

CONFLICT IN THE CAUCASUS

Paul B. Henze

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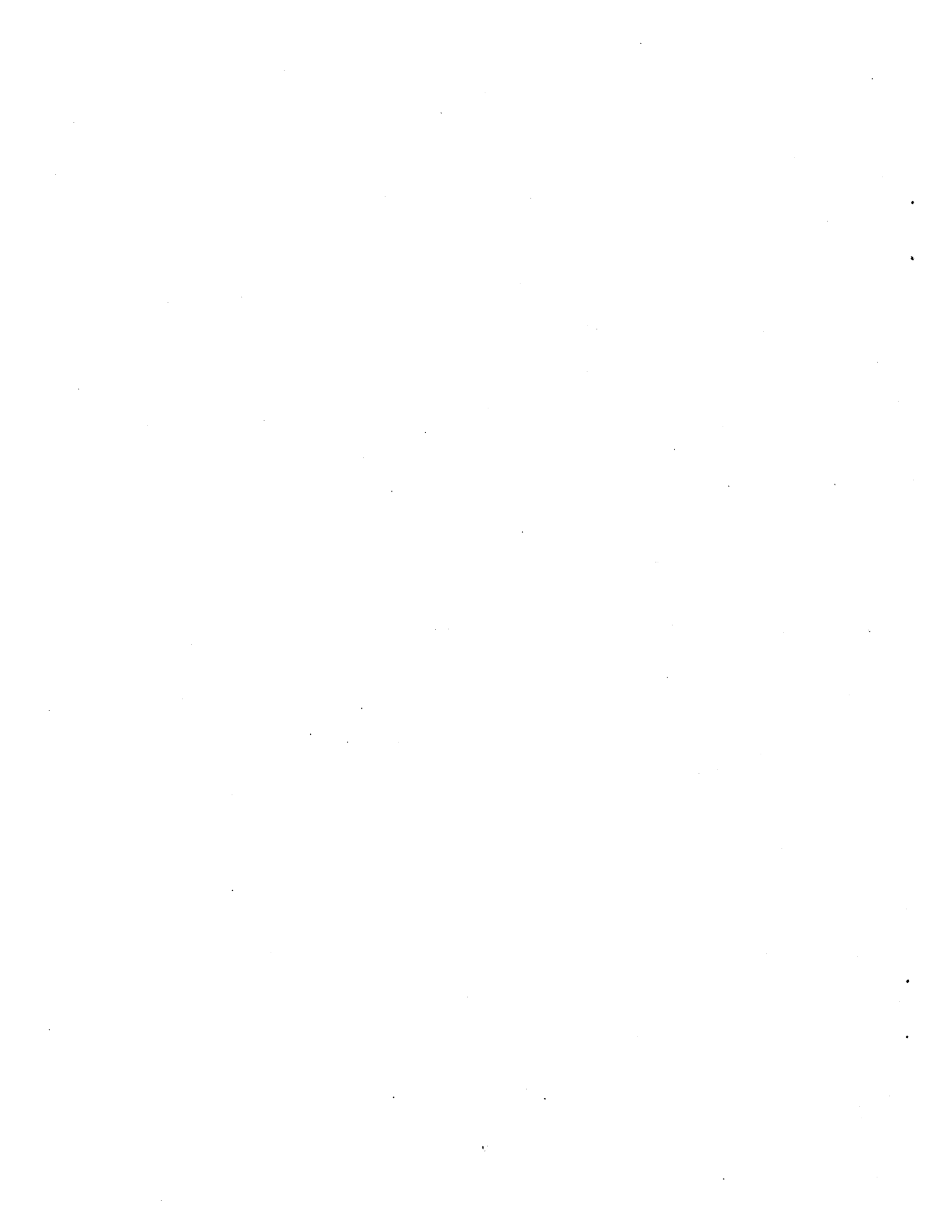
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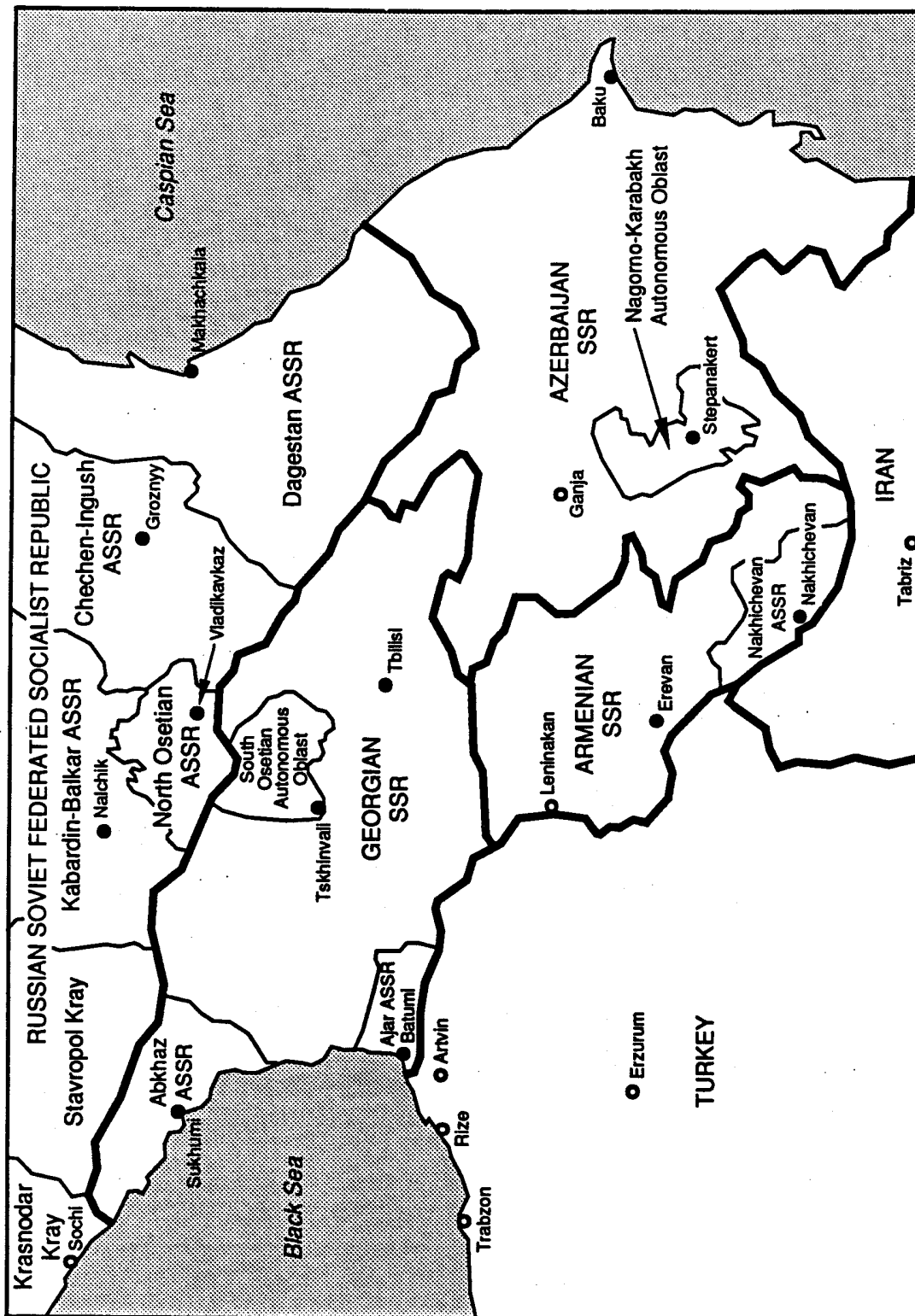


