

# An Account on Karabakh War: Why Now and Then What? - Ayça Ergun & Anar Valiyev

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## **Abstract**

The Nagorno Karabakh conflict has been one of the major challenges for the stability and security in the South Caucasus for almost three decades. On September 27, Azerbaijan initiated a new war to liberate its occupied territories. The aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of the reasons and implications of the Azerbaijani military operations in Karabakh, focusing on the background of the current events and discussing the role and the impact of the third parties. Possible scenarios for the future of the region will also be elaborated.

Keywords: Karabakh war, Azerbaijan, Armenia, external actors

## Introduction

For almost three decades, Karabakh problem constituted one of the major conflicts in the post-Soviet territories. The war in the early 1990s between Baku and Yerevan resulted in the occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and seven adjacent cities of the larger Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Although a ceasefire was achieved between two countries in 1994, peace talks have proved to be unsuccessful since then to solve the deadlock and restore territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, which is demanded by several UN Security Council resolutions. The existing *status quo*, implying a “no peace no war situation”, has constituted a regional security threat.

On September 27, 2020, Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense reported active shelling of Azerbaijani villages from Armenian troops located in Karabakh. Following the reports of deaths of civilians, Azerbaijan launched a counter-offensive operation along the entire line of contact. Since then, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have claimed destructions of significant military equipment and soldiers from the other side. As of October 29, 2020, Azerbaijan [claimed](#) regaining control over four cities, four towns and around 180 villages from occupied territories.

Students of the South Caucasus were rather surprised in the initial stages of the war asking “why now”, though Azerbaijan’s move was not at all unexpected as it was a question of time particularly after Armenia’s provocative fire to Tovuz on July 12, 2020. Tovuz, located outside of the Karabakh region, is of geostrategic importance located at the intersection of the main energy and transportation routes, namely the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines, as well as the South Caucasus pipeline -the first segment of the international Southern Gas Corridor (SGC)- are passing. This was one of the largest and deadliest confrontations since April 2016 escalation (Garibov 2020). Within few days, 12 Azerbaijanis including one civilian and a high-ranking officer were killed, while the Armenian side reported four dead soldiers. It is difficult to establish with accuracy what caused the events in the south-west of Azerbaijan, two hundred kilometers from [Karabakh](#). Both sides accused each other for escalation. Later, in early August, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov speculated in an interview that the reason behind the skirmishes was a decision from the Armenian side to revive the old border checkpoint located 15 kilometers

from the Azerbaijani export pipelines which heightened anxiety of Azerbaijan and led to a disproportional response (Morozov 2020). He went further stating that the ceasefire was reached through the active Russian mediation.

Same question was also asked back then regarding Armenia's unexpected move, particularly because it was clearly enjoying the *status quo*. Interpretations included Armenian President Nikol Pashinyan's attempt to consolidate his rule within the country, and possible Russian encouragement, reasoning that Armenia's move could not have been possible without Russian consent. Nevertheless, the attack on Tovuz was contained, though Azerbaijan also called on international community to react and restore its territorial integrity, arguing that Armenia is the main threat for the security and stability in the South Caucasus.

As of September 27, Azerbaijan found a rather suitable opportunity structure to initiate a war to liberate its territories. This had several aspects. First, the war option had been voiced quite frequently in the last couple of decades by Azerbaijan particularly after each round of peace talks had failed. Second, Azerbaijani statehood has been consolidated since the early 1990s and the Azerbaijani army has become well equipped in recent years. Third, the country lost its belief to international community due to ineffectiveness of the OSCE's Minsk Group, co-chaired by the US, France, and Russia, and non-implementation of the UN Security Council decisions recognizing Azerbaijani territorial integrity. Fourth, Turkey, strategic partner of Azerbaijan, has decided to become pro-active after Tovuz attack, stating that it would back Azerbaijan with all its resources. Fifth, Russia seemed to withdraw its support to Armenia whose loyalty was questioned after Pashinyan's pro-Western statements. Finally, it appeared that a tacit agreement has been reached between Turkey and Russia whereby the former would move to play a more active role as game changer and the latter would stand by unless the conflict expands to Armenian territory and/or threaten wider regional security.

