Global Advanced Research Journal of History, Political Science and International Relations ISSN: 2315-506X Vol. 1(7) pp. 162-165, October, 2012
Available online http://garj.org/garjhpsir/index.htm

Review

The importance of conflict transformation between the parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

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Accepted 16 August, 2012

The ceasefire between the parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been signed in 1994 but there has been no step forward since then to establish peace and normalize relations between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Numerous efforts by international community to mediate between the parties were not effective. The stalemate between the parties has been dissatisfactory for most of the actors directly or indirectly involved in conflict. In this study we examined the potential for conflict transformation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the new approaches of conflict management in the aftermath of Cold War. We argued that traditional means of conflict settlement were not enough to transform relationship between the core parties and establish peace among them. We proposed that without applying conflict transformation mechanisms it will be much more difficult to reach long-term irreversible peace.

Keywords: Reconciliation, conflict transformation, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, peacebuilding.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s triggered many violent conflicts in the post-Soviet territory and the Balkans. A new type of conflict came increasingly to the fore: conflicts that took place within and across states, intra-state conflicts, in the form of civil wars, ethnic strife, violent secessionist movements and other internal warfare. The bipolar paradigm of conflict settlement mainly dealing with proxy wars could not be effective any more in the search for peace in the South Caucasus and other parts of the world.

Among these conflicts was Nagorno-Karabakh conflict when the Armenian majority of Nagorno-Karabakh found the only way of survival in pursuing a policy of securing identity through self-determination. The conflict touched every Armenian regardless of age, sex, occupation, or social standing. Armenians had the experience of feeling themselves united as people, of remembering their common humanity, history, and identity. In such deep-rooted conflicts, conflict management strategies were not enough and usually also rather inadequate. Some other constituent parts of conflict resolution process, such as *conflict transformation* mechanisms, should be exercised to ensure that not only the underlying issues to the conflicts are resolved to everyone's satisfaction but also the antagonistic attitudes and relationships between the adversaries are transformed from negative to positive.

The Role of Reconciliation in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process

In order to understand the role of conflict transformation, and reconciliation in particular, in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, we must note that there is no peace agreement over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but

intensive negotiations between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan are in the agenda of the foreign policy of both states. The negotiations are carried out under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair countries, namely Russia, France and the US. To indicate the need in reconciliation in the future resolution and transformation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict we will use John Paul Lederach's approach towards reconciliation and conflict transformation.

Lederach (1997) constitutes the idea of reconciliation in a tri-lateral way. First aspect of reconciliation is the relationship – the basis of the both the conflict and its long-term solution. Reconciliation is built on mechanisms that engage the sides of a conflict with each other as humans-in-relationship. As in physical world where the parts of the system play significant role in development, in social world the same role of parts plays relationship within the system of conflict. The sides of conflict imply the entire social structure of the society with from policy-makers to grass-roots.

Engagement is the second aspect of reconciliation. Reconciliation must find ways to address past without getting locked into a vicious cycle of mutual exclusiveness inherent in the past. "Reconciliation-as-encounter suggests that space for the acknowledging of the past and envisioning of the future is the necessary ingredient for reframing the present. For this to happen, people must find ways to encounter themselves and their enemies, their hopes and their fears" (Lederach, 1997, p. 27).

And third, reconciliation requires that we look outside the mainstream of international political traditions, discourse, and operational modalities. It is important to overcome tunnel vision and envisage mid-term and long-term future of the conflict parties.

Since conflict settlement over Nagorno-Karabakh conflict mediated by the third parties has so far proved ineffective, it is essential to consider the conflict transformation potential within the conflicting parties themselves. Adam Curle describes the ability of citizen diplomacy to bring change in the following way: "Experience indicates that this potential exists in the form of groups of people working against the tide of violence and militarism to preserve human rights, to care for all the victims of war irrespective of ethnic background, and to sustain the values of peace and compassion… The value of citizen peacemaking, citizen or non-official diplomacy, or whatever we may choose to call it, is now being widely recognized. It can provide a very useful supplement to the efforts of international agencies or individual governments, essential though these may be. Such individuals and such groups have at times done what no government could have achieved" (Curle, 1994: 96).

