

Southern Caucasus: struggling to find peace

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The dominant images of the Caucasus in the past decade have been violent conflict, social and economic disarray and the prospect that the extraction and export of oil might transform the region. While the region remains little known and less understood by the outside world it has long inhabited a strategic geographic location both as a buffer zone and a bridge between regional powers and cultural traditions. This has informed the identities and international orientation of the states and peoples of the Caucasus, which presents a diverse and often fluid ethnic, cultural and linguistic mosaic.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia emerged as new states only to experience a decade of armed conflict and economic misery, which overshadowed the high expectations that came with independence. Apart from an interlude of limited independence from 1917–21, Russian rule had defined life and borders in the Caucasus for two centuries, as a result of wars of conquest in the nineteenth century and Soviet rule in the twentieth. With the demise of this rule political structures and economic practices that had long conditioned peoples' lives were undermined and long suppressed aspirations unleashed. Hostility within and between communities degenerated into wars in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorny Karabakh that have yet to be resolved. The Caucasus also experienced a number of coups accompanied by wider civic conflict. Ethnic difference was central to much of this but it would be wrong to call these "ethnic conflicts". They were a consequence of elites and societies grappling with past grievances and present insecurities, changing power constellations and access to resources in the context of a disintegrating empire and were very much political power struggles. Recognizing the broader issues behind conflicts in the Caucasus helps to explain why they have so far not been resolved and why democracy and development in the region remain a weak insurance against further conflict.

State and nation building

The ebbing of the nationalistic fanaticism of the early 1990s allowed greater concentration on state and nation building in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as the decade progressed. The needs of nation building have often complicated the coherence of state building, particularly in Azerbaijan and Georgia where the very diversity of ethnic groups has been a major cause of the current fractured statehood and has often given rise to prejudicial policies against minorities. All the newly independent states have struggled to control and administer their territory. Georgia and Azerbaijan in particular have failed to establish a monopoly of the use of force as a prerequisite for the defense of the realm and hence statehood. In addition to the challenges posed by violent conflicts the extent of criminality also undermines state coherence.

While the formal structures of democratic systems have been put in place – presidents, parliaments, constitutional courts and multipartyism – question marks loom over the degree to which democratization is entrenched. Legislatures remain relatively weak within strong presidential systems, which suffer from a lack of accountability. Although general and local elections have been held, they have been flawed by tampering and outright manipulation. The credibility and administration of law is fragile. Governance remains bedeviled by corruption and malpractice. The operation of patronage networks in exercising much political and economic power does not bode well if the ritual of democracy is to become more substantive. There has been no democratic change of government in the region since independence and with presidents Aliev (Azerbaijan) and Shevardnadze (Georgia) aging political succession is an increasingly worrying issue.

Politics has generated pluralistic debate but societies are only partially coming to terms with the notion that democracy in multiethnic societies means participation in decision making by diverse groups, airing different views. Accepting conflict, as opposed to violence, as part of social and political life is a threatening notion to weak states. Ways in which difference (ethnic or otherwise) is handled will have a significant impact on whether or not more democratic processes can be consolidated or will rather be subsumed to a persistent authoritarianism.

This applies even more to Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, and South Ossetia than to the recognized states. Since the establishment of cease-fires these entities have entrenched their positions. While they have worked on establishing the institutions of statehood politics

remains more restrictive. Despite the appearance of more authoritarian regimes, it would be mistaken to assume that there is no political debate. Rather, it is more circumscribed, with participants reluctant to expose disagreement to their opponents. There are also fewer legal constraints upon the conduct of political activity, making it more prone to the maneuvering of powerful individuals. Pluralism, democratization and the development of civil societies have been less important goals than survival and political consolidation. Solidarity has been central to survival, but leaderships have to balance the integrity of their political positions with the aspirations of populations, which on the one hand might be motivated by the same political ends, but on the other seek greater options for participation and material well-being. The bottom line is that despite several years of de facto sovereignty for Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, and South Ossetia the international community shows no inclination to recognize their status formally.

Economics – dismal reality or hope for change?

