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Conflict and Accommodation in the FSU: The Role of Institutions and Regimes

JAMES HUGHES AND GWENDOLYN SASSE

It is not surprising that the collapse of a multinational empire like the Soviet Union gave rise to political instability and conflicts over territory as this conforms to a pattern set by the historical experience of the fall of other great empires. The contributions in this volume have examined cases of post-Soviet states where there are simultaneous nation- and state-building dilemmas arising from the problems of new state formation during transition, in particular those of identity, territorial definition, building state capacity, and international recognition. These problems have interacted with and accentuated ethnic or regionalist challenges 'from below', and in some cases 'from outside'. There is an observable trend for post-Soviet states to engage in 'nationalizing' projects which have as their goal the recasting of the newly independent state in the mould of the predominant ethnic group. This trend enacts a preference for homogenization and a tendency for discrimination against minorities. The scale and intensity of these 'nationalizing' projects have varied across the FSU as the time frame or temporal sequence of certain policies, such as citizenship or language laws, have often revealed marked differences.

No single factor from the list of conventional causes of conflict, whether structural, geographical or identity-related, appears to convincingly account for the causation of all post-Soviet conflicts. The contributions in this volume illustrate this wide diversity of factors in the causation and dynamics of post-Soviet conflicts. The significance of the key causative factors – such as the historical legacies and memories of ethnic strife, international conditions, demography and settlement patterns, the degree of societal homogeneity and the nature of cleavage structures, geography, the political economy of transition, institutional engineering, the role of the military/security forces, elite and popular perceptions and practice, and cultural proximity or difference – have varied depending on the case. The contributors have analyzed these diverse conflict cases by focusing on the four underlying questions outlined in the introduction. First, the causes and distinctiveness of the territorial challenges; second, their nature: are they essentially ethnic, regional or driven by some other factors, or indeed some combination of elements? Furthermore, what is the relationship between territorial

challenges and the process of post-Soviet transition and state- and nation-building? Third, why have some conflicts been amenable to accommodative strategies, while others have been violent and protracted, and yet other predicted conflicts have not materialized? Fourth, how have international and domestic factors interacted in the shaping of conflict trajectories and outcomes?

STANDARD EXPLANATIONS

The key works on ethnic and regional conflicts in the FSU generally offer two types of explanation. Brubaker and Bunce take a neo-institutionalist approach and emphasize the importance of the Soviet institutional architecture for ethno-political mobilization during the breakdown phase of the Soviet Union. Linz and Stepan follow the conventional liberal argument about the incompatibility of sustainable democracy and multi-ethnicity, particularly where the latter is institutionalized in a constitution or other superior political arrangement. Both of these categories of explanation share an underlying assumption about the inefficacy, if not undesirability, of institutional arrangements for managing multi-ethnicity in a divided society. The transitology approach, in particular, reflects the liberal precept that assimilation into the hegemonic group is the most democratic way to achieve inter-ethnic peace, presupposing that this is always possible, and assuming that the ethnification of politics in democratizing states precludes a stable democratic outcome or 'consolidation'. The ethnically complex transitioning states of the FSU are regarded as a significant testing ground for these assumptions, yet they appear to have been presented with a logically inconsistent Catch-22 formula for democratization. To reformulate Barrington Moore, we summarize this prescription as: *no homogeneity, no democracy*.

The contributions to this volume have contested these assumptions. Brubaker and Bunce have rightly emphasized, in our view, how the 'institutionalized multinationality' embodied in Soviet federalism created a specific 'breeding ground' for ethno-political mobilization during the breakdown phase of the Soviet Union. Our framework goes one step further than this by analyzing not only the post-collapse deconstruction of the old system by nationalists, but the reassembly and construction of the new post-communist systems. Similarly, we believe that one of the basic assumptions of transitology – that to successfully establish themselves newly democratizing post-Soviet states must first eradicate institutionalized multi-ethnicity and homogenize their populations and state structures – is deficient. This assumption is derived from fundamental levels of analysis problems inherent in Western liberal thinking on

transition and nationalism. One of the key assumptions of many of the core writings of transitology, that the fall of the Soviet Union initiated a 'transition to democracy' process, is tautological. The regime change from Soviet authoritarianism that began in the mid-1980s developed along different roads of new state formation and state building, and this process was accelerated after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This process of change is multi-dimensional and cannot be reduced to 'democratization', even of a problematical variant. In a considerable number of post-Soviet states, most obviously in Central Asia where varieties of sultanist dynasticism and authoritarianism rendered democratic transition an ephemeral phenomenon, transitions were transient. Post-Soviet 'democratization' is a process along a spectrum, where even two of the most widely accepted consolidated democracies, Estonia and Latvia, reveal clear evidence of privileging of the hegemonic ethnic group and systematic institutionalized discrimination against their large Slavic minorities. Transitology proposes that transition is universally a 'state' process where integration is achieved by national level elites. These core premises of transitology are deficient for understanding the complex processes of regime change in a multi-ethnic conglomerate like the FSU, particularly given the legacy of formal and informal institutionalized and territorialized multi-ethnicity. In our view, the adoption of nationalizing and homogenizing policies in divided societies is likely to intensify minority discontent and sow conflict. The threat of, or actual eruption of conflict, in turn, leads to a temptation among hegemonic elites to opt for an anti-democratic oppressive control regime, unless there are countervailing disincentives (such as international pressures). Consequently, the challenge for political elites is to engineer a state institutional architecture which manages to accommodate multi-ethnicity.

