Competing theories of Ethnic conflict in the Caucasus

Abstract: This study presents a conceptual framework for understanding the conflict in one of the most dangerous regions of the world – the Caucasus. By proposing a typology of armed conflict, the study seeks to achieve analytical clarity and contribute to conflict analysis. My approach, typological theorizing, provides a rich depiction of phenomena and identifies conditions under which the conflicts may escalate.

Author’s identification: Zinaida Shevchuk is a Ph.D. candidate in the field of international relations at the Department of International Relations and European Studies, Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University, Czech Republic. She has published in several journals as the Communist and Post Communist Studies and Defence and Strategy. She is fluent in Czech, English, Georgian and Russian languages.

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Introduction

This study is about ethnic armed conflict in the Caucasus region. It is built on three main elements. First, creation of the theoretical model of ethnic conflict; second, applying the model on the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus, identifying the causes of the conflicts along the way; third, identification and finding the conditions under which the conflict become violent.

The end of Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union witnessed the outbreak of a new wave of intrastate and national ethnic conflicts that were suppressed during the Cold War period. International violence has become less problematic than it was during the last century. This means that there are more intrastate conflicts than interstate struggles and the number of ethnic has increased considerably. The emerging political map has complicated the prospects for peace period. This complication include particular types of societies and governments, the rise of ethnic nationalism, distinctive nationalist doctrines divide national states and contribute to tensions across ethnic lines. Perceived grievances, patterns of political, economic, cultural discrimination, intensified by historical grievances, the effects of political transformation and economic development, national doctrines divide humanity into distinctive nations.

There are three reasons for choosing Caucasus region for our analysis: First, the strategic importance of the region; second, potential for re-escalation of the conflicts in the future; third, ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus are understudies in comparison to other conflict regions of the world.

The strategic significance of the region attracts the attention of regional and great power actors providing the venue for their conflicting interests. The Caucasus is relatively small region with a high number of unresolved ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, the Caucasus lies in the proximity to other such strategically important regions as the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

These conflicts remain unresolved and can lead to other armed conflicts in the future. The so called “frozen conflicts” in this region limits the internal development of these countries and has a huge influence on their security and foreign policy goals. Consequently, it has an impact not only on the development inside the state boundaries,
but also has a regional and international dimension evolving different regional and great powers. Conducting an assessment of stability in this region is important, as those conflicts can re-escalate and may lead to broader conflicts in the region. Escalation of Caucasian conflicts has implications not only on stability in this region and its neighborhood, but on the broader European security architecture.

Ethnic conflicts in Caucasus have gained less scholarly interest than, for example, the former Yugoslavia or conflicts in Africa. Scholarly studies about this conflict are sophisticated, but still unsatisfying. The conventional wisdom about causes of these conflicts lies on an assumption that the “lid” of “ancient hatreds” has been taken off after the demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of authoritarian rule lead to the outbreak of the violent conflict. As one of the most prominent scholars on ethnic conflict Michael Brown observes this is a limited explanation and fails to explain why violence has occurred in some places and not in others and through which mechanism conflict become violent.1

Part I

1. Main objectives of the study

The study considers four analytical categories of ethnic conflicts and applies them to the major armed conflicts in Caucasus region. These are, first, the conflict over Abkhazia, second, the struggle in South Ossetia in Georgia, which resulted in the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, third, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and, fourth, the Chechen wars. I evaluate each conflict through the outlined categories of theories of ethnic conflicts, explaining the relevance of each type to it. In this way, I am able to explain the cause, the mechanism through with the conflict has become violent and how have they change their character in time.

Analytical categories help us to classify the different types of internal armed conflict. What makes the study’s typology valuable is that it does not pivot on naming a conflict, but enables us to put these different categories next to each other and observe

how do they complement each other. This allows us to proceed further in analysis and to examine to what extent the conflicts in Caucasus region actually are about ethnicity. The study focuses on an assessment of the extent to which ethnicity is a merely a convenient common dominator to mobilize ethnic groups in the struggle over resources, land, or power.