Fig. 1—Map of the Transcaucasus region at the End of the Soviet Union

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper was originally prepared at the request of the Conflict Resolution Program of the Carter Center, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. While it reflects my own study of Caucasian history and politics extending back over a period of more than three decades, its current observations are based primarily on direct experience of problems of the Caucasus during the past two years.

At the invitation of the Georgian Foreign Ministry, I spent three weeks in Georgia during September and October 1991. I made a brief visit to Baku just before the June 1992 elections. During September 1992 I headed an international observer mission to Chechnia sponsored by International Alert, a London-based nongovernment organization (NGO). I attended a Turkish-Azeri conference supported by the National Endowment for Democracy in Baku in November 1992 and also took advantage of the opportunity to travel in the countryside. During late November and the first part of December 1992 I was a member of another International Alert observer mission which focused on the internal situation in Georgia and the Abkhaz problem, visiting both Abkhazia and Ajaria, as well as Tbilisi.

The paper is intended to give those who are unfamiliar with the Caucasus an appreciation of its history and political culture--essential for understanding the problems with which all these countries and peoples are contending in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. A shorter version of the paper was introduced into the record of the hearings of the Helsinki Commission of the U.S. Congress on the Caucasus that were held on March 8, 1993.

As an appendix, I have added a brief bibliography of basic works on the history, culture, and politics of the region which will be helpful to those wishing to gain deeper background on it and a list of my own published work on the Caucasus, including several recent RAND publications.

2. GEOGRAPHY

Taken as a whole, the Caucasus has been favored by nature as much as any comparable region in the world. A splendid 600-mile-long mountain chain divides the region in two from northwest to southeast. High peaks with glaciers and permanent snow--Mt. Elbruz reaches 18,471 feet--feed rivers that water attractive valleys and plains both to the north and the south. An enormous variety of crops can be grown and livestock grazed in this area. The Caspian Sea on the east provides an easy water route to Central Asia and, via the Volga, to the Russian interior. The Black Sea, with its dependable moist winds, creates a subtropical microclimate along the western Caucasian coast. It also provides a sea link to Turkey, Ukraine, the Balkans, and through the Turkish Straits to the Mediterranean world.

On both sides of the mountains vast coniferous and deciduous forests survive, having suffered comparatively little degradation during the Soviet period. The Caucasus has been noted for its mineral wealth since ancient times. Azerbaijan's oil, which began to be developed in the late 19th century, fueled much of the Russian economy well into the Soviet period. At the beginning of the 20th century the oil fields around Grozny in Chechnia were opened up and still provide a major share of the ex-Soviet Union's aviation fuel. The region is capable of feeding and clothing itself from its own resources. It has a well-developed infrastructure but is not overpopulated.

Why is such an attractive part of the world, blessed by nature, the locus of so much strain and conflict? Many factors are responsible and must be taken into account by those interested in helping Caucasians work out their problems and chart a clear course into the future. A discussion of these factors follows.

3. HISTORY

As throughout the ex-communist world, history has come alive again in the Caucasus in ways that are difficult for those who have not experienced communism to understand. The region is among the oldest settled areas on earth; it is populated by peoples speaking languages related to no others in the world; and its history extends far back into ancient times. During the Soviet period all history was suppressed or forced into a rigid, dogmatic framework which left most Caucasian peoples feeling cheated of their past, but deeply concerned about their identity and their roots.

With the collapse of communism, the people of the Caucasus are free to repossess their history and explore their roots. It is exciting to watch this process. But there is also a downside. Each ethnic group has its own version of its origin and its past, and these frequently conflict with neighbors' versions. There is, thus, a great deal of argumentation about history. More often than not, current problems are debated in terms of ancient texts, archaeology, and even legends and myths. Intriguing and entertaining as such argumentation may be, it tends to exacerbate and obfuscate conflicts rather than facilitate settlement of them.

The history of the Caucasus during the last two or three centuries is as much a colonial experience as is the history of India, most of the Middle East, and Africa. Historians steeped in Russian history and Sovietologists often forget this. The Russian advance into the Caucasus began in the 17th century but did not proceed very rapidly until the end of the 18th century. Then it accelerated with great speed and considerable drama.

By the end of the first quarter of the 19th century the Russian Empire's boundaries with Turkey and Iran had been firmly established where they remained, with only slight changes, until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and the newly independent Transcaucasian republics inherited them. The predominantly Muslim North Caucasus was not subdued until the 1860s. Many of its peoples never reconciled themselves to

Russian domination. They revolted every time there was a good opportunity. Both they and most of the peoples of the Transcaucasus now see themselves as liberated from a colonial past. They display many of the attitudes and behavior patterns characteristic of ex-colonial Asians and Africans.