The aim of this article is to provide an analysis of the reasons and implications of the Azerbaijani military operations in Karabakh, focusing on the background of the current events and discussing the role and the impact of the third parties. In conclusion, possible scenarios for the future of the region will be elaborated.

# Historical Background

The contemporary phase of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region began in February 1988 with regional Armenian nationalists demanding unification (*miatsum* in Armenian) with Armenia. As the tension rose, more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia. On 2 September 1991, “the local councils” of Nagorno-Karabakh adopted a “Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh” which was declared “null and void” by the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and the Soviet Union. However, the local administration of Nagorno-Karabakh conducted a “referendum” on December 10, 1991, contrary to regulations and legislation of the Soviet Union and the Azerbaijani SSR.

The Armenians argue that the following proclamation of independence by Nagorno-Karabakh was exercised in accordance with the April 3, 1990 Law of the USSR “On the Procedures for Resolving Questions Related to the Secession of Union Republics from the USSR.” According to this law, during the initiation of a process of secession of a Soviet republic, its autonomous entities also have the right to make their independent choices to remain or leave the Soviet Union. However, Azerbaijan, like Armenia and other Soviet republics, left the Soviet Union on the basis of the Belovezha Accords on the collapse of the USSR dated December 8, 1991. Therefore, one cannot refer to the abovementioned law dated April 3, 1990, as neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia used this law to secede from the USSR. Moreover, Azerbaijan was admitted to the United Nations on March 2, 1992, with the borders of former Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Nevertheless, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia launched full-scale armed hostilities against Azerbaijan and defeated Azerbaijani forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, and then occupied seven regions outside of it. Along the way, on February 25-26, 1992, Armenian forces razed the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly to ground, killing 613 Azerbaijanis. In May 1992, Armenian forces captured Shusha – an Azerbaijani populated and strategically located city in Nagorno-Karabakh, and later Lachin. After short advancement of Azerbaijani forces in summer 1992, Armenian armed forces were successful in 1993 with the occupation of Kelbajar, Agdam, Fizuli, Jabrail, Qubadli and Zangezur.

In 1993, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions –822, 853, 874 and

884- demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied Azerbaijani territories and reconfirming Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In May 1994, Russia brokered a cease-fire agreement between the warring parties in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

After the failure of various proposals by the Minsk Group of the OSCE, which was tasked by the organization to mediate between the parties, the accepted mode of operation became direct negotiations between Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders. They met several times between 1999 and 2001 in Washington, Istanbul, Geneva, Davos, Moscow, Yalta, Paris and Key-West. After the failure of Key-West talks and subsequent elections in both Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2003, the mediators initiated the Prague Process in 2004, which envisaged negotiations between the foreign ministers. In November 2007 on the margins of the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the OSCE, "Madrid Principles" were presented by the co-chairs to the warring parties. These principles, updated in 2009, envisioned a compromised solution including the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied adjacent territories to the Nagorno-Karabakh region with special modalities for Lachin and Kelbajar districts, and subsequent establishment of interim international security arrangements for the region until voting on status is conducted. Since then direct negotiations between the foreign ministers continued mostly with Russia's efforts with no apparent resolution.

## **What Happened Between July and September 2020?**

The latest escalation between Armenia and Azerbaijan should be considered in the context of two dimensions. First, from a military viewpoint, the Armenia's Minister of Defense David Tonoyan announced a new doctrine in March 2019 - "new war for new territories". Second, on the diplomatic front, Armenia denounced the Madrid Principles in March-April 2020, thus effectively ending the negotiations between the two countries. Moreover, in August 2019, Prime Minister Pashinyan declared the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Armenia. This irredentist claim run contrary to the goal and format of the international negotiations under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-chairs as well as the principles of international law.

While Armenia thus abandoned the peace process and opted for the military

escalation, the public mood in Azerbaijan moved towards pro-war position as Azerbaijanis were increasingly tired of waiting for the resolution. Some hopes were connected to Russia especially after April 2016 clashes when Azerbaijan gained some positions and Moscow promised to exert more pressure on Armenia for the resolution of the conflict. However, after the July 2020 clashes, Moscow supported Armenia by delivering more military hardware to Yerevan. Whatever the reasons for the clashes at Tovuz, it sparked a rise of nationalism and patriotism in Azerbaijan leading to street demonstrations and unprecedented pressure on the government to continue military action to regain the occupied territories in Karabakh.