Serious academic research of the causes of ethnic conflict has resulted in development of different approaches and theoretical schools how to explain ethnic conflict. Theories of ethnic conflict are very well developed in explaining conditions under which conflict can occur. However, research in the identification of precise mechanisms through which these conditions can turn to violence is limited. This study seeks to overcome these limitations, and postulate hypothesis and mechanisms that explain the causes of conflicts in the Caucasus. My study will compare these mechanism through selected cases and will explore how are they different from each other. Furthermore, the study will trace how the conflict has changed its character through three time period: non-violent, violence and stalemate. In other words, the aim of this study is not only to identify the conditions under which the violence has occurred in the Caucasian conflicts, but to go deeper in our analyses and explain the mechanism through which the conflict has become violent and how they have change in character. This allow to trace, for example, how ethnic conflict in non-violent phase has transformed to strategic territorial or political conflict in violent phase. Categorization of internal armed conflict will contribute to explore which of the ethnic conflict theory has a stronger explanatory power.

### 2. The Central Questions of the Study

The main research questions of this study are three. First, what are the conditions under which the conflicts in the Caucasus become violent? Are they different from each other, and if so, how are they different? Second, which aspects are more significant for outbreak of the violence? How do they change in character over time? Which is most dangerous? Third, what are potential solutions?
3. Importance

This study is important for three reasons. First, I present four analytical categories of ethnic conflict to frame my discussion and that of the literatures. Second, I apply these types on Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechen conflicts. In this way, I am able to explain the cause of the ethnic conflict, how dangerous it is, that is, the likelihood that it will escalate in violence (vertical escalation) or horizontally, to other states. Third, I explore ways they might be resolved.

There are two major problems in study of internal armed conflicts. First, changeable nature of armed conflicts, that is, there is no consensus how to classify internal armed conflict, due to variable nature of warfare. Conflict can change its character even in a specific conflict, and the goals and objectives of the belligerents change, and so the object of research may change continuously.

The second issue is connected to how internal armed conflict has been studied. Research in this field requires going beyond disciplinary boundaries. Research requires different methods, different ontological and epistemological perspectives than traditional studies of conflict, for example, of World War II.

This study aims to address these problems and create a model how to solve them. Typological theorizing can contribute to better understanding of ethnic conflict. Theories of ethnic conflict are very well developed in explaining conditions under which the conflict can occur. However, research in the identification of precise mechanisms through which these conditions can turn to violence is limited. This study seeks to overcome these limitations and postulate mechanisms and hypothesis that explain the causes of conflicts in Caucasus.

4. The Central Arguments of the Study

There is a broad range of literature explaining the causes of intra-state violence. General theorizing however has its weakness. It fails to recognize how complex the phenomenon of conflict is. Explanation based one factor does not mean that this factor is unimportant for the outbreak of the conflict, but that single factor explanations are
oversimplifications and fail to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. Accordingly, a typology of internal armed conflict is valuable, because it can define the set of factors, which are causally connected to each other.

My main argument is that ethnicity is not necessary condition for conflict to become violent. For example in case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian side prefers to name its unresolved conflicts as “political”, because both conflicts were about statehood and territorial integrity of Georgian state. The argument is based on the claim, that Georgia is not fighting specific ethnic groups but “separatists” – that is, people who are challenging its territorial integrity, whatever their ethnic origin”. On the other side for separatists the conflicts are about self-determination and reinforcement of their political rights on their ethnic home. Thus we can claim that the conflicts inside Georgia with separatists were not caused by ethnic hostility. They were rather struggles about the national-state, over status of some specific groups and were caused by contradictions between their national projects. Conflicts in Caucasus were about defending territory, ethnic homes and independence. However, recent mutual relations between conflict parties are ethnically hostile. This can lead us to the conclusion that ethnic animosity was not the cause, but the result of the frozen conflicts in Georgia.

5. Methodology

As mentioned above, the main goal of this research is to address the complex phenomena of armed conflict in Caucasus region and to provide comprehensive analysis of all possible kinds of cases. In order to avoid oversimplification, this study will be based on typological theorizing through the classification of theories of ethnic conflicts. In contrast to general theories in the field of international relations, typological theory provide a rich and differentiated depiction of a phenomenon and serves as a foundation for explanation, generalization and policy recommendations.

