The end of the Cold War was to usher in a New World Order where peace would reign and the United Nations would finally govern with power and supranational impartiality. This idealist dream, however, soon crashed against the rocks of modern ethnic conflict. Tribal fighting erupted in Somalia. Iraq became mired in ethnic conflict with its Kurd minority. Genocide washed over hundreds of thousands in Rwanda and Burundi. Closer to the Western conscience, Yugoslavia fell apart along ethnic seams. Ethnic conflicts seemed to be slowly eroding any lingering hope that the New World Order would be one of stability. What was worse, modern ethnic conflict proved to be far more savage, far more violent, and far more incomprehensible than traditional interstate conflict. As a consequence, ethnic conflict has today become the greatest threat to the stability and security of the modern world. Solutions must be found to resolve these conflicts.

Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has struggled to find successful methods of resolving ethnic conflict. Its attempts, however, have been marked with two alarming weaknesses. First, policymakers rely on assumptions based on the nature of the Old World. They treat these conflicts the same way they treated traditional interstate conflict, ignoring the unique nature of modern ethnic conflict. While traditional Cold War conflicts were based on the politics of interstate war and balance-of-power thinking, this has not held true for modern ethnic conflict, which arises not so much out of interstate politics as it does out of group psychology and mutual hatreds.

Second, those theorists who have attempted to break tradition and not take traditional assumptions for granted have relied too heavily on only a few of the most prominent conflicts, most notably the conflicts of former Yugoslavia. They fail to recognize many insights that can be found in other conflicts, insights that would help better explain this type of war.

The goal of this paper is to develop a theory of conflict resolution that remedies these two weaknesses. We will form a theory of conflict resolution that takes into account the unique nature of modern ethnic conflict. We will do this by analyzing two largely neglected case studies – namely, the conflicts in the former Soviet Union region of Transcaucasia. These conflicts, the conflict between Azerbaijan and its Armenian enclave Nagorno-Karabakh, and the conflict between Georgia and the secessionist Abkhaz, have been some of the most bloody and violent wars of this decade. They have also been some of the most ignored. Yet they provide insights that cannot be discovered by focusing narrowly on Bosnia and Kosovo.

First, we will briefly review the history and then analyze the sources and nature of modern ethnic conflict. After, we will use the Abkhazian and Karabakh Wars to demonstrate this nature and to discover how the unique aspects of modern ethnic conflict can guide us to a
better method of conflict resolution. This will not be a detailed account of all the factors that led to war in Transcaucasia. Neither will it be an attempt to determine whose side of the conflict is more just or whose account of history is more accurate. It will merely be an overview of each war to highlight characteristics typical of all modern ethnic conflict.

Then, we will review five traditional methods of mediating international conflicts that prove most relevant to modern ethnic conflict and how they have been used in these two conflicts. We will do this to discover why some have fallen short and others have been more successful. We will use this analysis to form a theory of international conflict resolution more applicable to modern ethnic conflict, based on an “atmosphere of reconciliation.”

This paper does not purport to be a plan for a political settlement of the Transcaucasian conflicts. The aim here is to deal only with the process of conflict resolution, not the optimal outcome of a given conflict. Furthermore, while this paper mainly focuses on the Transcaucasian conflicts, the inductive conclusions can be applied to other modern ethnic conflicts. As such conflicts escalate throughout the world – in Cyprus, Turkey, Corsica, Northern Ireland, Indonesia, Kashmir, and all other regions – the need for such theories to guide the international community’s actions grows.

A HISTORY OF MODERN ETHNIC CONFLICT

Although some believe ethnic conflict is a new phenomenon, this is far from the case. Ethnic war has existed since time immemorial. But the history of the twentieth century has transformed its nature. With the end of World War II, the victorious nations, with much rhetoric about a New World Order, established the United Nations to govern this New World Order. The Charter of the UN, however, was based on two theoretically opposed principles: territorial integrity and national self-determination. The first principle claimed all states were completely sovereign within their territory and no other state had a right to interfere with their internal affairs. The second principle maintained that all nations had a right to self-determination – that is, to their own state and government, independent of all other states and governments. These principles sounded eloquent on paper, but they rested on a faulty assumption – that the world was made up of nation-states; in other words, that the boundaries of nations and states coincided perfectly. They did not.

This became apparent as leaders of the Third World seized the principle of self-determination to champion decolonization. As colonies clamored for the independence to which they, as nations, believed they had a right, they discovered that within their own borders were other national minorities that desired the same right. Wars broke out. These wars of ethnic group against ethnic group were not traditional interstate wars, however. They were internal wars, between a state and its own citizens. Thus, legally, the UN could do nothing about these conflicts, as this would violate the given states territorial integrity. The UN tried, however, to bend these rules in order to find a solution to the new internal nature of ethnic conflict. The 1950s struggle in Congo was the most vivid example. As the Belgian imperial rulers pulled out, they left a power vacuum behind them, and ethnic groups violently struggled for the right to primacy within the new state. The UN made a meager attempt to bring stability to the new country, but soon left with its tail between its legs (see Meisler, 115-134 for a descriptive summary of the UN’s first peace-enforcement mission).

Because of the Cold War, no other attempts were made to solve ethnic conflicts unless these attempts could be defined in the ideological terms of the Cold War. Thus, if it was not a blow against a communist-backed government or rebellion, it was not worth Western attention. The end of the Cold War, though, saw the explosion of hundreds of internal ethnic conflicts, from Indonesia to Africa to Eastern Europe. In Europe, because of the Bosnian crisis, many people began to believe that modern ethnic conflicts had become “the most prominent security issue in Europe for the foreseeable future” (Karkoszka, in Cuthbertson and Liebowitz, 212) and, consequently, made efforts to resolve them, but with little success. Desperation in the West began to set in. In the words of a prominent scholar of conflict resolution, “the failure to stop the bloodshed in the former Yugoslavia is causing pessimism and frustration to overshadow European thinking and action” (Rabie, 167). Even the cease-fires attained in both Bosnia and Kosovo have done little to dampen this pessimism. The violence has been stopped, but the conflicts continue to go unresolved.

This pessimism is unfounded. These conflicts can be solved. But to do this, two factors must be recognized. First, traditional methods of international conflict resolution (mainly, power-based third state mediation) fail to resolve modern ethnic conflicts because these
methods were not designed for modern ethnic conflicts. They were designed for traditional interstate conflict. Modern ethnic conflict is different in nature than traditional interstate conflict. An effective method of conflict resolution must take into account these differences.

Second, an effective method of conflict resolution must be based on insights gained from a wider perspective. Westerners are too often narrowly focused, being so obsessed with the case of Yugoslavia that raging ethnic conflicts in other regions of the world go completely ignored. Through a wider perspective, we will gain a broader understanding of the real nature of modern ethnic conflict. But first, we must specify what we mean by modern ethnic conflict.

THE NATURE AND SOURCES OF MODERN ETHNIC CONFLICT

Definition

Our first task, then, is to define modern ethnic conflict. The sociologist Hugh Miall has given a detailed, comprehensive definition in the following terms:

Most ethnic conflicts involve the rights of ethnic groups to maintain their identity, to have equal status with other groups, and to have equal access to decision-making. Societies with ethnic differences often divide along ethnic lines in such a way that some ethnic groups are forced to integrate into the national culture of the state in which they find themselves, the threat to their identity can readily lead to frustration, polarization and violence (Miall, 141).

This is the type of definition many scholars of nationalism and ethnic conflict rely on. For the purpose of conflict resolution, however, we will define modern ethnic conflict in somewhat broader terms. Modern ethnic conflict is violence between two groups within a state that has the question of ethnicity at its core. Modern ethnic conflict is not fought between two different states. While traditional interstate wars may have an ethnic factor (such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait), this does not make them ethnic conflicts. Modern ethnic conflict is most often fought between a state, governed by a dominant ethnic group, and another ethnic group within the state who feels oppressed or discriminated against. Although the oppressed ethnic group may rely on support from a neighboring "homeland," as the Karabakh Armenians did, or on support of ethnic cousins in neighboring states, as the Abkhaz did (including Chechen, Adyghe, and Dagestani irregulars from Russia), this does not make the conflict a traditional interstate conflict. Modern ethnic conflict is stuck uncomfortably somewhere between internal conflict and international conflict.

Consequently, these conflicts are not fought by trained armies. They are fought between neighbors. Sadly enough, Michael Ignatieff was woefully too accurate. Wars "between the closest of kin" have proven to be much more violent (Miall, 146) and hatred much stronger (James, in Carment and James, Peace in the Midst of Wars, 166) than in wars between states. What drives one-time neighbors to now turn their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears?

SOURCES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

Common Hypotheses

Many scholars believe that modern ethnic conflict arises from competition over scarce resources such as property, jobs, language rights, etc. (Lake and Rothchild, 44, see also Paul, 56). Thus, the conflict can be resolved if the parties find a mutually agreeable compromise that will allow both sides access to the given scarce resource. But concerning the Abkhazian and Karabakh conflicts, as well as many others, it is hard to find such a resource lying at the center of tensions. Some may retort that government independence can be classified as a scarce resource. But what makes it a scarce resource? The government becomes a scarce resource when one ethnic group defines their national identity and the state in terms that exclude other groups from the state. In other words, ethnic conflict drives groups to define the state as a scarce resource. But, what causes ethnic tension in the first place?

Some claim that ethnic tension grows when there are difficult economic troubles in a given region. But a recent sociological study has shown that a rise in ethnic conflict within a given space was not related to economic distress. Rather, the study continued, ethnic tensions seemed to rise not in times of economic transition, but in times of political transition, when the power of one group relative to the other was shifting (Paul, 57). There
are different explanations for this phenomenon. One is that when the transition is accompanied by a transformation of political institutions (e.g., from communism to democracy), ethnonationalism and the consequent ethnic tension is used by the political elite to distance themselves from the old regime (Ropers, 12). Another explanation is that in a time of transition, when political institutions that usually channel social conflict do not exist, conflict has no peaceful avenue to travel and thus becomes violent. Yet another explanation is that institutions and ideologies that were used in the past to mobilize the masses are either de-legitimized or nonexistent during political transition and, thus, rising politicians use the only means currently available for political mobilization – ethnicity (Gellner, in Motyl, 249-250).

All these, although plausible arguments that most likely hold weight, still do not reach far enough. What is it about political transitions that creates this ethnic tension, this need to redefine or reinforce the borders of "us" and "them"? It helps to point out that modern ethnic conflicts do not exist solely in states in transition. The scholars David Lake and Donald Rothchild have pointed out that the same tensions that play out in transition states also seem to exist in "weak" states. But what is a weak state? According to Lake and Rothchild, who have studied the same phenomenon, a weak state is one that must rely on "manifest coercion rather than legitimate authority" (Lake and Rothchild, 43). East Timor in Indonesia or the Kurds in Iraq accurately typify this type of conflict. However, to complicate the picture even further, modern ethnic conflict even exists in stable, strong (i.e., politically legitimate) states, such as Northern Ireland and Turkey.

**Group Psychology and Fear**

How can we find a common thread in ethnic conflicts of such varying countries? What do they share in common? We hypothesize that they each share an aspect of group psychology we will call "collective fear." In each state mired in ethnic conflict, fear has become the major catalyst for social action. This fear may originate from different sources. In states in transition, individuals fear the uncertainty of the future because they have lost the old reliable social and political institutions and have not become accustomed to the new institutions, if new ones have even succeeded to materialize (which may not be the case in Georgia, Armenia, or Azerbaijan). In weak states, individuals fear the arbitrary hand of a ruthless dictator. In strong states, individuals fear real or perceived discrimination based on their ethnic identity.

There are three possible outcomes to a situation of collective fear. First, some event or phenomenon may resolve the fear. For example, a state in economic distress may experience an economic boom. Second, collective solutions can be found. For example, a multi-national state with ethnic tensions can establish a government where an individual's relationship to the state is not defined in terms of nationality, but in terms of citizenship. Third, fear can push individuals to turn to smaller social groups for reassurance and security. Indeed, it is a well-known psychological fact that humans, even without the catalyst of fear, have a natural pull to form groups in order to decrease their feelings of uncertainty and increase their feelings of security. Furthermore, once these groups are formed, favoritism for "us" (those within the group) against "them" (those outside the group) immediately sets in (Horowitz, 143). Recent psychological experiments have shown that even with small numbers of people arbitrarily assigned to different groups, members of one group will immediately show favoritism for their group and discrimination against other groups. In fact, even when an individual was presented with the possibility of an optimal outcome for all groups, the individual tended to choose his or her group's maximization at the costs of others rather than the collective optimal outcome (ibid, 145).

