

**Reflections on Negotiation and Mediation:
The Frozen Conflicts and European Security**

Speaking Notes

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I am delighted to have the opportunity to visit Hokkaido University, see many old friends and colleagues, meet new ones, and share observations on some of my experiences in working with several of the conflicts that sprang up around the periphery of the USSR as the Soviet Union collapsed.

Having worked in one way or another at various times and places in various capacities with participants from almost all of these conflicts, my experiences suggest to me that resolving these conflicts requires attention to: (1) regional and great power differences and conflicts of interests; (2) specific local factors unique to each of the conflicts, in addition to broad similarities springing from their common Soviet heritage; and (3) the personalities of key figures involved in the conflict settlement processes.

The historical development of these conflicts depended at various times on both the correlation of external power interests at the particular moment in history, and the dynamics of the individual internal political, economic, and social conditions in each country and/or region.

First, take Nagorno-Karabakh – this is the most clearly ethnic-national of all the conflicts, and the only conflict that involved hostilities between two recognized independent states. More than any of the other conflicts, this one is driven from the bottom up by popular fears and hostilities.

From the beginning to the present day, this conflict has seen the best US-Russian cooperation. The Minsk Group still works fairly well (at least until very recently) – perhaps because US, Russia, and France work as true equals in this format

The US and Russia in the early 1990s both had an interest in avoiding Iranian involvement in mediating in the Caucasus, and therefore agreed from the very start on the CSCE/OSCE as the forum for conflict resolution efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The South Ossetian and Abkhaz conflicts in Georgia also have considerable ethnic elements:

--it is a great irony after 19th century history in the region that the Abkhaz now find Russia their protector against Georgian monoethnic nationalism;
--the South Ossetian motivation is slightly different; the Abkhaz seek preservation as an endangered nationality, while many Ossetians wish to join with their ethnic kin in Russia.
--However, conflicts in Georgia owe a great deal to the influence and personality of leaders, in particular President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, but also the warlords of the early '90s, and Presidents Shevardnadze and Saakashvili.

In a meeting with President Gamsakhurdia in May, 1991, he spoke to me of the need to eliminate enemies as he discussed the conflict with South Ossetia; how much of the fighting in Georgia in this and other cases might have been avoided with different personalities in charge on all sides?

I should note there was strong western cooperation with and support for Russian peacekeeping interventions in Georgia in the early 1990s:

--western/US forces were tied up elsewhere (e.g., Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia)
--the US was worried about proliferation dangers (e.g., old Soviet facilities in Abkhazia).

US support for Georgian independence (including personal support for Shevardnadze and Russian attacks on him) gradually made US-Russian cooperation on Georgian conflicts more difficult.

The Moldova-Transdnistria conflict is unusual in that ethnicity played and still plays only a minor role – language is an excuse for elites to mobilize supporters on both sides, but not the cause of the conflict.

The historical background of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was important in the development of the Moldovan national movement in the 1980s, but most Moldovans never wished to join Romania – they preferred independence.

It is also important that the initial Transdnistrian ambition was to remain with the Soviet Union; Moscow's involvement in the dispute was initially to use the separatists to press Chisinau to support Gorbachev's union treaty.

Over time, each of these conflicts experienced several common developments:
--Russia-US cooperation diminishes as strains develop in the relationship over other issues;

--Europe (in particular institutionally as the EU) becomes more interested and involved in conflict resolution mechanisms and efforts – a development not always welcomed by Russia;
--As situations in the conflict regions stabilize, the entrenched interests of elites, rather than the original causes of the conflicts, become the greatest obstacles to resolution.

Some of my own personal experiences illustrate these trends and developments:

For example, on a 1993 CSCE visit to the Caucasus I had great relations with my Russian colleague and a friendly, useful encounter with Russian negotiator Kazimirov (who was very blunt about his pursuit of Russian interests).

In 2000 I worked closely with former Prime Minister Primakov, the Russian Ministry of Defense, and the Russian MFA to craft an agreement on the use of OSCE assistance to support the withdrawal and destruction of Russian arms and ammunition from Moldova:

--I enjoyed great informal access to MoD and OGRF;
--this access gradually disappeared after the Kozak Memorandum failure.

In 1999 the Finnish EU Presidency tried to interest the EU in Moldova-Transdnistria after a troika visit at the Political Director level; unfortunately there was absolutely no interest in a follow-up at the 1999 Helsinki summit.

By 2005, after the 2004 round of expansion and on the eve of Romanian and Bulgarian accession, the Black Sea became of great interest to the EU – witness the appointment of special representatives for Moldova and the Caucasus.

For me the most important development in each of these conflicts is the growth of entrenched interests and the accommodation of elites on all sides to the protracted existence of unrecognized separatist entities:

--e.g. South Ossetia becomes a giant duty free for both Georgia and Russia;
--Transdnistria facilitates smuggling and tax evasion for Moldovan, Ukrainian, Russian, and Romanian businesses by allowing undocumented diversion of goods in transit.

The bulk of the populations of many of these states and entities deal with the situation by migration, seeking survival through foreign employment and remittances; this solidifies even more the support of the elites for the status quo.

The vicious cycle of supporting the state budget through emigration and remittances also constitutes one of the most graphic real life examples of the maxim that politicians in pluralist environments (even authoritarian and/or semi-open) tend to opt for their short-term interest and protection of their current positions rather than be guided by the long-term interests of their polities.

All these factors lead to the present day situations in these conflict areas:

- separatist entities are content to protect the status quo, but will accept more if they can get it (viz. South Ossetia and Abkhazia);
- recognized states – at least Georgia and Moldova – seek victory on their terms imposed by an external power, rather than by negotiations on real power sharing with their separatist rivals;
- Armenia and Azerbaijan are prisoners of the popular myths they have created about the inadmissibility of compromise, as well as by elite accommodation with the unresolved conflict;
- the involvement of external powers complicates the process of reaching settlements, particularly in a time of exacerbated East-West tensions;
- in fact, external involvement may prevent a settlement (for example, US/EU opposition to the Kozak Memorandum, or Russia's support for separatist entities in Georgia), but external dictates alone are not sufficient to produce peaceful settlements.

PROSPECTS: What is needed is pressure from large external powers – Russia, EU, US – on all parties to each conflict to negotiate seriously; without such engagement and commitment those supporting the status quo will win.

In an atmosphere of poor relations between Russia and the EU and US, we are unlikely to see such external cooperation in influencing the internal dynamics of these conflicts so that real negotiations can take place.

Resolution of at least some of these conflicts ought to be a win-win scenario for Russia, the EU, and the US; given the current international environment the best we can probably hope for is to manage the issues successfully for the time being without making them any worse.

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