

Raymond, Duncan W., and G. Paul Holman Jr., eds. *Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict — The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994.

Andre Lapointe

Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 1995

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs15_02br08

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Lapointe, A. (1995). Review of [Raymond, Duncan W., and G. Paul Holman Jr., eds. *Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict — The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994.] *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 15(2), 169–172.

Raymond, Duncan W., and G. Paul Holman Jr., eds. *Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict — The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994.

The vision of a new world order in the wake of the Cold War quickly dissipated as the international community was faced with what seemed to be a new world disorder characterized by ethnic conflicts and potential regional instability. Coming to terms with this state of affairs and analyzing its impact on international relations has been the central theme of much scholarship in recent years. In *Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict — The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, W. Raymond Duncan and G. Paul Holman have assembled a series of insightful case studies, which attempt to set many of the actual or potential ethnic conflict situations in a coherent framework, and to draw from them lessons for the conduct of American foreign policy. The book was produced as a result of a conference held at the US Naval War College in April 1993.

The editors' introductory remarks set out clearly the aim of the book as an examination of the impact of ethnic national identity on regional security and stability in the post-communist world. It is a well structured article which defines the terms and concepts to be used throughout the book and it provides an overview of ethnic conflict in the former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the former Soviet Union (FSU). It also outlines the impact on and possible implications of those conflicts for US and European security, and for international organizations such as the United Nations. Finally, the article sets out the key issues which serve to guide the analysis in the subsequent chapters. These are the historical roots of conflict; dimensions of national identity; the impact of the international community's role in managing conflict; the lessons learned in conflict management; and the policy and strategy alternatives for muting regional ethnic tension.

The first case study, by Duncan, is that of "Yugoslavia's Break-up." The article examines the conflict in the FRY as a possible prototype for future ethnic wars. Duncan examines in turn the historical roots of the conflict, Western and American roles in the face of escalation and the lessons for American national security decision-making. The analysis includes an ethnic breakdown of the various component republics, the economic and political factors involved in fostering conflict as well as political elite behavior. Duncan provides a listing of the problems that plagued European and American policy formulations, such as American concern with other foreign policy commitments in the Middle East and the European Community focus on immediate internal problems. Together these resulted in a lack of co-ordination and efficiency in managing the conflict. Duncan argues that had some form of coordinated effort been possible, the fighting might have been stopped in the early stages. He also examines the lack of agreement and the bureaucratic in-fighting within the American government, under both the Bush and Clinton administrations concerning policy on Bosnia. The article closes with an examination of the lessons learned from Western and American shortcomings in dealing with the conflict in the FRY, the central one being the situational and informational uncertainties which have profound repercussions on decision-making and the willingness to use military force.

Duncan's contribution provides insightful analysis and conclusions. The one shortcoming seems to be the virtual absence of a discussion of the impact of the FRY conflict on the future prospects of European security arrangements, a minor flaw given the book's admittedly American focus.

Wayne P. Limberg offers an analysis of the roots of the various conflicts in the FSU in the second case study, "World Turned Upside Down: Ethnic Conflict in the Former Soviet Union." The article provides a good summary of the various conflict situations in the FSU and reviews Soviet-era policies and developments vis-a-vis minorities. Limberg classifies the types of conflict in that region under four general non-exclusive categories: minority/majority rights; irredentist claims; religious differences; and centre periphery power struggles. The article also examines the security implications of the conflicts generally and the challenges they pose for the West.

In his case contribution, "Russo-Ukrainian Relations: The Containment Legacy," Holman examines the history of Russo-Ukrainian relations. In his analysis he focuses on the Soviet handling of Ukrainian nationalism and the internal divisions and animosity within Ukraine regarding Russia and the Soviet system. Holman explains the rise of modern post-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism and situates its birth at Chernobyl. The current relationship with Russia is analyzed by examining elite behavior, the nuclear weapons

question, the Black Sea fleet issue and the situations in Western Ukraine and Crimea. Holman examines the future of the relationship and concludes with a focus on the nuclear issue, the future of democracy and stability in the region.

One of the difficulties in producing a book dealing with regional/area studies is the rapidity with which changes in situations and relationships often occur. Some of Holman's conclusions, namely those dealing with elite behavior and the nuclear issue, have not been borne out by subsequent developments. A new Ukrainian leadership more favorably disposed toward Russia and an accommodating posture on the nuclear issue have changed the conditions of the relationship somewhat. This is not a reflection on or criticism of Holman's analysis which is both solid and thorough, but rather points to the difficulty associated with literature on contemporary area studies.