There were extensive speculations in Azerbaijan about the July crisis. Despite the Russian mediation, the strongest suspicion was that Moscow was behind the clashes as it served Russian energy interests. The share of the Russian gas in overall gas consumption of the EU and Turkey is gradually diminishing mainly because the EU market is slowly moving to alternative energy resources, COVID19 pandemic is limiting energy consumption, and additional gas supplies in terms of LNG arriving from the Middle East. On top these, entrance of Azerbaijani gas to Bulgarian, Italian, and Greek markets would further decrease the dependence of EU countries to Russian gas. At the same time, the Blue Stream pipeline delivering Russian gas directly to Turkey was inactive since May 2020 as Turkey was able to diversify its gas supply by turning to LNG sources and thus decreasing dependence on Russian gas.

Azerbaijan on the other hand was able to increase its share in the Turkish market and was slowly pushing Russia out. It was reported that between January and June 2020, Azerbaijan exported 6,36 billion cubic meters of gas (23% of total gas purchases) to Turkey and thus took the lead among its suppliers (Jafarova 2020). At the same time, the time to inaugurate the TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline), connecting Azerbaijan with Italy via Georgia, Turkey, Greece, and Albania was approaching. As a result, it would not be surprising to see Moscow reigniting tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia to show Russian influence over the region and its gas supplies. The fact that Armenian attack on Azerbaijan happened in Tovuz region, that is outside of Karabakh but close to pipeline routes, indicates that the reason for the attack was somewhat related to demonstration of ability to disrupt transportation of hydrocarbons from Azerbaijan to Europe.

The military experts also stated that combat operations between Armenia and Azerbaijan were fought for a high ground allowing Armenia to harm oil and gas deliveries as well as Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway.[1] For Moscow, it is very important to control and disrupt such connections especially with Turkmenistan which is considering to join the TANAP project through a projected Trans-Caspian Pipeline. It is not a coincidence that Turkmen President visited Baku in March 2020 to discuss joint development and implementation of energy projects, within which the construction of a gas pipeline between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan was one of the projects (Saeedi 2020). Showing that Baku understood the Russian dissatisfaction regarding these developments, Azerbaijan already started to re-use long-forgotten Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline for oil transportation (Ismayilov, 2020). Since its independence, Baku has had to come to terms with the fact that despite the formal rejection of Russia's dominant position in the post-Soviet region, its implicit presence still lingered there. Russia would exploit any opportunity to prevent South Caucasian states from integrating into the Euro-Atlantic community. In the view of the Russian establishment, such a scenario would constitute a serious and hostile move against its interests (Kubicek 2009; Valiyev 2019).

It is clear that Russia can easily disrupt the projects that Azerbaijan has invested billions of dollars, including non-oil related projects such as Belt and Road Initiative, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, North-South Corridor and others. Thus, it was not in Azerbaijan's interests to start these clashes taken into consideration its massive investments in areas close to line of contact. Moreover, Armenian membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was a [red line for Azerbaijan](#) in direct confrontation with Armenia.

## **What is different in the current conflict?**

The current situation is different from the aftermath of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. This time newly reinvigorated Turkey is trying to play a role in the region. Feeling unprecedented Turkish support, Baku made several accusations against Russia, blaming it for its arms sale to Yerevan amid military actions. The accusations also came during planned large-scale "Caucasus-2020" exercises, held by Russia jointly with Armenia. Azerbaijani media published news that several tons of weapons were shipped from Russia to Armenia between July 17 and August 4, replenishing Yerevan's arms stock that was depleted during the

clashes with Azerbaijan in early July. On August 13, 2020, Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia spoke over the phone, during which the Azerbaijani President raised concerns of Azerbaijani society on this issue (Mammadov 2020).

