

Playing Cat-and-Mouse: Conflict and Third-Party Mediation in Post-Soviet Space

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While the increase in the number of violent conflict at the global scale might be explained by the end of the bipolar power politics, the emergence of numerous ethnic/civil wars in the post-Soviet space is almost univocally explained by the dysfunctions or the collapse of the Soviet system. Despite the deceptive simplicity of post-Soviet conflicts in terms of similarity of their causes, the globalized modern world complicated them by multiplying the number of [third] parties. Increasing number of states and international organisations (UN, OSCE, etc) defined themselves as important actors or third parties of those conflicts and included the conflicts which would were previously treated as the inner territorial problems of the Soviet Union into the scope of their interest and action.

The large amount of theoretical approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding (sometimes defining themselves as distinct academic disciplines), treat the role of third parties as important factors, escalating or, in contrary, settling the conflicts.¹ The theory usually ascribes them with different sets of rights and obligations according to the partial or impartial position that the parties officially take. Third-party involvement is ranged from impartial and pacific mediation (non-coercive diplomacy) to the imposition of agreements to the conflicting parties using political leverages or even force.

Involvement of third-parties into conflicts both inter-state or intrastate (civil), which *mediates* between the conflicting parties in order to bring about a peaceful resolution, is highly encouraged by the theories as well as international community. Therefore, the issues of (*im*) *partiality* or the *degree of involvement of third parties in conflicts* is central in studies of any conflict resolution process. Nevertheless, the third-party involvement has brought to a varied degree of success in different conflicts. The present article explores the factors standing behind the success or failure of third-party mediations on the examples of two conflicts – over Nagorno-Karabagh region in Southern Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan and civil war in Tajikistan. The research looks predominantly at the position of the third parties to identify the degree of their involvement and success in peace processes.

The present analysis consists of the following parts: introduction provides a brief theoretical overview of third party mediation issue. The remaining parts of the paper consider each case of conflict separately and analyse issues related to mediation, with special attention to the position and degree of involvement of the third-parties in the conflicts. The concluding part summarises the research findings and point to the issues for the future research in this field.

¹ For an overview, see: Ronald Fisher, “Methods of Third-Party Intervention”, Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, 2001

Third-Party Mediation: A Theoretical Account

Conflict rarely involves only two sides. Often, conflicting parties receive direct or indirect support from third parties, which, in turn, have their direct or indirect interest in the conflict. Moreover, the majority, if not all conflicts, is settled or can be settled only through the involvement of third parties. This is particularly true in case of interstate conflicts but can be useful in the case of civil ones. Therefore, the study of the third-party involvement in the conflict management is both of theoretical and practical importance. This part of the research provides a theoretical account of the third-party mediation in the peace processes. It will focus specifically on the role of third-party mediation and position/identity of mediators, their degree of power and involvement, their motives and behaviour and, crucial for this research, their effectiveness.

It should be noted in the very beginning that the literature on the third-party mediation is still scarce. Many scholars of conflict studies agree that there is no single and unified theory of third-party mediation. Therefore, this part draws on only some works on this field, especially those, which concentrate on the issues central to this research, i.e. identity and power of third-party mediators, the presence of power and bias, and their effectiveness.

Third-party involvement in the conflict management has a long history. It also has different forms, dimensions and purposes. Probably, the main necessity in third party mediation is connected with the low level of trust between conflicting parties as well as the positions and strategies they chose and which have already brought to the state of conflict. Scholars, advocating the necessity of third-party mediation often point out the power-balancing role of third parties, which should facilitate the negotiation process.² Conflicting attitudes, distrust, and power imbalance make the third-party involvement relevant and necessary.

There are a number of definitions of mediation process. However, they may be integrated if the similarity of some of their common assumptions is considered. Mediation is a process of intervention by a third party or intermediary to facilitate or enforce a mutually acceptable settlement between the two conflicting parties³. It is assumed that third-party involvement or intervention is a form of conflict management with the purpose of finding, proposing, negotiating or enforcing a settlement to a conflict. Mediation, thus, is regarded as a strategy to *facilitate* or *impose* a settlement even when the parties to a conflict are unable to do so on their own. However, the second strategy attracts a lot of criticism as any third-party mediation without the willingness of conflicting parties is doomed to failure or may cause prolongation of the conflict⁴.

Third-party mediators may work on different levels. This research pays specific attention to the official third-party involvement, which usually occurs at governmental, regional, and international levels. Mediators may be representatives of

² see, for example, S. Touval and W. Zartman, *International Mediation in Theory and Practice*, Westview, Boulder, USA, 1985

³ The definition is based on the works of many scholars, including Zartman and Ron Fisher

⁴ Patrick M. Regan, "Third Party Intervention and the Duration of Intrastate Conflict", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 46, No. 1, February 2002

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states perceived as impartial by both conflicting parties or representatives of international organisations which include impartial conflict mediation into their organisational profile (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), European Union (EU), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the United Nations (UN), and others). Mediators on this level often use the Track I diplomacy as the dominant strategy⁵ in their activities. Taxonomy of the methods of third-party involvement is useful at this stage.

