-Chairs had come to the conclusion that, with Kocharyan as the President of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh would no longer need to be included in the negotiations. The Co-Chairs also no longer invited the Minsk Group to the negotiations, because they felt that having three co-chairs constituted as sufficient representation.

The Key West formula caused unrest both in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Certain notable MPs were shot in broad daylight at the Armenian Parliament. The Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan resigned as a protest against the Key West formula. The resignation was futile, because after consulting his advisers, President Aliyev withdrew from the plan.

After this, France took an active role as co-chair. However, its attempts were not successful, because the new President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, brought back the concept of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan to the negotiation tactics of the Azeri, thus taking the negotiations to a new level.

After the Russo-Georgian War, Russia took an active role. My interpretation is that the Russian President at the time, Dmitri Medvedev, was doing his part to create a solution that would have eased regional tensions. Whether he had Prime Minister Putin's full

support for his actions still remains a secret. At that time, in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War, the situation with Moldova and Transnistria, and the internal instability in Ukraine, Russia was facing such huge security issues that no solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue could be imagined to satisfy Russia.

In one sense, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is now very close to the situation in Georgia that led to the crisis. Armenia is Russia's ally and Georgia has Western allies. In the middle is Azerbaijan, backed by its energy funds. It is nevertheless clear that if Azerbaijan were to attack Nagorno-Karabakh, it would not only be fighting against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, but also against Russia. And Azerbaijan could not expect to get any military assistance from the West. That is why this conflict remains "frozen".

I have often been asked whether it is Russia's intention to be in control of the situation in the South Caucasus through hindering the finding of a peaceful resolution to conflicts. My opinion has been that Russia is ready to use any solution that does not weaken its position. This view is supported by Russia's behaviour in other conflicts, brought on by the West's attempts to undermine Russia's position in the South Caucasus and Transnistria. This category also includes the issue of Kosovo, the status of Crimea and the self-governance of East Ukraine. Russia made the first initiative regarding the unification of Transnistria and Moldova in 2003, but the EU torpedoed its federalist solution.

In the behaviour pattern of Russia that I have created, Nagorno-Karabakh fits as follows:

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is a latent problem for Russia, because it may endanger its position in the South Caucasus.

Russia has not made any attempts to solve the conflict by dismissing the interests of Azerbaijan and Armenia, and since these two have not at any stage been ready to make any compromises, it has thus also been in the best interests of Russia that the conflict stays frozen.

Therefore, the problem that Russia has with Nagorno-Karabakh has not yet reached an acute stage.

THE YUGOSLAV WARS

The behaviour of Russia can never be fully understood without taking into account the Yugoslav Wars and the strong military role of the West in that course of events. For Russians, the final straw was the Kosovo War, which showed the goals of Western policy without any significant action or influence on Russia's part. Specifically, this was about the weakness of Yeltsin's term of office and the related attitude towards Western values and geopolitical aspirations.

The former Prime Minister of Russia, Viktor Chernomyrdin, was still in power then and able to influence policy-making. He was a member of the group led by Ahtisaari that was tasked with reaching a negotiated settlement with Milosevic. It is doubtful that Ahtisaari would have been able to persuade Milosevic into a settlement without Chernomyrdin. Afterwards, Chernomyrdin has defended his actions by stating that he prevented a third World War from breaking out between the West and Russia. Be that as it may, Chernomyrdin faced fierce criticism when he returned to Moscow. He was accused of betraying the Russian cause. Chernomyrdin gradually transferred to Ukraine to act as an ambassador. Judging by today's standards, not a minor position, but at that time, a clear demotion for him.

Sometime later, when Ahtisaari wanted to confirm the final status for Kosovo, Russia's President at the time, Vladimir Putin, would not see Ahtisaari in Moscow unless he had something new to present. This "something new" was related to the status proposed for Kosovo and how, back then, the Russians no longer approved of the West's proposal for Kosovo's independence from Serbia. This was because the Serbs themselves were opposed to the secession of Kosovo from Serbia.

Russia had no means to resist the transfer of the former Yugoslavian region to fall under Western control and, from the viewpoint of Russia, the situation cannot even really be described as a latent problem. But the Russians understood the symbolic value of Kosovo, and realised that the solution to the Kosovo issue was problematic on account of it definitely leading to other measures aimed at pushing the Western sphere of influence to the borders of Russia by leveraging the attempts to resolve the conflicts arising from the collapse of the Soviet Union.

