

THE GUNS OF ETHNONATIONALISM: LOOKING FOR LESSONS

Since 1988, ethnic related wars have raged from one flank of the former Soviet dominated world to the other; ethnonationalism has assumed aggressive forms from the coast of the Adriatic Sea to the Pamir Mountains in Central Asia. At present, a US–NATO imposed cease-fire has temporarily quelled the worst of the fighting in Bosnia, though with little prospects of a lasting peace. In southern Caucasia, a fragile moratorium grudgingly agreed upon by Armenia and Azerbaijan as far back as July 1994 has brought a measure of calm to the stalemated war over Nagorno–Karabakh; but in northern Caucasia, Chechnya's bloody war of secession continues in full force well into its second year with no political end in sight; and fears of its spreading eventually to neighboring Daghestan and Ingushetia are not necessarily exaggerated. While in Tajikistan, the complex and bitter civil war shows no signs of coming to a satisfactory solution. Worse, in all three regions, not far below the surface, there lurks the potential for additional ethno-nationalist eruptions.

What can we begin to learn from this? Is this the unavoidable price for the end of multinational entities? How responsible for the human carnage is the legacy of communist rule? Why was it so simple for once staunch communist apparatchiks to metamorphose into zealous nationalistic commissars? Was the pre-Soviet heritage of intra-ethnic strife a major factor in the intensification of post-Soviet ethno-confrontations? How effective have been and can be outside interventions in pacifying and preventing violent ethnic-fueled collisions? Are there any relevant Conflict Resolution theories and practices that can contribute towards mutual understanding and compromise amongst feuding ethnicities? In the near future, will the post-Soviet *Raspad* dissipate? Will the process of disintegration under pressure of remorseless ethno-separatism exhaust itself? Or are we to expect further episodes of territorial fragmentation in the face of a chorus of ethno-political claims?

Evidently, the answers to each of these questions call for arduous research on the part of scholars from many disciplines. As usual, the key to understanding lies equally in the distant and near pasts, as well as in the mercurial present. Imperative theoretical projections into the immediate future require thorough familiarity with both past and present patterns. But too much still remains unknown. Case studies, individual and comparative, call for information not yet available: too many (secret) documents remain to be obtained and examined before reliable answers and interpretations can be produced. The links between the past and the present, and, by extension, between the present and the future, remain elusive, mountains of information and ultra-fast scenario computations notwithstanding.

Future contributors to *Nationalities Papers* will have no shortage of opportunities to assist in framing questions and answers to what we can expect to learn from the present nightmare of ethno-warfare, from its elusive antecedents/causes to its unpredictable consequences. As in former issues, *Nationalities Papers* will assist in the process of providing fruitful opportunities to raise provocative questions and in encouraging a wide range of answers in the belief that the best lesson emerging from these troubled times in our area of concentration is the same old one: the more insightful the question, the more enlightening the answer.

The guns of ethnonationalism remind us of salvos of cannons past, of yesteryears, when scholars and diplomats also sought to probe into the mysteries of ethnicity and of the ethnic mind, not only of its darker side but its more creative potential. Even as ethnic blood is spilled, we recall the miracles of multi-ethnic coexistence in Prague, in Vienna, in Budapest, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Cracow, Tbilisi, Baku, (to name but a few) and Samarkhand. Yet, these once vibrant multi-ethnic urban centers have been “purified” by genocide, by massed artillery, and by ethnic cleansing (by forced deportation or “voluntary,” induced departure). As the guns of ethnonationalism roar their venom, these cities have lapsed into mono-ethnic silence, culturally parochial, spiritually near death.

Did this have to be? Is there a lesson here, too? Are we being told that mono-ethnic societies are essentially sterile? That multicultural communities are the stuff of civilization? Look at New York, past and present, at Chicago, at San Francisco and at Los Angeles. As the spirit of mono-ethnicity descends on the region of concern to our readers, are we privy to a glimpse of the emerging future? Of uni-ethnic territories, of increasing ethno-compartmentalization and mutual exclusion? And at what cost? There are lessons here, lessons with global implications that need to be learned and articulated soon.

HRH