The categorization of ethnic conflict theories offers a framework of multidimensional typologies. Scholars sometimes refer to their analytical categories as

2 Ghia Nodia, Causes and Vision of Conflict in Abkhazia, p. 4.
ideal types, creating an abstraction that may not consistently serve to classify empirical cases. In analytical categories the degree of abstraction is lower. Analytical categories on the theory of ethnic conflict will be created by complementing major theoretical approaches in the conflict studies. For example, an ethnic conflict category will review the major theoretical approaches and use their core argument to create an independent type. Complementing one theory with another within a single category will help to define the arguments of one theory against another. Thus leading to the incorporation of multidimensional independent and dependent variables in each analytical category.

Typological theorizing has a distinguished history in the social sciences. Scholarly research has generated different kinds of types, for example, “ideal”, “empirical”, “classificatory”, “constructed”, “heuristic” or even “typology of typologies”. For this study, I identify the explanatory typology of Colin Elman, which is understood as the multidimensional conceptual classification derived from the stated theory. By creating such typology we can test theories and assume what we can expect if the theory is correct.

Furthermore, typological theorizing has a classificatory function. When applied to case studies, we can determine to which “type” this case belongs. Empirical datas are coded as falling into one category or another. It allows us to trace if there is congruence between categories. By locating cases into different category, we can make most productive comparisons for testing theories.4

Typological theorizing can be a powerful tool in conflict studies. As mentioned above, explanatory typology is based on explicitly stated preexisting theory. It is a complement to deductive approaches. The creation of each type requires working through the logical implication and causal mechanism of particular theory when its variables take on different values.

Typological theorizing is useful both in theory testing and theory developing. With respect to theory developing task, typologies allow us to identify the multiple causation. With regard to theory testing, typologies are helpful too in identifying the degree of causal homogeneity and for positing it counterfactual reasoning.

There are two techniques which can be employed in refining typologies: compression and expansion. With compression techniques, we are able to work with multivariable explanatory typology in more sophisticated way. While with expansion techniques we are able to discover missed combinations and assumptions.\(^5\)

After creation four analytical categories of theories of ethnic conflict, they will be applied on the selected cases studies. Each case will be evaluated through each of the categories to find out their strength in explaining research question of this study. Theoretical categories will compete with each in their ability to explain the different aspects and causes of ethnic conflicts. In order to measure different variables and determine which of them has greater significance over the other, the study will study non-violent conflicts in the Caucasus region.

Bearing in mind the problem of research subject mentioned above – constantly changing character of the conflict – the observation for each category will be divided into three time periods: non-violent mobilization, violence and stalemate. This will allow us to uncover the importance of each aspect though the time and on different level of conflict development. Characteristic features of the conflict change through the time and understanding this change is critically important for testing each of the categories. This will lead to a more equitable measurement of the strength of each type of ethnic conflict theory on explaining the real causes of the conflict.

Research design based on typological theory depicts the independent variables in the categories, thus leading to a better understanding of how these variables are operating in hypotheses. Furthermore, it allows us to understand how and under what conditions they behave in specific connection to lead to specific outcome (by producing effect on dependent variables).

5. 1. Research design: “Building Block”

This study is based on similar cases research design; cases with similar outcomes. Typological theorizing is based on identifying the variables that define each type. To

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strengthen the inferences, process tracing will be used to check their presence. This allows more accurate measurement of independent variables and proper classification of case studies. Process tracing will be used as a technique to strengthen typological theorizing. It will check the validity of explanations and reduce the risk of mistaken inferences.

My research is based on the deductive outline of variables, which are characteristic or definitive for each type. It should be mentioned that in some cases the interactions effects are easier to define, while in others it is not an easy task. Process tracing can help in both circumstances. In the first case, it will be attributed as a check for identifying the interactions effects between variables in each type. In the second case, if there are defined variables identifying the type without clear interaction between them, process-tracing can inductively identify the interactions within each case of the particular type.

Classification of cases is based on an assumption that cases differ in one independent and one depended variable. The existence of an exogenous variable (independent variable that affects a type without being effected by it) is attributed as a source of difference in the case typology.

Research is based on a deductive approach to typological theorizing. This helps to test existing theories in the field, propose theories addressing the issue of equifinality, and most importantly, to develop theories which studies interaction effects between independent and dependent variables.