THE KOZAK MEMORANDUM FOR A UNITED STATE OF MOLDOVA AND TRANSNISTRIA

Negotiations regarding the Transnistrian problem were carried out in 2003 between Russia, Moldova and Transnistria, and consequently reached the point where the parties were ready to sign the “Kozak Memorandum”, the objective of which was to reunite Transnistria with the Republic of Moldova. The President of Russia, Putin, was preparing to fly from Moscow to attend the signing.

At this point, the EU woke up to the realisation that the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria was about to be solved based on terms accepted by Russia. As a result, EU High Representative Javier Solana informed Moldova that if the memorandum is signed, Moldova will lose its EU membership perspective. After hearing this, the President of Moldova cancelled the signing of the memorandum and in the process undermined the authority of President Putin; an act that would cast a shadow far into the future.

In 2006, the EU was drunk on power and did not regard Russia as an equal partner whose opinions, let alone suggestions regarding crisis management needed to be taken into account. According to the EU’s interpretation, the Kozak Memorandum included clauses that would have given Russia the power to influence EU policies in case Moldova later became a member of the EU. No later than in 2006, the President of Moldova, Voronin, stated that the Kozak Memorandum was no longer relevant.

Be that as it may, 2006 is the year when the relationship between Russia and the EU started to escalate rapidly, with no end in sight yet. Actually, in the view of the Russians, the actions of Ahtisaari or Solana were not useful in trying to resolve the conflicts and territorial fights between the West and Russia.

The problem of Moldova and Transnistria was left on the table. For Russia, it is a latent problem, and it has no interest in resolving it if it benefits the West. The problem is closely related to the internal weakness of Ukraine and the attempts of the West to tie Ukraine to its sphere of influence. The conflict between Transnistria and Moldova may become acute if the crisis in Ukraine turns into a civil war again. The existence of Transnistria strengthens Russia’s

position in the negotiations with regard to its presence in the Black Sea and, through that region, also in the South Caucasus and the Middle East.

In any case, 2003 and the Kozak Memorandum showed that the Russians are ready to solve these conflicts, provided that doing so does not diminish Russia's influence in the regions in question.

PRESIDENT PUTIN IN MUNICH IN 2007

The chain of events described above led to Putin's forthright speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007. The key message of his speech was that enough is enough. In other words, Putin was annoyed with the way Russia was being treated by the West. In short, Russia wanted the West to behave in a manner which would have shown that it recognised Russia as its equal, even though in many respects, they were not on an equal level. It probably should be noted here that this time it was the Russians' who were naive: equality can only be achieved through being on equal level. That is to say, force and the potential use of force are the key to solving the equation. This message has now been received by the Russians and they have been behaving accordingly, in line with the behaviour pattern of the West.

The reactions of Western leaders to Putin's speech were characterised by a genuine uncertainty about what he meant by his speech and what he wanted to achieve with it. After all, the European Union is a peace project, and the actions of the US after the collapse of the Soviet Union were merely taken to ensure the spreading of democracy and global markets to benefit the world as a whole. To achieve this, use of force was totally justified and especially after the war on terrorism began, it was fine to eliminate and occupy countries that had provided strongholds for terrorism, all in the name of the common good.

The use of force by the West was viewed as an act of humanitarianism and, for the first time ever, the bombing of areas belonging to rogue states was deemed as protecting the local civilians. The West had long forgotten the concept of the sphere of influence, which had been dismissed after the dissolution of the USSR.

The attitudes described above did not create favourable conditions for mutual understanding on either side, and the relations are still marked by a lack of understanding and suspicion. Russia has now become a counterforce to the expansion of Western organisations to regions that are sensitive to Russia, and therefore the West has also had to adjust its pursuits to the idea of the sphere of influence. In my opinion, Moldova and Ukraine are important issues for Germany, which is the reason why the EU is advocating the membership of these two countries, albeit some obstacles have now emerged to hinder this process. The Baltic countries and Georgia, on the other hand, are important issues for the US. The Baltic countries are not able to establish their own defensive system, so it is only natural that their solidarity in the security matters lies with the US and not the EU, because the latter has no teeth. This also applies to Georgia.