Azerbaijani media outlets close to government also tracked planes flying from Rostov, Russia to Yerevan over south Russia, Kazakhstan, Caspian Sea, and Iran to Armenia. Azerbaijani mass media claimed that these weapon deliveries triggered Armenian provocations. Facing such criticism, Moscow dispatched Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu to Baku to assure President Aliyev on the usual character of military supply. During the meeting, President Aliyev said that the purpose of the Armenian attack was to involve the CSTO in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. At the same time, the intensity of deliveries of military supplies from Russia to Armenia “caused concern and serious questions in the wider Azerbaijani public” (Mammadov 2020). Weeks later presidential foreign affairs aide Hikmet Hajiyev reiterated accusations and expressed government’s opinion on unsatisfactory explanation of the Russian side over the arms supply to Armenia during the conflict.

Baku at the current stage is facing an unusual situation. Since the independence, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy toward Russia has been driven by two determinants. First, Russia’s continued support to Armenia and procrastination in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has prevented Azerbaijan from active rapprochement with the West. Russia appears to believe that if the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is solved, Baku would immediately rush into an anti-Russian alliance or NATO membership. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict then has remained the principal leverage Russia use against Azerbaijan to keep it from unfriendly actions. The 2008 Russia-Georgia War, as well as Russia’s occupation of Crimea and its suspected support for separatists in Donbas have further complicated Azerbaijan’s position in this respect.

Second, Azerbaijan’s vast oil and gas reserves have encouraged it to preserve the rhetoric of independence in its foreign policy formulation. The geostrategic importance of the country has steadily increased by contributing to Europe’s energy security, which allowed Baku not to become “Kremlin’s puppet”. It was the “blessing” of natural resources that has provided Azerbaijan with an option to adjust its relations with Russia.

Developing a hedging strategy of a middle ground allowed Azerbaijan to



strengthen its position in the regional politics and also ease the tensions in its neighborhood. Azerbaijan's strategic hedging *vis-à-vis* Moscow has therefore helped the former to avoid entanglement in a power contestation that could have endangered its autonomy in its foreign relations. The latter would have been inevitable should Azerbaijan preferred one-sided strategic alignment choices - either balancing against Russia or bandwagoning it.

Nevertheless, at the current stage, the situation seems to have changed. The looming prospect of an imminent war with Armenia and open Russian support encouraged Azerbaijan to rely more on its traditional ally -Turkey. As a result, amid the open Russian support to Armenia, Baku held joint military exercises with Turkey in Azerbaijani exclave Nakhichevan and other regions of the country between July 29 and August 6, during which Turkish Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar and high-ranking Turkish military officials, including the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces General Yaşar Güler, visited [Baku](#). President Aliyev during the meetings with Turkish officials assured that Turkey will become the number one partner of Azerbaijan in the area of military-technical cooperation. It is important to note that, for many years, Russia was the largest arms exporter to Azerbaijan. It is worth to mention that Turkish rhetoric and support were also much stronger than before.

## **Involvement of the Third Parties**

One cannot neglect the role, impact and involvement of the third parties in the conflict. International organizations historically and currently express their concerns and urge ceasefire as well as immediate resolution of the conflict and restoration of peace in the region. Yet current circumstances require more concise, effective and immediate measures.

Since the beginning of the conflict, a number of inter-governmental organizations including the UN and the EU actively involved in the resolution of the conflict. Yet, particularly the OSCE's Minks Group, co-chaired by the US, Russian Federation and France, have failed to make a headway. What is different in the current circumstances is that Azerbaijani perspective is much more vocal compared to previous periods. Although consistently referring to its resolutions dated 1993, the UN seems to be a rather ineffective organization in the last couple of decades, and could only support parties after the resolution of the conflict through humanitarian assistance, building up a taskforce for peace

building and ensuring safety and security of the refugees and internally displaced people if the Azerbaijani territorial integrity is restored. The OSCE's Minsk Group also proved to be the less than effective and rather reluctant actor in the conflict resolution so far and even considered as not reliable by Azerbaijan. Regional countries including Turkey, Russia and lately Iran seems to engage more into the process of conflict resolution and peace building.