The socio-economic ramifications of the conflicts will remain for years to come, even if political accords can be reached. Each of the conflicts generated humanitarian crises. Out of a South Caucasian population of about fifteen million, over a million people have been displaced. As a result isolation and marginalization scars the lives of whole generations, not just of those displaced, but also of those living in areas where the social infrastructure has been unable to cope with the influx of displaced people and those living in areas where political isolation has curtailed economic opportunities. This blight is compounded by the painful and incomplete transition from communism to democracy and free market capitalism.

Economic indicators show a region-wide development crisis: radical de-industrialization, growing unemployment, shrinking consumption, swathes of the population living below the poverty line, and out-migration (generally in search of better work opportunities) amounting to as much as twenty percent of the region's population. Reduced life expectancy and birth rates indicate the gravity of the situation. While new economic elites have emerged and economic activity has undergone a dramatic reconfiguration, in rural areas monetary economies are faltering. Conflict and political antipathies have diminished intra-regional trade just at the time when the economies have become more open to trade.

Nevertheless, the chaos of the early 1990s has been overcome and largely as a result of the prospect of Azerbaijani oil fuelling change the risk takers of international investment are slowly being attracted.

However, ineffective tax collection has imposed major constraints on the exercise of power. The control exerted by mafia-type organizations on business reflects on the market less as a civilizing mechanism than as one generating inequality and quick, but rarely clean, wealth. Certainly the wealth generation that has occurred has not yet been transferred into reinvestment in the productive capacities of any of the countries.

In the war-torn regions economic reconstruction has occurred at different rates. Progress is most advanced in Nagorny Karabakh, where the existence of a secure border with Armenia, the largesse of a wealthy diaspora and the expropriation of materials and equipment from occupied territories in Azerbaijan, have contributed to the renovation of much of the economy. In South Ossetia links to North Ossetia provide an important outlet, while trade with Georgia is in fact both a sign of relative progress in the peace process as well as a confidence-building measure encouraging further progress. In Abkhazia there is little productive industry, the physical infrastructure devastated by war has yet to be reconstructed and much of the agricultural bounty of what was a supremely fertile region has gone to waste. The trade that does exist is either of a subsistence kind or controlled by mafia-type organizations.

Economic and political isolation resulting from the imposition of blockades and trade restrictions as crude means of leverage, generates siege mentalities, self-reliance and antagonism that reduces the propensity not only to compromise but to make any form of contact with antagonists. Yet there are constituencies (black marketers, local monopolists, border guards, troops and militia members) who benefit from thinly regulated economies across conflict divides. They are unlikely to promote resolutions that might undermine their scope for graft. Economic and ethnic relationships between entrepreneurs and criminals are blurred when profits are to be made, whether this relates to Abkhaz and Georgians trading across the River Inguri or Armenians and Azeris meeting in the Sadakhlo market in Georgia.

The long-term viability of the economies of the conflict-ridden zones remains questionable. The economic benefits from peaceful co-operation (such as the Inguri hydroelectric dam, or ambitious region-wide plans such as the Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia [TRACECA], let alone pipelines) have yet to provide a sufficient incentive to conflict resolution. This suggests that despite recognition that peace would enable trade and transport links to be reconstructed (within the region and to surrounding markets), the prospect of economic

development on its own is not a sufficient temptation to encourage communities to compromise their long-term political goals, despite the costs. In this light spurring economic development should not be seen as the carrot that will make peace agreements happen, rather the cement that can hold them in place.

Civil Society – preparing the way for peace?

Although an ill-defined notion, much emphasis has been placed on civil society by Western donors searching for an antidote to ethnic nationalism and as an aid to democratization. Central to this understanding of civil society as a motor for social change has been the promotion of NGOs. To a certain extent these have begun to meet social needs not met through official channels, because of policy, political constraints or the dearth of resources. In Georgia more than elsewhere NGOs have begun to engage dynamically in dialogue with the authorities.

Yet despite the proliferation of NGOs, the salaries they generate and the extensive sphere of their activities, their influence is limited. Their activity has been confined primarily to cities and rarely spreads to rural communities. More significantly they are dependent on external financial support, which leaves them vulnerable to the vagaries of international donors. The fragility of democratic institutions exacerbates this vulnerability. So does the failure to take root of a free and open media. Crude censorship is not frequent but generally the only dynamic media are supported by international agencies or are close to the NGO sector. Civic actors striving for peaceful solutions are politically weak and the majority of the regions' population is grappling with economic hardship rather than political change. Institutions supporting participatory democracy and the rule of law have not, despite considerable progress in recent years, consolidated democracy in terms of the creation of a free and open political space. Whether civil society would be able to resist political reversals is uncertain. This is especially important given the creeping disillusion with western values that is emerging alongside a revival of nationalistic tendencies in response to frustrations at the depth of socio-economic disarray and the flawed nature of regimes that the West has supported with too little conditionally.