SOUTH CAUCASUS

In summer 2003, I was appointed EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus. I was the first EUSR in that region. The European Commission was widely represented in Tbilisi, Georgia, and there was also a branch office in Yerevan, Armenia. The Commission did not have representation in the city of Baku in Azerbaijan until a Commissioner was appointed there during my term of office. I was tasked with representing the Council of the European Union as a member of the team of EU High Representative Javier Solana, and I reported to the EU Political Committee, which comprised representatives from the capital of each Member State.

I stayed in close contact with Commission personnel both locally and in Brussels, because every time I visited the region, Commission representatives would take good care of me together with the representatives of the EU Member State holding the presidency at the time. My close relationship with the Commission was at first criticised in Brussels by Solana's Cabinet, but they too later approved of my co-operation with the Commission, which came naturally to me. Then again, I should note that the weaknesses of the EU as an organisation were clearly visible also

in the Commission's operations. I had no official access to the reports of Commission representatives, because statutes prohibited showing them to Council representatives. This put me in an awkward position on a few occasions during negotiations with non-EU states: while I could not obtain the relevant Commission report, the opponent could, and they also made sure that I saw that they had gotten hold of it.

In my new capacity, I also visited Moscow to introduce myself. Solana had also expressed his expectations regarding my ability to get along with the Russians in the South Caucasus, where a certain territorial mindset was gaining ground. I told the Russians that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the South Caucasus did not include any membership perspectives for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Their response was that this is what you assured us earlier about the Baltic countries, and now they have joined both the EU and NATO. The Russians had given the European Commission some observer statuses regarding the co-operation bodies whose task it was to find a peaceful solution to conflicts and prevent new ones from emerging. However, I was led to understand that as a representative of the Council, i.e. the Member States, I could not have any part in these co-operation bodies. I made an attempt to participate in the Joint Control Commission on South Ossetia, but gave up quickly on account of Russia being opposed to it.

As is often the case with EU decision-making, the EU changed its policy roughly at the turn of the year 2004–2005. The new policy stated that the ENP still does not include the EU membership perspective but, on the other hand, it does not rule it out either.

I was no longer in the South Caucasus when, during Finland's EU Presidency in 2006, Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) were concluded between the EU and three South Caucasus states. Finland played a significant role in the successful completion of the PCA negotiations. The goal was to improve stability in the border regions of the EU, but also to offer these states financial aid and other support. From the perspective of the Russians, this may have been interpreted as the West wanting to slowly push the South Caucasus under its "control".

FINLAND'S OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP IN 2008

Finland held the Chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) in 2008. Back then, I had agreed with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Ilkka Kanerva, that I will join the team to handle the so-called frozen conflicts. At first, my tasks also included following the elections in the region and the leg work required to gather all the evaluations on the elections. I myself did not take part in evaluating the elections.

Quite quickly, however, it became clear that I needed to discard the elections and focus completely on the conflicts. We were in full negotiation mode regarding the Moldova and Transnistria issue. In addition, the Abkhazia issue required taking action in spring 2008, until South Ossetia took centre stage in August 2008. When Alexander Stubb became Minister for Foreign Affairs, I was solely involved in crisis management.

RECOGNITION OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVO

Finland had decided to recognise the independence of Kosovo at the beginning of 2008. For Finland, this was a question of EU foreign policy. A common EU policy on Kosovo was not formed later because, due to their own regional problems, many EU Member States did not find it appropriate to recognise Kosovo's separation from Serbia. It was my understanding that the Finnish Government wanted to fly the flag in order to highlight the fact that Finland is part of the West, and that any tactics related to the OSCE were less important. I was about to start the Moldova-Transnistria talks and, for tactical reasons, from my perspective in those negotiations it would have been appropriate to postpone the recognition of Kosovo's independence until after 2008, to gain more leverage. I did not suggest this, and after the statement by the Russians that the recognition of Kosovo's independence by the West will have a negative impact on international relations, I started to think about how I could avoid any negative reactions by the Russians regarding

the Moldova-Transnistria talks. I ended up postponing the talks and, after the Russians said that they might be ready for the talks on 15 March, we all convened in Vienna that day and the Russians were also there. The recognition of the independence of Kosovo by the West influenced Russia's choices throughout 2008 and, for multiple reasons, we did not have any chance of success in the Moldova-Transnistria talks.