Our analysis examines various dimensions, not only the state level process, but also the relations between territorial authorities within states, as well as the role of external states, regions, and other actors on developments. We support the view that post-Soviet regime change constitutes a specific 'regional' category because these states share a common legacy and were affected by distinct domestic and international 'regional' factors.¹ The critical role played by a common Soviet structural and institutional legacy is one of the most distinctive traits of post-Soviet conflicts which strengthens the validity of a distinct intra-regional comparative approach. Furthermore, the Soviet-era legacy made for a particular type of interdependency of institutions and regimes among the successor states, and this continues to reverberate in the demonstration and contagion effects of conflict, conflict management and strategies of accommodation.

INSTITUTIONS AND REGIMES

The contributions to this volume suggest that while there are obvious differences in the contexts and participants, there are some common causes and similar dynamics to many post-Soviet conflicts. Previous studies, such as that by Roeder, have stressed the significance of the size of an ethnic minority and the cultural distance between the core nation and the minority as the pre-eminent factors in the causation of post-Soviet conflicts (Roeder, 1999). The relative population size of a particular group is most relevant when it is associated with the spatial concentration of a group. The bigger and more concentrated an ethnic minority is in a given territory, the greater the likelihood for conflict. Even then, Abkhazia is a clear exception to this rule since conflict began despite the fact that the Abkhaz population accounted for only 18 per cent of the population of the Abkhaz Autonomous Oblast in 1989, though the proportion soared rapidly after the mass ethnic expulsions of Georgians and Mingrelians in 1992. In Crimea, the share of the returning Crimean Tatars today accounts for only about 10–12 per cent of the regional population, but their high degree of political mobilization and intense motivation has given them a political significance in ethnic conflict potential far outweighing their numbers in Crimean and Ukraine as a whole.

In comparing the outcomes of the different strategies of coercion and accommodation pursued in post-Soviet conflicts, we have attempted to draw together the rather compartmentalized literatures on transition, nationalism, ethnic conflict regulation and regionalism. Our analysis attempts to interlink these conceptual approaches and by concentrating on their shared emphasis on mobilization, institutions, elites and historical legacies, we have identified four defining traits of post-Soviet ethnic and regional conflict.

- The context of post-imperialism
- The combination of territorial and ethnic challenges
- The impact of transition regime type on institution building
- The interaction of internationalization and interdependency

The Context of Post-Imperialism

Empire is a regime of hegemonic control, which tends to act as a limiting constraint on ethno-territorial conflicts. One of the characteristic features of the decline of empires is the rise of such conflicts (Lustick, 1979 and 1993; Horowitz, 1985; Lieven, 2000). This is not to say simply that imperial breakdown opens a lid and releases ancient hatreds. Instead post-imperial conflicts thrive on the multi-dimensional nature of the imperial legacy and the difficulties of regime change in conditions where the

systemic stress levels of managing the demographic, territorial, cultural, functional and institutional remnants of empire cause overload and breakdown. It is the 'detritus of empire', as Snyder observed, that 'constitutes the building blocks of the new political arrangements that are constructed out of the rubble' (Snyder, 1998: 1). Any edifice constructed from rubble is bound to be messy, if not inherently unstable, and the historical lesson of state-building on the detritus of empire is that it is conducive to instability, if not to failed states. If the end of empire is sudden the subsequent political vacuum and weak institutional capacity can render the conflicts with an explosive quality. Europe has been one of the most significant zones of such conflicts given the confluence of several major empires: the Ottoman, Habsburg, German, British and Russian-Soviet empires. The ethnic conflicts that have arisen after the end of the Soviet empire fit within a broader historical pattern and may persist over the *longue durée* (Rubin and Snyder, 1998; Lieven, 2000).

The collapse of the Soviet empire in the late 1980s and early 1990s resembles earlier periods characterized by the disintegration of great European empires, after the First World War (the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Tsarist empires), and the Second World War (the German empire in Europe, the British and French empires outside Europe). Each of these periods was an apogee of international involvement in a highly selective policy of nation state-building in the emergent successor states. What is arguably different about the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, however, is that Russia's inheritance of the Soviet nuclear arsenal has severely weakened the capacity of outside powers to reshape the post-Soviet order. The enlargement of NATO and the EU are types of third-party intervention aiming to reshape the political order in Central and Eastern Europe, but the capacity of these blocs to project their power into the FSU is limited. One of the fundamental criteria of membership of both regional organizations is the acceptance of existing territorial boundaries and internal guarantees for ethnic minorities. This kind of Western conditionality, however, has not been extended to the FSU, with the exception of the Baltic states. In the FSU Russia retains its influence as an unrivalled regional power, and the West has been hesitant or incapable of intervention, as demonstrated by the renewal of war in Chechnya in late 1999. Geographical proximity and the persistence of Soviet era dependencies have allowed Russia to stay deeply involved in all of the violent and some potential post-Soviet conflicts, whether providing military, economic or political support, managing negotiations or organizing peacekeeping forces with UN tacit approval (as the CIS forces in Abkhazia and Tajikistan) or without (as the Russian military in Transdnistria).