4. ETHNICITY

The ethnic complexity of the Caucasus makes areas such as the Balkans or Afghanistan look simple in comparison. Ethnic awareness and language are, with few exceptions, inextricably linked. Depending on criteria used for classifying peoples and languages, as many as fifty ethnic groups, each with its own distinctive language or dialect, can be catalogued in the Caucasus. The most numerous of the indigenous nationalities are the Azeris, the Armenians, the Georgians, and the Chechens. The Azeris are Turks and speak a language close to the Turkish of Anatolia. The Armenians are an ancient Indo-European people.

The Georgians and the Chechens are peoples unique to the Caucasus, often termed Paleocaucasians. There are perhaps as many as two dozen other Paleocaucasian ethnic groups in the North Caucasus. These include the Abkhaz and several Circassian subgroups; the Chechens' cousins, the Ingush; and the Avars, Lezgins, and several others in Dagestan, which is the most ethnically complex of all Caucasian territories.

Turks came into the Caucasus for the most part during the first millennium of our era and, in addition to the Azeris, include four North Caucasian ethnic groups: the Karachai, the Balkars, the Nogais, and the Kumyks. There are smaller Turkic groups as well, such as the Meskhetian Turks of Georgia, who were deported (along with several North Caucasian peoples) at the end of World War II but were not allowed to return when the others were restored to their native territories at the end of the 1950s.

The Ossetes, who occupy the center of the North Caucasus, speak an Iranian language. The Kalmyks who occupy a large territory in the steppes north of the mountains are Mongols. There are other, smaller, Iranian-related groups. Sizable groups of Greeks have lived in the Caucasus since ancient times. Finally, there are Kurds, Assyrians, several kinds of Jews, and last but not least, Slavs.

Russians first came to the Caucasus as Cossacks in the 16th century and intermarried with native peoples, but their Russian ethnic consciousness was reinforced in the 18th and 19th centuries, when

Cossacks often took part in Russian military campaigns against the North Caucasian mountaineers. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cossacks have experienced a rebirth of tradition and identity. Other Russians, along with Belorussians and Ukrainians, came to the Caucasus as settlers, officials, traders, entrepreneurs, and technicians from the late 19th century onward.

The in-migration of Russians accelerated sharply during the first decades of the Soviet period, but from the beginning of the 1970s there has been a net outflow of Russians and other Slavs. Out-migration has accelerated markedly since the collapse of the Soviet Union to the point where not more than half a million Russians now remain in the three independent Transcaucasian republics out of a total population of sixteen million. In the North Caucasus, out of a total population approaching six million, perhaps 20 percent are now Slavs.

Ethnic consciousness is strong throughout the Caucasus and a high degree of adherence to native languages, even where Russian is widely spoken as a second language, is common. Without intending to do so, the Soviet system encouraged ethnic cohesiveness. The collapse of the system has further encouraged it, in some instances to the point of chauvinism; ethnic groups and their leaders, uncertain of their status and apprehensive about their future and their relations with neighbors, have fallen back on ethnic solidarity to counter feelings of insecurity.

5. RELIGION

Religion is, as a rule, a component of ethnicity in the Caucasus, but it is almost always secondary. While, for example, Christians and Muslims feel a high degree of affinity to other ethnic groups of the same faith, adherence to a common religion will not necessarily reduce feelings of hostility and tension if conflict is caused by territorial disputes or exacerbated by economic rivalry. Historically, Russia exploited Georgian and Armenian adherence to Christianity to cast herself in the role of protector of all Christians, but resentment among Georgians of Moscow's domination of the Georgian Orthodox Church runs deep. Among Armenians religion operates in a more complex fashion, but no longer automatically inclines Armenians toward Russia.

North Caucasian Muslims are almost all Sunni. While Azeris are perhaps two-thirds Shi'a, religious tension in Azerbaijan has not become a serious problem. In general, Islamic feelings and habits in the North Caucasus are strongest in the east and become less intense toward the west. This reflects history. The eastern Caucasus was converted by Arabs who invaded in the first two centuries of Islam. Some of the peoples who lived north of the mountains in the center and west adhered to ancient forms of Christianity often mixed with more ancient beliefs until the 18th, and in some cases, the 19th centuries.