ABKHAZIA

The Abkhazia crisis was showing signs of heating up in spring 2008. Russia was building rail roads and Georgia violated Abkhazian airspace with an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). A Russian Air Force jet shot down the Georgian UAV in Abkhazian airspace, resulting in complaints from all sides, and Finland had to find a forum for handling these complaints. Such a forum was found, and talks began in Vienna that no one was expecting to lead anywhere; it was just an opportunity for everyone to vent.

The real reason for the increased tension in Abkhazia was to be found in the domestic policy of Georgia. Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili was re-elected for a second term in an election that had the opposition present very convincing suspicions of rigging. The domestic political situation was unstable and the US Ambassador's assurances that the elections were not rigged only made it worse. Saakashvili received 53% of the votes.

A parliamentary election was scheduled to be held in May, and they could not be allowed to fail. Georgia initiated provocation tactics in Abkhazia and the Russians retaliated in kind. The threat of war was in the air, and Georgian ministers visited European capitals, preaching how the war was coming. In the May elections, Saakashvili's party was hugely successful and so the threat of war had done its job and the situation in Abkhazia eased off.

NATO SUMMIT IN BUCHAREST

In spring 2008, a NATO summit was held in Bucharest, and the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, did not trust Georgia's Saakashvili any more than she did Ukraine's Yushchenko. During the preparations for the Bucharest summit, Germany and France were against advancing the accession process of Georgia and Ukraine, i.e. offering them the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). When I visited the NATO Headquarters in Brussels before the Bucharest summit, I was told that the US had not made up its mind yet, but that the possibility that it might want to help Georgia and Ukraine get to the next stage in the process to join NATO could not be ruled out. This eventually became the US position on the matter, which resulted in a rather conflicting atmosphere when the delegations arrived at the Bucharest summit.

In Bucharest, NATO decided that Georgia and Ukraine will not be offered a MAP, but both countries were given clear membership perspectives. This compromise has since proven to be quite unsuccessful. It managed to make both Saakashvili and Russia angry. In late summer 2008, the situation in South Ossetia started to show signs of heating up.

SAAKASVILI ATTACKS SOUTH OSSETIA ON 7 AUGUST 2008

Georgia attacked South Ossetia in the late hours of August the 7th. I was in Finland when the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the OSCE, who was in Vienna, contacted me by phone several times during that evening. His message was that a war would break out at any moment and, in those final moments, he wanted Finland to do something. I did my best to assure him that none of our information indicated that Russia would attack Georgia. I could not understand that the Ambassador of Georgia in OSCE was trying to tell me that Georgia will attack South Ossetia, even though he could not say it directly. The following morning it became known that Georgia had opened fire on the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali, from the

front lines of the city of Gori, and that Georgian troops had invaded South Ossetia.

The Olympics were on in Beijing, and many state leaders were there to watch the games, including Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Vanhanen met with Putin on 8 August, but it was clear that his message could not be more than urging the parties to cease fire. On 8 August, it was clear that Russia would retaliate in response to Georgia's military action in kind. It was later discovered that Russia had moved some of its units from the North Caucasus to the south side of the only mountain tunnel on the road through the Greater Caucasus Mountains, the Roki Tunnel. Georgia aimed to close this transport connection from the Russian armed forces in an effort to prevent Russian additional forces from entering the theatre of war.

When I later discussed this in Moscow with the President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Yevgeny Primakov, he said that if the Roki Tunnel had been closed, it would have taken the Russo-Georgian War to a more serious level. Russia would have been forced to attack the army of Saakashvili through Abkhazia.

The Prime Ministers of Finland (OSCE Chairmanship) and France (EU Presidency), Stubb and Kouchner, arrived in Tbilisi with the aim of negotiating a ceasefire agreement that would be approved by President Saakashvili and then presented in Moscow. At this stage, the Russian army had not made its final breakthrough and, on the other hand, it was clear that the EU no more than Finland had, either mentally or politically, what it would take to go to Moscow and ask for the terms of the ceasefire in advance.

After three days, Russia finally broke through the lines of the Georgian army and reached Georgian territory where the city of Gori is located. The Georgian motorway that runs from Tbilisi to the Black Sea coast was cut off, and the Poti seaport was occupied. Georgians started to flee from Abkhazia again, and the Russians occupied the Abkhazia region. An American military supply warehouse in the city of Poti, meant for the Georgian army, was confiscated.