Third-party involvement may take different forms - from facilitation to military/power intervention. Fisher and Keashly developed a typology of third-party interventions, which is composed of the following six processes: conciliation, consultation, pure mediation, power mediation, arbitration and peacekeeping. Of these six processes, the following three are more relevant and have been used in the case studies analysed in this paper.

- *Consultation* - third-party facilitates problem-solving through communication and analysis of the conflict by taking a role of an adviser;
- *Pure Mediation* - third-party facilitates a settlement through reasoning, persuasion and suggestion of alternative ways;
- *Power Mediation* – while being similar to the case of pure mediation, it also involves the use of leverages or coercion by third-party mediator. This includes both promise of inducement and threat of punishment⁶

Every conflict is inherently different, arises in a specific setting and in a particular time, and becomes a particular mixture of objective and subjective elements. Shortly put, every conflict has more unique elements than general ones. Therefore, the application of a certain method of intervention should depend on many factors, and first of all, the context and the stage of conflict. In his influential work Zartman develops the concept of a ‘ripe moment’ which implies that third parties can intervene only at a certain point of the conflict. This point, Zartman argues, usually occurs when there is a “mutually hurting stalemate”, i.e. when parties to a conflict realise that there are no resources left to continue the military actions and to win, when continuing violence will bring more damage to all sides, and first of all, to themselves. This is the very moment when the third-party mediators should come into play and employ their strategies to bring the conflicting parties to negotiation table and to reach or to enforce an acceptable settlement.

What is not less important in Zartman’s concept of the "hurting stalemate" is the notion that third-party mediators can also induce the “ripe moment” or create it. They can imply a variety of strategies to achieve this in order to reduce the likelihood of intransigence by a conflicting party or even prevent a stronger party from imposing its unilateral solution. The most important point is that any attempt of mediation

⁵ on multitrack diplomacy, see: Diamond, L. and J. MacDonald. 1996. *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace*, Third Edition. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

⁶ For a full account of this taxonomy, see: R. Fisher and L. Keashly, "Third party consultation as a method of intergroup and international conflict resolution", in, R. J. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution*, New York, Springer-Verlag, . 1990, pp. 211-238
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before this objective or constructed ‘ripe moment’ is not likely to bring to satisfactory results⁷.

Holding the same logic, Dixon and others employ phase-based approaches to show that the effectiveness of third party mediation may vary at different stages of conflict.⁸ In other word, any intervention by third-party mediators should be measured and matched to the particular stage of the conflict. Using Zartman’s concepts of “ripeness” and “hurting stalemate,”⁹ they make obvious that interventions are likely to take place when conflicting parties have already experienced violence, often in large scale. It also becomes evident that it is useless to wait that a single strategy may have the same effect or may bring to the same results if applied during different stages of the conflict or if is the only strategy used during the whole process of the conflict.

States have different motives to be involved in conflict management process between other states. Their motives may include humanitarian (moral) concerns, interests in regional stability, or even result from their ambitions to [re]establish geopolitical hegemony. States may be also concerned about their own security – economic, political, military, or humanitarian - challenged by a conflict in a neighbouring country. Therefore, while regional and international organisations mediate according to their institutional role (e.g. OSCE and UN), states, acting as a third-party mediator, usually expect and receive benefits from their involvement.¹⁰

The position of a third-party mediator vis-à-vis the conflicting parties is also of crucial importance. More and more the third-party mediators act as if pursuing some interests in the conflict or in its outcome. Zartman and Touval argue that the interests and motives of mediators can be described in the context of power politics: mediators are rarely “truly indifferent to the issues and terms being negotiated.”¹¹ Mediators may choose a certain strategy, depending on the degree of influence they enjoy over conflicting parties or one of them: if their influence is low they usually opt for consultation and pure mediation, whereas they tend to choose the power mediation if their influence is high.

Although third-party mediation is applied in the majority of conflicts, the degree of their success varies tremendously. Fisher offers a number of indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of third-party mediation. These indicators are, *inter alia*, the rate of settlement (peace or no peace), satisfaction of parties, change in relationship between the conflicting parties, and, compliance with agreement¹². The degree of success is correlated with the form of third-party mediation and strategies that mediators use. Consultation, one of the three forms of third-party mediation mentioned above, is not expected to produce any agreement. However, the other two

⁷ David Carment & Dane Rowlands, “Evolutionary Models and Third Party Intervention in Ethnic Conflict”, The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, 1999

⁸ W.J. Dixon, "Third Party Techniques for Preventing Conflict escalation and Promoting Peaceful Settlement," *International Organization* 50:4, 1996

⁹ W. Zartman, "Alternative Attempts at Crisis Management: Concepts and Process," in G. Winham, *New Issues in International Crisis Management*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1989

¹⁰ R. Fisher, “Methods of Third-Party Intervention”, *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, 2001, p. 10

¹¹ S. Touval and W. Zartman, *International Mediation in Theory and Practice*, Westview, Boulder, USA, 1985, as quoted in Fisher, 2001, p. 11

¹² Fisher, 2001, p. 13

methods – pure mediation and power mediation - *should* produce agreement and must be evaluated in accordance to it. Furthermore, the degree of success may depend on a variety of other factors that are not related to third-party mediators or their strategies.