Religion has been both misunderstood and misrepresented (sometimes willfully by Caucasians themselves) as the primary cause of current conflict. The Abkhaz, for example, repeatedly characterized in the Western press as Muslims speaking a Turkic language, are for the most part not Muslims at all, and their language has no relationship to Turkish. Most Muslim Abkhaz emigrated (or were expelled by the Russians) to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, along with perhaps two million other Muslim Circassians, Chechens and others. New North Caucasian leaders (e.g. Dudaev, the Chechen president) have exploited the concept of Islamic solidarity as a cover for intervention in Abkhazia that appears to have had other motivations. Religion is not a factor in the Abkhaz situation.

Neither is religion, *per se*, a primary cause of Azeri-Armenian hostility, which has led to massacres by both sides and fuels the seemingly endless war over Nagorno-Karabakh. The hostility is generated to a greater extent by ethnic and economic animosities and territorial disputes rooted in the history of the past two hundred years.

6. SOVIET COLONIALISM

Violent as Russian imperial conquest often was, Russian colonial administration was relatively benign compared to that of its successor, the Soviet Union. It is true, of course, that some Bolsheviks did not originally conceive of the net effect of Leninist restoration of the Russian Empire as colonialism at all and were genuinely, if misguidedly, motivated by intellectual zeal to remold and improve all mankind.

Bolshevik idealists were quickly pushed into the background as the Red Army was employed by Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin to destroy the governments of the independent republics all three Transcaucasian nationalities set up in the wake of the 1917 revolutions. North Caucasians attempted to establish a federated Mountain Republic during the same period. Moscow manipulated the situation to take it over, and for a time tried to make it work, but soon reverted to the traditional Russian *divide et impera* approach to the region.

By 1936, when the Transcaucasian Federated Republic was abolished and the various ethnically defined regions of the North Caucasus were given the administrative form that for the most part survived to the end of the Soviet Union, Moscow ruled the Caucasus region by region from the center. Territorial boundaries had been delineated to facilitate control from the center, not to encourage indigenous peoples to cooperate and mitigate their differences. Rivalries and resentments among Caucasian peoples were always subtly--and at times quite blatantly--encouraged.

7. ECONOMICS

Economically, Soviet colonialism was highly exploitive, for priorities applied to infrastructure expansion and agricultural and industrial development were invariably those of the center. Policies common to the entire Soviet Union--agricultural collectivization, nationalization of commerce and crafts, forced industrialization with priority for heavy industry, and extraction of natural resources without regard for pollution and depletion--were applied with little attention to local circumstances and desires.

And as the momentum went out of the system, stagnation and degeneration set in. Thus, the Caucasus today, like the rest of the ex-Soviet Union, suffers with distorted economies that serve local needs inadequately, inefficient factories that consume three or four times as much energy as comparable installations in the West, appalling devastation of landscape in oil-producing regions, poor housing, inefficient transportation, and communications that are 50 years behind what is now taken for granted even in many parts of the former colonial Third World.

Because the region is basically well endowed by nature, and because population pressure is not serious, danger of starvation and severe privation is less acute in the Caucasus than in many other parts of the ex-Soviet Union. Everywhere, however, there has been a severe decline in the standard and quality of life, for the highly centralized Soviet economic system deterred regional authorities from rational management of their economies.

Both heavy and light industry as well as services were expanded with little consideration given to meeting local needs or exploiting nearby export markets. Where ethnic tensions have erupted into war, however, disruption of overly centralized, now fragile, systems of supply of energy, food, medicine, and other necessities have broken down. Tensions which cause these breakdowns and conflicts which result from them are then fed and exacerbated by them.

8. SHORTAGE OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL SKILLS

Some colonial areas (such as the former Belgian Congo--now Zaire--and Indonesia) were launched into independence with little preparation by the metropolitan power. Most, however (such as India), went through a long period of tutelage in self-administration. Transfer of power--independence--involved more elation than shock and even in areas where disorders followed (India and Pakistan, e.g.), experienced administrators and political leaders were able to maintain control and ensure resumption and continuation of administration and economic life. Few European colonial empires experienced collapse; most were disbanded in an orderly way.

In contrast, there was almost no preparation for independence in the ex-Soviet Union. Local party and government officials had been conditioned to obey and implement orders from the center and to think in terms of central priorities. These habits became deeply ingrained. Populations developed habits of thinking of their own needs as largely illicit--which they were, from Moscow's point of view. Under Soviet socialism everything belonged to everybody, so public facilities in actuality belonged to nobody. Common property could be misappropriated, stolen, or neglected. Attitudes of responsibility, forms of local initiative, and forms of discipline and control inherent in most free-market societies (and even in many other authoritarian systems) were largely absent in the ex-Soviet Union.