Turkey's support to Azerbaijan in Karabakh conflict is undeniable. The two countries enjoy a special type of bilateral relationship inspired by ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic affinities, frequently echoed with the motto of "one nation two states". One should admit that they have not took this motto for granted and invested significantly in the diversification and intensification of their bilateral relationship at all fields including energy, transportation, trade and education. What is most significant is that this is not only an elite initiative but also has a strong foundation at the public level. Turkey's rejection in exchanging diplomats with Armenia until the return of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan is considered as "extremely precious" by the Azerbaijani side.

Although one can argue that current Turkish support can be seen a natural continuum of its long-standing discourse, the current conflict provided yet another opportunity structure to both countries to intensify and deepen their existing relationship, cooperation, and strategic partnership. Turkey's stance is not simply "yet another act" of fraternity and friendship. Between July and September 2020, both countries made joint military exercises based on the bilateral strategic agreement, making their partnership more visible.

Moreover, Azerbaijan's military operations has so far been supported by high level declarations on the Turkish side. President Recep Tayyip [Erdoğan stated](#) that the Turkish nation stands by its Azerbaijani brothers with its all resources and [strengthen its solidarity](#). Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [declared that](#) "Azerbaijan will surely use its right of self-defense to protect its people and its territorial integrity. In this vein, Turkey fully supports Azerbaijan with unwavering solidarity. We will stand by Azerbaijan whichever way it prefers". Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [summarized this statement](#) by saying "We stand by dear Azerbaijan both in the field and on the table". Çavuşoğlu also stated that Turkey and Azerbaijan can even be counted as one state when [necessary](#). Similarly, Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar [stated](#) that they will stand by "Azerbaijani Turkish brothers with all resources till the end".

The discourses of political elite in both countries are also strongly supported in the public opinions. Turkish media provide full coverage of the conflict since September 27. A scant look to Azerbaijani social media accounts shows that they frequently use the Turkish flag emoji together with the Azerbaijani one. One can also observe the use of the both countries' flags side by side in the major cities of Azerbaijan.

Turkey had already been providing support to Azerbaijan in all international and regional platforms. There is nothing new in this. Yet, its stance in the current stage of the conflict has become more pro-active, assertive and involved. Nevertheless, while consistently expressing and underlining Turkey's moral and political support to Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan is also rejected alleged Turkish military support during the operations in order not to overshadow Azerbaijan's victory. It should however be noted that Turkish army and military schools provided training to Azerbaijani army for a couple decades. This has obviously contributed to the formation of a well-equipped and strong army in Azerbaijan compared to early 1990s and a generation of military elite who has close collaboration with their Turkish counterparts. In a recent statement, the head of the Foreign Policy Affairs under the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan, Hikmet Hajiyev, [stated](#) that Turkey's presence on the table is Azerbaijan's *sine qua non*. The existing situation is also a test for Turkey in its immediate neighborhood to strengthen its role in the region and to become a more prominent security actor.

Russia has historical legacy in the region with growing security, control, and dominance concerns. It would be wrong to argue that Russia would not like to lose Azerbaijan where there were no anti-Russian sentiments expressed. It therefore has given its rather implicit consent to Azerbaijani move to liberate its occupied territories through the Lavrov's statement that envisioned the return of five districts adjacent to Karabakh back to Azerbaijan. Its complicity in the occupation of the territories around Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s by providing military support to Armenia was unfair and unjust. This could explain Lavrov's recent statement encouraging Armenia to return some of the occupied territories to Azerbaijan. Yet, to keep Armenia in its fold, he still offered Armenia to keep Shusha and the Lachin corridor, and negotiations for the undetermined status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Russia was the first country to host the first meeting to initiate a cease-fire for humanitarian reasons between the two countries on October 10. With the participation of the ministers of foreign affairs

of the three countries, the warring parties agreed on the temporary ceasefire. However, it was broken even before it was in force. As such, this attempt did not provide much hope for a meaningful ceasefire anytime soon. Yet the meeting underlined Russia's decisiveness in dealing not only the war but also possible peace talks.