Potential for conflict after the end of the Soviet empire has been more acute because of a number of key differences compared to preceding end-of-empire processes. Most empires have collapsed as a consequence of military defeat, and arguably, the Cold War depleted the capacity of the Soviet Union and the will of its elites to compete with the West. First, however, the nature of the Soviet collapse differed from its predecessors by its speed. It was extraordinarily fast by comparison with other empires, including the British, taking little more than two years in 1990–91. This rapid deflation allowed virtually no time for conflict potential to be planned for, channelled or managed. In any event, empires are rarely deconstructed according to a plan and disengagement tends to be most problematic the closer the periphery of empire is to the imperial core, as the anti-colonial struggles in Ireland and Algeria demonstrate. Second, the geographical proximity of core and periphery tends to be correlated with deep historical and cultural ties and the blurring of identities. The fact that Russia's empire was the most contiguous in modern history, with its core and periphery coterminous, inevitably made for a much more complex and destabilizing disengagement. Territorial proximity was a ready-made rationale for continued Russian *droit de regard*, interference and, when deemed necessary, direct intervention in the affairs of successor states in the 'near abroad'. Contiguity explains why Russia has retained a considerable influence over developments in many successor states, since proximity is not merely an excuse for interference but creates security imperatives and national interest dilemmas that, taken together, constitute a logic for it. Third, the sheer scale of the disintegration, the Soviet Union being one of history's greatest land empires, created a chaotic surge of demonstration and contagion effects among the new states. Fourth, the Soviet empire was organized in an ethno-federal structure, many of the units of which were highly multi-ethnic within their administrative boundaries. Thus, the Soviet collapse released pre-institutionalized, but still immature, nation-states in embryo, most of which had no historical provenance as independent entities. Whether or not the new state did have a history of independent statehood, the nationalizing state-building policies pursued after independence broke their Soviet territorial and identity templates. The task of building or consolidating nations and states in such conditions was a formidable one. International norms of recognition in the post-imperial phase were intended to embed new states in the international system, but these norms also created an enduring problem of frozen conflicts, with many secessionist entities surviving *de facto* independent and *de jure* unrecognized. Fifth, and most importantly, the configuration of the collapse was exceptional as the imperial core, Russia, played a central part in the dismantling of its contiguous empire.

Post-Soviet state-building has been conditioned by an intricate interplay of path-dependent and contingent endogenous and exogenous factors. On the one hand, a path-dependent endogenous factor is evident in the way that nation- and state-building proceeds within multi-national institutionalized and territorialized political-administrative constructs inherited from the imperial era. How the institutional legacies have been disassembled and reassembled affects, and is affected by, competing territorial, ethnic or separatist challenges, and has a crucial bearing on the likelihood of conflict. The exogenous factor is evident in the fact that nation- and state-building occurs not only in a post-imperial but also in a truly international and global context where international intervention to regulate conflicts has acquired a new legitimacy, although not necessarily with a more effective capacity for enforcement. We should also take note of the changing impact of international competition over time, in particular between Russia and the USA/NATO/EU, in determining how and when conflicts will be settled.

The context of post-imperialism allows us to compare the post-Soviet conflicts with previous and ongoing conflicts over imperial legacies elsewhere. Furthermore, the emphasis on the role of institutional change and design opens the way for a meaningful integration of the post-communist cases into theories of ethnic conflict, nationalism and regionalism. It is also apparent, however, that the concurrence of post-imperialism with the legacy of communist federalism is a fertile ground for ethnic and regional conflict and, as one of the most distinguishing features of these cases, makes for useful intra-regional comparisons.

We have sought to move beyond the cruder end-of-empire theses used to explain post-Soviet conflicts, which often have a primordialist undercurrent that overstates the importance of the upsurge of 'ancient hatreds' once the communist control regime was removed. Clearly, historical memories shape identities and political behaviour. In some cases, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, historical animosities are salient factors. The question is, were the historical elements of these conflicts primary agents of causation, residual factors, or mobilizing and radicalizing features after the initiation of the conflicts? The evidence from the contributions suggests that, on balance, history was a residual factor and was drawn on more for its mobilizing power once the conflicts were under way. The trigger in most cases appears to have been the centre-periphery elite conflicts over attempts to modify or disassemble Soviet-era autonomies or otherwise distinctive territorialized structures by nationalists and nationalizing states.

The Combination of Territorial and Ethnic Challenges

The role of regions is one of the least studied, yet fundamental, factors in post-Soviet conflicts. Although nationalism, ethnic mobilization and regionalism are conceptually distinct, in many studies the regional factor to the conflicts is either ignored altogether or is subsumed under the generic term 'ethnic conflict'. The contributors have examined the substantive nature of the regional cleavages feeding into conflicts. We suggest that many of the violent and non-violent post-Soviet conflicts are regional rather than clear-cut ethnic conflicts, or are impelled by regionalist factors in addition to the ethnic dimension. The widescale destabilization that accompanied the post-Soviet transition has often led to political mobilizations around secessionist and substantively regionalist issues, but these were often disguised and voiced in the rhetoric of inter-ethnic competition. Tatarstan, Crimea, and Transdnistria best illustrate this phenomenon, as these were all cases where elite mobilizations of ethnicity against the central government were initiated and strongly impelled by political economy distributive issues (oil resources in the case of Tatarstan, and the protection of outdated Soviet industries and regional assets in the others). In particular, an inherited Soviet regional socio-economic and demographic structure are key elements of some conflicts, nurturing them in Transdnistria, Northern Kazakhstan, and in the Ferghana Valley, and defusing them where there are economic dependencies on the central state, as in Gagauzia and Crimea.