It is not surprising that the Soviet system did not produce large numbers of men with the political skills necessary to lead open societies, set rational priorities, bargain with interest groups, and work to persuade competing constituencies to recognize the necessity to compromise for the common good. Under the Soviet system, many of the most talented people took refuge in safe areas of specialty.

One is struck in all these Caucasian societies by the large number of specialists in linguistics, literature, folklore, archaeology, and history who are now active in politics. After decades of suppressing their ethnic pride and natural feelings, they have now moved into the

forefront of political movements asserting ethnic rebirth and national self-determination. Many of them, alas, are ill-equipped to understand the principles of democracy, or even of simple leadership and administration in any form, and some have already inflicted great harm on their people and brought disaster on themselves. Gamsakhurdia in Georgia is a tragic example. Few of the newly emerged leaders show much grasp of economic realities.

As it collapsed, the Soviet system left people in all parts of society few alternatives except to maximize their demands in hope that they might at least in part prevail against political and economic degeneration and the machinations of their rivals and enemies. Given the shortcomings and lack of understanding on the part of available leaders, it is surprising that the transition to independent existence in the Caucasus has not produced more conflicts than it has.

9. SOCIAL STRAINS

Overpopulation is a relative concept. In comparison to regions with similar geographic features and resources, the Caucasus is not overpopulated. However, the Soviet system prevented people from developing their skills and servicing their own needs. At the same time it provided relatively few opportunities for migration under attractive conditions. Consequently, many parts of the Caucasus suffer from lack of employment opportunities. For much of the Soviet period, people have been moving out of the mountains to the lowlands. Several factors have been involved, including forced collectivization of almost all agricultural activity. State agricultural enterprises employed large numbers of workers irrationally, industry even more so.

Because the state-managed distribution and supply system failed to meet the needs of the population, illegal private trade--and even manufacturing--networks developed. These were usually dominated by regional or ethnic "mafias", a term used in the ex-Soviet Union to cover almost all interest-groups operating outside the framework of official controls. These provided, and continue to provide, employment for otherwise jobless young men. Nevertheless, even during the period of firm Soviet control there was a great surplus of labor, some of which was siphoned off to seasonal employment in Russia. Chechens, e.g., have been employed as livestock herders throughout southern Russia.

The political collapse of the Soviet Union and resultant economic difficulties have exacerbated the employment problem throughout the Caucasus, where most local authorities have been slow to develop comprehensive economic reform plans. Leaders eager to organize followers find no shortage of young men ready to volunteer. The deterioration of the former Red Army and the inability of Moscow to exercise effective control over military units in the periphery has unleashed a flood of arms and military equipment available, sometimes at little or no cost, for freebooters eager to organize paramilitary formations.

Georgia, perhaps more than any other part of the region, has suffered from this kind of development, but it is also a factor in the Nagorno-Karabakh situation and common in parts of the North Caucasus. Regional authorities have often been forced to organize irregular security forces to protect their interests. Many regional governments are nevertheless too weak to enforce discipline over the forces they sponsor.

Crime, looting, and theft in many forms have become rampant and individual Caucasians, accustomed to the basic order that prevailed under the centralized Soviet system, are ill equipped to take collective responsibility for protecting themselves.

10. THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

In all three now independent Transcaucasian republics--Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia--responsible people maintain that the KGB and the communist party, on orders from Moscow, deliberately exacerbated conflicts within and between them during the final years of Soviet power. While this perception may be exaggerated, there is evidence to support it in some cases and the result (whatever the cause) was to burden each of these countries with deteriorated situations difficult for inexperienced and often insecure leaders to deal with.

Armenia has never recovered from the massive damage inflicted by the 1988 earthquake. Nevertheless some Armenians gave priority to an attempt to absorb Nagorno-Karabakh and started a war against Azerbaijan which sent the Azeris reeling. Like the Georgians, the Azeris had difficulty getting a government capable of defining their national interests and setting priorities for consolidating independence. The democratically elected and comparatively liberal leadership which finally came to power in Azerbaijan in June 1992 had no alternative but to give highest priority to regaining territory lost to Armenia and counter a potential threat against Nakhichevan.