Time and time again, the social group most commonly turned to in times of collective fear is based on ethnicity. It remains to explain why, in times of insecurity, people within a state turn to ethnic groups and not other groups based on class, religion, or even political beliefs (e.g., along liberal or social lines). One interesting theory states that individuals tend to cling to ethnic ties more strongly than others when there is a threat to security because these individuals are forced to think about the possibility of their own mortality. Therefore, they turn to ethnic ties because, unlike religious or civil ties, "ethnicity is passed on biologically to offspring, promising a kind of immortality" (Paul, 60). While this may be a little far fetched, it brings out a crucial point. Ethnic ties are biological, and thus, unchangeable. All other ties are theoretical and may be changed or completely abandoned at any given time. While it is true that some "ethnic" groups are not, in reality, connected by blood, but are more imagined (for example, Azeris, while probably a mixture of ethnic groups in the region that were converted to Islam, believe they are the pure descendants of the first ancient inhabitants of the Caucasus, the Albanians), it must be remembered
The ethnic population of Transcaucasia, however, was not as simply delineated. Each country housed many ethnic minorities and many ethnic groups from neighboring republics. The ethnic demography of each republic was extremely intermixed. Georgia, for example, was home to Georgians, Mingrelians, Kurds, Armenians, Ossetians, and most fatefully, Abkhaz.

The Abkhaz had an ambivalent relationship with Georgians. Their ancestors had been part of ancient Georgian kingdoms, but had never been fully assimilated into the Georgian nationality. Hence, with the birth of the Georgian SSR, the Abkhazian territory was given autonomous status outside of Georgia. However, as Soviet history progressed, the Abkhazian territory was gradually demoted to a status within the Georgian SSR. The

This would all be well and fine if it were not for one other very disturbing fact. As depicted in diagram 2, when collective fear is resolved either by a given event or by collective solutions, the outcome is peace. But when collective fear is resolved by turning to one’s ethnic group for security, ethnonationalism is the result. And ethnonationalism almost always leads to war. Why is this so?

This is the ideology of ethnonationalism. It is self-glorifying and other-abasing. It provides a scapegoat in times of crisis. For example, Hitler was able to use ethnonationalism to place all of Germany’s woes on the Jews. As the Eastern European scholar Veljko Vujacic has pointed out, ethnonationalism is extremely attractive to socially and economically impoverished ethnic groups because it gives them an explanation for their destitute state (Vujacic, 770-771). It frees that community from blame and guilt and turns those feelings into enmity toward another group. It simplifies extremely complicated problems of social and economic woes into black and white, bad and good, “them” and “us.” Typical of such ideology is the saying “no foreigner understands us,” or “we can rely on no one but ourselves.” National grievances and suffering become the center of national identity. National retribution becomes the aim of relations with other ethnic groups. This antagonism breeds reciprocal hatred from the targeted ethnic group, and this mutual hatred feeds off its own logic and leads to rapid escalation that quickly spins out of control. It has the ability to turn lifetime friends into the deadliest enemies. It tears towns apart down ethnic seams. It ruin any sort of trust that supported the political institutions of the past. Worst of all, it leads to senseless war.

THE TRANSCAUCASIAN CONFLICTS

A Brief History – Abkhazia

The history of the Transcaucasian conflicts will help to demonstrate how collective fear can cause this turn to ethnic group security and ethnonationalism that leads to conflict. But first, we must understand a little of the political history of these conflicts.

Up until 1991, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan made up the southwestern flank of the Soviet Union – a region called Transcaucasia. Each state had no history of independent statehood except for a brief three-year period between the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the 1921 reincorporation of each state into the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). For several reasons (whose explanations would deserve a whole paper on their own), a part of Soviet policy was to divide Soviet territory into ethnic units (republics, autonomous regions, autonomous districts, etc.). In this way the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republics were born. The ethnic population of Transcaucasia, however, was not as simply delineated. Each country housed many ethnic minorities and many ethnic groups from neighboring republics. The ethnic demography of each republic was extremely intermixed. Georgia, for example, was home to Georgians, Mingrelians, Kurds, Armenians, Ossetians, and most fatefully, Abkhaz.

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ethnic Abkhaz began to fear that their ethnic group was being threatened with extinction. They blamed this on Soviet leaders Stalin (head of the USSR), Ordzhokinidze (one of his assistants), and Beria (head of the precursor to the KGB). All of them were Georgians. As a result, throughout Soviet history, the Abkhaz claimed they suffered from “Georgianization” (forced assimilation into the Georgian population) and repeatedly petitioned the center to change the status of their territory. This collective fear did not lead to ethnonationalism at this time for two reasons. First, the Center repressed any expression of nationalism not sanctioned by itself. Thus, collective fear was not allowed to translate into ethnonationalism. Second, collective fear had not yet developed to the extreme necessary to cause individuals to seek safety only in one’s ethnic group. To reach this extreme condition, Soviet society and its myriad nationalities needed something more. In the late 1980s, Gorbachev provided that catalyst.

Gorbachev’s policies of perestroika caused mass social upheaval. His economic and political policies threatened to undermine the ideology on which Soviet society had been established. Gorbachev’s policy of glasnost added fuel to the fire by allowing social groups, including, most fateful, ethnic groups, to express themselves for the first time in 70 years. The growing collective fear and the freedom to form autonomous ethnic movements gave new life to the expression of Abkhazian consternation. In March 1989, 30,000 citizens of Abkhazia signed a petition to send to Moscow expressing the desire to secede from Georgia and began demonstrations. Georgians, who had never really understood why the Abkhaz did not consider themselves a part of Georgian civilization, answered with their own demonstrations. While their demonstrations were mainly directed at obtaining sovereignty from Moscow, they began to include anti-Abkhazian declarations. These demonstrations were quickly and brutally dispersed by Russian forces, which killed 21 demonstrators. Because of this, and because of continuing Abkhazian demonstrations, tensions in Georgia continued to grow.

Finally, in July of that same year, the conflict reached a new level. Tbilisi State University (in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia) had recently established a branch in Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia. In July, Georgian professors refused to continue teaching in Sukhumi as long as Russians and Abkhaz were allowed to lecture there. Intercommunal violence erupted and many were killed and wounded.

1990 began the “War of Laws” where the Abkhazian government would sign a decree declaring independence and the Georgian government would retaliate by annulling that decree. The Abkhazian government would annul the 1921 decree that incorporated Abkhazia into Georgia, and the War of Laws would continue in this way.

Increasing spontaneous acts of violence continued until July of 1992, when the conflict took a new turn. The deposed president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was mounting a rebellion against the new government led by the ex-Politburo member, Eduard Shevardnadze. Gamsakhurdia and his military contingent entered Abkhazia to seek for supporters and to prepare their strength. Shevardnadze immediately used this as an excuse to move troops into Abkhazia. The Abkhaz, however, saw this move as a declaration of all-out war and began their own military maneuvers. By August, the war over Abkhazia had begun.

A Brief History – Nagorno-Karabakh

Georgia was not the only conflict-ridden Transcaucasian country. Armenia and Azerbaijan had a history of enmity that originated even before the Soviet Union. In 1905, the lower-class Muslims of the region now known as Azerbaijan became fed up with their lot and attacked the urban Armenians who ran most industries in the region. This street-level fighting, which later became known as the Armenian-Tatar war (as Azeris were at the time thought to be Tatar), resulted in 10,000 deaths (Swietochowski, 39). But there was worse yet to come. In 1914, during World War I, the Ottoman Empire, with Turkey as its head, attacked Russia in Transcaucasia. Russia quickly retaliated. As Russian victory grew, the Russian army prepared an attack on eastern Turkey, Anatolia, where an enormous Armenian minority lived. Turkey, fearing Armenian insurgency in this region, concocted a calamitous policy. They began murdering and deporting Armenians in what became one of the worst cases of genocide in the history of the world. By the end, 600,000 to 2,500,000 Armenians had been killed (Suny, Revenge of the Past 74).

Consequently, Armenian national identity had as its cornerstone hatred against anything Turkish. And the Azeris were considered Turkish. Thus, collective fear continued to exist between the Azeris and the Armenians. This was most significant for a small Armenian
minority that continued to live in an enclave within Azerbaijan – Nagorno-Karabakh. The people of this small Armenian enclave repeatedly petitioned Moscow throughout Soviet history to allow Nagorno-Karabakh to be united with Greater Armenia, claiming that they constantly feared Turkish oppression from their Azeri governors. However, as was the case with Georgia and Abkhazia, the Soviet system successfully repressed collective violence from turning into ethnonationalism until Gorbachev’s momentous policies of perestroika and glasnost.

Throughout 1986 and 1987, the Karabakhis, like their neighbors the Abkhaz, sent petition after petition to the Center. The Azeris, for their part, responded with their own demonstrations. Both sides attempted to prove that the primeval settlers of Nagorno-Karabakh belonged to the Armenian or Azeri ancestral ethnic group, respectively. On February 12, 1988, fearing the rising tension in the region, the Center sent a division of inner force troops to deflate the conflict. Both sides completely ignored this move by Moscow. On February 20, the Nagorno-Karabakh government adopted a resolution making their territory a part of the Armenian SSR. The very next day, Azeri locals began violent pogroms.

Both sides have conflicting accounts of how the violence began. Armenians insist that this was planned genocide. Azeris claim that the fighting actually began when Armenians killed two Azeri boys in Karabakh. Extremists on both sides hatched conspiracy theories. For example, one Azeri claimed that the Russian government deployed criminals from Soviet prisons into Sumgait, Azerbaijan to initiate the violence (Cornell, 4). Whatever the truth may be, these pogroms marked the beginning of the violent stage of Armenian-Azeri conflict.

In 1990, Soviet troops were deployed into Azerbaijan to quell the two-sided ethnic cleansing. Azeris blocked their way and the fighting raged on. By the time Azerbaijan declared independence from the USSR at the end of 1991, it was already mired in a war with the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Both the Abkhazian conflict and the Karabakh conflict raged on until 1994, when cease-fires in both wars finally stuck. Negotiations have been conducted ever since, but neither conflict has moved any closer to a political settlement. Indeed, both sides in both conflicts talk increasingly of renewing military actions.

These were not the only conflicts to erupt in the former Soviet space. Violent wars erupted in Moldova, Chechnya, and Southern Ossetia, to name only a few. The Abkhazian and Karabakh conflicts, however, present the best potential for the analysis of modern ethnic conflict and possible conflict resolution methods.

Ethnonationalism

How has ethnonationalism resulting from collective fear played out in the Transcaucasian conflicts? Two recent works are especially telling. In the first work, Bruno Coppieters has compiled essays on the Abkhazian War written by natives from each side of the conflict. In the first essay, Ghia Nodia, a Georgian sociologist, assumes that “what we are not” and “who is our primary enemy” are necessary parts of the definition of national identity (Coppieters, et al, 15). She implies that it is impossible to have a national identity without these negative factors, not realizing that they are unique to ethnonationalism and to rising ethnic conflict. She concludes that for the Abkhaz, this was the only factor of national identity. She states, “by the end of the Soviet Union [when the Abkhazian conflict began], there was only one element of the Abkhazian national vision which was quite unambiguous: Georgians were the enemy” (ibid, 22). The Georgian side was not much better. In another essay in the same work, Yuri Anchabadze portrays the Georgian view of the Abkhaz as “some kind of wild, uncivilized and uncultured people without their own ethno-cultural potential and incapable of self-development or of achieving high cultural standards” (ibid, 84).