The central question in reconciliation is not whether justice is done, but rather how one goes about doing it in ways that can also promote future harmonious and positive relationship between parties that have to live with each other whether they like it or not. With this regard, as with other deep-rooted conflicts, the social-psychological dimension of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is important to understand. Peace agreements and conflict resolution generally orient themselves toward dealing with content-specific issues requiring short-term immediate action from the people focusing on the issue. Reconciliation, however, requires that people not only decide what to do about particular issues, but also address and reconsider their understanding of self and enemy. In short, reconciliation based on the building of relationships requires that people begin a process of reconstructing their identities.

In all conflict situations there is a common element – the psychological: "Whenever people engage in a quarrel, whether it is a domestic row or international strife, emotions become exaggerated; reasonable anxiety becomes paranoia, irritation become fury, slight doubt becomes unbridled suspicion. By the same token perceptions become distorted" (Curle, 1994: 99). Selective perception is almost present at any conflict situation and overcoming this and other typical issues is very important in reconciliation process.

Another issue is stereotyping. Stereotypes normally concern social groups or categories, particularly ethnic groups or national groups. Overcoming stereotypes, which are firmly attached in the minds of people toward the other ethnic group, is a substantial step towards reconciliation. For instance, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, when asking Armenians about the perceptions towards the Azerbaijanis, almost all of them perceive them as Turks. And Turks, for Armenians, are perceived as "enemy" because of the Genocide in 1915 committed in the Ottoman Empire under the Young Turks rule. Thus, reconciliation between Armenian and Azerbaijani communities is exacerbated with the ongoing latent conflict between Armenians and Turks. Hence, no less importance should be given to the improvement of Armenian-Turkish relations in the context of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. (It should however not be confused that Armenian-Turkish normalisation process and Nagorno-Karabakh peace process should be dealt in one package which could make either of the processes deadlocked. Here we focus on conflict transformation approach rather than conflict resolution).

Reconciliation requires a transformative approach but is it possible to establish those relationships in the situations when the official peace agreement has not yet been signed? Lederach answers positively to this question and argues that it is particularly these relationships that can promote formalisation of peace agreement. Even though Azerbaijani side has always kept stating that any kind of relationship with Armenians are not realistic unless the final settlement of territorial

issues, in other words, unless the peace agreement over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh is officially signed, it is harder to believe that such strategy will not make war rhetoric, hate speech and negative stereotypes even more rigid and less subject to compromise rather than bring parties closer to the agreement. Certainly, with peace agreement sealed, peacebuilding measures would still be much required to secure long-term transformation of conflict.

Multi-Track Diplomacy

There are various interest groups and structures in the society that can promote conflict transformation processes. In Multi Track Diplomacy there are 9 Tracks discerned by MacDonald-Diamond model (Macdonald, J. L. Diamond, 1996. The model is available at http://www.imtd.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/IMTD-logo-text.jpg). Apart from Track 1 Government engagement there are other actors, such as professional practitioners, peace activists, business sector, private citizens, research structures, etc. that could promote peacebuilding before or after peace deal. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict one of the main links for peacebuilding could become Track 1.5. It encompasses peace efforts embarked upon by unofficial, non-governmental organizations and individuals who specialize in conflict transformation. Their aim is to help resolve conflicts by surpassing the logic of power politics and to encourage communication, understanding and collaboration between antagonistic communities.

The public peace process is based on the assumption that there are things governments can do that people cannot; and there are things people can do that governments cannot. One of the famous examples in the textbooks for conflict resolution is the Oslo Channel in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, which was implemented by non-official Track 2 activists. Even though nowadays it seems that the all steps made toward conflict resolution in the beginning of 1990s between the conflicting parties is now blown away, but by that time it was a great achievement to bring together the leaders of communities and to come to some mutually accepted agreements over Palestinian issue. This is one of the influential mechanisms, which is not applied in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process.