**Tables:**

**Table 1. Categories of theories on ethnic conflicts**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>Strategic-territorial</td>
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Table 2. Causes

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<th>South Ossetia</th>
<th>Nagorno-Karabakh</th>
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<td>Non-violent</td>
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Part II

6. Types of internal armed conflict

The following section will introduce the analytical categories of internal armed conflict: ethnic, political, ideological and strategic/territorial. Each subsection will start with a definition and the conceptualization of each type of the conflict. It will be followed by the explanation of the internal logic of each category. Each section will conclude with hypotheses and the reflection of causal mechanisms that identifies the conditions under which that type of conflict is more likely to occur.

6.1. Ethnic conflict

For the purposes of this study ethnicity is understood without any pejorative elements. Criteria of ethnics are specified according to Anthony D. Smith’s definition, which is composed by six components. Ethnic group is a named population sharing common myths about its origins, historical memories, and cultural features and is associated with a certain territory and has a sense of solidarity.6

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Ethnic conflict is a conflict in which the key causes and issues at stake involves some elements of ethnicity (mentioned above) or the statues of ethnic groups themselves. A conflict is organized armed combat between at least two belligerent sides in which at least on thousand people are killed.7

Ethnic appeals may lead to violent escalation only if a group fears that its existence threatened. What matters is the ability to evoke vertical escalation “our group is in danger”. The next condition, which has to be present in order for ethnic conflict to occur, is political opportunity. This consist of two elements, first, there must be sufficient political space (weakening or state breakdown, or support from external power) and secondly, a territorial base (for successful mobilization, ethnic groups are either territorially concentrated in some region or they have a territorial base in neighboring country). 8

As it is identified by one the most important scholars, Stuart Kaufman, ethnic conflict involves three dynamics: mass hostility, chauvinist political mobilization and a security dilemma.9 The combination and interaction of those aspects creates the spiral of escalation, if the preconditions mentioned above are present.

For ethnic conflict to occur, the interpretation of group’s history about its origins, history and status must justify hostility towards another group and has to strengthened by the fear of extinction; such an ethnic group must have the opportunity to mobilize; and hostile attitudes must grow strong. The size of the ethnic group can play a big role. As argued by Cederman, claims of ethnic groups become more powerful if the group’s size is relatively big.10 Extreme violence occurs if all conditions described above are present and all of these factors work to promote it.

Furthermore, it is important to include in our analyses, the precondition hat historical interpretations by ethnic groups are rooted in the history of their origins and their believes concerning the first settlers of the territory. But most importantly, the memories about recent victimization or unfair ethnic status strengthen the possibility of

renewed conflict. As on the most well-known authors Mark Beissinger outlines in his book “Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet Union” ethnic mobilization is macrohistorical process that operated over both short and long time spans.\textsuperscript{11}

Causal chain of ethnic conflict is following:

Three preconditions are necessary

- Ethnic group’s interpretation of its history justifies hostility towards others and emphasizes the need to gain special status.
- Fear of group extinction is strong at the time violence breaks out.
- Ethnic group has a territorial base and the opportunity to mobilize.

If all of these conditions are present, the conflict becomes violent through following mechanisms:

- Extreme hostility has a popular mass support. The probability of conflict increases with the ethnic group’s relative demographic size.
- The ethnic group glorifies its history through a one sided interpretation of its own victories and blames losses on traitors or weak leaders. Nourishing calls for revenge contributed to creating organizational structures and culture of violence.
- Elites uses ethnic appeals, promoting fear and mass hostility and mobilization for conflict.
- A security dilemma arises, in which the hostile ax by the leadership on one side leads to the radicalization of the leadership on the other.

Based on the causal inferences represented above, the study postulates following hypotheses:

- The stronger the ethnic hostility among groups (based on historical explanation, past victimization, perception about their past which have created the sense of solidarity and association to the certain territory) the greater is the probability of ethnic conflict.
- The probability of ethnic conflict increases with the ethnic group’s relative demographic size.
- Ethnic conflict is more likely and increases with the number of prior conflicts fought in the name of the same ethnic group.

\textsuperscript{11} Beissinger, Mark, R. \textit{Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet Union}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
The more acute the security dilemma, the fear of a group’s ethnic extinction (based on explanation of nationalistic and language politics, education and job opportunities, demographic changes involving “ethnic affinity problem”) the greater is the probability that it will lead to ethnic conflict.