The second work is a Foreign Affairs article by David Rieff, a journalist well known for his coverage of ethnic conflict. The article is a report of his recent 1996 visit to Nagorno-Karabakh. In the article, Rieff notes that in general, the Karabakh Armenians start from the premise that whatever they do will be misunderstood by foreigners. One of the Armenian politicians explained to him that “no Christian people can live successfully in a sea of Muslims.” Furthermore, when attempting to explain the differences between the Azeris and the Armenians, another Armenian Karabakh official proudly stated, “Armenians are fighters” and then disdainfully added as an afterthought, “Azeris do not like to fight. In the
great Patriotic War [World War II], in the Red Army, in Afghanistan, it was always the same – you found them in construction battalions” (Rieff, II). In each of these statements, and in other encounters with Karabakhis, the author notes that the national identity of the Karabakhis inevitably includes a sense of “our original virtue” and “their original wickedness.”

Thus, in both the Abkhazian and the Karabakh conflict, at the center lies the ideology of ethnonationalism. “We are good and they are bad,” “all of our problems stem from their depravity,” etc. While one ethnic group (the Abkhaz and the Karabakhis) argues that they cannot survive if they must live in the same state as the other ethnic group, the second (Georgia and Azerbaijan) denies that the first ethnic group even exists.

ASPECTS OF MODERN ETHNIC CONFLICT

A preliminary observation would lead to the conclusion that if collective fear and the resultant ethnonationalism causes conflict, then the solution would be to resolve these collective fears in a peaceful way. That is, conflict resolution practitioners should discover what is causing collective fears and eradicate this cause, whether it be economic distress, political instability, or so on. However, ethnic hatred has a logic of its own. Once it is formed, it will not die just because the initial cause has disappeared. Once someone has been taught to hate someone, it is much harder to re-teach him to love that person. The initial cause of collective fear must be dealt with, but conflict resolution must not stop there. Conflict resolution must deal with ethnic conflict on the basis of its nature, not only its causes, if it is to be successful.

The unique nature of modern ethnic conflict – namely its group psychology origins in collective fear and the resultant ethnonationalism – results in four aspects with which any attempt at conflict resolution must deal. These aspects include: first, the symbolic “identity” nature of the conflict; second, the value-related nature of the issues in conflict; third, the mass-societal level at which the conflict is played out; and fourth, the lack of central control for either side of the conflict. Let us deal with each in turn and discover what they each mean for conflict resolution.

The Symbolic Nature of Conflict

At its core, each conflict is mainly a conflict over identities, and, thus, over symbols. This explains such irrational acts during the war as the Georgian destruction of the Abkhazian historical archives in Sukhumi (ibid, 5). Why were historical archives such a strategic target of Georgian attacks? Because the archives were a symbol of Abkhazian identity. The Georgian troops were attempting to destroy the Abkhazian national memory, to erase their national identity. As Nodia points out, the center of the Abkhazian conflict has become the fact that each side has a “radically different answer to the fundamental question ‘What is Abkhazia?’” (Coppieters, et al, 24). While the Abkhaz maintain that “Abkhazia is Abkhazia,” the Georgians insist that “Abkhazia is Georgia.” While this may seem an over-simplification of the conflict, this is precisely how the conflict is viewed in the minds of those who are fighting it (ibid.).

In Karabakh, the same conflict over symbols exists. Thus, the American negotiator assigned to the conflict complained that even getting the parties to sit at the same negotiating table was almost impossible because the Azeris believed that, by doing this, they were giving the Karabakhis an official status, allowing them an identity (Maresca, in Crocker, 260). The American mediator notes that the conflict over symbols did not stop there. A huge dispute arose as to whether or not the Karabakh representative should have a nameplate at the table (ibid, 261). Again, to Azeris, this was reinforcing the de facto admittance of Karabakh national identity.

While it is true in that traditional interstate conflicts there will often be nationalist enmity and a symbolic aspect that will have to be dealt with, these factors are not the crux of the conflict. They are either outgrowths or justifications. Modern ethnic conflicts, on the other hand, revolve around these symbolic, emotive conflicts. This is the core nature of ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict is over the right to have an identity, the right to claim certain symbols as one’s own, the right to be equal to others, and often the right to exist. Ethnic cleansing and genocide are the elimination of this right.

What does this mean for conflict resolution? It means that the mediator must pay close attention to the symbolic nature of all actions. For example, by putting the two sides of the conflict at the negotiating table as equals, the mediator makes the symbolic gesture of
Ethnic conflict adds another burden. One’s values are a part of one’s national identity. To compromise on these values, one would be denying one’s own identity. While a person who believes in abortion might be slowly persuaded to disavow this belief (and vice versa), an Abkhaz is much harder to convince that he is not Abkhaz, but merely a confused Georgian and, thus, has no right to self-determination. This becomes even more difficult when hundreds of his friends have recently been killed, merely because they were Abkhaz. One the other side, for the Georgians, giving up any territory of “Historical Georgia” would be a compromise of the Georgian identity (Coppieters, et al. 19). One group’s identity depends on a denial of the other group’s identity. The scholar of ethnic conflict Mohamed Rabie has pointed out that ethnic, value-related conflicts “tend to reject the idea of accepting the other as equal or acknowledging the legitimacy of his grievances, two basic conditions for constructive negotiation” (Rabie, 134). In such value-related conflicts, instead of focusing on concrete issues, each side blames everything on the personal traits of the other ethnic group. Parties act more out of emotion than out of rational choice.

How does the value-related aspect effect conflict resolution? It leads many scholars to conclude that negotiations based on compromise are impossible (see Rabie, 134; Ropers, 25; Zartmann, 6). However, if we look at concrete examples, we find that this is not so. In Georgia, before the war began, the Abkhaz did not call for complete independence. They were merely demanding an increased amount of sovereignty. Furthermore, Georgia never removed Abkhazia’s autonomy. Some Georgians even recognized openly that the Abkhaz were of a different ethos than the Georgians (although they continued to maintain that the Abkhazian ethnic community had always lived within a Georgian kingdom, never outside) (Nodia, in Coppieters, et al, 25). Thus, before military violence began, both sides to the Abkhazian conflict left room for compromise. It is true that violence increases the grievances on each side and politically charges any compromise. Thus, while before the war the Abkhaz were willing to have some governmental relationship with Georgia, now the Abkhaz feel insecure in any Georgian state. But even now, the possibility of compromise exists. In his extremely pro-Abkhazian article in Coppieters’ compilation, Viacheslav Chirikba, an ethnic Abkhaz, admits that the present situation still “leaves both parties with room to compromise” (Coppieters, et al, 59). Why? First, the Georgians realize they cannot militarily defeat Abkhazia. Second, the Abkhaz realize that they are not going to receive international recognition as an independent state. Chirikba does not, however, suggest what that compromise should be. Furthermore, Anchabadze, in his work, hints at the fact that military war of any type means that one side has abandoned the hope of finding a compromise at the negotiating table. In other words, modern ethnic war is not unique in this aspect (ibid, 59). Negotiations usually resume when one side has won and wants to legitimize its victory or both sides have reached a stalemate or see the possibility for a compromise.

Despite the truth in Anchabadze’s and Chirikba’s statements, we must not ignore the fact that because the values in conflict are a part of each ethnic group’s national identity (our second characteristic of modern ethnic conflict), compromise is much more difficult than it
is in traditional interstate conflict. Yes, compromise may ultimately be possible, but the value-related aspect of ethnic conflict must first be dealt with. Thus, mediators should not focus on finding political compromises, but on treating the value-related aspect of ethnic conflict.

**Mass Participation**

The third factor of modern ethnic conflict that causes difficulty is that it is based on the masses. Within the last few decades, scholars of ethnic conflict have discovered a phenomenon they have named "elite-outbidding." According to Timothy Sisk, a conflict resolution scholar, elite-outbidding occurs when a group’s ethnic identity is manipulated by power-hungry elites (Sisk, 12). Political leaders use ethnic extremism to amass power by branding other moderate leaders’ accommodations to other ethnic groups as a sell-out of group interests. They play up the image of an external threat (other ethnic groups) to scare people away from moderates and toward the extremists. In order to gain power, they champion themselves as the only saviors of their ethnic group. In this way they also incite conflict (Sisk, 12-17). Many scholars have picked up on this theme. Carment and James, for example, have commented that most serious ethnic conflicts arise because the ethnic elite see the conflicts as beneficial to their interests (Carment and James, Peace, 3). The well-known scholar David Horowitz uses this idea to explain why small ethnic groups drive for secession and push their societies into war “despite the economic costs it is likely to entail.” They do this because, while a given region in conflict as a whole stands to suffer, “educated elites stand to gain from the creation of new opportunities in a smaller, albeit poorer, state” (Horowitz, 238). Rabie, in assessing the conflicts in the former Soviet Union (Transcaucasia included), applies this theory, stating that the political elite took advantage of people’s yearning for independence to gain power at the expense of minorities (Rabie, 167).

The reason scholars dwell on this point so extensively is because it has precise implications for conflict resolution. If conflict is a result of elite-outbidding, the best method to manage ethnic conflict is to create incentives for the elite to establish moderate policies and play to broader, more moderate constituencies. Indeed, this forms the basis of theories of “power-sharing” and “consociational democracy,” which Sisk dwells on at length. Thus, it pays to examine if elite-outbidding is the true nature of modern ethnic conflict by analyzing the Transcaucasian conflicts.

Paula Garb, a scholar on Abkhazia, while giving a lecture at Sukhumi in an obvious attack against such elite-outbidding theories, claimed that while the elite may have stressed ethnic grievances, these grievances were not “recently constructed and presented to the public by elites wishing to stir up ethnic tensions to pursue economic and political self-interests...These grievances have long been part of the everyday consciousness of average Abkhazians in rural and urban areas” (DiMento, et al). Is there evidence for or against her argument?

One may make the argument that leaders like Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Abulfex Elchibey played such an elite-outbidding role in Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively, but scant material exists to prove this point one way or the other. Furthermore, Gamsakhurdia was deposed long before the Abkhazian War even began. Thus, if he did play a role in manipulating the conflict, it was more a case of opening Pandora’s box. It is more useful to look at the activities and behaviors of the masses to discover whether the mass or the elite plays the preeminent role.

According to Nodia, when the Abkhazian War first began, mixed communities of both Abkhaz and Georgians made "separate pacts" with each other, agreeing that the war was "started by politicians, and therefore does not concern us" (Coppieters, et al., 38). This gives some proof to the idea that the conflict, at least to begin with, was more a conflict between elites than between whole populations. This picture, however, quickly changed. With mounting atrocities, Nodia recounts, these pacts quickly fell apart. Thus, if the conflict was elite-initiated, it quickly swept through the whole society.

What is more, as Lake and Rothchild point out “ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs are as much a product as a producer of ethnic fears” (Lake and Rothchild, 55). Leaders can make a panic worse, but as the psychologist Daniel Chirot has pointed out, “there has to be a predisposition to panic...There has to be something that has gone wrong in people’s lives. There has to be a perception of threat” (Paul, 61). "Ethnic entrepreneurs” may play an inciting role, such as Milosevic most definitely did in both Bosnia and Kosovo, but their role is not necessary, as ethnic tensions often create such leaders on their own.
Thus, whether or not a conflict is elite-initiated it quickly becomes a mass movement with participation at all levels of the society.

Thus, focusing on the question of whether or not there were ethnic entrepreneurs misses the point. Either way, the end result is the same. If mass ethnic tensions produce insecurity, the masses will create the incentive for such a leader. And if ethnic tensions are created by elite-outbidding, these tensions still spread quickly throughout the entire society and become a mass movement. Thus, the conflict, either way, must be dealt with on the mass level, as Coppieters alludes to, stating that "the mobilization of the public opinion in the conflicts in the region has been too thorough and the struggle for power in all Caucasian countries is too bitter to allow any compromise solution in conditions where public opinion is not prepared to follow suit" (Coppieters, et al, 9). Consociationalism and power-sharing will not be enough to solve the conflict. Any conflict resolution must deal with all levels of the society.

Lack of Central Control

Because of the mass nature of modern ethnic conflict, leaders rarely have as much control over the fighting as they would like to think. Those at the negotiating table do not represent the whole society. They cannot command all the fighting to stop. Thomas Goltz, a journalist who lived in Azerbaijan during the Karabakh War, recounts a telling story about an Azeri military commander nicknamed "the Mule.