Civil society voices are also emerging in Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, and South Ossetia although they face greater constraints. The fact that people here want to see a widening of civic space, more democracy and a peaceful resolution to conflicts does not, however, mean that they are willing to compromise on their political aspirations.

This presents a challenge. Communities have been in turn mobilized by war and rendered passive by the socio-economic burdens of transition. The lack of public information and debate about progress in or constraints on negotiation processes suggests that politicians and societies are divorced from one another. The space for compromise or the abandonment of animosities cultivated by the media and nationalistic political leaders is limited. Paradoxically, while pushing through unpopular compromises could be easier for less democratic leaders, the leaders tend not to be strong enough to risk doing this. In this light NGOs and civic actors that have worked to build bridges across conflict divides, widen the discussions about matters of conflict resolution and visions for the future within their own societies and create a social readiness for settlement, assume an ever more important role as agents of social change. This is especially important given the lack of trust in politicians and politics throughout the region, however civic organizations are not themselves political decision-makers, rather opinion formers.

No war no peace

Ceasefires that have now held for several years have been punctuated by periodic bouts of heightened tension and actual hostilities. While none of the parties to the conflicts seem inclined towards a renewal of outright war it would be premature to say that all have categorically ruled out the prospect of resolution through military engagement. Constituencies exist, particularly within the countries more disaffected with the status quo (Azerbaijan and Georgia), which advocate recourse to military options, but it is hard to envisage that these could be decisive. However, as long as vocal groups harbor aspirations of victory, or at least resolution on their terms without consideration of the needs and fears of opponents, compromise will be difficult to achieve.

Despite the attempts to mediate in the region (by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations; through the bilateral and multilateral involvement of a number of states; through bilateral contact at high levels; and through the role of a number of "second track" and civic initiatives by international and local NGOs) there has been little substantive progress toward political settlements. It is a misnomer to call these frozen conflicts since there are always dynamics at play that suggest some actors or interests are fluid. The difficulty for those intervening or for internal actors pushing for resolution is to identify the malleable issues and underlying interests and to design constructive means to work with the potential

for change.

South Ossetia has shown more promise of resolution. But any settlement there seems tied to the Abkhazia conflict, where, despite the signing of framework agreements early in the peace process there has been little meaningful trading of benefits and concessions and as a result the irreconcilability in the public positions of the parties has not been dented. UN efforts to interject new ideas have encountered this intransigence as well as an unbending Russian position, such that a UN position paper on the distribution of competencies under preparation for almost a year has yet to see the light of day.

In the first half of 2001 efforts to resolve the conflict over Karabakh, led by the co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, raised expectations for a settlement. However, following a meeting in Florida, the Armenian and Azeri presidents returned home for consultations, and although the detail of any proposed agreement was kept out of the public domain, opposition figures were openly discussing the option of resuming hostilities and there was certainly no outspoken public support for compromise. As a result the momentum has, for the time being, abated. The problem remains an inability to sell hard choices back home.

The chapters on Georgia and Nagorny Karabakh that follow provide analysis of the conflicts and the interventions of international organization in seeking resolution. The complexity of the conflicts partly explains the lack of success in reaching sustainable solutions. Difficulties in coordination, negotiating mandates and often cautious diplomacy, in the face of a multiplicity of actors and precarious balances of power, have constrained the way in which mediation has operated in the different conflicts. The remainder of this chapter looks at the factors motivating intervention by states and what light this sheds on the challenges of the peace processes and hence prospects for the future.

The inner circle – Russia, Turkey and Iran

Historically the power and influence of Russia, Turkey and Iran, in various incarnations, has ebbed and flowed across the region. This has left a legacy of overlapping and conflicting interests that do not necessarily facilitate conflict resolution or stable development despite each being aware that instability in the Caucasus has its costs at home.