6.2. Political conflict

In order to explain ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, as well as in post-Soviet states, some studies ignore the importance of the political system of a state. The notion that the risk of conflict is higher in case of weak states can be a useful starting point to explain the escalation and occurrence of ethnic conflicts. To evaluate the risk of ethnic conflict, it is also important to study relationship between political systems and peace.

This section is devoted to the explanation of the importance of the political aspects of internal armed conflicts, their logic and hypotheses. The series of significant inferences follows from insights into the political system of the state. Political problems, state actors, intra-state security concerns, the impact of modernization, the pattern of governmental policies, and institutional factors constitute an important part of conflict analysis.

Research on the links between the political system of the state and conflict is available. It starts with the observation that democratic states never got to war with each other. 12 On the most prominent scholars as Nils Peter Gleditsch, Scott Gates and Havard Hegre introduce and identify the different propensities in internal armed conflict of different kind of political system. They claim it is not purely democratic or purely autocratic regimes that are the most conflict prone. Most dangerous are systems in transition towards democracy. 13 This argument spreads a considerable light on the armed conflict in former Soviet states, which went through the systemic change in the midst of the disintegration of the central state.

The road to democracy is complicated and can be marked by internal violence and even the collapse of the state. Autocratic countries do not become mature consolidated democracies overnight. They go through a rocky transition, in which mass politics mixes with authoritarian elite politics in a volatile way. Political change deconsolidates political institutions and heightens the risk of armed conflict. Semi-democratic political systems are less stable and the development inside such a state is full of turmoil and conflict.

Political change, whether in the form of democratization or autocratization, can create instability. The loss of legitimacy by the regime induces dissatisfied groups to struggle against it. If the direction of change is toward autocracy, the deconsolidation of political institutions also implies increasing repression. Repression by a regime without well-developed political institutions is likely to promote violence.

The role of domestic élites has a big impact on evolution of intrastate conflict. Governmental politics has an impact on the pattern of intergroup relations. Different national governments utilize different instruments according to the nature of the political institutions of the state. Policy programs of educational, language and economic aspects have a significant impact on the status of particular groups inside the state. Success or failure of governmental policy determines the creation of tension and emergence of violent conflict.

Political conflict covers the political aspect of the state, it involves the concern about who should govern the state. Leadership conflict refers to a power struggle between different parties about the leadership of the state. This is especially true in case of weak states, when regional leaders and warlords gain in power and start a struggle for privileged position, autonomy, or even separation and independence.

States that are undergoing political transformation, even towards democratization, are more prone to conflicts. Political reforms can weaken the power of some political élites, which in order to preserve power can start the conflict. In a subset of these states, ethnic conflict will be caused by political élites who seek to advance political objectives, including the maintenance of power. The emergence of new groups and changes in an

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inter-group balance of power may lead to tensions. Such political systems are more volatile. Furthermore, when a state is in decline and there are significant intrastate tensions, an elite group’s strategy is to blame some ethnic groups for these difficulties. The strategy of government is to repress ethnic groups. The role of the leader plays a significant role in generating ethnic conflict.

Causal chain of political conflict is following:

There must be one pre-condition present

- Political system of the state is going through a transformation state. Most dangerous time for bad government is during the period when it tries to transform itself.

The conflict becomes violent through following mechanism:

- The lack of elite legitimacy results in discriminatory and weak political institution leading to instability.
- When authoritarianism collapses and is followed by ineffectual efforts to establish democracy, the interim period of relative anarchy is ripe leadership confrontation.
- Countries that have undergone a recent political transition are more likely to experience violent conflict.

Based on these inferences, this section postulates the following hypothesis:

The huger is the decline of state power the more significant are the incentives of the elites to provoke ethnic conflict as a strategy to maintain in power.

The more some groups are excluded from state power, the greater is the risk of ethnic tensions.

The likelihood of civil war in semi-democracies remains higher than in other regime types, even after a regime change.