The Mule did not believe in cease-fires – except those that he made himself with the commander of the Armenian fedayeen forces on the far side of the line, with whom he had gone to school. They had a lot of contact, the Mule said, and he hoped to kill his old schoolyard pal someday soon. "All that peace talk is empty talk because it is talk between empty people in Baku and Yerevan," said the Mule. "This is the front – the Jehbe. This is where brave men fight and die" (Goltz, 151).

This type of warfare is typical of modern ethnic conflict. War begins as pogroms, or neighbor attacking neighbor. Then gangs form and heavier weapons are obtained. Cities are ethnically cleansed. Last, military regiments are formed. But rarely do all regiments stay in line with a central control. These regiments are formed spontaneously by frightened citizens and, thus, conduct warfare spontaneously. There are no rules as to what is a "just war" or as to what is a "crime of war." Whatever brutality comes to one’s mind is quickly acted out with little restraint.

This was extremely evident in the Chechen War, another ethnic conflict neighboring both the Abkhazian and Karabakh Wars. Cease-fires were often signed between Yeltsin or his appointee and a Chechen leader, but fighting would continue regardless. Rebels would explain that the Chechen leader who signed the treaty had no jurisdiction over their fighting.

Speaking of the Bosnian War, the reporter George Zarycky explained, "Few of these [fighters] are soldiers of organized armies who died on noble fields of battle. This war was about rag-tag militias, looters, weekend...mercenaries and raiders, thugs killing civilians, 'ethnic cleansing,' mass rape as military doctrine, depopulation, the wholesale destruction of towns and villages" (as quoted in Rabie, 8). Nodia, referring to the Abkhazian War, stated, "What was called a Georgian army was really a bunch of self-ruled...poetically named 'battalions' comprising both romantic patriots and thugs, whose activities were only loosely coordinated and who...would not carry out orders they did not like" (Coppieters, et al, 36). "In practice, loyalty to their friends and particular commanders mattered more than abstract patriotic duty" (ibid, 38).

As a result of this mass-level character of ethnic conflict, the highest level of authority is not always the most important group at the negotiating table. First, they do not have as much control over the conflict as believed. Second, they will have little incentive to compromise or capitulate unless a similar effort at conflict resolution is made at all levels. The highest level will not see it in their interests – first, because the conflict might be a tool of their manipulation, and second, because they will fear that if their attempts at reconciliation are not accompanied by a corresponding reconciliation at lower levels, they will lose their power base, as their citizens will view the leader’s moves as "selling out." Thus negotiation must include, and even focus on, lower levels of leadership.

Summary
Ethnic conflict is a result of group psychology. When collective fear from any number of causes reaches a level past tolerance, tension arises. This tension can be solved in three ways, by an event that deflates the fear, by a collective solution to the cause of fear, or by a turn to small groups of security, which will most often be ethnic groups. This breeds ethnonationalism, which causes ethnic conflict. Modern ethnic conflict of this sort is marked by four aspects, each of which creates specific needs for conflict resolution. First, because of ethnic conflicts symbolic nature, the mediators must pay close attention to the symbolic aspect of any actions taken. They must also realize that symbolic issues, not material ones, will be at the center of the conflict. Second, this symbolic factor leads to the value-related nature of ethnic conflict. As a result, this value-related aspect stresses the notion that mediators should not focus on finding political compromises, but on treating the value-related aspect of ethnic conflict. Third, because the conflict is played out on the mass level, any attempt at conflict resolution must deal with reconciliation at all levels of society. Last, the fact that there is a great lack of central control in ethnic conflicts emphasizes the need for negotiations to focus on lower levels of leadership. This leads us to the conclusions represented in diagram 3.

The second and third conclusions are the most difficult to deal with. The troubling values at the very heart of ethnic conflict and mass perception of it are those that make up the ideology of ethnonationalism. Thus, to resolve ethnic conflict, ethnonationalism must be transformed in a way that deflates the tension caused by these values. It must be transformed into a more civil definition of nationalism. Ethnonationalism may win wars, but it does not build states. A state ideology based solely on the idea that "we are different from them" will not consolidate political institutions. When one’s state has been cleansed of "them," individuals will realize that "we" are also different from each other.

To transform ethnonationalism, "resolution must satisfy the need for recognition of collective identities without threatening the other group" (Ropers, 25). In other words, national identities must be transformed to consist of values that do not threaten the security of another group. "What is remembered, what has been forgotten or repressed, provides the template through which the world is understood...Nationalist violence or inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance depend on what narrative, what tales of injustice, oppression, or betrayal are told" (Suny, Living With the Other, 6). Narratives of reconciliation must be stressed over narratives of conflict and hatred. Groups’ worldviews must be transformed. Changing people’s worldview is an extremely difficult task. Grievances cannot be written away. Deaths and atrocities cannot be erased. Women have been raped, children killed, houses looted and burned. Seeds of mistrust and hatred have been sown deep between each group. Each side, however, must be convinced that "sunk costs do not matter," that the past cannot be changed, and the future must not be held slave to the past. Each side must learn to forgive. To do this, an atmosphere of reconciliation must be developed.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Before we deal with the atmosphere of reconciliation, however, we must first investigate traditional methods of conflict resolution and discover how they meet up to the four conclusions we have drawn. While there are many methods of conflict resolution, we will only deal with those that are most applicable to modern ethnic conflict. Also, it is true that there is a growing consensus that "early warning" or "preventive diplomacy" is the most effective way to resolve such conflicts, dealing with ethnic tensions before they become violent and cause wars. While this may be true, other types of conflict resolution should not be ignored. For example, up until 1991, the Abkhazian and Karabakh conflicts were internal conflicts, confined to the USSR and Moscow’s jurisdiction. By the time the USSR fell apart and these conflicts became open to the international community, the conflicts were already on the road to war, and violence was already high. In fact, because of the intrastate nature of modern ethnic conflict, many such conflicts are not accessible to the international community until after violence is already at a high level. Thus, while the development of preventive diplomacy is valuable, we must not neglect the development of conflict resolution methods to deal with conflicts that have already turned into violent wars. Indeed, because of the internal nature of modern ethnic conflict, the international community will, in general, continue to be able to deal with most modern ethnic conflicts only after much blood has been shed. Therefore, let us review the methods most commonly used to resolve conflicts already at a violent stage.

Power-Based Mediation
The most traditional method, and today still the most common, is "power-based mediation." This is when the diplomat of a third state conducts negotiations between the two warring sides. The third state uses its power to compel the warring sides to find a mutually acceptable negotiated settlement. This type of negotiation has existed since the birth of modern states. While third-state negotiators try to pay attention to the symbolic nature of actions they take, they freely admit that this type of mediation is aimed only at obtaining a political settlement. It is widely recognized that power-based, state mediation is not aimed at the value level of the conflict or at reconciliation for the whole society. Furthermore, power-based negotiations rest on the realist assumption that states are unitary actors who can be represented by a single negotiator. Thus, attempts are rarely made at including any level but this. As is obvious, power-based mediation was never meant for mediation of intrastate conflicts. Yet state-based mediation remains the main tool of mediation, even in ethnic conflicts. Why? Because they are one of the only institutions in the international system with the power to influence the parties in conflict toward a settlement.

Yet this power to influence a settlement rests on another weakness — lack of neutrality. Recently, however, many policymakers and scholars continue to see power-based mediation as the most effective form of third-party intervention. Indeed, they argue, the third state's lack of neutrality is actually an asset, not a handicap. What is important, they say, is not neutrality, but credibility. While international organizations, may be neutral, they have no military or economic capabilities to back up any threat or to create any incentives for the warring parties to find a political settlement. What is more, close states fear much more the instability the conflict causes and, thus, feel much more incentive to resolve the conflict than an international organization does. A close and ongoing relationship must exist between the third state and the parties in conflict, a relationship strong enough that its denial could be used as a threat to keep the negotiating parties in line. Furthermore, they argue, even for an organization, it is impossible to remain neutral. One scholar has said, "The desire to appear neutral to all parties to a conflict is a noble, but misguided proposition. Conflict prevention is a political act with political ramifications...Third parties must recognize that they are at risk of becoming part of the conflict when agendas are cloaked under the blanket of neutrality" (Carment and James, The United Nations at 50, 78).

Use in Transcaucasian Conflicts

Power-based mediation has been one of the most frequently used tools in the Abkhazian and Karabakh conflicts. Both cease-fires have been negotiated with Russia as the third party. Thus, many may point to this as a success for power-based mediation. However, while it is true that cease-fires have been obtained, no political settlement has been reached in either conflict. The negotiations have been dead in the water since the cease-fires were negotiated. While it has been in Russia’s interest to stop the fighting and the flow of refugees, some argue that it is in Russia’s interest to keep the conflicts from being resolved. These conflicts, they argue, keep each side of the conflict dependent on Russia. For example, at the beginning of 1994, a group of Georgians, led by the former president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, began a revolt against Georgia’s current president Eduard Shevardnadze and the Georgian government. Shevardnadze, his country on the verge of disintegration from trying to fight wars on two fronts, turned to Russia for help. Russia agreed to help restore order to the country only if Georgia agreed to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the loose transnational organization that replaced the Soviet Union. When the CIS was formed two years ago, Georgia initially refused to join for fear of Russian domination. Now, in order to avoid state collapse, Georgia agreed to enter the Commonwealth, a cease-fire was negotiated, and Russian peacekeepers were sent to guard a demilitarized zone between Abkhazia and Georgia proper. Although Russia could not have planned Gamsakhurdia’s attack on Georgia’s center, it was obvious Russia was willing to take advantage of the situation to strengthen its dominance in the Transcaucasian region.

Is Russia's negligence in solving the conflict just a case of Russian self-interest, or does all power-based mediation tend to keep the actual conflict from being resolved? Unfortunately, one need only look at US attempts to mediate ethnic conflicts (in Northern Ireland, Israel, etc.) to see that Russia is not an isolated case. State-based mediation is almost always aimed only at obtaining a political settlement. Thus, after a settlement is obtained, no more efforts are made to resolve the underlying conflict. In Northern Ireland, for example, political settlement after political settlement has been broken because they do not rely on conflict resolution at the value level nor do they attempt to create reconciliation


Conclusions

Power-based mediation is flawed in its very nature. It relies on the state's ability to influence the conflict by negative pressure and positive incentives. It relies on the third state's lack of neutrality. It aims at obtaining a political settlement, not resolution of the underlying conflict. It cannot deal with the conflict at the values level because states have no way to pressure individuals or societies into transforming their values. While power-based mediation has brought an end to many conflicts in the past, most often conflicts resolved in this way result in three possible outcomes. First, the conflict is resolved in favor of the victor, as was the case in US mediation of Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Second, the conflict is resolved in favor of the mediating state. Indeed, this is true to a degree of almost all power-based mediated conflicts. Third, the fighting is ceased, but the conflict is not resolved. This is the case with the Transcaucasian conflicts. In almost no case has power-based mediation solved the underlying conflict. Why? Because it fails to recognize the role that the value level plays in the conflict. Power-based mediation cannot take this value level into consideration because states have no means to pressure others into changing their values.

A recent study listed the most important factors that make power-based negotiations successful. They include the following: the third party should be from the same cultural system as the warring parties; there should be internal homogeneity between the members of each side; power relations should be symmetrical; the conflict should not have gone on too long before negotiations are started; and the issues of “national security” and “sovereignty” should not be the center of the conflict, but should have as low of a profile as possible (Ropers, II, 7). Yet ethnic conflicts meet almost the exact opposite of all these criteria.

Militray Intervention

Frustrated with recent failures of power-based mediation of ethnic conflicts, the international community has turned more and more to military intervention, forcefully bringing the warring sides to the negotiating table. The most obvious use of force, although far from the only, has been in Bosnia and Kosovo. Bosnia and Kosovo also show most conspicuously the failures of military intervention. In Bosnia, NATO "peace-enforcing" troops have been stationed interminably. In Kosovo, NATO bombing has done the same and also reinforced Serbian antagonism toward the West. Military intervention does not offer a constructive end to any conflict; it simply forces a settlement established by an outside party. The warring sides feel no obligation to the settlement since it was, in large part, forced on them. This is shown by the post-Dayton elections in Bosnia. Hopeful candidates openly campaigned on promises to resume the conflict. Thus, the outside intervener is constrained to eternally police the settlement they have forced on the warring parties.