Georgia became independent with secessionist movements already asserting themselves with external encouragement in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Azeris accuse Moscow of tilting toward Armenia, and Georgians accuse Moscow of still encouraging secessionists or, at a very minimum, of failing to control Russian elements supporting them.

The primary conclusion that can be drawn from this continuing welter of charges of interference and irresponsibility by Russia(ns) is that Yeltsin's government has not articulated or been able to enforce a clear and comprehensive Caucasus policy. It is not surprising that the disengagement of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan from the former Soviet Union has left much unfinished business with the Russian Federation. Each of these governments is currently working on new treaties and agreements. There is a tendency to postpone some difficult issues, however, which may not be unwise. One example is the issue of border

controls between Azerbaijan and Dagestan, which is potentially exacerbated because of Lezgin territorial sensitivities. This, fortunately, has not yet developed into a serious confrontation.

A clear Russian policy is even more urgent in the North Caucasus, for the collapse of the Soviet Union left the North Caucasus within the Russian Federation, though geographically and politically the Caucasus as a whole constitutes a rather clearly defined region. The structure of the Russian Federation is being redefined, with a new constitution likely to be put to referendum during 1993. The new constitution, whatever its provisions, is not likely to settle many ethnic and regional demands for self-determination, real autonomy, or independence. The status of the eight formerly "autonomous" North Caucasian ethnic entities, now all called republics of the Russian Federation, is unavoidably linked to that of similar components of the Russian Federation, such as Tatarstan and other Volga-Ural republics, as well as distant Buryatia and Yakutia, now called the Sakha Republic.

Chechnia declared its independence in August 1991 and defied Yeltsin's attempt to coerce it militarily in November 1991. At the same time Chechens gave reluctant *de facto* recognition to the separation of their long-standing partners, the Ingush, who, with Russian encouragement have now set up a separate republic. In effect, Russia was applying traditional divide-and-rule tactics in this situation. This led to a new confrontation within a year when the Ingush launched an offensive in the fall of 1992 to regain the long contested Prigorodny Rayon from North Ossetia.

For two hundred years the Ossetes have traditionally been regarded by Russia as a most-favored Caucasian people. When the Chechen-Ingush Republic was restored in 1956, Ingush territory previously part of it was left in North Ossetia. Russia now faces a situation where two peoples regarded as among its best friends in the North Caucasus are at odds with each other and the confrontation that has developed cannot be eased without alienating one or both.

The situation in the North Caucasus has been additionally exacerbated by the existence of a Confederation of North Caucasian Peoples (not states) which was formed in 1991 with Chechens and

Kabardans among its most enthusiastic members. It claimed membership of 15 peoples, but the manner in which these peoples' representatives were chosen is unclear. These 15 peoples include the Abkhaz, whose territory is internationally recognized as part of Georgia and who constitute only 17 percent of its inhabitants. By sending volunteers to Abkhazia to fight, the Confederation greatly complicated its situation. There are other incongruities as well.

Deposed Georgian President Gamsakhurdia was given refuge in Chechnia when he fled Tbilisi in January 1992. He was a strong opponent of Abkhaz separatism. Though the Chechens have demanded (and for the most part successfully asserted) their independence from Russia, in supporting the Abkhaz they associated themselves with extreme conservative nationalists in Russia who hoped to break Abkhazia off from Georgia and incorporate it into the Russian Federation. Abkhaz leaders accepted support from some of the least savory elements in the Russian political spectrum: military conservatives, neo-imperialists, and ex-communists centered around Prokhanov, Alksnis, and the newspaper *Den'*, who have been advocating the restoration of the Soviet Union. Early in 1993 the Abkhaz leaders "recognized" the breakaway "Dniester Republic" in Moldova, which has likewise enjoyed support of Russian ultra-conservatives and has been openly supported by the Russian 14th Army.

As of the spring of 1993, efforts by Chechen leaders to extricate Chechnia from involvement in Abkhazia and work out a rapprochement with Georgia are advancing. The situation in Chechnia has been complicated by growing tension between President Dudaev and the parliament. Meanwhile some of the other North Caucasians appear to have lost enthusiasm for the Confederation: e.g., the Balkars and the other Turkic groups and many of the peoples of Dagestan.