6.3. Ideological conflict

Ideological armed conflict is understood as a conflict that is driven by domestic forces. Ideology has been one of the most widely used terms in political thought of twentieth century. Different scholars used the term in different ways. The function of
ideology can be explained in different ways. Ideology can be understood as moral basis to justify use of power by elites. It means that it is not only is it important to process power, but also to have a moral and legal basis, doctrines, and beliefs that are accepted by groups. Function of ideology as a political formula is to "integrate group and legitimize its normative order." Ideology could be propaganda of such ideas as national survival. It can be a tool used by conflicting parties to maintain or create normative orders. The role of ideology is in advancing the interests of one group by propaganda, thus promoting the conflict. Other scholars explained the ideology as a "myth" that supported and determined the group’s action in a struggle against other groups. Thus ideology can have different role, ranging from strengthening the ties within the group and its identity, aiding conflicting groups in their claims and interests, strengthening the will of particular members of the group to wage war against other groups.16

For this study, these ideological roles are not in contradiction with each other. Ideology as a myth can be identical with its role as propaganda or as a political formula. It means that in different conflicts, the same ideology that strengthens the ties within groups can also strengthen the will of the group’s members to wage conflict against another group. National symbols, which unite the group and increase their loyalty, can have a role of myth in a conflict. The same ideology may have all of these functions at the same time or at the different stage of the conflict. As all functions of ideology are important for this study, it will be understood as a combination of all its potential functions: ideology as myth, propaganda and political formula. While the first function does not explicitly explain the outbreak of violence, the other two functions of ideology will be studied in more detail.

Unlike ethnic conflict, the struggle in ideological conflict is about the superiority of ideology of one party and not about the survival of particular ethnic group as it is ethnic conflict. The core aspect in ideological conflict is the belief of the people about how the state should be governed. The aim of ideological armed conflict is to change or maintain the rule of the state. Ideological internal armed conflict is a clash between two or more armed forces and their rival ideas about how the state should be ruled.

In ideological internal armed conflict the key issue is the fight between rebel groups for the loyalties of the population. In comparison to ethnic conflict, loyalty is a variable and is more difficult to keep. The central issue is not purely military success in order to control the population, but to gain the “hearts and minds” of the people and their loyalty. Important instruments to achieve these goals are political, economic and social policies. Ideological identity is changeable in its nature and is linked with individual belief and political behavior. It means that conflict parties have to be more careful not to struggle against potential supporters.

Ideological conflict has a distinct dynamic and military strategy in contrast to ethnic conflict. The territorial control matters more in ethnic conflict than it does in ideological conflict. The recruitment and population control in ethnic conflict depends on territorial control. As Kaufmann argues: “Because of the decisiveness of territorial control, military strategy in ethnic wars is very different than in ideological conflicts. Unlike ideological insurgents, who often evade rather than risk battle, or a counter-insurgent government, which might forbear to attack rather than risk bombarding civilian, ethnic combatants might fight for every piece of land.”\textsuperscript{17} It means that control of territory and decisive military operations are important factors to achieve victory in ethnic conflict. In ideological armed conflict, the importance of territory is quite limited. A key determinant in order to achieve the decisive victory in ideological conflict is to gain the loyalty and support of the population. In other words, in order to win ideological armed conflict, territorial control is not as important as control over the heart and minds of the people.

The peculiar feature of the process leading to ideological conflict is that it is a process of positive support: people become convinced that their group’s dominance is essential to group survival. It leads to mass-led violence. The causal mechanism for escalation spiral is the following:

\textsuperscript{17} Kaufmann, Ch. Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil War, International Security, Spring 1996, Vol.20, No. 4. pp. 136-175.
• Existence of dehumanizing ideologies against other group carries emotions that make attitudes even more hostile.

• Support of armed mobilization makes the chauvinist political programs a popular case.

Ideological conflict will test the following hypothesis:

The larger a group’s belief that coexistence is not possible, because it can damage the core ideological convictions of a particular group, the higher the risk of the ideological conflict (exclusionary national ideologies).

If the claims of one party are based on superiority of one’s race (kin group) over the other (perceive oneself to be better than other groups, that’s why the one has no right to have better rights in a country), there is a risk of ideological conflict.