At this stage, the US and Russia agreed that Russia will withdraw from the official Georgian territory and, based on the French EU Presidency, President Sarkozy will be the one to present the terms of

the ceasefire in Moscow. Once the terms have been approved there, they will be submitted for approval in Tbilisi. Russia also accepted that EU observers would be deployed to ensure that the ceasefire would not be breached.

The Geneva talks on South Ossetia and Abkhazia were launched. The talks were co-chaired by representatives from the EU, the UN and the OSCE, and the negotiators came from Russia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, the United States and Georgia. Russia made it clear that the topic of discussion was not the status of these two breakaway regions, but the creation of such a regime that would prevent new acts of provocation by Georgia and create channels for keeping new hotbeds of conflict under control.

Russia also declared that the crisis management by the OSCE had not been objective and that Russia was no longer in favour of the continuation of the OSCE mission to Georgia. The representative of Finland was told by a representative of Russia that this was nothing personal. Another attempt to change the Russians' mind was made in Vienna, but Russia did what it had said it would do, despite being the only one to vote against the continuation of the OSCE mission to Georgia.

In the end, Russia recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This behaviour pattern therefore followed the behaviour pattern of the West with regards to the declaration of independence by Kosovo.

Following Saakashvili's election as the President of Georgia in early 2004, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were a latent problem to Russia. When Saakashvili declared that he will unify the state of Georgia during his first term of office, the problem remained latent to Russia. This was backed by the US announcement to Saakashvili in spring 2004 that if he were to attack to South Ossetia, he will be fighting against Russia without US involvement.

Every autumn, Georgia's actions in South Ossetia and its peacekeeping forces increased tensions, but nothing ever happened. All the parties were used to this. However, the Russians were building an infrastructure in preparation for moving the troops both in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Through all this, the problem remained latent.

In spring 2008, when Saakashvili started having internal policy problems, the tension increased, first in Abkhazia and then, after the parliamentary elections, in South Ossetia. At this point, the problem was becoming acute, and the NATO Summit in Bucharest may have contributed to the increase of tensions. The assumption is that all the states involved in peacekeeping efforts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia had replaced their peacekeepers with military units.

Even so, it seems incredible, to say the least, that Russian forces suffered quite significant losses during the early stages of the war. Apparently they did not believe that Georgia would actually attack.

The Russians must have had various scenarios for how to react in case a war would break out. The military forces took part in the Red Square May Day parade in 2008 for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Back then, I wrote in my blog that Russia probably did not mean this as a threat to any particular state, but if Russia's vital interests would be violated, it would be prepared to bring out the guns to defend them. No plan was in place prior to the attack on Georgia, apart from the infrastructure improvements and the manning of the Roki Tunnel. The OSCE observers were also able to verify that Russian troops were ensuring their own security in the official Georgian territory and had no intention to invade Georgia. The Russian troops also did not invade the region where the West's Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline transports gas and oil.

During the Russo-Georgian War, Ukraine was actively supporting Saakashvili. Ukraine delivered Buk missile systems to Georgia, used for shooting down a few Russian Air Force jets. In addition, President Yushchenko declared that the Russian fleet in the Black Sea could not return to the Russian naval base in Sevastopol, because it was located in Ukrainian territory. Naturally, the fleet returned to Sevastopol, but its status was becoming critical.

MOLDOVA

The final discussions on Moldova took place at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Helsinki in December 2008. The internal situation in Ukraine, the status of the naval base in Sevastopol in general, and the updating of the disarmament agreements between

the West and Russia, were the main reasons why the Moldova issue did not move forward.

Later, the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, put strong pressure on the President of Russia, Dmitri Medvedev, regarding the Moldova issue. But even this pressure did not have any impact on finding a resolution to the conflict. Merkel's goal was to find a resolution for both the Moldova and Ukraine issue in order to enable these two countries to join the EU based free-trade area and later eventually the EU itself. With Germany being the most powerful state in the EU and Merkel being a superior player in the sphere of influence of the EU, it is clear that the membership of both Moldova and Ukraine in the EU based free-trade area would strengthen the sphere of influence of Germany in relation to Russia.