Russia's roles in the generation of the conflicts and in attempts to resolve them have been the most complex. Conditioned by a loss of

empire, new constraints on strategic and economic interests, concerns about Russian minorities, and about the possible expansion of NATO or at least GUAAM (the mutual support grouping created in 1996 by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, joined by Uzbekistan in 1999), as opposed to the Commonwealth of Independent States' security framework, Russia has displayed a tendency to pursue vital interests through often heavy-handed means. The multiplicity of institutional actors pursuing policies in the region (including the president, ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Border Guards and the State Duma) has hindered the emergence of a coherent approach and made Russian policy vulnerable to accusations of partiality. Russia's ability to act as a peacemaker or peacekeeper in the longer term could be diminished by the lack of capacity to provide economic investment. However, economic interests (particularly export routes for the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian region) and instability in the North Caucasus mean that the Caucasus remains one of Russia's main security priorities.

Following the cease-fires, which Russia brokered, there was a decline in Russia's capacity to influence events as the states began to assert their independence and become involved in an ever more complex web of bilateral and multilateral international relations. This coincided with the first of two Chechen wars in the 1990s, both of which have drained Russia's financial and political capital and imposed a particular strain on relations with Georgia. Since President Putin's accession to power Russia's negligent approach to the region has been replaced with more rigorous measures, such as cutting off gas to Georgia or the introduction of a visa regime for Georgia, but not Abkhazia or South Ossetia, although these have also been accompanied by indications that Russia is introducing more subtle and accommodating policies as well.

Attitudes towards Russia vary from perceptions of benign patronage in Armenia to Machiavellian intrigues in Georgia. The military bases issue is a good litmus test as well as having strategic significance. Armenia holds on to bases as part of its national security whereas Georgia strongly opposes continued basing rights, even though populations living in regions where some of the bases are located oppose their removal (mainly on economic grounds). The distrust generated by Russia's roles will in itself be an important legacy of how the South Caucasian states choose to engage with Russia in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, regional stability will require all stakeholders to be engaged. Russia remains the regional hegemony. It operates as a facilitator in the UN and OSCE mediated peace processes (often being

concerned to restrict or at least control international mandates), as a mediator in bilateral and trilateral relations with the parties, as a troop contributor to the CISPKF and UNOMIG in Abkhazia, and as a state seeking to promote its national interest. Russia will continue to be a key player with the ability to sabotage peace processes if not to resolve the conflicts.

For Iran and Turkey the emergence of three independent states, and soon after conflicts, on their borders created opportunities and threats. Their rivalry in the region was initially based on the false premise that the influence of Russia was in terminal decline. While this has not been the case the Caucasian states themselves have not been the passive objects of external intervention. Furthermore their initial ambitions overstretched their capacities, resulting in them playing more modest roles while attempting to promote their own interests.

Turkey's penetration into the Caucasus has historically been an obsession in Russia; therefore its strengthening of relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia has prompted caution in Moscow. Support to Azerbaijan has posed a particular threat to Armenia, where attempts at normalization have been hampered not only by the Karabakh conflict but also due to the genocide debate. Downplaying grandiose ideas of a renewed Turkish sphere of influence stretching into Central Asia, Turkey has increasingly focused on promoting its commercial interests, its role in pipeline routes and its contribution to international efforts to foster peace and security (conscious of ramifications with its Kurdish population).

Iran's position tends to be more pragmatic and flexible than its external image suggests. Closer relations with Armenia than with Azerbaijan reflect the fact that oversimplified interpretations of religious affiliations should not disguise geopolitical interest or imperial legacy. In Azerbaijan there are perceptions of Iran as an historical overlord that is ambivalent about its independence, while the issue of a substantial Azeri population in northern Iran, which prompted Azeri nationalists to call for a reunification of historic Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, cautions Iranian policy. Iran has provided an important economic outlet for Armenia and has used this relationship and common interests with Russia (particularly demarcation of the Caspian and a less enthusiastic attitude to the West) to alleviate its diplomatic isolation, in particular in regard to its relations with the United States.