6.4. Strategic/territorial armed conflict

Territorial issues have been identified as the most war prone issue in conflict studies. The tendency is seen in the great willingness of people to fight over their homelands, economically, and strategically important territories. As Vasquez wrote “territorial issues are “best” handled by use of force and violence”18. People tend to e emotionally attached to the territory, it becomes an integral part of their identity and the question who controls the territory becomes very important.19

Major studies in the field consider international armed conflict as purely domestic phenomena. Trans-border cooperation and military support against state government may make internal armed conflicts more likely. The nature of the external group and the impact on regional security should be taken into consideration, as they may lead to the outbreak of the conflict.

This section will define the logic of strategic/territorial conflict and conditions under which such conflict is more likely to occur. At the end of the section, some hypothesis will be proposed to explore the key mechanism at work.

Strategic/territorial dimension of internal armed conflict is an understudied aspect in the conflict studies. There are two aspects, which have to be understood in order to bring analytical clarity of this type of the conflict. First, the effect of a given conflict on neighboring states, “spill over” from one place to another. Second, the behavior of neighboring states in order to provoke violence conflict. External forces can be responsible for triggering the violent conflict. External actors provoke and support conflict in neighboring country for strategic reason: to undermine a neighbor and advance its interests at the neighbor’s expense.

The territorial dimension of internal armed conflict is based on the close study of how an internal armed conflict in one place can generate instability in another and what are the effects of the actions of one country on the development of internal conflict in another. Strategic/territorial conflict studies the mechanisms that increase the risk of transmit ion instability to different place.

As it is identified in the study on “Ethnonationalist Triads” by Erik Cederman, Lui Girardin and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, cross-border links can provide insurgencies with many advantages. On the one hand, the ethnic-kin group may provide additional resources to a peripheral group. On the other hand such groups can provide additional resources and contributions to insurgencies.

Furthermore, insurgencies can seek shelter among kin groups in neighboring state and operate from extraterritorial bases. Since kin groups are based in other states, it will typically be much more difficult for the central government to target supporters of insurgency.

Military interventions against another state are acts of aggression and multiethnic states that have problems with minority issues must typically think twice before supporting rebellions in neighboring states. “Even where ethnic affinities relate, not to peripheral minorities in the external state, but to centrally influential groups, support is by no means automatic.”20 Cross-border assistance may likewise lead to unwanted turmoil spreading across state borders into the territory of the intervening state. While these are strong arguments for supporting nonintervention, there is empirical evidence pointing in

the opposite direction.  

Most of the internal armed conflict has notable implications for regional stability and have “spill-over“ effect. Some neighboring states can trigger the conflict by supporting different groups. This strategy is based on interests of particular state. Conditions under which the spillover effect can transmit the violence to different places occur then internal tension and instability in one country gives the opportunity to external power to intervene in order to maximize its interests and gain power.

Thus, drawing the inferences from the analysis and represented mechanism above we can conclude with outlining hypothesis for this study:

The greater the level of instability in one country the more significant the risk of a spill over effect into the neighboring state.

The probability of conflict increases with the external group support.

The risk of conflict increases if the kin group is governmental rather than another peripheral group.

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Conclusion

A major debate in conflict research concerns how to define ethnic conflict. Theories are a good starting point for understanding the causes of the conflict and provide comprehensive analysis. However the lack of conceptual consensus is damaging to scholarly efforts to advance our understanding of armed conflict.

This study tests the ability of four major analytical categories – theories on ethnic, political, ideological and strategic/territorial issues - to explain the outbreak of ethnic conflict in Caucasus. Such a model of competing theories will allow me to provide a comprehensive analysis of the real causes of the selected cases. Furthermore, the study can shed a considerable light on the significance of the different aspects and illustrate their change in time. This breadth of explanatory power is the theory’s chief claim to its status as a paradigm superior to another theoretical approach.

The model represented in this study provides a tool how to study internal armed conflicts, which can be applied on other regions too. In the Caucasus case, this study has significance, because of the lack of the academic interests in this region in comparison to other regions (former Yugoslavia or Africa).

The deep knowledge of the causes and the conditions under which they lead to violent confrontation contributes to the policy recommendation. Deep analysis can improve not only our understanding of the conflicts, but it also can contribute to the theory development and identifying their weak and strong sides. The policy implications of these findings are also important. The overall inferences of such comprehensive analysis can inform policy recommendations, thus leading to correct policy prescriptions for preventing conflict from becoming violent in the future.
Bibliography:


