

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE
IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH:
INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC
PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Alexander Iskandaryan

THE NAGORNO- KARABAKH CONFLICT: A NEW PARADIGM?

The April 2016 escalation changed the situation around the Karabakh conflict in a major way, at the very least, from the point of view of the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the escalation consolidated trends that persisted for some years, and caused them to come to a head. In reality, changes began sometime in 2011 after the meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents in Kazan. This meeting was the last somewhat serious attempt at reaching a breakthrough in negotiations within the framework of the OSCE Minsk group with a goal of achieving a final peaceful settlement.

Following the 2011 summit up until the April 2016 escalation, there had been nothing but decline in progress – of the conflict itself and of the negotiations process around it.¹ Although connected, the conflict and the negotiations are two different processes.

¹ Sergey Markedonov, “Azerbaijan in 2013: Main Trends of Socioeconomic and Political Development,” in Alexander Iskandaryan, ed. *Caucasus-2013* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2015, in Russian), 27.

Sergey Markedonov, “Azerbaijan in 2014: Main Results,” in Alexander Iskandaryan, ed. *Caucasus-2014* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2016, in Russian), 23.

Sergey Markedonov, “Azerbaijan in 2015: Main Trends,” in Alexander Iskandaryan, ed. *Caucasus-2015* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2017, in Russian), 9-27.

There is a large number of reasons for the worsening of the situation that lie outside the scope of this paper – starting from the decline of oil prices to domestic political concerns in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Given all the external and domestic circumstances, the situation on the front-line in Nagorno-Karabakh tensed and became more complicated. The sniper war escalated into cross-border shelling with artillery and missiles. The number of violent incidents on the frontline increased. The confrontation spilled over to the borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan, sometimes even to the border between Armenia and Nakhichevan.

After an MI-24 helicopter was shot down in November 2014, bilateral relations escalated even further. The parties in conflict began using heavy calibre artillery on a regular basis. After the April 2016 escalation, the death toll on the conflict's borders decreased, but only in comparison to the post-2014 situation.² So far, all efforts to lower the degree of violence in the conflict to pre-2011 level have failed.

Naturally, under such conditions, the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk group are focused on trying to reduce the violence and contain the risks of further escalations. Particularly since 2016, the efforts of the Minsk group have been directed mainly at pursuing trust-building measures, maintaining the “relative calm,” increasing the number of monitors on the Line of Contact, and setting up a system for investigating incidents.³ One must admit that even along those lines, progress has been very moderate.

At any rate, despite the optimistic statements sometimes made by officials, no real attempts at resolving the conflict are currently being made. The positions of the sides are so opposite that there is no room for peace negotiations. Maintenance of the status quo used to be a minimum requirement. It has now become the desired outcome. Final peaceful resolution is no longer perceived as a realistic goal. Conflict resolution has been replaced with conflict management.⁴

Unsurprisingly, this situation caused the positions of all parties in conflict to toughen. This hardening follows different trends in Armenia, Karabakh, and Azerbaijan.

² “Mortality Rate in Artsakh Decreased by 6.6%,” *Armenpress*, January 31, 2017 (in Armenian). <https://armenpress.am/arm/news/876845/arcakhum-mahacutyuny-nvazel-e-66-tokosov.html>

³ Alexander Iskandaryan, “Armenia-2016: the Year of Crises,” in Alexander Iskandaryan, ed. *Caucasus 2016* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2017, in Russian), 30.

⁴ Hrant Mikaelian, “Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh,” Caucasus Institute, Policy Paper, 2017.

In Azerbaijan, the anti-Armenian rhetoric of state officials, sometimes at the highest level, is becoming stronger every day. For example, a speech recently made by president Aliyev at a convention of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party mentioned the “return of Yerevan” to Azerbaijan.⁵ Azerbaijan has intensified its policy of persecuting citizens of various countries who travel to Nagorno-Karabakh.⁶ Azerbaijan has resumed pressuring its civil society actors involved in peacebuilding activities and persecuting independent journalists.

In Armenia, the official policies are somewhat different. Once in a while, Armenian public officials, including the minister for foreign affairs and the president, make speeches that mention Armenia’s preparedness to continue the peacebuilding process in the format of the Madrid principles. However, the civil society, social networks, media, and the analytical community increasingly circulate the perception that Armenia no longer has a counterpart in the peace negotiations.

