Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict
Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered

Emil Souleimanov
Understanding
Ethnopolitical Conflict
Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia
Wars Reconsidered

Emil Souleimanov
Charles University, Prague
Contents

Foreword by Stephen Blank xi
Acknowledgments xiii
Note on Transliteration xiv

1 Introduction 1
   The South Caucasus 2
   Theories of ethnic conflict and civil war 6
   Methodological remarks 9
   Organization of the book 11

2 Theorizing on the Causes of Civil War and
   Ethnopolitical Conflict 13
   Explaining the terms 16
   Typology of conflicts 27
      Conflict vocabulary 27
      Periodization in ethnopolitical conflict and civil war 29
   Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict 31
   Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic or low-scale violence 31
   Phase C: Sustained large-scale violence – civil war 33
   Conflict-onset based theories 34
   Structural accounts 35
      Level of economic development 35
      Facilitating a rebellion? Natural resources, diaspora,
      and geography 36
      Demographic factors: ethnic diversity, size, and proportions 38
      Regime type and regime change 39
      Social inequality accounts 40
      General shortcomings of quantitative research 41
      Conflict-escalation based theories 42
   Perceptual accounts 43
      Ancient hatreds 43
      Security dilemma 44
      Symbolic (identity) politics 46
   Instrumentalist accounts – manipulative leaders 47
Opportunity in power asymmetry: a missing causal link between ethnic riots and civil war? 48

3 The South Caucasus: A History of Identities, an Identity of Histories
Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis 51
Azerbaijan 52
Relations with Persians and Persia, or Turks and Turkey, in historical perspective 56
Relations with Russians and Russia in historical perspective 59
Armenia and Armenians 61
Relations with Turks and Turkey in historical perspective 63
Relations with Russians and Russia in historical perspective 68
Georgia and Georgians 71
Relations with Russians and Russia in historical perspective 72
Forging nation-states: societal transition in the South Caucasus Republics 77
The internal political situation in Azerbaijan on the eve of the breakup of the U.S.S.R. 79
The role of clans in Azerbaijani politics 79
Müttəllibov's rule: chaotic internal politics 80
Elçibay: the nationalists in power 85
The rise of Heydər Əliyev 85
The internal political situation in Armenia on the eve of the breakup of the U.S.S.R. 86
The internal political situation in Georgia on the eve of the breakup of the U.S.S.R. 89

4 Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia:
The Ascent of Ethnopolitical Conflict 94
Nagorno-Karabakh 97
Conflict and historiography 101
Chronology of escalation 105
Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict 105
Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic violence 108
Phase C: Armed conflict – civil (international) war 110
The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia 112
South Ossetia 112
Abkhazia 114
Conflict and historiography 115
South Ossetia: chronology of escalation 122
Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict 122
Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic violence 124
Phase C: Armed conflict – civil war 126
Abkhazia: Chronology of escalation 128
Phase A: Mobilization – latent conflict 128
Phase B: Radicalization – sporadic violence 132

5 War and Diplomacy: Ethnopolitical Conflicts as a Factor in the Foreign Policies of South Caucasian Countries (1991–94) 135
Turkey 136
Relations with Azerbaijan 136
Relations with Armenia 138
Turkey and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh 139
Iran 141
Relations with Azerbaijan 142
Relations with Armenia 143
Iran and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh 144
Russia 147
Relations with Azerbaijan 148
Relations with Armenia 150
Russia and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh 151
Russian relations with Georgia 155
Russian–Georgian relations and the war in South Ossetia 157
Russian–Georgian relations and the war in Abkhazia 159
Outcomes of the ethnopolitical conflicts in Georgia 162
Establishment of Russian military bases on Georgian territory 163

6 Conclusion 165
Level of economic development 165
Facilitating a rebellion? Natural resources, diaspora, and geography 166
Demographic factors: ethnic diversity, size, and proportions 168
Regime type and regime change 169
Social inequality accounts 170
Ancient hatreds 171
Security dilemma 173
Symbolic (identity) politics 175
Manipulative leaders 176
Expanding the theory 179
Distinguishing between onset-based and process-based causes of civil war and ethnic conflict 179
In-group cohesion 180
External support of secessionist movements 183
Power asymmetry-related opportunity, institutionalization of violence, and path to ethnic civil war 184

Notes 188

Bibliography 225

Index 243