CHAPTER 3

The Legacy of the Iranian and Soviet Ethno-Political Systems and Policies

According to the previous chapter, one of the most relevant conditions that can explain ethno-territorial conflict is the ethno-political system involved. Two ethno-political systems are particularly relevant to the regions in this study: the former Soviet Union’s ethno-political system is relevant to the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the Iranian ethno-political system is relevant to Fereydun.

After the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet Union developed a nationalities policy, which had territorial manifestations, the legacy of which is still present in its successor states. The Soviet nationalities policies showed sharp discontinuity with the former Tsarist policies on different ethnic and religious groups in the Russian Empire. Iran, on the other hand, has shown relative stability in its ethno-religious, and less so in its territorial-administrative, policies in the last centuries. Its ethno-religious policies have been relatively unaltered since the establishment of the Safavid Empire in the sixteenth century.

This chapter will provide an analysis of both systems, with a focus on their conflict-generating or conflict-mitigating/preventing aspects. As a result, a further specification of ethno-political systems as an explaining condition for ethno-territorial conflict will be necessary.

The Soviet Union and Its Successor States

The Soviet Union (Figure 3.1), officially called the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), evolved from the dominions of the former Tsarist (Romanov) Russian Empire. The Soviet Union was gradually established after the October Revolution of 1917 until 1922. “The Soviet experiment,” as the historian Ronald Grigor Suny (1998)\(^1\) calls it, lasted until 1991, when it ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet legacy and the effects of its collapse and after-shocks are still prevalent and important in the explanation and understanding

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\(^1\) See also Suny (2003) for primary documents and important scholarly articles about twentieth-century Soviet history.
Figure 3.1 Soviet ethno-territorial divisions

ASSRs and AOs in the Caucasus
1. Adygeyskaya AO
2. Karachayevo-Cherkesskaya AO
3. Kabardino-Balkarskaya ASSR
4. Severo-Osetinskaya ASSR
5. Checheno-Ingushskaya ASSR
6. Yugo-Osetinskaya AO
7. Adzharskaya ASSR
8. Nagorno-Karabahskaya AO
9. Nakhichevanskaya ASSR (Azerbaijan SSR)

*No oblast-level administrative divisions

The United States Government has not recognized the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union. Other boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.