This brief theoretical overview has shown that third-party mediation and mediators differ on the basis of many aspects, such as their role/identity, level, partial or impartial position, strategies and the degree of success. The following chapters will apply these issues in specific case studies and identify the degree of effectiveness of third-party mediation.

The Peace Process and Third-Party Mediation in Tajikistan

Tajikistan, a former Soviet republic is located in the south-eastern corner of Central Asia, and borders with Afghanistan, China and Uzbekistan. It became independent from the Soviet Union in September 1991. Soon after independence, the country held its first free presidential elections and Rahmon Nabiev, a former communist party leader, became its first president. However, the results were contested and opposition groups started to organise demonstrations, demanding president's resignation and calling for new elections. Meetings had been organised in support of Nabiev soon after. Tensions between the groups increased substantially by May 1992 when a trigger took place – a group opened fire on the other¹³. The full scale conflict broke out in June 1992 between the supporters of opposition, which was composed of two political parties, Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and Democratic Party, and number of other supportive small parties, and pro-government forces armed by the government and consisting mainly from small groups of voluntary fighters and often former soldiers and retired officers of the Soviet army.¹⁴

In June 1997, after five years, both conflicting parties signed a peace agreement in Moscow, marking the end of fighting, and established a power-sharing government including representatives of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The process of mediation, bringing to the peace agreement, was long, complex, and often marked by violations and renewed efforts to rehabilitate the conflict. Russia, Iran and neighbouring countries along with the United Nations and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe played key role in the mediation process and in peacebuilding process.

The basic issue, standing behind the conflict, was the discontent of members of southern and eastern regional elites about their limited access to higher governmental positions, occupied by the elite from northern regions throughout the Soviet rule. While it is widespread to portray the conflict as between the Islamist and pro-communist forces, the conflict was rather a fight for the acquisition of and control over the central government by rival political groups based on regional allegiance. The mix of national-democratic and Islamist parties enjoyed the support of Iran and Afghanistan, while the government received substantial support from Russia, especially through the Russian army division dislocated in the country. Russia openly supported one party - pro-government forces - in this conflict. Nevertheless, despite the sources of their support, the opposition groups looked only at the mediating efforts

¹³ it is still not clear whether the opposition or pro-government side opened fire first

¹⁴ Tajikistan did not have regular army until 1994

of Russia as at the most important one. (Russia was disposed to act in collaboration with Iran, despite the fact that they support different conflicting parties).

The conflict was intensive in the first six months, from June to December 1992, resulting in an estimated 50 thousand deaths. By the early 1993, pro-government forces achieved a preliminary victory, after driving the opposition forces to Afghanistan and mountainous eastern region. However, the conflict was escalating from time to time, taking more lives and threatening to become a regional problem.

First attempts to mediate between conflicting parties started in 1994 when and the first meeting between them took place in April 1994. Russia succeeded in bringing both parties together at the 'round' table in Moscow. This was the period of stalemate – when both parties realised that more fighting would bring more damage to them. This was also much to the fact that the stalemate was hurting also Russia, a third-party mediator with its clear interest in the conflict and its solution. In an analysis of the Russian foreign policy regarding Tajikistan, Jonson argues that Russia had two contradictory objectives – to secure its presence and influence in the region and to end the civil conflict in Tajikistan. On the one hand, the conflict enabled Russia to increase its military presence in Tajikistan, and thus in Central Asian region. On the other hand, Russia offered unconditional support to the pro-government forces, thus helping the current regime to come into power. This contradiction, Jonson argues, had deepened the conflict and had repercussions for Russian interests and position in Central Asia¹⁵.

The first attempt brought initial result – a ceasefire agreement was signed between the parties to the conflict. It should be mentioned that the agreement was signed with the direct support from Russia and Iran as third-party mediators. Both conflicting parties agreed to enforce this ceasefire and seek for political solutions to conflict. However, the agreement was soon breached as the government started to undermine the opposition side and to strengthen its position. In particular, contrary to the agreement between them in April 1994, the government started a campaign for referendum and presidential elections.

The conflict intensified again in early 1995. At large extent it was due to the position of Russia. With its support of only one side and promotion of Rahmonov's candidacy at the presidential election and neglecting and even excluding the candidates from the opposition from the process, Russia became rather a spoiler than the mediator of the peace process¹⁶. The government started to push for a full military victory and thus undermined achievements of the first two mediation attempts.

By the end of 1995, once again the conflict in Tajikistan ran into a stalemate: opposition groups made advancements in their military operations and intensively attacked the border, which is patrolled by Russian troops. In December 1995 both parties met to negotiate again in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan. The choice of place marked a new shift in negotiation process: on the one hand, Russian policy makers involved Central Asian countries in the process; on the other hand, Iran played an active role in persuading the opposition to come to negotiation. It was also meant to

¹⁵ Lena Jonson, "A dilemma to Russian policy?", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2(8) 1997

¹⁶ this view is supported by many experts, including Lena Jonson

show to the opposition that Russia is not the only mediator in the negotiations and thus to underplay its support to the government¹⁷.