Iran is not necessarily involved in the conflict, though its support to Armenia has been apparent since the ceasefire in 1994. Due to its geographical proximity, it eased Armenia's deadlock through transfers of goods and military equipment. Although there have been historical ties between Azerbaijan and Iran, this connection has not been a source of inspiration or a motive for strengthening collaboration between the two countries. Since a significant percentage of its population consists of Azerbaijani Turks, Iran has been suspicious about Azerbaijani motives and thus stood closer to Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the recent flare up, it again provided support for Armenia, which resulted in a series of protests across Iran by the Iranian Azerbaijani Turks. It seems that Iran would need to re-consider its position in order to prevent potential upheavals among its own citizens. As such, in a recent statement, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Javad Zarif, revisited the Iranian position arguing that it respect the territorial integrity of [Azerbaijan](#). Recently, Zarif also stated that they were preparing a proposal for the resolution of the conflict and would present it to the authorities in Baku and [Yerevan](#). Iran also dispatched its own envoy to the capitals of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia and Turkey trying to mediate the resolution of the conflict. However, no information is given so far and it is believed that this Iranian initiative also failed.

## **Conclusion: Suggestions for the Future of the South Caucasus**

The peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia need to be restored. However, it also needs to be structured in a more effective, substantial, and restorative way. Such attempt should definitely need to be result-oriented. The future of the region in terms of securing peace and stability will require a new positioning of a number of countries and organizations. President Aliyev, in his recent address to the nation after Armenian attacks on Gence, Terter and Mingeçevir, [stated that](#) "Azerbaijan would not wait for another 30 years for the resolution of the conflict", and called for immediate "withdrawal of Armenian troops, recognition of the

Azerbaijani territorial integrity, Pashinyan's apology to Azerbaijani nation and offer to a concrete timetable for the withdrawal".

The OSCE Minsk Group should restore its reliability and effectiveness. Although it should have been one of the most effective institutions, its reluctance in mediating the conflict for the last couple of decades is remarkable. This has resulted in not only disappointment but also distrust in Azerbaijan, which considers the Minsk Group as applying dual standards between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Particularly due to France's open support to Armenia, with President [Macron's statement](#) "we won't accept Azerbaijani control in Nagorno-Karabakh", its presence in the Minsk Group has become increasingly questionable to Azerbaijan.

Turkey and Russia seem to have a tacit agreement so far regarding the recent clashes. Turkey's support to Azerbaijan is more than obvious and apparently Russia is not opposing it as of yet. Moreover, there were [discussions between the ministers of defense](#) of the two countries and the two presidents also talked by phone on October 14, [2020](#). This can further be considered as another example of "competitive cooperation" between Russia and Turkey (Aydın 2020; Çelikpala, 2018).

In the existing situation, Turkey expects its unconditional support to Azerbaijan to be translated into its active participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This would yet to be another act in its attempt to be a major regional security actor in the South Caucasus. This is not an easy task though. It would not be at all surprising to see resistance from Armenia and Armenian Diaspora to include Turkey in the peace talks. Russia on the other hand, though less visible and quieter, seems to avoid its historical backing up of Armenia so far. One can expect that the remaining two regions, i.e. Shusha and the Lachin corridor along with the status of Nagorno Karabakh would be the most contested issues in any forthcoming negotiations.

Azerbaijan would expect to see the reflection of its military success in the field when the negotiations start. After 27 September 2020, nothing will be the same between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Pashinyan's rule has already been challenged and damaged in Armenia. His pro-Western statements challenged Armenia's loyalty to Russia and probably lost its credentials as a country to be supported. As for Azerbaijan, restoration of territorial integrity will definitely be contributing to

its nation and state building as well as its economic development with increased prosperity.

As of late October 2020, three attempts for cease fire under the auspice of France, Russia and the US have failed. The war is still going on. Azerbaijan continues its military operations to restore its territorial integrity. President Aliyev has consolidated his popular support in the country. The previous “no peace no war status quo” is not an option anymore for Azerbaijan, though the terms and conditions which would inform the content of peace talks are yet to be seen. The international community’s call for an end to the war is important, but not enough, particularly because of increasing number of civilian casualties. There should also be strong attempt to re-consider existing circumstances to envisage a viable peace plan.

[1] Interview with an anonymous military expert from Azerbaijan. 2 August 2020.

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