

Introduction

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The principles of perestroika ran counter to all forms of particularism. According to the world vision of the Soviet leadership in the second half of the 1980s, the economic future of the Soviet Union had to be judged from the perspective of world development. The logic of military confrontation with Western powers now had to be superseded by a rationale of global cooperation; ecological issues were going to be solved in concert with the world community. Thus ethnic conflicts did not fit in with the policies of perestroika - they were regarded as expressions of particular interests. The nationalist demonstrations of December 1986 in Alma Ata - organized in protest against the nomination of an ethnic Russian in place of a Kazakh as party chief - were perceived as having been orchestrated by a corrupted Kazakh nomenklatura, in order to protect its local privileges from the democratic reforms of the Soviet leadership. Armenian demands for unification with Nagorno-Karabakh were regarded by the Kremlin as an unacceptable attempt to push local interests without consideration for the general good.

The democratization process ran into difficulties when the Soviet leadership tried to channel ethnic and regional demands. Neither the ideologues of perestroika nor their conservative opponents were ready to accept the declarations of sovereignty made by the different republics in the Baltics and the Caucasus. Confronted with opposition from the periphery, Gorbachev found common ground with the more conservative members of the political leadership, who saw a need for a more assertive defence of Soviet unity. Their attempts to halt the war of laws between the centre and the rebellious republics backfired. The use of military means in Yerevan (July 1988), Tbilisi (April 1989), Baku (January 1990) and in Riga and Vilnius (both in January 1991) strengthened the nationalist mobilization. The different factions in the Soviet leadership were unable to reach any consensus on how to handle the conflicts in order to defend the Soviet state. The reform of the federal system had to be postponed repeatedly; then the discussion on a new federal treaty precipitated an attempted coup d'état in August 1991 and the Soviet Union was dissolved before the federal reform could be completed. In December 1991, the world view of socialist "new thinking" had been defeated once and for all by national particularism.

Western governments had great difficulty in recasting the new world order. The general principles and universal values of the ideology of perestroika had been easier to assess than post-Soviet nationalism. It was much harder, for instance, to familiarize oneself with all the peculiarities of Georgian or Tajik politics than it was to distinguish between reformist and conservative principles in the Kremlin. Even if Western governments and

institutions were quick to recognize the independence of most of the former Soviet republics, they continued to centre their attention on Moscow's political life. Other aims, such as establishing security relations with the Baltics or Ukraine, took far longer to be established as priorities. Generally speaking, the future of the periphery was seen as a consequence of the fate of the centre.

This political perspective made it difficult to assess the threat to Western security represented by the military conflicts in or between Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Tajikistan and Moldova. Many questions concerning Western interests in the periphery or Western attitudes to Russian policies in those regions remained unanswered. But the invasion of Chechnya (December 1994) finally confronted Western governments with the fact that the periphery of Russia had more than marginal significance for world security.

The contributions to this volume highlight the difficulties experienced by Russia, Turkey and Iran in trying to find their bearings in the post-Soviet space. Unlike the Western states, all these countries considered the Transcaucasus to be of primary importance to their national interests. Russia, confronted with the impossibility of obtaining a guarantee for its security interests from European security institutions (due, some may say, to its own incapacity), declared that the Transcaucasus belonged to that group of countries in which it could legitimately claim to defend specific security interests and special rights of intervention. In order to stabilize its predominance in the independent republics of the Caucasus, Russia supported attempts to destabilize regimes which were opposed to its own policies. Russian forces were actively involved in the civil war in Georgia in 1991-1992 and the war in Abkhazia in 1992-93. Russia also supported the overthrow of the Elcibey government in Azerbaijan in mid-1993. By 1994, it had successfully consolidated its military presence in most of the region. Russian success was not, however, complete. Azerbaijan and breakaway Chechnya were still able to oppose attempts to restrict their sovereignty.

Despite the international blessing bestowed on the Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia failed in its attempts to gain full international recognition for its peacekeeping activities. The international status of its military forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia remained unclear. Neither the UN nor the CSCE agreed to give a free hand to Russian policies or to a Russian-led CIS peacekeeping force in the region. Lack of impartiality in the conflicts was one of the main arguments put forward by Western governments for the denial of a mandate from the international institutions. Nor would the Russian military accept international monitoring of their troops stationing. The suspicion that Russia's concept of a peacekeeping policy would not correspond to Western standards and interests was a major reason for refusing Moscow's request. As Dmitri Danilov writes in his contribution to this book, leading Russian policy-makers had made it clear in 1994 that independence and sovereignty were relative concepts where its "near abroad" regions were concerned. A Russian presence in the Transcaucasus was conceivable without an international mandate. At the end of the year, Russia demonstrated - with the destruction of the Chechen capital - that, inside its own borders at least, it needed no international approval for its ethnic policies.