This round of negotiations marked a new turn in the whole peace process. The conflicting parties started negotiations about political issues – the main issues behind the conflict. Pressure on the Tajik government increased to include the opposition groups in the government structures. It was the moment when not only the conflicting parties but also the third-party mediators, including Russia recognised that the military solution to this conflict was not in prospect.

Changing positions and strategies of Russia as the main third-party mediator were largely determined by the developments within the Russian foreign policy during the whole lifetime of the Tajik conflict. These strategies were a product of Russia's revised geopolitical strategy in the region, including renewed close ties with Iran and fear of advancement of Taliban in Afghanistan. The two latter points help understand the intensity of Russian involvement in the peace process since 1996¹⁸.

Since 1996, the progress in the peace process was visible; by the end of 1996, the parties agreed on the creation of the Commission for National Reconciliation, which should oversee the inclusion of the opposition members in the government. In January 1997, the parties started to negotiate over the distribution of seats and power of the Commission. However, the process of negotiations was not smooth and ran into stalemate on several occasions and every time the parties continued their negotiations under the pressure from Russia and, occasionally, from Iran¹⁹.

Numerous mediation attempts led to the signing of the General Agreement between the Tajikistan government and United Tajik Opposition in Moscow in June 1997²⁰. Several geopolitical developments in the region helped to foster the process. The following three developments should be seen as crucial:

- ♦ the advancement of Taliban in Afghanistan posed a security threat to the whole region and Russia;
- ♦ neighbouring countries, especially Uzbekistan, became more intensively involved in the peace process, threatening Russia's influence and position;
- ♦ Russia improved its relations with Iran, which helped them – the two most important mediators - to find a solution that is common and unacceptable [or acceptable?] to them and to both conflicting parties.

As this brief analysis has shown Russia's role as the key third-party mediator in the civil conflict in Tajikistan has been effective. The very fact that the two conflicting parties came to negotiate and finally signed the peace agreement comes to prove this. However, Russia has not been the only mediator in the peace process. Iran, as

¹⁷ Kamoluddin Abdulloev and Catherine Barnes, *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, ACCORD series, March 2001, London

¹⁸ for more information on this issue, see: Jonson, L.& Roy, O. "Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes, Developments and Prospects for Peace", Eisenhower Institute's Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Washington, 1997

¹⁹ Lena Jonson, p. 4

²⁰ for a comprehensive overview, see: Kamoluddin Abdulloev and Catherine Barnes, *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, ACCORD series, March 2001, London

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mentioned, has played a key role along with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan – neighbours of Tajikistan. The United Nations and OSCE also played an important role in the process but their involvement was limited to the principles of consultation. In contrary, Russia's mediation efforts can be viewed as based on the mixture of principles of pure mediation and power mediation²¹.

Russia's influence over one side of the conflicting party – pro-government forces – had been a crucial element in the dynamics of the mediation process. It helps to explain both the positive outcomes of the process and the intensification of the conflict during the periods between the negotiations. Some observers argue that Russia's military assistance was decisive in bringing Rahmonov and his government to power²². A number of experts hold Russia accountable for numerous stalemates in the conflict since 1994, when the first negotiation took place²³.

As it has been noted earlier, the intervention of Russia in the conflict and its role of mediator have been determined and influenced by a number of factors, stemming mainly from developments in Russian foreign policy, its geopolitical strategies, as well as geopolitical developments in the region itself. Jonson argues that changes in Russia's position and strategies throughout the process of mediation reflected a larger process 'whereby a former great power adapts to a new modified status and role'²⁴.

Mediation started when the conflicting parties ran into a stalemate and recognised that more violence would be more dangerous. However, they ran into more stalemates as the process advanced, in large part due to biased position and assistance of Russia as the key mediator. Confident in Russia's support, Rahmonov's government sought a military victory soon after the first round of mediation. Opposition groups, in turn, targeted Russian military installations and troops based on Tajikistan as they lost confidence in Russia's interest and its strategies to bring peace. It should be noted here that Russia's strategies had changed over time as the mediation process developed. It had not always pursued power mediation. At times it offered only military assistance to the government, but it also applied political and economic pressure on the government when it acted against the agreements and undermined Russia's position²⁵.

It can also be argued that the mediation brought positive result because it directly addressed the fundamental issue behind the conflict – control over the central government. This is a compatible goal and parties to the conflict recognised that through power-sharing principles they can bring the conflict to an end. Thus, the nature of the fundamental issues behind the conflict also helps to explain the outcome of mediation.