Multi-ethnicity has been a major challenge for many post-Soviet states, as it was for the totalitarian and authoritarian periods of Soviet power. In many cases of post-Soviet conflict clear-cut inter-ethnic competition eludes definition, but rather we are dealing with complex compounds of regional, cultural and economic grievances that were generally triggered into conflict by attempts to alter the institutional arrangements for managing multi-ethnicity inherited from the Soviet era. While it is not our aim to either downplay the significance of ethnicity in causing, fostering and prolonging conflict in general or to suggest an extremely narrow definition of 'ethnic conflict', it seems appropriate to shift the focus from the generic label 'ethnic conflict'. The contributions in this volume offer a detailed analysis of the important but partial role that ethnicity plays in many of the actual or potential conflicts under scrutiny. Similarly, we do not view ethnic and regional conflict as mutually exclusive categories, as both ethnic and regional issues can overlap or activate one another as the conflict arises and develops over time. Ethnic and nationalist mobilization have diverse causes, modes of articulation and forms of accommodation, but we distinguish them from regionalism by the latter's mobilization around primarily territorial

interests, the absence of an overarching ethnic cleavage, and the absence of an aspiration for a nation-state.

In all of the real and potential conflicts considered in this volume, ethnic and/or linguistic issues were instrumentalized as one of several mobilization strategies advanced by the elites. In four of the five violent conflict cases considered (Chechnya, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh) ethnicity was one of the defining markers of the conflict from the very beginning, but the intensity of this marker sharpened as a consequence of the radicalization induced by the conflict process itself. The post-Soviet conflicts in Transdnistria, Gagauzia, Crimea, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Ajaria, Northern Kazakhstan and, potentially, the Ferghana Valley involve mobilizations around a complex range of regional, ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic and pragmatic elite concerns as well as security considerations. On the whole, all of these conflicts could more appropriately be described as regional rather than clear-cut ethnic conflicts, despite their ethnic overtones. In fact, with the exception of Ajaria, the above cases have occurred in multi-ethnic settings, although a high degree of sovietization conceals this underlying trait. While the overarching 'Soviet' identity had a moderating and stabilizing effect on ethno-political mobilization in the USSR, this role came under extreme pressure with the collapse in 1991. Those successor states that have been most aggressive in the pursuit of nationalizing projects to construct their new identities have, by definition, had to decisively destroy the previously hegemonic 'Soviet' identity. Regions where residues of the Soviet identity persist strongly, however, have tended to have limited or no violent conflict. In Crimea, Gagauzia, Transdnistria, and Northern Kazakhstan, minority groups exhibit a strong 'Soviet' identity that counterbalances the potential for an ethnic political mobilization. In some cases, such as Crimea and Gagauzia, constitutional autonomization designs have accommodated these conflictual identities. In others, such as Transdnistria, conflict resulted from the attempted nationalizing project, while in the case of Northern Kazakhstan a strongly oppressive control regime coupled with a gradualist nationalizing project has kept the region subdued.

In disentangling the regional and ethnic issues, our conclusion is that in most cases an 'ethnic' veneer hides more deeply embedded regional issues. Some conflicts have a double 'regional' dimension as they have occurred in regions that are not simply located within one successor state, but also are ethnic exclaves or 'external peripheries' that were dislocated from potential 'homeland' states by Soviet boundary-making policy: for example, Nagorno-Karabakh, Crimea, Transdnistria and South Ossetia. The irredentist potential of such double regions is enhanced by their

geographic location on or at the new international frontiers of the successor host state and adjacent to their potential 'homeland' state.

The Impact of Transition Regime Type on Institution Building

It may seem that post-Soviet conflicts have occurred irrespective of regime type. For example, there have been violent conflicts and peaceful accommodations in both presidential and mixed systems. Equally, we can observe a similar pattern in federal and unitary states. Only Russia is a constitutionalized federal state, though other successor states, such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, have federal elements to their constitutional arrangements. Consequently, state type – unitary or federal – does not appear to be significantly correlated with conflict, though power-sharing arrangements of a federal or quasi-federal type do appear to be an effective means of managing such conflicts.

Similarly, regime type is not clearly correlated with conflict. The impact of presidentialism, parliamentarism or some form of mixed regime type on state stability is much debated. The importance of constitutional design is an axiom of transitology. As was noted in the introduction to this volume, the assumption is that institutional choices matter for democratic consolidation and economic performance over time, and that parliamentarism is 'more conducive' to building democracy. How countries are constitutionally equipped, that is, the choice of regime type, is seen as being critical for their state capacity to manage the problems of transition. We may summarize this as the effectiveness and stability thesis. One of the problems in this literature, however, is that attempts to measure the comparative advantages and disadvantages of presidential, parliamentary or mixed systems, are frequently characterized by definitional blurring. One indication of the blurring of distinctions between the systems is the increasingly widespread use of the term 'semi-presidentialism'. Furthermore, the influential study by Shugart and Carey identified two additional intermediate regime types between pure presidentialism and pure parliamentarism: the 'premier-presidential', defined as a regime where the president has some significant powers but the cabinet is responsible to the assembly; and the more unstable 'president-parliamentary' type, defined as a regime with shared or 'confused' responsibility over cabinets between president and parliament (Shugart and Carey, 1992: 15). On applying this framework to the FSU, Shugart found a trend from the former to the latter along a west–east axis into the FSU (Shugart, 1996).

The variety of regime types in the FSU lie along a spectrum from democratic to authoritarian, and even to, in the case of the Central Asian states, sultanistic regimes.² This reality makes the application of terms such as president and parliament frequently merely shorthands for leaders

and assemblies. The leader of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, for example, is widely referred to as 'president' by Western commentators and analysts. In fact his official title, 'Turkmenbashi', should be translated as 'leader of all Turkmen, and he is president for life. This concept of leadership has more in common with authoritarian and totalitarian regimes than it does with the concept of presidentialism.

As important as institutional frameworks are for democratic consolidation, their performance is determined by the actors and elites that operate them and their political values and modes of behaviour. Personalities, leadership style and character issues can be as or more important than the formal rules of the game. Institutional studies of post-Soviet constitution-making have tended to stress the path dependencies arising from inherited rules and recirculated actors and elites. Elster's metaphor compares the challenge of constitution-making in post-communist states with 'rebuilding the ship in the open sea' (Elster *et al.*, 1998). The constitution-making process began under old communist era rules and – to varying degrees – with the same old elites involved. The paradox of post-Soviet change was that the political actors had to redefine the constitutional rules of the game while themselves playing that game. Similarly, Easter suggests that the structure of old regime elites as they emerge from the breakdown phase determines the institutional choices of the transition phase. Distinguishing between three types of old regime elites emerging from the post-communist transitions (consolidated, dispersed and reformed), Easter argues that the regime type chosen was determined by the elite structure: presidentialism in the cases of consolidated and reformed elites, and parliamentarism in most cases where there were dispersed elites. Elite preferences for one regime or the other, according to Easter, are shaped by how they affect power resources. Presidentialism (decree powers, fixed term in office, personalization of power) is better suited to establish a proprietary claim on power resources, denies new political actors access, and provides a buffer against the new forces released by democratization and the market. Parliamentarism, on the other hand, is preferred where old elites have been dispersed and politics is dominated by new political actors, whose concern is to establish open access, largely guaranteed by electoral competition (Easter, 1997: 189).

A major weakness of the debate over regime type in the transition states of the FSU is that there is a tendency to overlook Horowitz's thesis on the importance of presidentialism as a potentially critical stabilizer in ethnically divided societies. The question is whether regime type is a significant factor in conflict causation or management. The dimensions of the question can be considered as follows: do similar regimes have similar outcomes; do similar regimes have different outcomes; do different regimes have similar outcomes; and, do different regimes have different

outcomes? Of the post-Soviet states Estonia and Latvia have strong parliamentary systems, though even here presidential veto powers have been crucial for the management of minority issues through legislation rather than constitutional enactments, and in accordance with OSCE recommendations. Moldova, Ukraine and to some extent Russia have mixed systems, while the rest have strongly presidential leader-dominated regimes. In focusing on the institutional dimension of the management of multi-ethnicity as a key level of analysis, the studies presented in this volume have followed a broad interpretation of what institutions are and how they function, as outlined in the introduction, rather than a narrow focus on the presidential–parliamentary spectrum. Irrespective of regime type, nation- and state-building in the successor states has interacted with the legacies of the old Soviet system by discarding it in whole or part, or recycling it in some form. Thus, the experience of how nation- and state-building projects in post-Soviet states have dealt with ethnic and regional challenges may be examined as a model of two trends: de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization.

The first trend involved the de-institutionalization of different Soviet legacies, including attempts to alter the formal arrangements of ‘institutionalized multinationality’ at the regional level by changing the status or eradicating autonomous areas (Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Oblasts and Autonomous Okrugs). For example, the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia in December 1990 hinged on the nationalizing project of Gamsakhurdia’s parliamentary nationalist regime. In response the Ossetians attempted to opt out of Georgia but stay within the USSR, while the Georgian parliament revoked the autonomy status of South Ossetia. A similar dynamic led to the conflict with Abkhazia in 1990–91. Alternatively, in Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh there were attempts to eliminate autonomy status ‘from below’ in preference for secession at a time when Russia and Azerbaijan were predominantly parliamentary regime types. Other substantive changes to inherited institutional legacies included policies to undo Soviet language policy, economic structures and practices, eliminate or constrain settler-colonialism, the de-privileging of certain regions or groups that were beneficiaries of the Soviet regime (such as the Russian or Slavic diasporas), and installing a new privileging regime for the hegemonic ethnic group, in particular through laws on citizenship, voting rights, language, residence and employment. The parliamentary regime types in Estonia and Latvia and the mixed regime in Moldova presided over such a de-institutionalization and attempted to privilege the hegemonic ethnic group in the initial stages of transition. In the latter it provoked the secessionist movement in Transdnistria and the autonomist challenge

from Gagauzia. In the former, the process was relatively successful, partly because of subdued mobilization on the part of the large Slavic minority and partly because the ethnic privileging by Estonians and Latvians was constrained and monitored by international organizations such as the OSCE and EU which exercised leverage because of the Baltic states international aspirations to 'rejoin' Europe.³ Virtually unconstrained programmes of ethnic privileging, in contrast, were implemented in the Central Asian states, though more gradually.

De-institutionalization of the inherited structures for managing multi-ethnicity in the early phases of transition tended to provoke a reactive mobilization from the region or regions affected, and was usually elite-led and framed in ethnic rhetoric. Where territorial autonomy was threatened, the typical trajectory of this reactive mobilization developed from an initial aim of protecting the autonomy status, to demands for enhanced autonomy, and then to the extreme option of secession. Thus, the conflict dynamic itself appears to be a critical factor in transforming and radicalizing demands.

The second trend involves a reassembly of the inherited institutional legacy, whether by institutional, constitutional or other structural devices. The reaffirmation of formal or informal ways of power-sharing and accommodation is termed here a re-institutionalization. This type of re-institutionalization should not be confused with democratization, as in some cases, such as in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Ajaria and Central Asia, political and inter-ethnic stability correlate with the consolidation of new forms of authoritarian politics. The establishment of a control regime, in our view, is a form of re-institutionalization. In many post-Soviet states the management of ethnic and regional challenges by re-institutionalization is, in practice, the prerogative of presidents and leaders. The para-constitutional new Federal Treaty of 1992 in Russia was adopted at a time when the state was formally still a parliamentary system. The asymmetric power-sharing treaties for Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha of 1994–95, in contrast, were executive agreements between President Yeltsin and the strong presidents of these republics. The constitutional accommodation between Ukraine and Crimea was achieved at a time when President Kuchma's power was strong vis-à-vis the Ukrainian parliament. On the other hand, Yeltsin had a prominent role in the launching and pursuit of war against secessionist Chechnya. Similarly, the second war in Chechnya initiated by Russia in late 1999 was a conflict primarily driven by the presidential ambitions of Putin. More recently, strong presidents such as Aliiev in Azerbaijan, Kocharian in Armenia and Shevardnadze in Georgia, have taken the lead in the negotiations to reach accommodations to the conflicts in the Caucasus.

Repressive control regimes have been most strongly consolidated in the sultanistic regimes of Central Asia since the early 1990s. While there is no clear correlation between regime type and conflict or accommodation over ethnic and regional challenges to the state, it does appear that strong control regimes, such as those of Central Asia, can manage ethnic and regional challenges without necessarily addressing or even attempting to resolve the issues at stake. In the short and medium term they may succeed in neutralizing reactive mobilizations from minority groups by coercion, or some measure of informal accommodation in a patrimonial system of elite cooption, or through strengthened central administrative control through regional governors appointed by the presidents. Comparative experience indicates that such regimes can persist, but they are notoriously unstable as they preside over an immense potential for opposition and mobilization.

Consequently, the institutional legacy of the Soviet era, in particular 'institutionalized multinationality', may not only explain the patterns of the breakdown of the communist system, as Brubaker and Bunce have argued, but also the patterns of nation- and state-building during post-communist transition. In fact, the Soviet institutional legacy was an important constraint on nationalizing projects. Nagorno-Karabakh is a special case in that it is the only post-Soviet conflict where a territorialized ethnic group which enjoyed an institutionalized status that was not threatened by a nationalizing state took the initiative to secede to join a nationalizing project in a neighbouring ethnic kin state. While the reasons for this conflict are essentially historical, even this case confirms the general argument made by the case studies of conflicts in this volume, that the 'making' of new post-Soviet states could not proceed in a stable or peaceful manner on the basis of a rapid 'unmaking' of the Soviet structures by nationalizing projects, and that regional and ethnic factors are intertwined.

THE INTERACTION OF INTERDEPENDENCY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

A recurrent theme of the multi-level analysis presented in the contributions is the high degree of interdependence of transitioning states in terms of the causes and dynamics of their conflicts. The interdependency has two dimensions. The first dimension involves the impact of successor states and their conflicts and non-conflicts on each other, including most importantly the role of the Russian Federation in all of the violent and potential conflicts in the FSU. The second dimension concerns the impact of the international system and its organizations on

potential and violent conflict. The conflicts do not occur in a vacuum but are processed within the wider context of post-imperialism and transition. Consequently, post-Soviet conflicts are as much influenced by inter-state relations and the interdependencies among transition states as they are by intra-state and international factors. The fundamental interdependency is the Soviet legacy of interconnected economies. Crimea's economic dependence on Kyiv is one example; Moldova's dependence on Transdnistria for electricity is another; Tatarstan's landlocked location and dependence on Russia for oil processing and transshipment is yet another.

The interdependence of post-Soviet conflicts is reflected in their contagion or demonstration effects. The Russian military intervention in Chechnya in 1994-96, for example, was a powerful deterrent for the resumption of other potential conflicts, demonstrating the enormous costs of all-out war. In contrast, Tatarstan's power-sharing agreement of 1994 was widely perceived beyond Russia as an institutional innovation that could be a precedent for conflict resolution. Crimean elites drew on the experience of Russia's accommodation with Tatarstan for settling the Crimea issue, while Georgia and Azerbaijan have offered similar autonomy arrangements to resolve their secessionist problems, though as of yet without success. The fact that Russia under Putin is now attempting to dilute many of the autonomous arrangements of the power-sharing treaties with Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, and has returned to a coercion strategy in Chechnya, is not a good advertisement for the durability of such institutional devices, and will undoubtedly make institutional accommodations based on autonomy appear less attractive and less viable elsewhere. The dynamics of conflict interdependence in Moldova, however, have exhibited the reverse tendency. Rather than the autonomy arrangement of 1995 with Gagauzia acting as a precedent and an incentive for conflict-resolution in Transdnistria, Transdnistrian elites have rejected the constitutional arrangement as falling too far short of their demands. Concurrently, the Gagauz elites are increasingly dissatisfied by the discussions of more extensive powers for Transdnistria, which could lead to a reopening of the autonomy issue in order to secure even more powers. Thus, unresolved regional problems have a contagion effect to destabilize other regions that seemed to have been successfully accommodated. The demonstration or contagion effect can, therefore, work both ways: it can shape perceptions and provide an example of institutional means of conflict-management, but it can also revive debates and tensions based on new expectations or the perceived ill-functioning of existing autonomies.