The shadow of the Kozak Memorandum and the final stages of the Ukraine crisis naturally have an impact on the inability to proceed in this matter. For Russia, Transnistria is currently a latent problem. Then again, if Moldova obtains a status in EU based free-trade area and later also an EU membership, it would mean that Transnistria would be left on its own, and support would have to be sought from other regions under Russia's control.

THE CRIMEAN PENINSULA AND SEVASTOPOL

I have often been asked what historical analogy would best describe the situation in Crimea. Could it be the annexation of Austria to Germany in 1938, or the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany? I have replied that the transfer of the Crimean Peninsula by Khrushchev in 1956 to Ukraine, which was then part of the Soviet Union, is analogical to a situation when Alexander I reunited "Old Finland" with the rest of Finland in 1812 at a time when Finland was a Grand Duchy and part of the Russian Empire. When Finland became independent, and Russia was weakened by revolutions, a border was drawn in Tartu in 1920 that was the border of the Grand Duchy and only 30 kilometres from St. Petersburg. Two wars were subsequently fought between Finland and the Soviet Union over this border. As a result, Finland is now an independent state, but the border between Finland and Russia is the so-called border of

Peter the Great, from 1721, with which Peter the Great secured the existence of his new capital. Similarly, Khrushchev did not think that Ukraine would become independent and the Crimean Peninsula and the naval base in Sevastopol would be left on foreign territory. When Ukraine became independent, Russia found itself in a state of weakness again.

In the relations between Finland and the Soviet Union, the border issue was a latent problem until Hitler's rise to power, after which it became an acute problem for the Soviet Union. The resolution had two parts. The Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) formed by a Finnish Leftist Eduard Gylling had to be eliminated, and this was undertaken immediately after the assassination of Kirov. Solving the border issue became relevant again in connection with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, with the help of Germany.

A rental agreement was concluded on the naval base in Sevastopol. Russia was full of trust for the ability of the CIS to ensure the existence of a certain type of sphere of Russian influence. This trust dissipated rapidly and the Russian fleet was decrepit to say the least, and the state did not have the funds to build it up again. This issue was not very significant in the 1990s, when the key issue with the nuclear powers was how to compensate the loss of nuclear weapons to Ukraine.

Sevastopol became a latent problem for Russia during the term of office of President Yushchenko. After the Russo-Georgian War, when Yanukovych had won the presidential election, he continued the rental agreement for the naval base in Sevastopol, which had the effect that the situation in Crimea and Sevastopol remained a latent problem for Russia. However, it was still a problem in the sense that Ukraine's domestic policy situation was unstable and prone to major changes.

And next, we arrive at the zero hour, i.e. Yanukovych was about to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU when President Putin started to put pressure on Yanukovych, saying that the energy issue could not be resolved in a manner that would satisfy Ukraine if it signs the SAA. To replace the SAA, Putin offered the Eurasian Customs Union that Russia was developing.

There were spontaneous protests in the Maidan square in favour of the SAA, and Yanukovych soon started to feel the pressure. In addition, Maidan was ceased by several armed groups, including the Svoboda (Freedom) Party and its more radical offshoot, the Pravy (Right) Sector. The EU, the US, Russia and Ukraine (Yanukovych) did eventually come to an agreement that would have secured Ukraine some sort of an orderly future. However, this did not suit everyone, and fatal shots were fired at Maidan, killing both police officers and civilians. This was provocation: unless the shooters were identified and punished, it would be the end of the recently concluded agreement and Yanukovych. Apparently no one had the capacity for it, and the West did not seem to have the will either. The West put the blame on Yanukovych, at whom the provocation was actually directed in the first place.

The Winter Olympics were on in Sochi, and Ukraine fell into a state of anarchy. The country had no president or government. The Freedom Party was legalised by the West, except that the EU and the US would not have approved if the new president or prime minister would have been a member of the Freedom Party. The Freedom Party did manage to get some ministerial positions, and the Right Sector continued to be the most powerful paramilitary group in Kiev. The new government launched an agitation process in the Parliament immediately, demanding a ban on the Russian language in Crimea and East Ukraine.

In light of these events, it is clear that security at the naval base in Sevastopol could not be guaranteed. If not earlier, at this stage at the latest, the Crimean Peninsula became an acute problem to Russia on account of the strategically important Black Sea naval base. The Russians still claim that at that stage they had no plans to invade Crimea. This may be true, but it does not mean that they had not thought of all the options. The plan came together during the aftermath of Maidan. At the time of the plan's implementation, the future circumstances of the region were well understood.