In "O Patria Mia: National Conflict in Mountainous Karabagh," Audrey L. Altstadt explores the relationship between national identity, historical arguments and claims to territory. Her focus is on the elements that constitute national consciousness. She traces the formation of this consciousness in the Karabagh conflict as it relates to territorial claims and national identity. In doing this she discusses the nationalist movements in the region in the nineteenth century; the territorial disputes after the First World War; the historical arguments and claims to territory on both Armenian and Azerbaijani sides; the political grievances articulated in nationalist terms; and the nationalist viewpoints on both sides of the conflict. She pursues the analysis by examining the roles of Russia, Turkey and Iran in the conflict. The central lesson Altstadt identifies for managing the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict is the serious need for regional expertise in order to understand the roots and the subtleties of post-communist ethnic conflicts. To this lesson she adds that, in order to be able to formulate alternative policy positions in conflict situations, national priorities, both domestic and foreign, must be clearly identified.

Altstadt's sobering conclusions certainly offer a partial solution to problems posed by what Duncan calls situational and informational uncertainties. That security policy decisions are often made with partial and incomplete information is a given, but the argument for area specialists in providing decision makers in the post-communist environment with appropriate information rings true. The generations of sovietologist and kremlinologists trained on the Cold War no longer seem able to provide decision makers with the necessary insights for informed policy formulation. Fumbling on policies regarding Bosnia and the areas of the former Soviet Union bear witness to this state of affairs.

Malvin M. Helgesen's contribution, "Central Asia: Prospects for Ethnic and Nationalist Conflict," provides a survey of the Central Asian states' positions regarding the 1991 coup and their leaders' subsequent embrace of nationalist policies. Helgesen explains that the main focus of these countries' adopting nationalist policies has been changes in language laws and reforms. He points to nationalism as more of a source of instability than of conflict so far in the region. In his analysis he lists the following factors as reinforcing nationalism in Central Asia: regionalism; economic difficulties centered on access to water; and minority nationalism. Helgesen focuses on the conflict in Tajikistan and its potential spill-over effect in the region. Although nationalism is a factor in Central Asia, a point Helgesen makes clear, it seems to be much less of an issue than regional power struggles, economic difficulties and the free expression of political views.

Toivo U. Raun's article, "Ethnic Relation and Conflict in the Baltic States," examines the potential for violence in the Baltic region. His central argument is that non-violent conflict resolution is the way of the future in the Baltic states. Raun provides demographic profiles of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and proceeds to examine the roots of ethnic tensions which are traced back mainly to Soviet rule. The positions of the various minorities, the language issues and the citizenship question are analyzed in turn. He provides a profile of how Balts see Russians and vice versa. Raun judges the possibility of ethnic violence to be low, because Russians are for the most part recent arrivals to the area and have no deep-rooted claims to territory or historical antecedents to rely on. Further reasons that violence is unlikely are the Balts' experience, however imperfect, with democracy and their non-violent history of conflict resolution since 1991. Raun's analysis of the Baltic states' minority/majority relations provides interesting insights. For Raun, the main lesson in examining conflict is that each case is different and that little can be gained from generalizations based on one conflict, namely in former Yugoslavia.

The editors' conclusion "The Implications of Post-Soviet Conflicts for International Security," is an

assessment of the cases in an attempt to see what they reveal about the international system after the Cold War, the capabilities and capacity of international organizations in dealing with regional civil wars, regional insecurity in the long-term and the implications for American foreign policy. The analysis provides a look at, among other things, the role of the UN, the case for and against military intervention and a brief overview of the UN's *Agenda for Peace*. The analysis of regional insecurity examines factors which emphasize regional instability and accentuate ethnic conflict, namely weapons proliferation, economic dislocation, the transition to market economies and the undermining of democratic political development through social disintegration.

The solid analytical framework Duncan and Holman provide is adhered to by the contributors but does not restrict analysis, leaving room for various approaches and interpretations. Discussions range from armed conflict to ethnic tensions and the potential for violence. Altstadt's analysis of national consciousness and its links to territorial claims is in my view the most incisive commentary on the issue of ethnic nationalism in the book. It is in-depth and the linkages between the different conceptual components are clearly and concisely articulated.

The volume is a useful collection of essays, some of which offer particularly insightful analyses of ethnic conflict. It provides numerous regional maps and tables of ethnic and linguistic breakdown for many areas. It will be of interest for both scholars and educators dealing with the subject as well those focusing on foreign policy formulation and development. Although the book suffers from being overly directed toward what the conflicts and their management mean for American policy formulation, many practical policy recommendations remain. One shortcoming in the book is the absence of a contribution dedicated to the conflicts in Georgia. Such a piece would have provided a more complete picture and analysis of post-communist ethnic conflict.

Andre Lapointe

Aylmer, Quebec