²¹ on the distinction see: R. Fisher and L. Keashly, "Third party consultation as a method of intergroup and international conflict resolution", in, R. J. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution*, New York, Springer-Verlag, . 1990, pp. 211-238

²² Lena Jonson, p. 4; Karim Khodjibaev , "Russian Troops and the Conflict in Tajikistan", Eisenhower Institute's Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Washington, 1997

²³ these include: Lena Jonson, Olivier Roy, Karim Khodjibaev, among others

²⁴ Lena Jonson, p. 7

²⁵ In 1995 when the situation ran into stalemate and the Tajik government advanced with elections leaving opposition groups out of the process, Russia applied economic and political pressure, by cutting loans and pressing the Tajik president in CIS summits

Thus, as this analysis has shown that, firstly, a third-party mediator with partial position and genuine interest in peace and stability in the conflict, country or region may be effective in resolving conflicts. Secondly, the willingness of conflicting parties is key to any mediation process: both conflicting parties had sought negotiations already in 1993, less than a year after it started²⁶. Thirdly, developments in the foreign policy of the third-party mediator country and the changing geopolitical situation in the region are also important factors influencing the outcome of the conflict mediation: internationalisation of the mediation process, with involvement of Iran, neighbouring countries and international organisations also helped to speed-up the process.

In case of Tajik conflict, the partial third-party negotiator succeeded in bringing the conflict to its end. Fundamental issues have been addressed in the mediation process, thus avoiding a protracted civil conflict. However, this analysis does not claim to be comprehensive. Factors of success of third-party mediator are diverse. More research and perspectives are required to understand the whole mediation process and its effectiveness.

Peacemakers or Spoilers? Third Party Mediation in Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabagh

"To my great regret, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan long ceased to be a war between two rivals ... This is a war in which the combating peoples have become the pawns of the mightier powers."

Former Azerbaijani President Abulfaz Elchibey²⁷

The Caucasus with seven federal republics of Russian Federation in its northern part and three independent states in its south became the epicenter of post-soviet ethnic tensions. Today in Caucasus there are four ongoing ethnic conflicts, namely Nagorno-Karabagh conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijan, Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts with[in] Georgia, and Chechnya's conflict with[in] Russian Federation. Caucasus with its geopolitical, historical and ethnic complexity became a major challenge to international organizations such as UN and OSCE, claiming for the central role in international conflict management and peacemaking activities. Unfortunately, all their efforts, undertaken during the last thirteen years, experienced a complete fiasco.

The beginning of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict should be dated back to 1920s when the territorial structure of the Soviet Union was under construction. While the preliminary solutions for the status of Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party Central Committee was

²⁶ Barnes and Abdulloev, p. 11

²⁷ Dadash Alishov. The Role of Caspian Oil in Maintaining Stability in the Caucasus Region: In the Case of

Mountainous Karabakh Conflict. Available on June 28, 2003

<http://www.azeri.com/azeri/dadash2.htm>

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supposed to be favoring Armenia, the final decision of July 5, 1921 was to attach Karabagh to Azerbaijan with “granting it broad regional autonomy”.²⁸

While during the Soviet rule ethnic grievances remained silent (or absent) and relatively peaceful relationship between Armenians and Azerbaijanis was established, in the mid 80s, due to the weakening of the political integrity of the Soviet Union, the ethnic tensions re-occurred and took the form of a violent conflict. The decision of February 20, 1988 of the Supreme Soviet of NKAO to appeal to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Azerbaijan, and Armenia to authorize the session of NKAO from Azerbaijan and its attachment to Armenia became the main trigger of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.

Already by 1990, the conflict developed at a full scale and serious fighting erupted in 1991. During the following years, until the ceasefire of 1994, violence was unleashed, with each side claiming that the other initiated the hostilities. Hundreds of thousands of refugees were created since both Armenians and Azeris fled to avoid the fighting or were expelled or forced out. The conflict left more than 15,000 dead. Armenian forces not only succeeded in gaining control over Nagorno-Karabagh but also occupied almost 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory.

Mediation and Peacemaking by International Organizations

Three main international organizations have been involved in mediating and peacemaking processes over Nagorno-Karabagh - United Nation Security Council, CSCE/OCSE, and CIS. While all these organizations developed their own strategies of peacemaking, adopted different roles and positions in mediating, and elaborated and proposed different solutions, their role in peacemaking remained highly influenced by regional and international powers capturing the direction of political developments in Caucasus and pursuing own interests in this region.

The involvement of the UN in peacemaking efforts meant that the UN might become a space free of influence of regional actors and their interests. It also meant that the UN was able to provide conflicting parties with impartial *and* professional support in developing settlement strategies acceptable for all conflicting parties. Nevertheless, the UN appeared to be less interested in the resolution of the conflict than was expected and limited its role in conflict resolution to political statements of the Security Council. The general model of UN peacebuilding, incorporating military measures to ensure the demobilization and disarmament of conflicting parties, constitutional measures to settle the conflict, human rights measures, return of refugees and restoration of the war-damaged infrastructure in conflict regions etc.,²⁹ never was regarded as appropriate for the case of Nagorno-Karabagh.

²⁸ Though the motivations of CP of doing so are beyond of the concerns of the present analysis, one thing should be admitted: neither Armenian nor Azerbaijan was satisfied with the decision. Armenia was frustrated with the fact of subordination of an autonomous district with almost totally Armenian population to Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan, in its turn, was concerned with the carving out from its territory a separate ethno-political unit with its own administration. Zverev, A. “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994” in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: pp 18-19.