Use in Transcaucasian Conflicts

In general, force has not been used to cease the fighting in the Transcaucasian conflicts. In the Karabakh conflict, there has been little outside military intervention at all, if one does not count the one-sided support of the Karabakh Armenians by neighboring Armenian irregulars or the occasional involvement of local Russian field officers independent from orders from Moscow. Likewise, in the Abkhazian conflict, it is true that the Abkhazian secessionists did gain military support from irregulars from neighboring cousin ethnic groups – most notably from the Chechens (Lieven, 33-35) – but this could not seriously be considered a state’s intentional attempt to cease a conflict. Also, Russian forces were used to cease the fighting at the end of the conflict, but it must be remembered that this was a result of Georgian-Russian bargaining. If Georgia agreed to join the CIS, Russia agreed to cease the fighting in Abkhaz. Thus, once again, while this may be viewed as a state’s attempt to cease the fighting, it was hardly a practice of conflict resolution and more correctly a consequence of realpolitik, self-interested Russian diplomacy.

Conclusions

Foreign military intervention has most often been out of self-interest, not out of a state’s strategic attempts to resolve the conflict. However, even when intervention is for that purpose (as can be argued was the case in former Yugoslavia), military intervention is
flawed in its very nature. It puts a lid over boiling ethnic conflicts, but does nothing to calm the boiling. Once the peacekeeping soldiers go home, and the lid is removed, it becomes quickly evident that the conflict is still boiling. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to remain neutral when conducting military intervention. Thus, NATO resorted in both Bosnia and Kosovo to bombing exclusively the Serbs. This type of intervention breeds enmity toward the intervening partner. The Serbs in Kosovo have labeled NATO the aggressor and all sides in Bosnia have little respect for the West. Again, military intervention does nothing to treat the values level of the conflict nor does it attempt reconciliation at the level of the entire society. For these and other reasons, there is a growing fear that the only type of military intervention that succeeds is one that is monitoring a preexisting peace agreement that all sides to the conflict have a vested interest in (i.e., an agreement that the sides have crafted themselves) (Economist, 20).

This is not to ignore the fact that sometimes, in extreme situations, there is no other option left. In extremely violent ethnic conflicts, before any conflict resolution can be accomplished, the warring sides must often be forced to stop the violence. As an analogy, no one would be insane enough to see two men trying to stab each other to death and only stand by and try to talk them out of it. First, they must be forcefully separated or there will be no conflict to resolve, since both will already be dead. Unfortunately, the West has been very poor at recognizing which conflicts need such attention. While the Rwanda genocide was most definitely a conflict that needed stopping, the West contented itself to barking about moral outrage. Meanwhile, while the Kosovars led a low-level insurgency to acquire independence (no more brutal than the Kurdish struggle for independence in NATO’s own backyard – Turkey), the West felt a moral duty to stop the “bloodbath." Once again, military intervention is driven as much by self-interest and, as Michael Ignatieff terms it, “narcissism” (Ignatieff, 95), as by a feeling of moral duty to resolve the conflict. Moreover, after the violence is stopped, the West often does little to resolve the underlying conflict, ignoring the values level of the conflict and the need for societal-level reconciliation, contenting itself to policing the cease-fire it so proudly brokered. The West most often resorts to military intervention to avoid dealing with the actual conflict, which would take much more time and effort. By ceasing the fighting, the West can say that it has accomplished something and yet leave the problem untouched, leaving the conflict simmering under the lid, waiting for the Western troops to pack up and go home. Then when the West pulls out and the conflict resumes, Western policymakers can blame the ethic groups in conflict. "We did all we could,” they complain. "They just refuse to mend their ways." This is actually far from the truth. The West’s military intervention doctrine must be rethought.

On the other hand, the promise of some sort of post-conflict military intervention (peacekeeping) is often necessary for negotiations to be successful. If both sides believe that the other side will break the agreement once it gets the chance, negotiations are stuck in a "prisoners’ dilemma": there is more incentive for both sides to break the agreement than there is to respect it. But the promise that military peacekeepers will enforce some form of retribution on the side that breaks the agreement increases the incentive to reach an agreement and to respect it. In fact, the lack of such potential enforcement is the biggest argument against our third type of conflict resolution – institutional mediation.

Institutional Mediation

Transnational organizations, of which the UN is the most eminent, have, in the last 50 years, taken a prominent role in third-party mediation of conflict negotiations. The main advantage to institutional mediation is its impartiality, which also gives its authority more legitimacy than power-based mediation, whose strongest guiding principle is the interests of the mediating state. Many practitioners and scholars, however, argue that such mediation is like a lion without teeth. Because of the lack of military peacekeepers or, as is the case with the UN, their passive mandate, they argue, institutional mediation has no power to back up its settlements. Nevertheless, this should not divert us from exploring the potential benefits of institutional mediation, with the understanding that the military capabilities of such intervention need strengthening.

UN mediation has several other drawbacks. First, because of its size and under-funding, the UN must deal with too many global crises and has too few resources. The UN is almost always stretched to the limit of its financial capabilities, and yet many conflicts and crises throughout the world continue to go unheeded. What is more, because of its size and inclusiveness, and because of the need to reach consensus on any Security Council resolution, the UN is often hampered by disagreements between Security Council
Concerning modern ethnic conflicts specifically, the UN was not created to deal with such internal conflicts. It was established as an organization of states, not ethnic groups and, thus, has difficulty relating to sub-state actors (Carment and James, *UN*, 50). It was established on the premise of territorial integrity and state sovereignty and, hence, does not have the right to meddle in the internal affairs of its member-states. It is true that UN officials are trying to change this situation, establishing a High Commissioner for National Minorities and developing early warning and preventive diplomacy tools. But development in this direction is slow and often outpaced by the rising tempo of ethnic conflicts. Thus, the UN is still relied on mainly for traditional peacekeeping and traditional third-party mediation. The Abkhazian conflict is a perfect example. The UN has played the role of mediator and has even sent observers to track the actions of Russia’s peacekeepers. But the UN’s mediation of the conflict has had little effect, as does its current “observing,” other than giving legitimacy to Russia’s actions as the third-party mediator.

Frustrated with the impotence of the UN, and relying on the logic used to defend power-based mediation (states closer to the conflict feel a more urgent need to resolve the conflict), policymakers have pushed for the UN to delegate authority for hot regional conflicts to regional organizations, such as NATO, the CIS, and the OSCE (Maresca, in *Croc*ker, 264).

*Use in Transcaucasian Conflicts – OSCE in Karabakh*

How much more effective are regional organizations than the UN at meeting the needs of modern ethnic conflict? The Karabakh conflict provides a perfect case study for this question. First, of all regions in the world, Europe has the most developed and strongest regional institutions, with NATO at the forefront, but with organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the OSCE not far behind. Second, by chance and circumstance, the OSCE was able to enter into the role of the prominent third party mediator in the Karabakh conflict early on in the fighting. As a result, the Karabakh conflict has been one of the first, most extensive experiments in institutional mediation in recent history. Thus, it pays to analyze the history of the OSCE and its involvement in the conflict to draw lessons for institutional mediation.

The OSCE was founded in 1972 as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Its aim was "to facilitate East-West dialogue" during the Cold War and to "reduce the danger of interstate warfare through open exchange of military information between states" (Huber, *Ethnic*, 30). As such, it was a very loose organization with very little real power. But with the end of the Cold War, the CSCE began to change. At the 1990 Copenhagen Meeting, its bodies were strengthened and more institutionalized. Managing ethnic conflict was discussed for the first time. A declaration was written that declared that ethnic and minority issues "are of legitimate international concern and consequently do not constitute exclusively an internal affair of the respective state" (as quoted in *Leff*, in Kanet, 216). This declaration was the furthest step any international organization had taken in redefining the international system. While the UN continued to be hindered by its obligation to respect the sovereignty of all states, the CSCE was creating a new understanding of the international community’s responsibilities and rights.

The CSCE began its first experience in ethnic conflict with the breakout of the Bosnian War. It failed miserably. No one on any side of the fighting believed in the credibility of such a "toothless" organization, with no military forces to back up any of its decisions. However, what proved more disheartening, the organization itself was mired in disagreements between its own member states. Since the CSCE had been established as a neutral meeting ground for the East and West, it was extremely inclusive, accepting all member-states from both sides, including all of the new states replacing the USSR. Every decision within the CSCE was taken by consensus. Thus, the smallest state held an all-powerful veto, including Yugoslavia. Consequently, no decision could be made regarding conflicts involving member-states and the CSCE was left to bark impotently. As a result of the Bosnian War, the CSCE lost all credibility in the eyes of the international community (Fortmann, et al, in Carment and James, *Peace*, 138).

However, while most had written off the CSCE, its officials were not disheartened. They silently continued the task of restructuring the organization to meet the needs of the modern world. The CSCE became the OSCE to mark this restructuring. The consensus
requirement was dropped in favor of a "consensus-minus-one" formula. The possibility of forming smaller working groups for specific cases was initiated. Discussion of establishing case-specific peacekeeping forces began. Most significantly, a new experiment in ethnic conflict resolution began – Nagorno-Karabakh.

In truth, the OSCE had been involved in Nagorno-Karabakh since 1992 when it organized the Minsk Conference, an international conference to be held to discuss possible solutions to the Karabakh conflict (Huber, New Role, 27). But the conference never took place. Instead, a makeshift negotiating group was created by high-level US diplomatic efforts (Maresca, in Crocker, 260). The group consisted of diplomats from approximately 11 member-states, including the parties to the conflict, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and was named the "Minsk Group," as it was supposed to be the precursor to official negotiations within the structure of the Minsk Conference.

Negotiations in the Minsk Group were slow. Often, the group had to break down to a smaller core group (usually consisting of the Russian, American, and Turkish representatives along with the representatives from the warring parties) to reach any agreements. In one such core-group meeting, on December 14, 1992, the warring sides reached a cease-fire agreement. They consented to present the cease-fire to the whole Minsk Group the next morning. Unfortunately, the next day, the Azeri side pulled out of the agreement before the core group could present it to the entire assembly (ibid.). For the next few years, the Minsk Group presented many agreements and cease-fires, but none were ultimately agreed to or applied. Russia, the dominant player in the negotiations (excluding Armenia and Azerbaijan), began to voice disappointment with the Minsk Group negotiations and to work outside the Group to find a solution to the conflict. In 1993, in a bid to reassert its preeminent role as mediator, the Minsk Group put forward the "Adjusted Timetable of Urgent Steps to Implement Security Council Resolution 822 and 883," a detailed, comprehensive "package" peace plan and demanded the warring sides accept the plan, which both sides refused to do. As the agreement represented more a settlement forced from the outside than an agreement reached mutually by both sides, neither the Armenians nor the Azeris had any interest in such a plan.

As Russia continued to work counter to the Minsk Group, the newly installed president of Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev, boldly announced a new policy direction for Azerbaijan. The Azeri government was also giving up on the Minsk Group peace mediation and would now look to Russia for successful management of Karabakh negotiations. Unfortunately, Russian mediation did not prove any more successful, and negotiations reached a standstill from which they have never recovered. Attempts have been made to revive the Minsk Group’s preeminent role, but little ground has been made in finding a successful solution to the conflict.

Why was the Minsk Group unsuccessful? In contrast to power-based mediation and military intervention, this does not represent the inability of institutional mediation to resolve ethnic conflicts because of its very nature. Institutions do not base their intervention on their ability to pressure sides toward a political agreement, but on their legitimacy as transnational arbitrators. They have more liberty to focus their attention on more than just the political settlement. They can, if they deem to, focus on the values level of the conflict. They can make attempts to foment reconciliation at the societal level. The failures of the Minsk Group were not characteristic of the failure of institutional mediation as a whole, but of the particular form it took in this instance. Let us review three examples.

First, the Minsk Group’s "Adjusted Timetable" is indicative of one of the group’s greatest weaknesses. The group had a tendency to present "package" deals to the warring parties, with every detail of the settlement already spelled out for the warring sides to either accept or not accept. This type of package deal did nothing to treat the deeper conflict – the values level. As a result, neither side ever wanted much to do with such settlements. As is obvious, this is not a problem of institutional mediation, but specifically of the type of negotiation that the Minsk Group chose to follow, called "comprehensive" negotiations.