The outer circle – the US and Europe

Before 1994 Western policies in the region sought to enhance political stability through state building and democratization; to promote market reforms; and to support the sovereignty of the states vis-à-vis Russia. These limited aims did not justify a significant political, let alone military, involvement. Energy interests came to the forefront after the signing of the so-called Contract of the Century to export Caspian oil in September 1994. Policies towards the region were reconceived, with pipeline politics at the heart, especially for the US. It can be argued that the potential oil wealth to be derived from the region has exaggerated its strategic significance given that while Caspian oil is important for the West, it is not vital to western security. The US has been very wary of assuming a security role, partly due to the logistical difficulties this would entail but also due to the priority of integrating Russia into an international co-operation framework. However, balancing relations with Russia, the influence of the oil lobby and the Armenian diaspora as well as troubled relations with Iran has created constraints that have not always been conducive to fluent policy making.

European states individually and collectively have been less proactive than the US. Policy has generally lacked a developed political let alone conflict resolution agenda for the region. Instruments such as Partnership and Co-operation Agreements, aid and development programs such as TRACECA, INNOGATE, TACIS, and ECHO have been used to exert leverage, with almost a billion euro being invested in the Caucasus since 1991. But often-ambitious plans, while contributing to change have been undermined by bureaucratic implementation and have not produced striking outcomes nor led to the region being embraced by Europe. In the late 1990s this did begin to change as the EU developed more assertive policies. Furthermore, the stated long-term goal of the Caucasian states to join the EU should provide future leverage. This implies exporting a certain model of economic and political life. But it is questionable to what extent Russia and Iran want this, or how far this is feasible within the states for at least a generation. Acceptance of the three states into the Council of Europe is a sign of Europe's commitment to the Caucasus. However, this poses a challenge since at times advocacy of human rights and deep-rooted democratization have been relegated below supporting stability and sovereignty and in so doing risked breeding contempt for these values.

A more dynamic European involvement has also contributed to increased discussion of proposals for a regional stability pact. The notion may have met criticism in regard to the unlikelihood of Western investment (financial or political) on the same scale as in the Balkans,

because of Russia's hesitance and in regard to persuading states that have only recently gained independence to relinquish aspects of their sovereignty. Nevertheless, there is a clear demand for regional thinking as indicated by frequent allusions by political leaders and civil society actors to the need for solutions to conflict and developmental issues that assume a regional dimension. One challenge will be that Caucasian experience of shared sovereignty (federal and autonomous relations under Soviet rule) has left very a negative legacy. Another will be how to engage the North Caucasus in any long-term solution to the region's tensions, given that Russia is very protective regarding how this region relates to international forums.

Challenges on the road to peace

Resolving conflicts in the Caucasus is not only about mediation or negotiation processes. To limit the search for peace to the domain of official diplomacy is to ignore the fact that sustainable peace requires economic development, social justice and legal frameworks that can accommodate conflicting relationships.

Political elites in the Caucasus have pursued a dangerous game, often encouraged by external political actors, of creating states without meaningful politics and permeated by paternalism and clientalistic networks. Personalities and not policies are at the heart of politics. The narrow focus on democracy as an institutional arrangement distracts attention from wider definitions in terms of the real distribution of power, socio-economic rights and accountability in society. The under performance of institutions is not as damaging for the long term as the absence of a wider culture of democracy. Although the political climate throughout the South Caucasus, including within the unrecognized entities, has been changed by the experience of the past decade, there have been few signs of statesmanship or the promotion of reconciliation within societies (let alone with regard to the so-called enemies). Nowhere is democracy sufficiently entrenched to allow the creativity of leadership that might overcome the ongoing political impasse.

A number of challenges need to be addressed and preconceptions confronted if coherent political communities characterized by a consolidation of democracy rather than cycles of violent conflict are to evolve. Reframing needs to recognize that resolution is complicated by conflicting perceptions of political principles, above all territorial integrity and self-determination. Mediators have operated from the basis that any outcome other than territorial integrity has been proscribed, but the international community's commitment to territorial

integrity presents the prospect that the parties that effectively won the wars will lose the peace. Whether it is possible to reconceptualize and reinvigorate perceptions of political relationships in such a way that parties can be convinced that they have not lost what they fought for or that security priorities are not compromised, is questionable. But this will be critical to the achievement of non-violent settlements that are neither fragile nor short-lived.