²⁹ Miall, H. “Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task.” In Austin, A., Fitscher, M. , and Ropers, N.[eds] *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berlin: Berghof Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2003

However, the UN never elaborated new models and measures to handle the conflict. The actions undertaken by the UN were limited to fact-finding missions in Nagorno-Karabagh, serving as the main source for the UNSC political statements regarding the situation. The positions expressed in this political statements were usually seen as favoring one of the conflicting parties and very soon the UN as a mediating instance became discredited for all parties – Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh authorities, and Azerbaijan.

For example, UNSC Resolutions on Nagorno-Karabagh,³⁰ demanding “immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces from different regions of Azerbaijan, were completely rejected by Karabagh Armenians and authorities in Armenia as being biased towards the Armenian side and therefore were never fulfilled by them. The same position was taken by Azerbaijan regarding UNSC’s Resolution of January 1993 against Azerbaijan’s blockade of Armenia.

UNSC’s political statements were abstract and vague and often influenced by the lack of internal political consensus or by the rapid change in its power structure. The UN never undertook humanitarian measures (humanitarian intervention or whatsoever), or diplomatic, economic, or military sanctions against the parties involved in the conflict. In contrary, in 1991, when the conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh was at the very stage of escalating into violent armed conflict, UN withdrew itself as the main peacemaking actor and called for peace initiatives of individual states or regional organizations. In 1992, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later OSCE – Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe) substituted the UNSC as the international mediating organization dealing with Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and remained the main mediating organization for the last ten years.

While taking an active position in peacemaking since the spring of 1992, CSCE/OSCE planned concrete measures to settle the conflict. First measure was the establishment of so-called Minsk Conference (later known as Minsk Group) as an impartial structure within CSCE/OSCE. It consisted of eleven Participating States and three co-chairmen representing France, the US, and Russian Federation. Second, CSCE/OSCE undertook different measures to verify various cease-fire agreements, took a decision to send CSCE monitoring mission, achieved an agreement between parties to use UN or CSCE peacekeeping forces in the region and adopted so-called “calendar of urgent measures”.³¹

CSCE/OSCE planned measures but almost always failed to implement them. While the main barriers for the UNSC’s effective involvement in the peacebuilding should be found in its political nature, the main constrains to CSCE/OSCE’s effective policy should be found in the lack of resources as well as in its organizational and procedural gaps. It was unable to mobilize any diplomatic, political, or military mechanisms to maintain the cease-fire agreements, usually broken by the Armenian

³⁰ Resolutions 822 [30/04/1993], 853 [29/07/1993], 874 [14/10/1993], and 884 [12/11/1993] U.S. Department of State. *1993 UN Security Council Resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh*. Available at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/13508pf.htm>

³¹ Paye, O., and Remacle, E., “UN and CSCE Policies in Transcaucasia” in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: pp 114-120

side (during Armenians' attack on the last Azererbajjani city in Nagorno-Karabagh Shusha in May 1992, CSCE mediators were not able even to enter the region).

It also failed to bring parties to any preliminary statement of general principles, guiding the process of conflict settlement. For example, at 1995 OSCE Lisbon Summit, due to the consensual decision-making format of CSCE/OSCE, the OSCE Declaration about the main principles of peacemaking process in Nagorno-Karabagh was accepted by 53 out of 54 member countries but was vetoed by the Armenian delegation (the main reason why Armenia refused to sign was the principle of territorial integrity of conflicting parties including Azerbaijan). After CSCE Lisbon Summit, Azerbaijan doubted CSCE's ability to ensure its territorial integrity and Armenians in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh declared that the Minsk Group is not an impartial, objective mediator.³² CSCE/OSCE appeared to be unable even to setup any preliminary format of negotiations.

The question of the official parties of negotiations is still open. Azerbaijan refuses to accept Nagorno-Karabagh as a full party to any talks, demanding instead to negotiate with Armenia. Armenia insists that it had nothing to do with Nagorno-Karabagh's struggle for independence and that the latter should have a place at the negotiating table.

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a peacemaking structure entered the mediating process when Azerbaijan accepted the invitation to enter the collective CIS Tashkent Agreement on collective security in May, 1992 (Armenia had already signed it in 1991). Soon after Russia, arguing that CSCE/OSCE was not able to secure even cease-fire in the region, called for participation of CIS structures in peacemaking processes in the Caucasus.³³ CIS's role in peacemaking processes in Caucasus was confirmed by the 1992 CSCE Summit Declaration recognizing the possible support of CSCE peacekeeping operations from the peacekeeping mechanisms of the CIS.³⁴ Russia's and hence CIS's 'effective' role was confirmed by the achievement of a sustainable cease-fire agreement in May 1994.

