Nationalism and Conflict Prevention in Central and Eastern Europe

Chayes, Abram and Antonia Handler Chayes, eds. *Preventing Conflict in the Post-Communist World: Mobilizing International and Regional Organizations*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1996.

Tishkov, Valery. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; Oslo: International Peace Research Institute; Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1997.

The end of the Cold War and of superpower confrontation opened up possibilities for new sources of tension and violence throughout Europe and the former Soviet Union, despite the optimism, even euphoria, that characterized much public discussion about the emergence of a "new world order" of peace and democracy. Wars have broken out and, for the most part, are still unresolved, in Bosnia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova, Georgia, Tajikistan, Chechnya and elsewhere. Escalating tensions in other post-communist countries have raised serious concerns in the international community, as well.

The two books under discussion here treat the ethnic and nationalist sources of this recent and current conflict, and discuss ways in which the international community might help to mitigate or even prevent such conflict. Valery Tishkov, a well-known Russian historian and ethnographer and former Minister of Nationalities in the government of President Yeltsin, has written a multi-faceted examination of the place of ethnicity and nationalism in the conflicts that have exploded on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Tishkov begins with a general review of Soviet and Russian ethnography, in which he makes clear that virtually all scholars of ethnic and nationality issues in both the former Soviet Union and contemporary Russia have been fully committed to a view of ethnicity as "an objective 'given,' a sort of primordial characteristic of humanity." (p. 1) He then argues that this emphasis, plus the general nationalistic orientation of Russian ethnographers, means that ethnic and conflict studies have learned little from recent experiences and actually contribute to inflaming national confrontation. The propagandistic use of academic research has indeed contributed to the collapse of functioning relationships among ethnic communities.

Tishkov, who makes clear throughout this important study his familiarity with contemporary Western literature on ethnicity and nationalism, then traces the history of Soviet ethnic and social engineering and the legacy that it left behind for post-Soviet states and peoples. Throughout his study he makes clear the role of the political efforts of elites - both during and after the Soviet period - in the instrumental use of nationalism to accomplish their own purposes. "These elites are now acquiring access to resources from which they feel they had been alienated by the unitarian state. They are beginning to exercise political and, partly, cultural control in their 'own' republics." (p. 255) In other words, Tishkov adheres fully to the instrumentalist conception of ethnicity and nationalism.

About one-third of this penetrating analysis of the post-Soviet milieu is devoted to a series of case studies - about the reasons for Russians leaving Central Asia, the background to the ethnic conflicts in Kyrgyzia, the conflict between the Ingush and Ossetians, and the war in Chechnya. Tishkov concludes with a call for the creation of political structures and a public climate that will permit the preservation of a cultural mosaic and group integrity. He suggests a strategy and mechanisms to govern conflicting ethnicity through a policy of cultural pluralism, civil rights based on the community, and individual freedoms. In fact, the book is much stronger in its evaluative and analytic contributions than in the probable success of the policy recommendations that the author makes. Although he is indeed correct in calling for the establishment of a civic state in the post-Soviet environment and argues most persuasively that ethnically-based conflict is not "programmed by history and ethnicity itself," (p. 286), one might question whether the situation has not deteriorated to the point where his recommendations - at least for the foreseeable future - have little prospect for successful implementation. Yet, Tishkov provides us with a perceptive analysis of the sources of conflict in post-Soviet society - an analysis that could easily be applied to other post-communist environments in central and eastern Europe.

While Tishkov examines the sources of conflict, the contributors to *Preventing Conflict in the Post-Communist World* take conflict as a given and turn to an assessment of the potential role of external actors, in particular international and regional organizations, in controlling and preventing that conflict. The editors bring together a broad array of articles dealing with ways in which international and regional organizations might play a role in contributing to the prevention and resolution of conflict throughout former communist Europe. The contributors to this important study examine the actual involvement of international and regional organizations, as well as their possible expanded involvement. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the European Union, international financial institutions, the European Bank for Reconstruction, NATO, the Western European Union, and the United Nations are the institutions discussed. Most of the authors are not specialists on the region and take the origin of the existing conflicts as a given. They do, however, provide extensive discussion of the international institutions which they treat; although, in some cases the reader might wonder why individual chapters are so extraordinarily long - 40-50 pages is the median, while some go beyond 70 pages.

The authors are well aware of the problems and potential problems involved in resolving these conflicts. Part of the problem addressed here results from the fact that, despite the end of cold war confrontation, there has been little catalyst to change the way in which politicians, statesmen, even analysts perceive the situation. While the international system is by no means static, it is extraordinarily slow to change. Thus, effective regional and international institutions that might prevent the kind of conflict that has exploded across the former communist world have been very slow to develop.

In a very perceptive concluding chapter, Keitha Sapsin Fine outlines the role to date of Western individuals and institutions contributing to the chaos that has emerged in much of the post-communist world, when she states: "With the best of intentions - and

sometimes the worst - legions of foreign consultants and advisers have unintentionally rebuilt walls between East and West, their insistence on certain open 'Western' procedures, styles, and programs, engendering more resistance and negativity than constructive change. They misunderstand local norms, have no idea of cultural dimensions that must develop for change to occur, do not appreciate how difficult it is to recruit and train people to think and act in new ways in an environment where so much of the past governs daily life." (p. 573) To some extent, Fine's comments might be applied to some of the authors of this volume, who bring to their analytic task expertise on theories of conflict resolution and on the background of international and regional organizations. The question arises about the relevance of their proposed solutions to the cultural environments, including the heightened sense of national hostility, that characterize the region under consideration.

The two books discussed in this essay complement one another exceptionally well. Tishkov provides the descriptive detail and the concrete analysis that one would expect of a renowned ethnographer. The contributors to the volume edited by Abram and Antonia Chayes bring a very different perspective, but one of great relevance, since the conflicts in the post-communist world are likely to challenge the very security of the European and broader global system. Both of these books are recommended to anyone seriously concerned about ethnic and nationalist conflict and the ways by which that conflict might be resolved.

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