Another problem specific to the Minsk Group was its structure. The negotiations included representatives from more than 11 states, each with their own interests and their own agendas. Thus, the group had to reach settlements that met the requirements not only of the warring sides, but also of over nine other states. The US negotiator complained:

In addition, because the Italian chairman had to have translation into Italian, the French and German representatives also insisted on the equal use of their own languages. This made the Minsk Group an unwieldy and absurdly heavy piece of negotiating machinery, including eleven countries, two noncountries, a
chairmanship plus a secretariat, and five interpreting booths. Concessions involving war and peace, life and death, are not made in such a setting (ibid, 262)

As a result of its size, negotiations within the Minsk Group were often too cumbersome and too slow. Thus, while the OSCE was busy trying to set up an efficient ad hoc committee and reach consensus, the Karabakh conflict continued to escalate out of hand (Paye and Remacle, in Coppieters).

Third, the OSCE had no existing conditions for a post-conflict peacekeeping force. Diplomats involved have pointed out that for institutional peacekeeping to exist, such a potential peacekeeping force must exist and that this might have been the greatest drawback in the OSCE negotiations. As the US negotiator phrased it, "Everyone was aware that without a firm commitment from the CSCE to provide a force promptly, no agreement was possible, because the parties knew a cease-fire would not last unless outsiders were present to supervise it" (Maresca, in Crocker, 262).

Conclusions

From this analysis, it becomes clear that while the Karabakh conflict does illustrate the weaknesses of institutional mediation as practiced by the OSCE, it does not signal the ultimate failure of all institutional mediation. The failure of institutional mediation is not because of its nature, but because of its practice. These practices can be remedied. For example, the OSCE can establish a more firm and credible peacekeeping contingent. Also, mediators can shy away from comprehensive package plans. What is most important, mediators are at liberty to pay attention to the four needs of ethnic conflict resolution: they can pay more attention to the symbolic nature of their actions, they can concentrate on the values level of the conflict, they can effect reconciliation at the societal level, and they can include lower levels of leadership in the negotiations. This leads us to question what type of mediation should be practiced by the institutional mediators.

Integrative Approach (Harvard Negotiation Method)

The "integrative approach," (also known as the Harvard Negotiation Method), based on the work of Roger Fisher, is one of the most well-known mediation methods based on the values level of conflict. The essence of this method is the distinction between principles and positions, between values and interests. Most mediators try to find compromises between the interests of each side without realizing the values that are driving these interests, thus leaving room for further conflict. According to the integrative approach, successful mediation should discover the values that are driving these interests. Then, the parties in conflict should be encouraged not to give up their values, but to find mutually acceptable positions to fulfill these values (Miall, 72). The following analogy is often used. There is a father and a son in conflict: the son wants to buy a motorcycle, the father does not want him to. Their interests seem uncompromisable. Yet if we look for their underlying values, we will see this is not so. The son wants to buy a motorcycle because he wants to have the ability to go places without being dependent on his father’s willingness to lend the car. Thus, the underlying value is independence. The father, on the other hand, does not want him to buy a motorcycle because of the dangers motorcycles present. His underlying value is safety. If this is discovered, a mutually acceptable solution can be reached to meet both values. For example, the father could help the son pay to buy a car. Both values are maintained and the conflict is resolved. This, of course, is an ideal example, whose simplicity rarely exists in the real world. Yet the principle still holds and such a method of conflict resolution has been used successfully in individual, inter-group, and interstate conflict.

Application to Modern Ethnic Conflict

As we have no data on the use of this method in the Transcaucasian conflicts, we will apply this method to modern ethnic conflict in general. How does this method work for modern ethnic conflict? Not as promisingly, unfortunately. As Mohamed Rabie has pointed out, seeking deeper values in ethnic conflict does not help because in ethnic conflict (a "value-related" conflict, as opposed to an "interest-related" conflict), even the values are opposed (Rabie, 75). The Abkhaz belief system includes the value that the Abkhaz are a distinct ethnic group, separate from the Georgian "Empire." The Georgian belief system includes the value that the Abkhaz have always been a part of the Georgian kingdoms and governmental units and, thus, are not a distinct group worthy of their own state. These are
the values that drive the conflict. They are diametrically opposed.

There are other problems with this type of mediation. The ethnic conflict scholar Norbert Ropers has pointed out that it tends to benefit the better organized side, the state, and, thus, encourage the status quo (Ropers, 61). Furthermore, this type of mediation deals with a specific situation. Most ethnic conflicts cannot be boiled down to one specific situation. A last argument against integrative negotiation is that it is based on the Western “individual/rationalist” culture, which expects people to make choices according to their rational self-interest. This is often not the case in other cultures and may backfire when applied to those cultures where rational individual self-interest is not stressed (ibid, 62).

Conclusions

Thus, the integrative approach is bound to be unsuccessful in modern ethnic conflicts because it assumes that the values of each side of the conflict are mutually exclusive and, therefore, can both be obtained if a new solution is found. This is not true in modern ethnic conflict. It is the very values of each side that are in conflict. The integrative approach does, however, point out the usefulness of dealing with the value level of the conflict as opposed to the issues level, a point we have already made several times.

Track-Two Diplomacy

Another growing field of conflict resolution is based on what is called “track-two diplomacy.” It is also referred to as “problem-solving” or “workshops.” This method is based on the assumption that it is not only the conflict that needs to be resolved, but the basic relationship between the two parties that needs to be transformed. If this happens, the conflict will resolve itself.

As a conflict between two ethnic groups grows, members of each group more and more avoid direct contact and interaction with members from the other group. As a result, their perceptions of each other, each other’s needs, aims, and motives, are more and more based on rigid stereotypes from past perceptions. False perceptions arise and both sides become deaf to the arguments of the other. Problem-solving workshops are an attempt to correct this deficiency (Vasquez, 49-50). Private conferences are set up at the grassroots level to try to change the relationship between the groups. Members from each side are invited to the conference, where direct, nonbinding communication is facilitated. Because discussion is nonbinding, it allows for more constructive joint thinking. It allows hot issues that are not debatable officially to be discussed and communication along such tender lines to be renewed. These discussions are not meant to be a substitute for political negotiations. They are merely meant to form a new kind of relationship between the parties that will induce the warring sides to find their own mutually agreeable solution to the conflict. The third party is not a participant of the discussion except to facilitate it in constructive directions.

Application to Modern Ethnic Conflict

Such problem-solving workshops have been held in conflicts from Ireland to Israel. The main complaint against them is that while the success they can potentially bring will be more stable, the approach takes too long and too rarely actually results in success. Why? Because it focuses only on the grassroots level and not the elite. Furthermore, discussion between groups does not always result in closer, more positive relationships. The third-party mediator must guide discussion in that direction. Thus, for such a method to bring any success, the third-party mediator must play a more active role, and the discussions should not only focus on the grassroots level, but especially on mid-level leadership. Lastly, such discussions must be more integrated with the actual official negotiation process.

Summary

From our survey of prominent conflict resolution methods and their application to the Transcaucasian conflicts where possible many things have become evident. First, it has become clear that both state power-based mediation and military intervention, because of their very natures, do not hold much promise for ethnic strife. They both rely on the state’s or military’s ability to pressure a political settlement. Yet as we have seen, a political settlement that is not based on the values level of the conflict will be unsuccessful and will only result in temporary peace, if even that. Military intervention is even worse, since it
Institutional mediation, on the other hand, may be flawed, but not in its very nature. Indeed, if we are to mold a new method of conflict resolution for ethnic wars, it will be most promising to use institutional mediation as our starting point. Of course, such mediation as it now stands will have to be reformed. Institutions will have to strengthen their military peacekeeping contingents and doctrine, for example. But most important, institutional mediators will have to learn a method of conflict resolution more appropriate to current circumstances. Comprehensive package plans miss the point, also focusing on political peace and not value-transformation. The integrative approach, while agreeing that the values level of the conflict should take preeminence in mediation, fails to recognize that it is not enough just to discover these values. These values must also be transformed, something that the integrative approach does not attempt to do. Last, while track-two diplomacy does focus on transforming values and redefining group identities, it still has two major faults. First, mediators play too passive a role. Second, these transformation efforts are only aimed at the grassroots level. They must be made an official part of the negotiation process.

Here it helps to review the four conclusions we have stressed about the needs of ethnic conflict resolution. First, mediators must pay close attention to the symbolic nature of all their actions. In general, power-based mediators are currently making more of an effort to do this, but one would be hard pressed to say that military intervention takes this into account. It is unclear as to whether or not institutional mediation pays attention to this need, but it definitely has the potential to. Lastly, both the integrative approach of mediation and track-two diplomacy are based, to a certain extent, on this understanding.

Second, for mediation to be successful, it must focus on the values level of the conflict. Both power-based mediation and military intervention fall woefully short in this regard, mainly because of their very nature. Institutional mediation, while it may lack in this regard also, again holds the potential for successful reform. The integrative approach, while based on the values level, assumes that these values will not be opposing, which, in ethnic conflicts, they unfortunately are. Last, track-two diplomacy is a method of mediation that is based on the correct understanding that it is values, perceptions, and identities that must be changed.

Third, any successful mediation must not only broker a political settlement between political elites, but must begin the process of reconciliation at the societal level. Of course, power-based mediation and military intervention have no intention of doing this. Institutional mediation may sometimes, and, if attention is paid in this area, will be the most successful at it. As for methods, the integrative approach does little at the societal level, while this level is the very focus of track-two diplomacy.

Fourth, negotiations must focus on lower levels of leadership. Indeed they should be the very foundation on which societal-level reconciliation is based. While state-based mediation and military intervention are making more efforts in the present to include lower levels of leadership, they do this not for societal reconciliation, but for political settlements. The same may be said of institutional mediation, but reform is possible in this regard. As to the integrative approach, it is not clear whether or not lower-level leadership is a factor. Last, for track-two diplomacy, leadership in general is completely neglected. While our hypothesis is that mid-level leadership should be the basis of societal-level reconciliation, track-two diplomacy assumes the exact opposite, that societal reconciliation will lead to leadership reconciliation and a resultant political settlement. Unfortunately, as we have said before, this approach has proven too slow to resolve the conflict effectively. Societal reconciliation may take years. By this time, the war could already have wiped out one side of the conflict, thus making reconciliation irrelevant. While we do not neglect the need for societal-level reconciliation, we stress that if the war is to be stopped, this reconciliation must stem from official negotiations and political settlements, not vice versa.

In conclusion, while power-based mediation and military intervention hold no promise, institutional mediation can and should be the base of successful intervention. We must not forget that military intervention will be necessary sometimes, but only in extreme cases. Furthermore, this intervention should never be the base and crux of conflict resolution. As for methodology, the integrative approach, while well intentioned, falls short of the needs of ethnic conflict. Track-two diplomacy, while focusing on the correct aspects of ethnic conflict, is focused at the wrong levels. Thus, a new method, based on the understandings of track-two diplomacy but aimed at the lower official level will be most successful if
practiced by institutional mediation. Let us now explain what this new method should entail.

THE ATMOSPHERE OF RECONCILIATION

We have seen how the main task of conflict resolution is to create for each side, through the settlement, a feeling of security. We have seen how this insecurity arises from the definition of group identities that each side has chosen, what we have termed ethnonationalism. Thus, we have concluded, conflict resolution should focus on transforming group psychology, redefining group identities in ways that do not threaten other groups. This can be done by creating an atmosphere of reconciliation, which includes the following four steps (see diagram 4). First, as we have said, the track-two values level of the conflict must be the focus of the official, issues-level negotiations and mediation. Second, the mediator must introduce reconciliation by focusing on peace, not justice. Third, mediators will aim at transforming national identities by using cultural narratives that already exist on each side. Fourth, as we have already concluded, the mediator will focus the reconciliation attempts at the middle level of leadership. Let us deal with each goal in more depth.