A coherent North Caucasian federation, within or outside the framework of the Russian Federation or the CIS, would offer the prospect of mitigating the problems of the region that are going to continue to bedevil Russia as long as she stumbles on along traditional divide-and-rule lines. Whatever the ultimate goal, it could only be pursued gradually, because everything we have observed during the past two years and current estimates of effectiveness of Russian military forces lead

to the conclusion that Moscow has lost the capability of mounting sustained military operations in the North Caucasus. To try could lead to a domestic Afghanistan.

Political effervescence and open conflict are likely to continue to characterize the region, for leaders of some ethnic groups aim to separate from existing political entities and set up separate administrations. Russia has been unable to find a way of easing tension between the recently established separate Ingush Republic (the creation of which it encouraged) and North Ossetia.

11. CHTO DELAT'? - WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Countries, organizations, and individuals concerned with helping the peoples of the Caucasus to recover from communism and to create viable governments and open societies will be wise to observe a few basic general principles:

- There is no general solution for the problems of the Caucasus. The complexity of the region is such that each critical situation has to be dealt with in its own context.
- Active external intervention in any form--fact-finding, conflict resolution, mediation, observers, peace-keeping forces--can be undertaken only with the consent and some degree of support of the powers that exercise sovereignty and/or parties in conflict.
- Russia must be at least minimally supportive of investigative and mediation efforts undertaken in the North Caucasus; the same applies to the Transcaucasian governments in issues that affect them, or issues between them and Russia.
- *Solution* of conflicts, desirable as it may be, is likely to be an unrealistic goal. *Mitigation*, reduction of intensity, or cessation of active hostilities are likely to be the best result that can be sought.
- Care must be taken that external intervention does not have the unintended effect of prolonging, exacerbating, or intensifying conflicts or reducing prospects for mitigation. Well-meaning external efforts at conflict resolution are all too often exploited by parties in conflict merely to propagandize their cause.

While Caucasians, like people throughout the ex-Soviet Union, talk in terms of democracy, political competition, human rights, free markets, and free flow of information, these concepts are still inadequately understood but are often exploited as slogans to attract

outside support or discredit rivals. Understanding of politics as the art of compromise and accommodation, of democracy as a never-ending process for peaceful resolution of differences and setting of priorities, of rule of law and systematic legal procedures, and of human rights as involving respect for minorities and political opponents is neither deep nor widespread in these societies.

Traditional habits and attitudes were never entirely superseded by Soviet practices. Some were adapted and some distorted, but they remain as a substratum. Outsiders coming into these societies to provide assistance of any kind must be mindful of underlying layers of consciousness, of conditioned reflexes, of deep-seated fears, both articulated and inherent, which are likely to persist for a long time. They will be well advised to read history, literature, and ethnography relating to the Caucasus to deepen their perceptions and give Caucasians some feeling of assurance that they understand the context in which they live.

While a sizable number of Caucasians of all ethnic groups expend their energy in economic activity ranging from open trade to smuggling of drugs and arms and many cooperate across ethnic lines, others who occupy themselves with politics are more often than not oblivious to broader economic considerations. While some conflicts in the Caucasus have been exacerbated by some of the economic factors discussed above and many, in their roots, can be reduced to issues relating to rights to land and resources, many other factors are involved in ethnic-based conflict.

Most of the ethnic leaders (both those in power and those in opposition) neglect economic considerations. As a result, economic reform has been lagging in most of the Caucasus. This lag and ethnic tension constitute a vicious circle--ethnic tension discourages economic reform and lack of economic reform encourages ethnic tension.

If economic rejuvenation and development were given higher priority, many ethnic conflicts would probably be reduced in intensity. A good example is the Georgian autonomous republic of Ajaria. If religion and ethnic particularism were inherently a cause of conflict, this region, with its Muslim-oriented population (closely related to the

population of northeastern Turkey) ought to be an area of serious tension. Instead, it is one of Georgia's most peaceful regions as well as an area which has made great strides toward economic recovery and prosperity. Cross-border traffic is brisk and beneficial to both sides; relations with Turkey cause no strain for either country.

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