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The Crisis of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Russian-Serbian Similarities

The character of crises, the way they unravel, causes that create them, the factors that keep them alive, the origin of consequences help us understand the domestic policies of individual countries as well as define ongoing geopolitical influences among them.

Meanwhile comparative analysis among a series of crises that occur at the same time but in different geographic regions help us identify political influences and geopolitical effects from large or medium size countries exercised upon regions and different communities in International Relations.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

One of the crises that attract today's international attention is the armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh and its seven surrounding districts. The study of this conflict crater reflects the characteristics of domestic political situation, as well as the geopolitical doctrine influenced by the Russian Federation in the region.

The region of Nagorno-Karabakh is located in the south western territory of Azerbaijan, near the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Nagorno-Karabakh is a mountainous region that has historically been (since ancient times) a land of Azerbaijan, has a mixed population that consists

of an Armenian majority and an Azerbaijani minority. It has a population of 144 thousand people spread in a territory of over 4,400 square kilometers; Nagorno-Karabakh encompasses almost twenty percent of the total territory of Azerbaijani today.

The history of Nagorno-Karabakh armed conflict begun after the end of World War I; exactly in 1918. At that time Ottoman Empire was falling apart and the Bolshevik Revolution emerged victoriously in Russia.

During the period of establishment and consolidation of the USSR, Joseph Stalin and his predecessors dominated the situation in the two republics, Armenia and Azerbaijan. However the Soviet Union had never provided a lasting solution to the conflict between these two republics, centered in Nagorno-Karabakh and its seven surrounding districts.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the beginning of 1990s, Armenia had supported the separatist movement of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh while embracing political and military interventions. With the political and military support of Armenia, the small province of Nagorno-Karabakh self declared its independence from Azerbaijan.

The self-declared Independence of Nagorno-Karabakh with the political and military support of Armenia provoked extended fierce fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These clashes over time caused the displacement of over 800 thousand Azerbaijani people and displacement of 220 thousand Armenians from the occupied lands of Azerbaijan and from the surrounding territories that were affected by intense fighting.

The international organizations have never recognized the Independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. Not only that but European Council, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, United Nations and European Union Parliament have approved a series of resolutions that demand a complete withdrawal of Armenian Armed Forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

On many international resolutions approved by International Organizations, are condemned Armenia's military incursion, Armenia's focus on ethnic cleansing against civilian Azerbaijani population and massive crimes against humanity executed by Armenian leadership during the last two decades; international institutions have appealed to stop the fighting and called upon the parties to urgently begin their diplomatic negotiations. International Pressure stopped the fighting in the region. The OSCE established the Minsk Group Co-Chairs to lead efforts in order to find a peaceful solution through dialogue.

After the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 involving the Russian minority in Ukraine, inspired by Moscow's Military Attacks against Ukraine, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh deteriorated once again. The Minsk Peace process was gridlocked. As a result the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is resurfacing again, over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Observed on a wider regional scale the re-emergence of the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan appears to be directly affected by Russia's geopolitical interests. Due to Moscow's regional geopolitical interest as well as its geo-economical motivation that are directly connected to the energy market of Azerbaijan and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline Project, one of the largest natural gas projects that will export natural gas to European Union. Russia instigates the creation of crises.

Russian crisis orchestration strategy relies heavily upon the separatist forces that are located on most of the Former Soviet Socialist Republics considered to be enclaves or minorities. Russia's crisis production strategy is mostly spread on the regions nearby the borderlines among nations. On these territorial conflicts Russia sponsors home countries of minorities in question, while producing permanent turmoil and intermittent wars.

The Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosova

If we embark on a comparative analysis we will notice numerous parallels between the Russian strategies in the Former Soviet Republics and the Serbian strategy in the Balkans. In the same vein, Serbian government encourages its minority groups, located on its neighboring countries, to raise their shoulders and embrace a separatist movement as well as block the legitimate governing institutions of respective countries by creating parallel institutions.

The Serbian strategy is clearly evident in Kosova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to a lesser degree in Montenegro. With such a Russian style strategy, Belgrade aims to produce constant crises on its neighboring countries, that are used in favor of its interests and strategic reasons on its relations with regional countries, but also as a pressure tool and as 'tit for tat' diplomacy with European Union and Western powers in general.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia is present through Republika Srpska. This entity inside the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a key political and institutional factor that creates the determination of an ethnic divide over the integrity and unitary functioning of the Federation. Within this entity is the National Serbian Party, which continues with insurmountable pressure to organize a referendum that would bring Republika Srpska into secession from the Federation. The Russian inspired referendum in Crimea has provided an additional reason to Serbian nationalists to continue to move forward with their aspirations and organize a referendum for secession.

In Kosova, Serbian strategy, aims to foster a series of crises within Kosovo including its relations with Serbia. Holding on permanently to these crises, Belgrade is ensured by the presence of very few Serbian minority groups within Kosova.

Domestically there are ethnic Serbian political parties, the Serbian parliamentary seats that are reserved in the Kosovo parliament, local governments in villages that have a Serbian majority, as well as other political factors, such as schools, cultural societies and Serbian churches, which create a network of well organized mono-ethnic institutions.

From outside the ongoing bilateral crisis between Serbia and Kosova is in service to northern Mitrovica. This borderline territory has become a buffer zone where the Government of Kosova has a very little constitutional, legal and institutional influence. Meanwhile Serbia continues to play a vital role as a gravitational center of Serbian Community in Northern Mitrovica.

Kosova is constituted as a multiethnic state and society based on the Martti Ahtisaari Plan. Within this multiethnic framework, only the structures of Serbian community are organized and are functioning on a mono-ethnic format. This creates a highly problematic asymmetry for the young state of Kosovo.

The mono-ethnic functioning and organization of domestic Serbian minorities in Kosova has a propensity to create the first embryos of parallel institutions inside Kosova. Such a premise of Serbian mono-ethnic embryo established simultaneously in a multi-ethnic Kosova is a threat that could bring into reality the creation of the Association of Local Governments with Serbian ethnic majority, an agreement that was signed in 2015 between the governments of Serbia and Kosova in Brussels.

The Association of Local Governments with Serbian ethnic majority, based on mono-ethnic principles signed by Belgrade and Prishtina, is a real threat, not a fiction, to political opposition in Kosova. This Association, strategically instigated by Serbia, could become a Republika Srpska that is very similar to what we have today in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Russian-Serbian similarities

To conclude we may say that the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh (Southern Caucasus Region) as well as other syndromes of crises in the Balkans, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosova are a testimony of overwhelming parallel strategies conducted by Russia and Serbia that continue to have a critical role in these two regions. These strategic parallels headquartered in the Kremlin, are instigated in the Balkans by the Euro-Russian Policy of Serbia.

The two Russo-Serbian parallel strategic attitudes create and foster latent crises that aspire to threaten the sovereignty and integrity of independent nations. These strategies are tactically accomplished by attempting to abuse the role of minorities in neighboring countries. Through

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these minority communities, the similar strategies of Russia and Serbia create parallel institutions that hinder a normal functioning of legitimate institutions on respective nations.

On the other hand, through the Parallel Institutions of ethnic minorities, the strategies of Russia and Serbia are prone to create repeated crises every time it is on their best interest, internally and in the region, while flagrantly violating the principles of peace, security and international cooperation as well as international laws adopted by the *magna carta* of United Nations.

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