Russia has played an ambivalent role in the regions in conflict. On the one hand Russian control and conditionality have had a stabilizing effect

on some of the conflicts and, for example, prepared the basis for OSCE and CIS/UN peacekeeping; on the other hand there has been a tendency for Russia to freeze conflicts by pressurizing both parties to the conflict and thereby helping to maintain the *status quo* (especially in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh). Ironically, its involvement on the Abkhaz side in the conflict with Georgia was effectively sanctioned by the UN's recognition of the CIS peacekeeping mission after the 1994 truce.

Once conflicts have erupted, however, they may develop a different dynamic altogether. There was a discernable snowball effect on the radicalization of conflicts after 1991. Once elites and society as a whole become radicalized by conflicts the parameters of any settlement can be subject to wild fluctuation and bidding games. Consequently, institutional designs for managing ethnic and regional challenges to the state, such as autonomy, which may have been acceptable at the outset of a conflict, become wholly unacceptable. An autonomy agreement could well have stabilized Abkhazia and Transdnistria in 1991, but by 1992 such arrangements were unworkable. In Nagorno-Karabakh, however, the prospects for a settlement within the institutional architecture of the state of Azerbaijan evaporated with Armenia's military intervention, supported by Russia. The specific historical circumstances and political dynamics of this conflict, in particular the rise to power of the secessionist Karabakhtsi in Armenian politics, may well have rendered any settlement internal to Azerbaijan impracticable, as it may cause a civil war in Armenia.

All of the violent post-Soviet conflicts have been shaped by the interaction of domestic and international factors. In addition to the role of interdependency discussed in the previous section, the international dimension of post-Soviet conflicts principally consists of the influence of, and intervention by, states external to the FSU and international organizations. International influence on post-Soviet conflicts from outside the FSU has been weak and ineffective. Western states have tended to channel their influence on conflicts through the key international organizations for conflict management and resolution, the OSCE and UN. To some extent the OSCE's mission is constrained by the contradictory international principles on self-determination and territorial integrity. In practice, the OSCE as a representative body of states and state interests promotes territorial integrity. When it comes to conflict resolution, this emphasis leads to a prioritization of autonomy arrangements within the existing post-Soviet state boundaries. Indirectly, the solutions suggested by the OSCE are, thus, framed by the Soviet legacy of institutionalized regions and autonomies and help to further embed and legitimize them. The OSCE is often not seen as a neutral actor by the conflicting sides in post-Soviet conflicts, as it tends to be associated with Western influence

or one of the parties to the conflict. It has been most successful in cases of conflict-prevention where the parties are already negotiating over constitutional devices, rather than in the resolution of conflicts which are ongoing and where the parties are radicalized. Generally, the OSCE employed a gradualist strategy of pressure, using the personal diplomacy of the OSCE High Commissioner of Nationalities, Max van der Stoel, as its most effective instrument. The results, however, indicate that the OSCE seems better equipped to protect minorities when the regime is compliant and receptive to pressure for some ulterior policy motive as in Latvia and Estonia.

Neither the OSCE nor the UN has been involved in a single case of conflict resolution in the FSU, though they are active in conflict regulation, managing those conflicts which are frozen, such as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and in Nagorno-Karabakh. Here the focus is on the stabilization of conflicts, the maintenance of ceasefires, and the facilitating of negotiations by round-tables and mediating groups, such as the 'Minsk' group for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia has been the key arbiter of many of the violent post-Soviet conflicts, mediating between the parties and brokering ceasefires in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transdnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh. It is on the basis of Russian arbitration that OSCE negotiations usually follow. Furthermore, states where there are conflicts have become more dependent on Russia as a result of its interference. Some parties to the conflicts have relied heavily on Russia for economic and military assistance, most obviously Armenia whose military victory over Azerbaijan and survival of an economic blockade was critically dependent on its alliance with Russia. Russian support has been crucial also for secessionists in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transdnistria. Ironically, even Georgia and to a lesser extent Azerbaijan, two victims of Russia's support for secessionists, became more subject to Russian influence as the price for a freezing of the conflicts at a time when the military advantage lay with the secessionists. Post-Soviet conflicts, consequently, by subterfuge have given Russia a greater leverage over the state-building and transition of many post-Soviet states.

Although the FSU is scattered with several important diaspora groups, most importantly Russians living outside Russia, cases of active support from ethnic diasporas or homeland states are rare. The strong influence of diaspora groups is evident in only one conflict: Nagorno-Karabakh. In the case of secessionist Nagorno-Karabakh, support has been given by the Armenian diaspora which has provided extensive financial assistance and significant political lobbying in the USA, where it is concentrated. In contrast, Turkey has played a restrained political lobbying role on behalf of its 'ethnic' kin in Azerbaijan and to a much lesser extent in Crimea. An

'ethnic' factor in direct military intervention by an outside state occurred in just two conflict cases: Armenia's military aggression in support of Karabakh's secession, and Russian military intervention in support of the secessionists in Transdnistria.