The key factor for the plan was that neither the EU nor the NATO would be able to make rapid decisions, as well as the US statement on not using military power in Ukraine. In addition, Ukraine's own armed forces were not functionally in order. The occupation

of Crimea was not an open military operation, which would have inevitably led to casualties on both sides. It was a covert operation by the Russian army, and even the Russians had no guarantees that it would be a successful one.

One curious detail is that when Grigori Potemkin annexed the Crimean Peninsula for the first time in 1783, he had a three-part plan: 1. No permanent troops. Potemkin chose Cossacks for the task. 2. No collateral damage. There was no collateral damage because permanent troops were not used in 1783 nor in 2014. 3. Get local leaders to approve the annexation. The local khans swore an oath to Potemkin and, by proxy, to Catherine II and the Russian Empire. All these elements of the annexation in 1783 can also be found in the annexation by Russia in 2014.

EAST UKRAINE

When Poroshenko was elected the President of Ukraine, he immediately started to unite the areas of the Ukraine State with the goal of taking control of all the areas occupied by the pro-Russian separatist groups of East Ukraine. The Ukraine civil war ensued, and the number of casualties quickly rose to thousands. The Ukrainian army and Poroshenko were successful in their pursuits and it started to look like the East Ukrainian separatists would lose their grip on this area. But then the separatists were given weapons and soldiers by Russia, and the tables were turned.

The NATO Summit in Wales drew limits for Poroshenko, stating that it was time to agree on a ceasefire and start negotiations for a truce in Minsk. East Ukraine's demands included an extensive autonomous status, and Russia supported its demands. The ceasefire has not been waterproof either, and as we know, the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, took control of the initiative when it was expected that the United States would start supplying weapons to Poroshenko. Merkel's actions were backed by the President of France, Francois Hollande, who also considered an armed confrontation between the US and Russia in Europe a very undesirable prospect.

Merkel and Hollande took a trip to Moscow to establish a line of negotiation with President Putin. Merkel also went to Washington to

meet with President Barack Obama. The result was Minsk II which, after a rocky start, appears to be leading to a ceasefire of sorts.

One goal of Poroshenko's army has been to destroy East Ukraine's industry and mines. East Ukraine's strength has been its mining activities and the production of components for weapons manufacturing by the Russian and Chinese armies. How Russia is planning to solve this dilemma is not yet known, but there are rumours that there are plans to move some of the destroyed factories that produced gun components for China to Kazakhstan.

The strong decline of oil prices and the economic sanctions put on Russia by the West led to Russia's rouble crisis in late 2014. The value of rouble quickly dropped by half, causing a major crisis for the Russian economy. Even though Russia will not necessarily abide by the sanctions related to its most vital interests, the assumption is that it is more susceptible to compromise now than before the rouble crisis. Western Europe has also come to realise that a Russia in chaos would pose a genuine security threat to it both politically and economically. Based on this, the President of France, Hollande, indicates a greater will by the West to compromise with Russia. Merkel on the other hand has warned not to expect rapid solutions amidst such a difficult crisis. But the momentum is there, so it should be utilised by the parties on both sides. So far, both have aimed at strengthening their own sphere of influence at the other's expense. Could we finally find a way to put things in balance?

INTERNATIONAL LAW

The West finds that Russia has violated international law by first taking over Crimea and then making it part of Russia.

Russia finds that it has acted in compliance with international law by protecting the Russian-speaking population of Crimea and East Ukraine, who have fallen under repression.

There is no question that the statutes of international law are appropriate and should be observed by all. In practice, however, the big powers with their global interests often violate these statutes and, in many cases, the vital security interests of states surpass compliance with international law standards.

Power politics and spheres of influence never went away. They are the first step, used politically until vital interests require resorting to military power. It is often used when countermeasures are not very likely or can be tolerated.

SANCTIONS

The United States, Russia and China form the tri-polar world in which they have to assess the use of military power and the related risks. It is plain to see that the US will not risk a nuclear war in Europe against Russia when China has been earmarked as its number one potential enemy. Russia also cannot afford to tighten the string in Europe too much, because its own interests are not necessarily sufficient for a prolonged war of attrition currently under way, which commenced with the West's cycles of sanctions on Russia and its economy.