³² Carley, P. "Nagorno-Karabagh Searching for a Solution". *United States Institute of Peace Report, 1998* http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks25/chap1_25.html

³³ Paye, O., and Remacle, E., "UN and CSCE Policies in Transcaucasia" in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: pp 121

³⁴ *ibid.* p 121

Regional Interests and Their Influence on Peacemaking

“Latent structure is master of obvious structure,” wrote Heraclitus.³⁵ The main constraints to the peacebuilding process in Caucasus should be found not in international formal structures but in latent structures of the regional politics. The latent structure, serving as a deadlock for every peacemaking effort in Caucasus, is known as *Security Complex*.³⁶ Contemporary Caucasus faces two layers of interests of regional powers - economic and military/security.

When after the collapse of the USSR the economic borders became open, the idea of economic expansion became a top-level political issue for Iran, Turkey, and Russia. Turkey aimed at political and economic co-operation with Azerbaijan and the central Asian countries and regained the hopes to realize its major dream of becoming a ‘bridge’ between Europe and Central Asia.³⁷ Turkey has also direct economic interests in the region. It declared itself (and is perceived also by other interested countries) as the most profitable transfer country for the Azerbaijan’s oil exports.

Iran designed identical economic projects. The collapse of the USSR was perceived by Iran as opening new economic markets in so-called “North West Asia”. It also considered the opportunity for easier access to the so-called Silk Road - access to China and the Far East via Central Asia. Another opportunity for economic expansion was to show Iran as the most convenient country for newly independent states in Caucasus and Central Asia for their transfers to Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, even Russia remained economically dependent on Caucasus, providing it with several important technological and military industrial products. Azerbaijan was and is the main country providing Russia with advanced oil-equipment. Georgia and Armenia provide Russia with military equipments that are produced exclusively in these republics.³⁸ The major economic interest of Russia in Caucasus, nevertheless, is the Caspian oil. After a huge political attack on Baku, in 1994 Russian company Lukoil finally received 10% of Azerbaijan’s oils asserts.

Economic competition is not always mutually exclusive and is open to compromises. Negotiations and compromises over Azerbaijan’s rich oil resources are perceived by many mediators as the key factors in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict settlement and the establishment of peace in the region. Nevertheless, despite all efforts to overweight the economic benefits that conflicting parties may have from fostering the peacebuilding process, the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict remained unresolved.

³⁵ Fragment 54, cited in Astourian, S. H. From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia

³⁶ Coppieters, B. “Conclusions: The Caucasus As a Security Complex” in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: pp 193.

³⁷ de Pauw, F. “Turkey’s Policy in Transcaucasia” in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: p 182

³⁸ Trenin, D. “Russia’s Security Interests and Policies in the Caucasus Region” in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: p 96

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In contrary, mutually exclusive regional concepts of military expansion of three regional great powers played and still play the key role in the mediating and peacebuilding processes.³⁹ After the collapse of Soviet Union, Caucasus became the battlefield where the regional powers struggled for their military influence, quite often supporting it with the concept of national security. For the last three centuries Iran's foreign policy and national security were tightly connected with the ones of Russian Empire and later of the Soviet Union. While during the Soviet Union Iran directly 'bordered' with Russia's national interests, after the collapse of the Soviet Union Iran became interested in counterbalancing Russia in the Caucasus and in the establishment of a so-called buffer zone of Caucasian republics between itself and Russia.⁴⁰

On the other hand, Iran considered also the new role of Turkey in the region. Despite the fact that after the collapse of the Soviet Union Iran and Turkey attempted to build some kind of economic relations, Turkey is still considered as one of the major threats to Iran's national security and interests in the region. Iran's third security issue in the region is connected with the large Azerbaijan community of Iran living at the Azeri-Iranian border. Nagorno-Karabagh conflict indeed was perceived by Iranian government as a threat to its territorial integrity as the overall political situation in the Caucasus could politically mobilize Azeri minority of Iran.

Nevertheless, while supporting Azerbaijan, Iran was simultaneously interested in counterbalancing Turkey with strong Armenia, historically opposed to Turkey. This was the main reason why Iran was one of those countries interested in the political stability of the region. However, despite its rather successful mediating efforts in the region in 1992 and relatively impartial position in the conflict, Iran became isolated from peace process by Turkey, Russia, and, particularly, Western countries.⁴¹

Turkey has three major reasons to take an active position towards Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. First, ethnic and cultural similarity of Azeri and Turkish nations forces Turkey to support Azerbaijan. Second, Turkey's strategic military alliance with western countries and, first of all, with the US during the Cold War, continued also after the collapse of the USSR, and Turkey is still seen as the promoter of western security interests in the region against the military expansion of Russia and Iran.

Turkey is less incorporated into direct mediating and peacemaking activities than Iran and, moreover, Russia. Despite the fact that the continuation of the conflict is not much in its interests, Turkey never gave up to its official international, economic, and military support to Azerbaijan.

Russia's expansion in Caucasus can be dated back to 17th century. Its permanent wars with two other great powers of the region – Persia (Iran) and Turkey made the Caucasus a buffer zone for more than three centuries. Today, Russia's interests in Caucasus both military and economic are articulated through the concept of 'near abroad'. The latter defines Caucasus as belonging to those groups of countries

³⁹ Coppieters, B. "Conclusions: The Caucasus As a Security Complex" in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: pp 195-198.