Combining the Official, Issues Level with the Track-Two, Values Level

Norbert Ropers has divided conflict resolution practices into two generally agreed upon tactics. The first, mediation, is meant “to end in a concrete agreement about how to regulate a previously precisely defined contentious issue,” while the second, termed consultation procedures, aims to “improve relations between the representatives of different ethnic groups” (Ropers, II, 8). This is the division between track-one and track-two diplomacy, between official negotiations and problem-solving workshops. It is generally understood that these processes do not, and should not, overlap. They are accomplishing two different things. This understanding, however, should be banished. The two should be integrated into one process. The negotiation process should meet both needs: to end in a concrete agreement on material issues and improve the relations between the groups. As Rabie has stated, “Efforts to resolve the conflict cannot be separated from those meant to establish and foster peace” (Rabie, 17). If negotiations at the issues level are not based on reconciliation at the values level, there will be a permanent need to militarily enforce the political settlement since the settlement is not based on a new, secure relationship based on trust. Yet if resolution is to stem from the societal level of track-two diplomacy, it may take too long and may often not even be successful.

The task of the institutional third-party mediator, then, is to help resolve the conflict over issues by addressing, in official negotiations, the conflict at the values level. The mediator is to transform the values of the opposing sides to become compatible. The third party does this by helping the groups transform their group identities into ones that do not vitally threaten the other group. Ultimately, the groups must change their definitions on their own. The mediator can only create the incentives to do this, to create an atmosphere of reconciliation, to help the sides see the benefit they have in accepting the other, in working with them, and, ultimately, in forgiving them.

Forming the Atmosphere of Peace, not Justice

This goal rests on the assumption that peace is more important than justice. Today there is an ongoing debate as to whether or not this should be the case. Even in the conflicts in Transcaucasia, the debate is shaping the efforts at conflict resolution. For example, after hearing recently a presentation on the need to be reconciled with the Armenian side of the Karabakh conflict, a representative of the Azeri People’s Front explained that the plan sounded good in theory, but could not be accomplished until justice was obtained (Shikhly). Justice, however, has proven to be the obstacle to solving many longstanding, bloody conflicts. As an example, by inditing the Serb leaders in Bosnia and Milosevic in Serbia via the war crimes tribunal, and by blaming and attacking largely the Serb side of both conflicts while holding the other sides largely innocent, the West has ensured that there will always be hostile feelings between the Serbs and the West, which makes the West’s peacekeeping in the regions even more complicated. Thus, our method of mediation must begin with the assumption that peace, not justice, should be the foundation of conflict resolution.

This is not to say, however, that justice cannot be attained to a certain degree. The
Nuremberg Trials, for example, brought a feeling of just recompense to the victims of Nazi hatred and also removed guilt from the German population as a whole and placed it on the individuals most responsible for the sordid atrocities of World War II. In this case, justice was a tool of reconciliation between nations as a whole. But reconciliation should never be held slave to the demands of justice. Some of the deepest and most complicated conflicts have been miraculously resolved by a leader’s ability to abandon justice for the sake of reconciliation – in other words, to forgive.

The US, as a matter of fact, suffered a conflict of its own. While the Civil War did not have ethnicity at its core, bitter feelings had developed between those citizens from the South and those from the North. However, after winning the war and reconquering the South, Abraham Lincoln immediately turned to winning back the hearts of the South. Vast amounts of Union and northern money were poured into rebuilding the infrastructure and economy of the South, which had been destroyed by the war. The South, in essence, was treated like the prodigal son of the Bible. Ever since, the South and North of the United States have been viewed as two inseparable parts of one great nation and most rancor between the two has disappeared.

West Germany after World War II provides another revealing example. After defeating Germany, the US, under the guise of the Marshall Plan, pumped money into rebuilding West Germany and its economy and into integrating that country into the modern Western world. Since this time, Germany has become one of the most important allies and strongholds of the West and the post-industrial world. Its strength and importance are represented by its role in the EU, NATO, the G-7, and other transnational organizations.

In all these cases, while some limited amount of justice has been sought, reconciliation has not been held a slave to justice. Indeed, justice has been used not as a goal in and unto itself, but as a tool for reconciliation, for removing blame from the society and placing it onto to a small group of individuals. Therefore, for mediators to be successful at conflict resolution, they must instill in both sides of the conflict the idea that peace, not justice, must be the foundation of reconciliation.

Some Examples

How can this be accomplished? The dynamics of the relationship between the two groups must be changed at the official level. There are many tactics for doing this. One practitioner at the grassroots level has pointed out that getting the sides to agree on anything, “even if just about the weather,” (Mirimanova, in Shapiro and Shonholtz, 91), gives the sides experience at agreeing and finding mutually acceptable solutions. While this tactic and others that we will discuss further on were used at the grassroots level, we must recognize that mediators must break the misconception that these cannot be used at the official level. They can and must if officials are to arrive at mutual understanding and optimal solutions.

Another approach a practitioner used at the grassroots level in the Transcaucasian conflicts was to begin by having each side express to the other side what they regret most about their own side, what weaknesses they recognize in their own activities and even culture. Many may believe that using such tactics is idealistic and unrealistic. However, in this specific instance, each side was astonished to here the other side admit their weaknesses and an atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect began to develop. Others may believe that neither side would be willing to admit their weaknesses. However, this is also unfounded. For example, during a conference in Abkhazia concerning the decade-old conflict, an Abkhaz mid-level official privately admitted to a foreign conflict resolution practitioner that the greatest Abkhaz weakness was their failure “to look to other cultures for knowledge about conflict resolution” (DiMento et al). Likewise, in an Azeri governmental conference, an Azeri official presented his view on the long-standing Karabakh conflict and complained that his own side, the Azeris, needed to become more familiar with the Armenian grievances, culture, and history and take steps to show the Armenians more understanding and openness (Shikhly).

Using Culture to Transform National Identities

This points to another step to successful conflict resolution: using narratives of reconciliation that already exist in each culture. The mediator has the undesirable task of transforming each group’s national identity. This may seem like an impossible, unrealistic task. It must be admitted that ethnic identities are the most difficult social identity to transform, since ethnic identities are based on (or at least believed to be based on)
inherent, biological, unalterable traits. One may convert to a new religion, but one cannot abandon one’s ethnic identity. However, it must be remembered that the task of the practitioner is not to replace one’s ethnic identity, but to transform its definition. Most individuals do not realize that while their ethnic identity may be a constant, the way they define their ethnic identity is dynamic, constantly changing as a result of the social conditions a group is found in. For example, while the Germans defined themselves as anti-French, anti-British, and ultimately imperialist before World War I, by the second half of the twentieth century, Germans largely defined themselves as one of the strongholds of Western culture and identity. One of its greatest enemies, France, had become one of its greatest allies. The US provides an even starker example. At the writing of the US Constitution, to be American largely meant to be a white landowner from Britain. Two hundred years later, the American identity includes individuals of Scandinavian descent, of Irish, Italian, East European, even Asian and African slave descent. Likewise, throughout most of the twentieth century, a Serb or a Croat owed allegiance first and foremost not to Serbia or Croatia, but to the Yugoslav state founded by Tito. However in a mere decade, this identity crumbled to ashes as Serbs and Croats turned on each other like savage dogs. Some believe this ethnic tension was always there and was only suppressed by Tito’s communist regime, but was never erased. If this is the case, then Tito’s suppression was very successful, as intermarriage between these ethnic groups was significantly high.

What is most fascinating is the effect this war had on the Muslims of Bosnia. Until the 1980s, the Muslims did not have a separate identity. Indeed, they were descended from both Croats and Serbs who had converted to Islam during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Yet faced with the disintegration of the Yugoslav War and the secession of the Slovenes and the Croats, the Muslim government of Bosnia had two choices: remain a member of Yugoslavia and become a part of Serbia’s war machine, or secede and, in this way, de facto declare Bosnian Muslim a separate identity. This road was taken and it has made all the difference.

Thus, if national identities can be transformed for the worse, it stands to reason that they can also be transformed for the better. The way to accomplish this is precisely by basing conflict resolution on the cultures in conflict – to stress the reconciliation patterns within a nationality’s culture as opposed to the vengeance patterns. As Ronald Suny, an Armenian scholar, has pointed out in a quote earlier on in this paper, national identity is a compilation of narratives on national history and culture. These can be narratives of hatred or of forgiveness. Most often, both types of narratives are combined in a comprehensive worldview that is sometimes contradictory. Humans have a unique capacity to live within a worldview that often combines contradictory narratives and yet does not disturb the peace of an individual's understanding of the world around him. For example, at the writing of the US Constitution, two contradictory principles made up the American national identity: first, that all men were created equal; and second, that black slaves were excluded from the first principle.

How does this concern the transformation of ethnonationalism? It demonstrates the point that it is not necessarily obligatory that all negative narratives within a national identity be eradicated, since contradictory narratives always seem to exist within a national identity. What is necessary is to stress the narratives of conflict resolution and reconciliation and to give them preeminence over narratives of hatred and violence. This is not an extremely new or foreign idea even in the Transcaucasian conflicts. For example, recently, in a work on conflict resolution, a Georgian scholar indicated that third-party mediation of the conflict must not only help resolve the conflict, but must also develop the peaceful conflict resolution practices in the society and in the cultures in conflict (Matchavariani, in Shapiro and Shonholz, 104-105). A mediator must study the cultures in conflict and discover narratives of reconciliation and conflict resolution. He must then apply these narratives to the negotiations. How is this done? Let us review a few examples from other conflicts.

**Examples**

In one of the longest standing and historically deepest ethnic conflicts of the world, a Jewish Rabbi, Marc Gopin, recounts, in a narration of his experience at a conflict resolution conference held in Caux, Switzerland between Jews and Muslims:

Caux alerted me to a biblical method of conflict resolution. Exodus 23:5 teaches that it is a *mitsvah* (good religious deed) to help your enemy when he is struggling under his burden. And rabbinic Judaism taught over a period of many centuries that shared work is designed to actually confuse the enemy, wake him up from his safe assumptions that the other person is evil. In creating
that confusion, the mitzvah creates the possibility of change inside someone’s heart, forcing him to re-evaluate his feelings, moving him to repent of his hatred and forgive. I have thought about that text for years now, and since Caux I have thought about the work details, and how the Muslim students and I shared the kitchen duty, and how this did so much to create a bond. The shared work, the leveling of social distinctions, the shared new experience that leaves behind old stereotypes and prejudice as we shared a new task and challenge together, the deflection of conversation away from – temporarily – the hard issues, and towards filling the salt shakers. All of these things helped to transform the relationship of enemies (as quoted in Henderson, 14).

Of course, warring sides cannot be expected to wash dishes together in the middle of negotiations over a war, but the principle is the same. This Jewish rabbi learned reconciliation by a reinforcement of one of his own cultural narratives. The narrative of shared work paved the way to better relations between members of two radically opposed ethnic groups. And it in no way degraded or replaced his national identity. It merely transformed it in a more constructive direction. A similar experience was shared by a Moroccan official who was involved in negotiations over the liberation of Morocco from France. Before the negotiations, Ahmed Guessous, head of Morocco’s Provincial Agricultural Department, was full of hatred toward imperialist French and toward the ethnic Moroccan group that had sided with them. However, at the conference, a friend made the comment, “In my own personal life I know I am no closer to God than I am to the person from whom I feel most divided.

“What was that?” he asked in surprise.
I repeated what I had said.
The young man [Guessous] put down his knife and fork and left the table. Later he told me that the idea went round and round in his head, and every time it came to the front, there was the image of El Glaoui, the feudal chief he hated. “If I am no closer to Allah than I am to El Glaoui, I’m a long way from home,” Guessous admitted to me (ibid, 49).

Once again, an ethnic leader’s national identity was shifted to a more peaceful direction by the reinforcement of a narrative of his ethnic identity, one that happened to be based on his religious tendencies. Reconciliation, however, does not need to be based on religion, although this is often the case. Although Russia, for example, used to have deep tradition of Christian Orthodoxy, the Soviet history largely erased that tradition. The countries of the former Soviet Union, although reawakening their old religious traditions, are doing this more out of a secular attempt to recapture the national profundity of their cultures than out of a revived belief in God. Most Russians for example, remain atheist or agnostic, but most often downright indifferent toward religion, although they may claim Russian Orthodoxy as their tradition. Thus, a practitioner of conflict resolution would despair at reconciliation with Russians if their only fallback was religion. However, this is not the case. In a recent conference on conflict resolution involving Russians and Germans, a different narrative was relied on.