The trend in post-Soviet conflicts conforms to a global trend identified by Gurr's updated 'Minorities at Risk' project, which states that: 'In most recent wars of self-determination, fighting usually began with demands for complete independence and ended with negotiated or de facto autonomy within the state.' Gurr believes that from the mid-1990s there has been an emerging international consensus on the idea that disputes over self-determination 'are best settled by negotiation and mutual accommodation'. He may well be also right in arguing that negotiating regional and cultural autonomy is cheaper than rising instability and insurgencies in the long-run, as well as the costs of incurring international opprobrium. The constraining network of international organizations, mutual obligations and dependencies that Gurr identifies as being crucial for conflict resolution, however, are essentially tools for the projection of the influence of the leading Western powers. Similarly, his claim that with 'international engagement, ethnic conflict's heyday will belong to the last century' is dubious (Gurr, 2000: 54–8, 61, 64). The logic of the above views is belied by the reality of continuing competition between Russia and the West for influence in the post-Soviet space, particularly where significant economic resources are involved, as in the Caspian Basin. Both, moreover, have very different interests in the outcome of post-Soviet conflicts. This international competition is a hindrance to conflict resolution, since a mutually agreeable solution for the parties to the conflict is complicated enough but is made even more complex by the need for Russian and US consent, most notably in Nagorno-Karabakh.

CONCLUSION

The complexity of the challenges to the post-Soviet successor states has been a major contributory factor in obstructing their overall reform process, not only in constitutional design but also in the fields of economy and social issues. Where conflicts have been managed peacefully or resolved by institutional devices, the negotiation process itself has been a positive development and helped to cement a more stable civic definition of the successor state. That, of course, is provided that national and regional elites are willing to negotiate and engage in compromise.

Confederal, federal, and common state solutions which promote and institutionally entrench autonomy arrangements at the regional level are

widely recognized to be the most productive basis for future accommodations and settlements of conflicts in the FSU. The obstacles to such arrangements appear to be twofold. First, there is the post-imperial context. By definition empires are often quasi-federal in that they are multinational and local governance is devolved to authorities within specific colonies, while matters of more general importance (foreign policy, defence, trade, taxation) remain centralized under the control of the imperial government. Federalism as a state organizing principle fits more readily with the logic of empire, whereas unitary systems accord with the logic of nationalism. The post-colonial experience in Africa and Asia with federalism demonstrates that there can be a significant disincentive for successor states to adopt it after independence, particularly if the pressure for this originates from external sources such as the former imperial power or international organizations, thus suggesting a continued paternalistic threat to sovereignty.

Second, the radicalization that inevitably intensifies during conflicts can trap transition states in a downward spiral of non-resolution and dysfunction that may be accelerated by the weakening of the state and other key institutions during the transition process. In particular, the economic dimension of transition tends to be disastrously affected by conflicts, even in those cases where institutionalized accommodation strategies prevailed. Whether violence erupted or conflict management succeeded, the conflicts led to a postponement or deflection of much-needed economic reforms at the national and sub-national levels. In fact, institutionally embedded autonomies often did little to progress economic reforms in the regions concerned since they entrenched old elites in power, though obviously they avoided the crippling costs associated with military conflict. In Crimea, Gagauzia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha, accommodation strategies tended to consolidate the power of regional rent-seeking elites who stalled any reforms that threatened their hold on power.

The studies presented here have attempted to illustrate the wide array of institutional devices and policies employed to manage regional and ethnic challenges to the states of the FSU, examining why particular arrangements have worked in some cases, while similar or other designs have been inoperable elsewhere. There is no doubt that the successful management of ethnic and regional diversity and conflict-potential is a prerequisite for political stability as well as the foundation for successful democratic consolidation and economic transition – though not necessarily for the onset of the transition process itself. To reiterate the problem of Gellner's rejection of a 'third way', we suggest that in the absence of forced assimilation or ethnic-cleansing, the pre-requisite for

the transition to a stable democracy in a multi-ethnic state is an institutional architecture that recognizes diversity and manages territorialized minorities and secession-potential. In the more democratic post-Soviet states this has been achieved by a re-institutionalization of multi-ethnicity through legislation and institutionalized autonomies. Where conflicts have not been managed by a re-institutionalization of multi-ethnicity the outcome is a fractured state and a deflected transition process, with mass ethnic expulsions or discriminated and disgruntled minorities, and frozen conflicts where unreconciled secessionist entities exist in a Nether World of the international system. Depending on one's perceptions, Nagorno-Karabakh, for example, can at present be interpreted as a secessionist region of the Azerbaijani state, an informal region of Armenia or an independent state though unrecognized by the international system.

Post-Soviet state-building in a context of territorialized multi-ethnicity tended to begin with a de-institutionalization of the legacies of the old system. Thus, the ethno-territorial structures of 'institutionalized multinationality' inherited from the Soviet period had a major impact not only on the collapse of the USSR, but also on post-Soviet state-building. They not only undid the Soviet past but also disrupted the post-Soviet future. In this sense the post-Soviet successor states became disassembled states. While conflicts tend to be radicalizing events, the effect of which may make an institutional 'fix' ineffective or inapplicable, the extent to which these states have been successful in stabilizing their conflict potential has been largely determined by their state capacity for creating a new institutional architecture. There are two main variants for this: either the establishment of a new 'control' regime, or the reassembly and re-institutionalization of provisions for multi-ethnicity in ways which may or may not draw on the autonomy arrangements of the discarded old regime. Both variants may be effective at managing multi-ethnicity, but only the latter comes with an international seal of approval.

NOTES

1. See Bunce's critique of transitology in the extensive Slavic Review debate of 1994–95 with Schmitter, Karl and others.
2. We employ Sultanism as a regime category in the Weberian sense of an 'extreme case of patrimonialism' where the public and private domains are fused, the polity is the personal domain of the ruler, there is no rule of law and a low level of institutionalization. In sum, an arbitrary and personalistic regime.
3. David Laitin's study of the Russian diaspora claims that Russian and Soviet settlers are often content to assimilate to the post-Soviet nationalizing state (Laitin, 1998).

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