⁴⁰ Ramezanzadeh, A. "Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis" in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: p 33

⁴¹ *ibid.* pp 170, 172-173

that have primary importance for Russia's security interests. According to this concept, Russia keeps special rights of intervention into the region.⁴² In Caucasus, security interests of Iran, Turkey as well as of the West confront with the concept of 'near abroad'.

Russia worked on its position in the region by two means - influencing international organizations involved in the various peacemaking process in the Caucasus and working directly (officially and unofficially) with the political elites of the Caucasian Republics. Russia is seen as supporting attempts to destabilize regimes in these republics that were opposed to its policies.⁴³ Some observers claim that political coups in Azerbaijan (1993), Georgia (1993), and Armenia (1996) were the outcomes of Moscow's personnel policy in the region confined to the top echelons of Caucasian leadership.⁴⁴

This is much due to the firm position of the Russian military in Caucasus. It has access to almost all important politicians and also controls the most vital assets in any conflict situation - weapons, ammunition, and infrastructure.⁴⁵ While the recent developments weakened the military position in Georgia from which several Russia military troops were displaced to Armenia, Russia still has a firm military position in Armenia where the main borders with Turkey and Iran are kept by Russian military troops.

In pursuing its security interests in 'near abroad', Russia successfully overcame almost all barriers put by international organizations against its dominant role in the region. Possessing with necessary political and military resources, Russia easily 'convinced' other UNSC members in its key role in conflict management. It appeared to be especially easy in a condition when other UNSC members do not have 'vital interests' in the region and are quite unwilling to use own resources to settle the conflict.

When the negotiated by Russia cease-fire was signed in May 1994, the UN has no other choice but to admit Russia's leading role in peacemaking process and to welcome CIS's peacekeeping operations in Caucasus, despite the fact that Russia's views on peacemaking differed from that of the UN.⁴⁶ Moreover, after Azerbaijan was incorporated into the CIS collective security agreement in May 1992, Russia claimed for a special position of CIS and its peacekeeping forces in conflict management in Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. While incorporating the CIS in peacemaking process, Russia officially confirmed its hegemonic role in peace process in Caucasus, marginalizing the role of CSCE/OSCE. This made some researchers to conclude that the future role of CSCE/OSCE in Nagorno-Karabagh conflict management may "depend to a large extent on the policies of Russia and the CIS."⁴⁷

⁴² Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: p 8

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Trenin, D. "Russia's Security Interests and Policies in the Caucasus Region" in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: p 100

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p 98

⁴⁶ Paye, O., and Remacle, E., "UN and CSCE Policies in Transcaucasia" in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: p 127

⁴⁷ *ibid.* pp 121-122

An Armenian diplomat said: “It is easier to bring the positions of Baku and Yerevan closer to each other than to reach an agreement between the mediators - Russia and the Minsk Group”.⁴⁸ The statement should lead peace researchers to the same question. Which actor has the crucial influence on the peace process - a pragmatic superpower or an international institution?

It would be misleading to conclude that the failure to reach a peaceful settlement of Nagorno-Karabagh conflict is a direct outcome of the partiality of the third parties and the influence of the regional powers on the mediating structures and the overall peacemaking process. Conflicts are much more complex phenomena to be explained only by one factor - the position of third parties.

Nevertheless, it is of a particular importance for a researcher or peacemaker to consider both layers of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. Broader structure of regional powers if not overweighs then largely determines the context and the dynamics of the conflict. Today, it becomes more and more obvious that before mediating Nagorno-Karabagh conflict, first of all special ‘mediation’ is needed to solve conflicting interests of regional powers.

Conclusions

Third-party mediation and mediators are among the crucial factors in resolution of almost all forms of conflicts, interstate or civil. The analysis has shown that states, as third-party mediators tend to have an interest, direct or indirect, in the conflict and/or in supporting one of the conflicting parties. Therefore, the focus on their identity, position, and interests, determining the partiality or impartiality of their mediation, should be central to any conflict and peace study.

Where impartial third-party mediators were involved in the conflicts of post-Soviet space their mediating efforts remained rather ineffective: efforts tended to make them frozen and hardly fostered their resolution. In the above-mentioned two conflicts, this was particularly true for international organisations choosing the strategy of consultations and political statements.

In contrary, *partial* third-party mediator (not incidentally the same in both conflicts), employing power mediation strategy, has been successful in resolving the civil conflict in Tajikistan and played a crucial role in the affirmation of the current unresolved state of Nagorno-Karabagh one. Moreover, as analysis has shown, a complex set of factors, and the most important among them the willingness (interest) in solving the conflict, led to the success in one case and lack of it in the other.

Therefore, the analysis of effectiveness of third-party mediators and mediation processes needs to expand beyond the elements of the partial-impartial position of mediators. Impartiality is not the main condition to solve the conflicts within or between states. In today’s global political game, the geopolitical interest has much more power than the international goodwill, unfortunately.

⁴⁸ Coppieters, B. “Conclusions: The Caucasus As a Security Complex” in Coppieters, B. [ed], *Contested Borders in Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996: p 202

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