In the Soviet Union, a tradition of “public apologies” had originated with the state and had become an integral part of Soviet culture. Individuals would often offer public apologies for wrongs committed, although sometimes these apologies were forced. More often, though, the state would use this policy as a form of reconciliation. As recently as 1990, the Soviet government apologized to the Polish government for atrocities in Poland committed by Stalin’s government. Relying on this tradition, the mediators of a grassroots conference on conflict resolution between Germans and Russians asked each side of the conference to stand before the other side and explain what made them proud of their nation and what made them ashamed of their nation:

It came as a total surprise to many of the Russians when Germans started to share their hurt feelings about the role of Germans and the German army in World War II. Almost fifty years after the war was over, children and grandchildren of soldiers of the Third Reich stood in front of Russians (very few of them having memories about the war) and spoke about their personal sense of guilt and repentance. The Russian participants responded to these statements with compassion in what became a dramatic process of reconciliation during the training” (Mirimanova, in Shapiro and Shonholtz, 94-95).
Thus, at the grassroots level, ethnic groups in conflict can transform group relations by a reinforcement of narratives within one's national identity that direct this identity onto more peaceful paths. This type of conflict resolution has already been practiced to a certain degree at the grassroots level even in Transcaucasia (see Matchavariani, in Shapiro and Shonholtz, also see DiMento et al). But it must now be practiced at the official level. This may sound like an impossible task, and it may very well be if one other aspect is not included. Not all levels of the society, of course, will be as susceptible to this redefinition of national identity. Not all will as readily accept narratives of reconciliation. The very highest level will, for specific reasons, be the least responsive. This includes the top leaders, such as Shevardnadze, Ardzinba, Aliyev, and Kocharian of Georgia, Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, and Karabakh respectively. A Russian scholar has given three reasons why the highest officials would not respond to a peaceful transformation of identities. First, the conflict is often a tool of these leaders for political hegemony, for example, to annex or maintain a given territory. Second, the conflict may be a vehicle for a power struggle. Third, the conflict may be used by the leader to distract society from domestic woes (Mirmianova, in Shapiro and Shonholtz, 95). However, as we have seen with the Transcaucasian wars, these conflicts are not always an invention of manipulating leaders. But Mirmianova's point can be boiled down to a simpler reason: the highest politicians carry too much political baggage. Ultimately, whether or not the war was initiated by them, the war does begin and end with them. They are the leaders of a given ethnic group. They represent the national identity as a whole. Any action they take will, they fear, be a representation of how well they respect that right and responsibility.

Another reason why the highest level of leadership cannot be relied on solely is the very nature of ethnic conflict. As we have stated earlier, ethnic conflict is marked by its lack of central control. As ethnic conflict arises spontaneously from personal ethnic hatreds, violence is often carried out spontaneously and is far from coordinated. The leader at the negotiating table rarely has the authority to stop all the fighting since it is being carried out, in large part, by autonomous military groups. It helps to remember Goltz's story of "the Mule," a military leader who saw no reason to listen to any orders from above and who would keep on fighting until he deemed it necessary to stop. Thus, for any conflict resolution to be successful, negotiations must include the middle level of leadership within both ethnic groups. However, it must also be recognized that the lowest leaders must not be the focus of conflict resolution, since they are often there to merely "repeat the formal positions of their authorities" (Maressca, in Crocker, 262).

**Examples**

Hence, there are two reasons why the middle level should be the focus. First, because they are the true controllers of the violent conflict. Second, because they will be more flexible in their worldview and a transformation of their ethnic identity. There is much evidence that this is the case in the Transcaucasian conflicts. The middle level officials have repeatedly been the ones voicing a more temperate line, a more willing desire to redefine national identities, to choose peaceful narratives and reconciliation. As recently as January 1999, the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, Zardusht Alizade, in a roundtable on the Karabakh conflict, announced that it "is necessary to carefully study Armenian psychology, culture and history," in an attempt to reconcile the two sides. He went on to name a handful of confidence-building measures that should be taken, including reviving economic ties, allowing visits to graves of relatives, etc. (Shikhly, my translation). While many were not receptive of this plan, this shows the desire of a large group of middle level leaders to begin the process of reconciliation.

Another mid-level official from the Armenian Karabakh side noted, "In the old days...it didn’t matter whether you were an Azeri, an Armenian or a Karabakhi. We all got along" (Rieff, right before Hard Work). Thus, he recognized that these ethnic hatreds, although they may use the historical tensions that reach generations back, are a new phenomenon. Ethnic tension between the two parties had largely disappeared until the outbreak of violence in 1988. Even now, large groups of mid-level leaders from both sides are willing to recreate the harmony that existed between both ethnic groups.

Yet for many conflicts, the hardest part of negotiations is getting the sides to the negotiating table in the first place, not to mention getting those mid-level leaders to be more receptive to reconciliation. Many scholars have pointed to the usefulness of encouraging what are called “confidence-building measures” (see for example Rabie). These include unilateral concessions of one side to show to the other side one’s goodwill intentions. These concessions are usually more symbolic than substantive. For example, one side can pull its army out of an area with low importance to show its willingness to
compromise with the other side. The only difficulty with confidence-building measures, however, is that one side has to first be convinced that it is in its best interest to make such unilateral concessions. Thus, the third party mediator must work on establishing an atmosphere of reconciliation even before each side has been brought to the negotiating table. This also can be a tool to attract those mid-level leaders who will be receptive to reconciliation.

These types of flexible mid-level leaders exist on both sides of the Abkhazian conflict also. An Abkhaz veteran of the war made the observation that those mid-level leaders who would be most open to compromise and reconciliation are those who had experienced the most atrocities in the war. In the words of his interviewer:

The most aggressive and vengeful Abkhazians are those who suffered the least losses in the war, and witnessed few of the horrors of war, if any...[T]heir aggressiveness is a way to compensate for their guilt over not having sacrificed enough in the war. He maintained that those, like himself, who lost as many as ten close family members, and saw battle throughout the war, are too numb to be aggressively hostile to the Georgians (DiMento, et al).

Another mid-level Georgian politician, in an article published in a Georgian newspaper spoke of the same need for reconciliation:

Unfortunately, no one speaks of the fact that we must bring back not the territory of Abkhazia, but its people, who had become strangers to us even before the war...As long as the government is not able to find a common language with its own population because of its own wrong policy, it will never achieve a success...There are a lot of people in Abkhazia who understand that it cannot exist independently and that the only country a part of which it can be is Georgia. But, unfortunately, at the same time they know that Georgia is the country where they hate the Abkhaz. That is why it depends on the attitude which will prevail in Georgia, whether we shall get Abkhazia back. So we should demonstrate to them that we are the only guarantee of their existence. We should confess that starting the military operations against Abkhazia was a great crime, that not only the Abkhaz, but we, too, have committed a crime against humanity" (Zakareishvili).

Many on all sides of both conflicts are ready to make this change. They are ready to redefine their group identities in more peaceful terms. They are ready to rethink their values. But they need to be sought out and encouraged. The purpose of pre-negotiation mediation should be to sound out these leaders and get them to the negotiating table by reinforcing this desire to be reconciled. There are many tactics to do this, such as the few we have mentioned above, including stressing the traditions of reconciliation and conflict resolution within each culture, encouraging sides to admit to each other their own mistakes and weaknesses, encouraging each side to become more familiar with the other side's culture, and other techniques. These kinds of methods have been used to a limited degree at the grassroots level and have been somewhat successful. But they need to be used at the official level. Middle-level leaders, who are the main champion of reconciliation narratives, need to be brought to the negotiating table and mediators need to reinforce these leaders' narratives of reconciliation. Until these steps are taken conflict resolution will continue to crash against the wall of mutual hatred and misconception.

CONCLUSION

Modern ethnic conflict is a growing concern for the world. These conflicts are different than traditional state conflicts in many ways. Any conflict resolution theory for ethnic conflict should take these differences into consideration. Ethnic conflict is not a conflict between two states, between two institutions, governments, or even societies. Modern ethnic conflict is a conflict between neighbors, between cousins, between brothers. What ideology is so strong that it can turn lifetime friends into the fiercest enemies? What turns cousins and brothers against each other? Ethnic conflict rises out of collective fear. This fear may arise for many reasons, whether it be state transition, state weakness, ethnic repression, or economic distress. When this fear is extreme, people turn to small groups they trust for security. There is no group more sure than one based on ethnicity, since it is believed to be based on inherited traits that cannot be changed. If the collective fear is not erased either by a given event or a collective solution, the threat, fear, guilt, or anger that arises from fear is placed on another group. This breeds ethnonationalism and tension between each group. Leaders may take advantage of this fear, or this fear may create the
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Yes, creating an atmosphere of reconciliation at the official
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traditional power-based mediation. But it treats the conflict at its true level, the level of
group psychology. Unless conflict resolution is based on this level, all efforts to achieve
peace will only be temporary and will result in the need for later conflict resolution. Two
well-known scholars of international conflict have noted that managing ethnic conflicts is
"an imperfect process that, no matter how well-conducted [sic], leaves some potential for
violence in nearly all multi-ethnic politics” (Lake and Rothchild, 42). While this may be true,
this should not lead us to despair and obstruct us from finding better solutions. A history of
ethnic tensions in the past may always exist, but these narratives do not have to remain
the preeminent narratives. Peace deals can be based on the emphasis of new narratives.
After a peace plan is obtained, however, the task of reinforcing narratives of reconciliation
must continue. Now that narratives of reconciliation have become the foundation of future
peace, the society as a whole must learn to accept these narratives and give them priority
over all others. This is the task of the mid-level leaders. They are the ones to champion a
new definition of ethnic identity. After obtaining a peace plan, there is only so much an
outsider can do before he gives the torch of peace to the native leaders of tomorrow.

A method geared toward creating an atmosphere of reconciliation will have the most
success at resolving modern ethnic conflicts. Many may view this method as over-
idealistic or even irrelevant. An Abkhaz official who participated in such reconciliation
conferences at the grassroots level complained that such tactics are damaging for three
reasons. First, they lead to a loss of focus on the major points of the conflict. Second, they
do not help to resolve the actual conflict. Rather they distract the participants to other
activities. Third, they take attention away from the central issues of the conflict (DiMento,
et al). These complaints, however, are typical of leaders who refuse to change their
worldview and values. They have adopted the negative aspect of nationalism into their
worldview as a constant – a principle etched in stone that cannot be changed. For this
Abkhaz, the Georgians were the enemy and nothing that happened would ever change
that. Such reconciliation tactics are a frustration to him because they present proofs
against his worldview and threaten to transform his values. They thus present a threat to
his identity. The purpose of pre-negotiations is to "weed out" these type of mid-level
leaders by supporting more flexible leaders and getting them to the negotiating table.
These leaders will then be able to take these reconciliation narratives to their
"constituencies" and begin the process of reconciliation at the grassroots level.

Others may argue that such methods of conflict resolution are too slow and too rarely
successful. But it must be understood that most who argue this are starting from the
assumption that the main goal of conflict resolution is to cease the fighting. If this were the
case, then we could call both Bosnia and Kosovo a success. But do we want a success
that requires our permanent patrolling? Should we seek a peace that demands our eternal
deployment to assure no one can demonstrate that the conflict still exists and has only
been repressed by foreign occupation? How would our actions, then, be different from the
Serbs, who initially invaded Croatia and Bosnia simply to protect their brother Serbs from
ethnic discrimination? The truth of the matter is that although military intervention may be
necessary in extreme situations, too often the West uses it as a way to avoid dealing with
the conflict. Too often the West forcefully stops the bloodshed, then occupies the country
in conflict to permanently patrol a peace that has never been achieved. Yes, the bloodshed
must be stopped. But the West must rethink the conditions for military intervention.
Furthermore, the West must realize that such military intervention should never be the end
of conflict resolution. It should only be the beginning.

Yes, creating an atmosphere of reconciliation at the official level might take longer than
reasons. First, they lead to a loss of focus on the major points of the conflict. Second, they
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