Sanctions have been issued in connection with the Ukraine crisis, but it is clear that they are ideological in nature, aimed at shaking the economic balance of Russia and a possible shift in power. The sanctions will not be removed in a way that would support the implementation of the Minsk truce agreement. It is the West's understanding that Russia is still in control of the Crimean Peninsula and that the Minsk agreement concerning East Ukraine is not on solid ground, and therefore the sanctions will be kept in force.

If the aim of Western politics is to keep the sanctions in force for as long as Russia controls the Crimean Peninsula, the cycles of sanctions can be assumed to be an endless series of non-military (soft) power measures. At some point, the West will run into trouble when its internal cohesion will not hold against imposing such strong and long-lasting economic sanctions on certain EU Member States that their meaningfulness becomes questionable.

For Russia, sanctions are currently a latent problem and their effects are being undermined. Russia has responded to the West's three cycles of sanctions with one cycle of its own. However, sanctions may turn into an acute problem that needs to be solved when the conditions are favourable.

Finland's use of sanctions has fully shifted the conflict between the big Western powers and Russia to the relations between Finland and Russia. The future impact of this is that even after the sanctions have been removed, the possibility of another cycle of sanctions will raise the level of risk associated with Russian-Finnish business and trade relations, with highly negative effects. The global market is heavily undermined by the sanctions.

OSCE

In connection with the Russo-Georgian War, Russia found that the OSCE's reporting was not impartial. For this reason, it did not approve the continuation of the mandate for the OSCE mission to Georgia. Of course, the OSCE has not become any less impartial after the Russo-Georgian War, and Russia's attitude towards the OSCE is somewhat ambivalent. This means that those OSCE operations for which Russia grants permission will have to undergo a close analysis by Russia.

The OSCE is also an independent operator, and lately Russia has shown interest in the appointment of its own diplomats to positions with the OSCE. In East Ukraine, the independent operations of the OSCE did more harm than good. They were mainly intended for sending Western diplomats on special monitoring missions to East Ukraine. These measures will reduce Russia's interest in using the OSCE for crisis management purposes.

With regards to the Ukraine crisis, the strength of the OSCE was that its 2014 chairmanship was held by Switzerland. Although it is clearly a Western country, Switzerland is a neutral country. Switzerland paved the way for the 2015 OSCE Chairmanship for Serbia, which is also known to have certain abilities to influence Russia.

Russia has commented on the impartiality of the OSCE also in connection with the Ukraine crisis. On the other hand, despite the alert mode, Russia has not dismissed the option of using the OSCE for conflict resolution purposes.

THE UN

For Russians, the United Nations is the international community. This is logical, considering that nearly every nation in the world belongs to the UN, making it holistic and not based on an artificial alliance in which the interests of a group of powers represent the interests of the international community as a whole.

In addition, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia has a veto right.

CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, Russia is a superpower that loses parts of its continent whenever its status is weakened. If the breakaway regions are not able to defend themselves, they are classified by Russia on the basis of its criteria for provinces. A weak Russia loses breakaway regions to potential enemies. When Russia is powerful, the regions become reunited with it. These criteria for provinces do not apply to Finland due to its ability in the past to defend its independence in two wars against Russia. Even today, Finland's credibility with respect to its ability to defend its territory is high. Forming a military alliance with an entity in which Russia is not a member would in all likelihood make Russia rethink its classification of Finland based on its criteria for provinces.

The aim of the weakening Russia was to form a loose alliance between all the former Soviet republics included in the CIS in order to internally find solutions to the problems arising from the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was not very realistic to begin with, because the Baltic countries and Georgia in particular were not interested in joining the CIS. Since then, this assumption was proven incorrect in light of the West's participation in solving these conflicts through the OSCE and the West's later attempts to advance the accession of these conflict areas to the EU and NATO.

Frozen conflicts were first considered by Russia as latent problems. They became acute problems when attempts were made to diminish Russia's position within the frozen conflict areas. Examples include the Russo-Georgian War and the falling of Ukraine into total

anarchy after the Maidan shootings. An acute problem will not go away unless favourable conditions

Russia is prepared to solve these problems in cooperation with the West, if its position in these areas will not be weakened. The West has not been willing to make this concession. Russia has shown its readiness to use military power in situations where its position is being undermined through power politics.

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