Media is another instrument in conflict transformation process. It can play both positive and negative role in the process. The negative aspect is the regular stream of newsfeed full of hatred and propaganda toward the other party of the conflict. The positive aspect of media is the potential for promoting tolerance and understanding. While the former substantially prevails nowadays the latter should become the objective of different other media, such as social media, in the region between the parties.

Education and training is needed to ensure the long-term peaceful relationships in the region. Bringing together young people and activists from the conflicting parties and sustain dialogue among adversaries in unofficial conditions is an important step to break the vicious cycle of hate narrative at least among certain groups of people. Educational programmes in schools, however, do not inspire the spirit of humanism toward the "other" but rather support hate propaganda in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Women could become more active participants working for peace in the region. They are primarily interested in ensuring not only the irreversibility of non-violent resolution of conflict but also initiating processes aimed at lasting positive relationship among currently embittered societies.

Private and economic sector is perhaps the most critical and pragmatic part of the transformation process. The development of economic co-operation can stipulate positive economic changes in each country, providing people with new workplaces, solving the farmer's problems connected with the markets for their production. Today the entrepreneurs have the greatest interest in realization of their economic interests and creating new markets, instead of smuggling in the border of both countries. Certain forms of economic cooperation such as Free economic Zones or Qualified Industrial Zones could be considered a positive step forward on the way of conflict transformation.

Unless the parties look at the conflict resolution through the lens of conflict transformation and reconciliation hardly any resolution can be achieved. The parties should overcome this tunnel vision and polarization in order to concentrate on more realistic and creative models in the process of settlement.

To make the picture full it is important to make one last distinction between reconciliation and forgiveness. Those who were murdered during the conflict cannot be returned. And the trauma of physical and emotional abuse, of torture and rape, cannot be erased in any material way. Thus, speaking of reconciliation there is always danger of forgetting who was wrong in the past and encouraging a kind of amnesia. "Victims and survivors do not forget what has happened to them. Unless they are faced as a part of a complete reality, sooner or later memories are acted upon. Equating forgiveness with reconciliation is an error. Both are effective in different ways, but they are very, very different actions. It simply may not be humanly possible for a person to forgive. But even when that is true, it is still possible for that person to choose to reconcile" (Scott, 1999: 355).

But how, then, is possible to promote reconciliation if it is not a matter of forgiveness. There is a way out from this dilemma, it is true that it is hard to forget or even

forgive the atrocities that were made during the conflict but the chance to put behind the hostilities and try to rebuild the shattered relationships looking towards future of oneself and generation as long as truth is disclosed is should be given. Reconciliation and rebuilding a society takes decades and generations of slow and steady work. As South African President Nelson Mandela pointed out: "Patterns of thought which have been there for centuries can't be changed in several years" (Scott, 1999: 357).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are a number of obstacles in reaching a resolution of the conflict. One of the major obstacles that hinders the process of transformation is the mutual distrust between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis strengthened by the characteristics of violence during the fighting that has convinced both sides that it is the other side that is the problem. This is why the parties must find new, innovative ways towards the resolution of conflict.

Looking to the future and not the past, however, may seem more of a Western approach of viewing human experience and not one that is easily understood by peoples so strongly defined by their history. It is clearly and unfortunately the case that Armenians and Azerbaijanis are currently not prepared to *put* the past *behind* them.

To re-/build relationships, we must develop innovative ways of providing space within which the emotional and psychological aspects of the conflict can be addressed and as Abu Alaa (Abu Alaa was a negotiator from the Palestinian side during the Oslo Channel) noted during the Oslo Channel negotiations: "Let us not compete on who was right and who was wrong in the past, and let us not compete about who can be more clever in the present. Let us see what we can do in the future" (Elon, 1993).

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