There is a deep fear of federal-type solutions to the conflicts. To an extent discussion of this is a case of closing the barn door after the horse has bolted – federal solutions that might have interested the "separatist" parties prior to the violent conflicts are now less attractive. But there is a reluctance to move beyond the abstract level and to explore the detail of what the long-term implications for political representation and financial accountability, social and economic policy, policing and foreign policy could be. Exploring power-sharing mechanisms is of importance beyond the current unresolved conflicts. The existence of compact ethnic communities contiguous with state borders in Javakheti and the Lezgin and Talysh regions in Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively, is perceived to present a threat to territorial integrity and therefore it is feared that any steps to devolve power could precipitate this. There is, also, a tremendous need to rethink structures of governance at central and local levels (regardless of unresolved conflicts). Given the incompetence and corruption – sometimes perceived and often real – of so much of the governance in the Caucasus this will be no easy task. These issues are especially pertinent as the demands of state and nation building collide with processes of economic interdependence and globalization.

If progress towards peace is to be attained ideals of multi-ethnicity and cultural diversity must be reinvigorated. It is, however, hard to envisage a settlement based on these ideals being realized in Nagorny Karabakh or parts of Abkhazia, where a comfortable political cohabitation of Armenians and Azeris or Abkhaz and Georgians in the near future is unlikely. The psychological inheritance of the wars cannot be ignored in the search for resolution. A generation is growing up without having known Georgian or Azeri rule (despite the fact that this was a very different type of rule, more Soviet than anything else, prior to the conflicts) and therefore with little inclination to accept compromises that could reintroduce such political relationships. The knowledge of what this rule might constitute is sparse and characterized by perceptions of undemocratic practices and a continuation of ethnically prejudicial approaches that are not attractive.

The fact that communities live beyond one another's orbit makes reconciliation, which will be a component of political settlements in the long run, problematic. Conflicting perceptions of justice in terms of history, atrocities committed during the war and the needs of marginalized and displaced people make compromise difficult. Finding ways to process the past that will lead to mutual understanding rather than recrimination will not be easy. Holding the perpetrators of wartime atrocities to account will be costly in political and financial terms.

The mass return of the displaced is impeded because of the absence of political agreements, because of security concerns and economic factors, but it is inextricably linked to conflict resolution. The reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-affected areas can only be limited without political normalization. International humanitarian assistance has been essential in providing a safety net for the displaced. Agencies have had to negotiate the dilemma that integrating the displaced within Azerbaijan and Georgia is a highly political act because it implies that they may not eventually return to the homes from which they were displaced. Yet not integrating them risks their marginalization in IDP and refugee camps and has often meant their exclusion from elementary social provision such as health care and educational opportunities, as well as political life.

A tendency to blame outsiders for many of the predicaments that the region faces often influences political debate, and often with good reason. Nevertheless, directing blame to the crude manipulations or efforts to exert influence by others is also a convenient way to shift responsibility from one's own actions. This tendency is accompanied by an expectation that peace and development can be delivered by external factors – be it NATO, Russia, or the US. Oil production and transportation presents an example of such thinking. Oil might lubricate development that could mesh together a regional interdependence making conflict resolution worthwhile for enough actors, but it could bring as much conflict as harmony. Furthermore, while it gives the Caucasus a new strategic relevance, this is not as great as many in the region might think. The West will continue to be preoccupied with the Balkans and the Middle East, and after “September the 11th” Afghanistan and its surrounds, among other regions, above the Caucasus.

The existence of vested interests, the lack of trust, the psychological heritage of separation that is accumulating, and the lack of sufficiently strong or motivated peace constituencies within societies, will continue to make it difficult to turn war fatigue into peace hunger. For politicians

and people to engage profoundly with the above challenges will require time. But the expectation (whether believed or simply used as political rhetoric) that problems can be resolved quickly is a factor that has undermined progress since the establishment of cease-fires. It is arguable on whose side time lies in each conflict – economic and social problems, out-migration and democratic deficits afflict all societies in the region to the extent that none can comfortably afford perpetual instability. The scale of the challenges, the lack of material resources and responses that have frequently lacked strategic coherence have at times threatened the existence of the states themselves. Nevertheless, while the multitude of problems persist the region has muddled through without a return to war in the past seven years. Crisis has become part of the political fabric and fragile stability. This, however, is no insurance against deterioration nor compensation for the millions of people enduring great hardship in comparison to their former economic well-being.

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