

INTRODUCTION

Some Features of the New Generation Conflicts

The new generation conflicts which emerged in the process of the collapse of the USSR and SFRY (the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia) are a new type of the local war. Although the possibility of spreading this or that conflict, i.e. its spill-over beyond quite a distinctly outlined zone, is almost improbable, however, such conflicts are, first, extremely devastating for the directly engaged parties, and second, in the globalization era they pose some danger for the external environment. They are defined by the following indicators:

-The parties to the conflict are a state and a group of the common identification (ethnic, religious);

-The conflicts take place in the countries, where the state governance is either very weak or does not exist at all;

-The parties engaged into the conflict have complicated political and economic trans-national relations.

In the process of development of such conflicts there is a growth of negative perceptions of the counter-partner's cultural, religious, ideological and even behavioural features. At the same time the contiguous social and cultural interests of the parties to the conflict grow up into the political, military-political, and further on, the economic confrontation.

An additional factor, typical to the entire post-Soviet space, is an anxious attitude of any titular nation to its history, language, religion and culture. Titular nations in the newly-formed states have intended to minimize any possible external and internal threats to their values, therefore, *a priori* considering the ethnic minorities as a so-called "fifth column."

It is worth mentioning that for the parties of the three conflicts in the South Caucasus – the Abkhazian, the South Ossetian and the Nagorno Karabakh conflicts, history is considered as a reference point to prove their case: the societies, especially their political and intellectual strata, consider their conflicts as historical, dating back to the ancient times. No wonder that immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union an accelerated reanimation of the enemy image, which was kept in the historical memory of the peoples and displayed as

outbursts of the ethnic violence of various intensity, occurred almost everywhere in the post-Soviet space. In this context it is possible to agree with Thomas de Waal's conclusion that "the problem is rooted in the societies, which are incapable of getting rid of illusions and rhetoric and displaying readiness to reconcile with the country that they are still see as their historical enemy."¹

Such a subjective factor as "skeletons in cupboards," possessed by each party, should be included into the multi-layer nature of a conflict.

In addition, in the phase of an overt military confrontation of a conflict and against the background of the reciprocal violence, emerging new layers of the negative perception of the adversary/enemy just complicate the further process of the conflict settlement.

As a result, the nature of a conflict is often not understood and revealed to the end, its perception from outside is distorted; the mechanisms for its settlement are halved, partial and/or unacceptable for the parties to the conflict.

In the case of three unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus, the process of settlement in the concrete period of time is restricted to the conditions of the reached cease-fire agreement or interim arrangements.

By the results of such agreements, first, a "neither war, nor peace" situation was established, while the achievement of the cease-fire was as a whole in the interests of all immediate participants of the conflict at the moment of the cease-fire.

Second, active military actions were actually stopped at the moment when the conflicting parties understood that the continuing confrontation would lead to ungrounded and very serious human and material losses, or when a military balance between the parties to the conflict was established.

Third, when the ceasefire agreement was reached, the parties to the conflict took into account the reaction of so called "third parties" (which might be individual states or authoritative international organizations), whose attitude to the conflict had already been formed to some extent, and who were more or less ready to establish a format for negotiations and to provide mediatory services.

Meanwhile in the case of the South Caucasian conflicts (due to almost or absolutely inconsistent positions of the conflicting parties)

¹Thomas de Waal. *Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. Moscow, Text, 2005. p. 9. (In Russian.)

negotiations were almost frozen at the level of discussion of the arrangements that might be acceptable for all parties to the conflict.

At the same time, the protraction of the settlement process, taking into account the logic of the internal development and perception of the established situation by each party to the conflict, has led complication of the conflict by numerous accompanying factors. It makes the possibilities of the search for the options of the settlement even more difficult, multi-layer and multi-level.

However, in the “neither war, nor peace” situation there may be something cautiously positive: at the moment of signing of the cease-fire agreement the parties to the conflict had reached the balance of forces that is not casual at all.

The further negotiating process, be it protracted or accelerated, is unable to get the situation back to the starting point, i.e. to the pre-conflict phase.

However, in the worst case, the aggregation of factors can provoke its rapid escalation by any party to the conflict as the most acceptable option for resolution of its own more acute internal problems, including those, related to preservation or seizing the power.

The five-day war in August, 2008, in the Georgian territory became an indicator of fragility of the whole security system in the South Caucasus, and at the same time triggered establishment of a qualitatively new status quo, which is defined by:

- The emergence of two partly recognized states – the Republic of Abkhazia and the South Ossetian Republic;

- A demonstration of readiness to defend its interests, including through hard power methods, by Russia;

- A decrease of confrontation between the United States and Russia in some issues, including those related to Georgia;

- A reorientation of the U.S. interests, aimed to increase Turkey’s role in the region, and therefore, pressure on both – Armenia and Turkey – to normalize their bilateral relations;

- A certain activation of the European Union in the region through soft power;

- A growing militarization of the South Caucasus;

- The strengthening of the Islamic factor, in particular, in Azerbaijan (against the background of the crushed secular opposition) and in the Northern Caucasus.

Each of the mentioned indicators contains a huge conflict potential; it is impossible to analyze them all within the frameworks of this study that covers developments in the South Caucasus up to the summer of 2010. The authors focus first of all upon the dynamics of developments in areas of the South Ossetian (Chapter 1), the Abkhazian (Chapter 2), and the Nagorno Karabakh (Chapter 4) conflicts. Considering the process of origination of these conflicts in the historical retrospection, they analyze the internal and external factors, contributing to the transition of the conflicts from the latent state into an overt military confrontation, discuss the role of the conflicts in the internal and external policies of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and their impact on the entire regional security system after the August, 2008 war. The military and military-technological cooperation of Russia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia is briefly discussed in the Appendix 1.

The situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti/Javakhk (in Georgia) with the compact residence of the Armenian population, as the area fraught with serious potential threats to the stability of the region, is analyzed in the Chapter 3. The authors conclude that any weakening of the central power in Georgia could result in breaking the balance and strengthening of the centrifugal forces in Samtskhe-Javakheti with consequent destabilization of the situation in the South Caucasus and with possible engagement of Armenia.

Another theme, “The Islamic factor through the prism of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict” (Chapter 5) is related to the problem of growing Islamist moods in Azerbaijan and probable exploitation of the political Islam for maintaining the tension in the Azerbaijani society and aiming the discontent outside.

In the Chapter 6, “The policy of non-regional actors in the South Caucasus: the conflict potential” the authors analyze the approaches of the U.S., the European Union and Turkey towards the South Caucasus, taking into account the level of their interaction through the prism of their interrelations with Russia. A special attention is focused upon the dynamic of the changing status of Russia in the region and its transformation from a peace-keeper to a regional power; the mechanisms of its pressure on the regional states; the ways how Russia is building up its relations with non-regional actors are also discussed in this chapter.

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