The demise of the Soviet Union raised great expectations in Ankara. Turkey had high hopes of political and economic co-operation with Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries. The geopolitical changes resulting from the independence of the Turkic

countries of the former Soviet Union led to a redefinition of Turkey's former identity as a buffer zone between Europe and the Middle East. Ankara's dream of becoming Europe's bridgehead to Central Asia and Azerbaijan did not come true, however. In the event, Western countries were not compelled to rely on Turkey, but pursued their own policies in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.

The issues of the oil wealth in the Caspian Sea and the routing of pipelines have dual consequences. On the one hand, they make the pacification of this region by international agreements more imperative, while, at the same time, they increase destabilization by generating fierce international competition among those attempting to gain a foothold there. In the long term, the economic interests of all the players involved in the Caucasus lie in the lasting settlement of the main ethnic conflicts. This does not mean that any of these players is prepared to accept such pacification unconditionally, or that they are all pursuing a foreign policy based on primary economic interests: for one, the Russian military intervention in Chechnya - jeopardizing the possibility of safely transporting Caspian oil to the Russian port of Novorossiisk - can hardly be regarded as the consequence of a rational calculation of economic interests.

The unravelling of the Soviet Union put Iran in a favourable geopolitical position. The reconfiguration of the former Soviet landscape led to hopes that the newly independent republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkmenistan, with whom Iran shared common land borders, would constitute a buffer zone with Russia. The Iranian government also counted on reaping economic benefits. The transformation of the former Soviet republics into capitalist economies led to the creation of a major potential market for the Iranian economy. Tehran made concrete proposals for the construction of gas and oil pipelines from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan through Iran. Despite enhanced prospects for economic and political benefits from the Soviet collapse, the Iranian regime had to reckon with increased international instability. It could not rule out the possibility of a secession movement among its Azeri minority or demands from the Azeri population in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which was striving for the unification of both Azeri populations. Although the fear of a unification movement proved unfounded, Iran failed to enhance its security as it may have hoped at the end of 1991 that it would. Despite the independence of the Transcaucasian states, the presence of Russian troops in most of the region made it impossible to call this a buffer zone. By the end of 1994, only Azerbaijan was still refusing to allow the stationing of Russian guards at its borders with Iran. The hundreds of thousands of Azeri refugees - from Nagorno-Karabakh and other regions occupied by Armenian forces - are causing instability in the region. On the other hand, diplomatic relations between Iran and Russia have changed for the better. The possibility that the Iranian government might establish normal political and economic relations with Russia and the new independent states of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus was of great concern to some Western governments. The United States was putting enormous pressure on Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan not to accept Iranian offers for the laying of gas and oil pipelines which would pass through Iranian territory. Russian-Iranian co-operation in the nuclear field also met with fierce American opposition.

In the period 1991-1994, Iran launched several diplomatic initiatives to try to reach a settlement in the Transcaucasus. This policy, which was an attempt to break through its international isolation, had only very limited success, but it did present an entirely new image of Iranian diplomacy to the international community. Even though the Iranian

government had religious interests to promote in neighbouring countries, it did not actively bolster Islamic fundamentalism in the Caucasus. Its support for Azerbaijan in the war with Armenia was quite limited, and when the Russian army destroyed the Chechen capital of Grozny, the Iranian protest remained largely vocal. Thus it seemed that economic and military co-operation with Russia was of greater importance to the Islamic Republic of Iran than pan-Islamic principles.

The contributions to this book analyse the main ethnic conflicts that erupted in the Caucasus between 1988 and 1994. This period starts with the outbreak of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and closes at the eve of Russian military intervention in the North Caucasian republic of Chechnya. It covers the ethnic conflicts in Georgia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the conflict in the North Caucasus between the Ingush and Ossetes. Alexei Zverev gives a broad overview of all these conflicts. He analyses the attempts made by different groupings and factions in the Soviet and Russian leadership to intervene in them. Ghia Nodia's contribution focuses on the consequences of Georgian independence for the conflict with South Ossetia. The independence movement's anti-Soviet and anti-Russian policies had considerable repercussions on intra-ethnic strife in Georgia. The contributions by Dmitri Trenin, Dmitri Danilov, Eric Remacle, Olivier Paye, Firouzeh Nahavandi, Abdollah Ramezanzadeh and Freddy De Pauw are concerned with the attitudes to those conflicts of the neighbouring countries in the Transcaucasus and of the international security institutions. Dmitri Trenin discusses Russia's interests and policies in the region. Eric Remacle and Olivier Paye deal with the mediation policies of the CSCE and the UN in the three main conflicts there. Dmitri Danilov presents the arguments put forward by the Russian government in 1994 in order to gain international recognition for its policies in the Transcaucasus. Firouzeh Nahavandi analyses Iranian policies in the region from a historical perspective, while Abdollah Ramezanzadeh focuses on Iran's Caucasian policies in the post-Soviet period. Freddy De Pauw describes Turkish disillusionment with its co-operation projects with Azerbaijan and the Turkic countries of Central Asia. The conclusions examine the Caucasus as an issue of regional security.

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