Where the public opinion in Azerbaijan is concerned, we cannot make an informed judgment about it, due to the fact that in recent years, social scientists have not had the opportunity to conduct any studies on the ground, and the news media in Azerbaijan is subjected to almost-official censorship. As in Armenia, field data is available and shows that over the last decade, the once-marginal thesis, “not an inch of land,” has become the most mainstream perception in Armenia.⁷

A popular view is that one cannot negotiate and shoot at the same time. This does not seem to apply to this particular conflict. Azerbaijan’s actions are anything but random or reactive. There is no doubt that Azerbaijan is implementing a consistent and thought-out strategy of maintaining its involvement in peace negotiations, while at the same time using a military toolbox to put continued pressure on the Armenian parties. And one has to admit that, with the parties lacking any motivation to seek resolution of the conflict based on difficult and

⁵ Joshua Kucera, “Azerbaijan President Calls for Return to ‘Historic Lands’ in Armenia,” *Eurasianet*, February 13, 2018. <https://eurasianet.org/s/azerbaijan-president-calls-for-return-to-historic-lands-in-armenia>

⁶ “Azerbaijan Blacklists Three U.S. Lawmakers for Visiting Nagorno-Karabakh,” *RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty Azerbaijan*, September 23, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-blacklists-three-us-lawmakers-visiting-nagorno-karabakh/28752231.html>

“Azerbaijan to Blacklist CNN Star for Nagorno-Karabakh Visit,” *Civilnet*, October 24, 2017. <https://www.civilnet.am/news/2017/10/24/Azerbaijan-to-Blacklist-CNN-Star-for-Nagorno-Karabakh-Visit/323241>

⁷ Mikaelian 2017, 28.

painful compromises, the strategy of negotiating and shooting at the same time is rational and effective. It is the only way that Azerbaijan can attract international attention to the conflict while gaining some leverage on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

As to Nagorno-Karabakh, given its unrecognized status and consequent international isolation, it felt and behaved like a fortress under siege long before the April escalation. The siege mentality had been mainstream there for many years, and after April 2016, it got worse. In Nagorno-Karabakh, all narratives about the conflict are securitized. Their survival strategy is to tighten security, reinforce borders, build up their defensive capacity, and so on.

Even when Nagorno-Karabakh demands to be allowed to return to the negotiating table – these demands on the part of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic have been a tradition of many years now – even then, it isn't so much trying to enable peaceful resolution of the conflict based on compromises, as it is trying to boost its institutional status and strengthen its positions on the path to recognition.

One can say with certainty that a final peaceful settlement is no longer viewed as a realistic goal by either Azerbaijan or Nagorno-Karabakh.

However, it is also true that the April escalation has demonstrated the impossibility of a full-scale war. There is a methodological controversy amongst scholars about whether the April escalation was an attempt at a full-scale war that was cut short, or whether a full-scale attack had not been part of the plan, and the escalation had been originally planned to be large but local. In my opinion, these methodological arguments are not really important. Whatever the original intentions might have been, the April 2016 escalation made it absolutely clear that it is impossible to settle the conflict with a blitzkrieg. The balance of forces does not allow that. Even hypothetically, the risks of a “real” war outweigh any potential profits for one of the parties.

Accordingly, in the coming months and years, we can expect the situation to remain more or less the same. There will be negotiations, and time to time there will be incidents on the Line of Contact of various degrees of severity. Sometimes there will be escalations. The only variable will be the severity and frequency of the escalations. The international community will continue efforts to minimize the violence. There is and will be a shortage of political pressure tools. There is no will to use a different set of tools, for example, military tools, and this is unlikely to change in the short- or mid-term.

Of course, there are external variables in this equation that may change unpredictably. For example, there are oil prices, the state of relations between Russia and the West, the unfolding of relations between Iran and the West, and so on. However, there is no reason to expect the balances to change abruptly or significantly. One should rather expect the nonexistence of a realistic perspective for peace to become the new normal, i.e. to be perceived as the normal state of play by all the societies affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

What can be done in a situation like this? Obviously, it is unlikely that the conflict will be settled in the short-term. The first step towards at least a theoretical renaissance of genuine peace negotiations is the ruling out of violence on the conflict's borders. Failing this, trust-building measures will not work. In the final analysis, it is true that negotiations cannot be effective unless there is a stable ceasefire. Moreover, the narratives and discourses need to become less hostile. Efforts must be made to reduce and ideally to prevent ethnization of the conflict. Hate speech needs to stop. While it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to achieve right now, at the very least, one needs to work in that direction.

It is altogether useless to discuss the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijanis or the surrender of territories with Armenians. However, it is possible to generate a narrative on preventing violence, at least towards civilians. At the very least, consolidated pressure by the co-chairs of the Minsk Group can yield some results. Strictly speaking, this is what is being done right now, not brilliantly, not very successfully, but it is at least something. The "relative calm" in 2017 was approximately on 2013 level – the death toll was much smaller than in previous years. If and when the level of violence goes further down, it will be possible to discuss the implementation of basic trust-building measures. At the current stage, they would not be effective. It is a long and difficult road, but the only alternative is war.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Thomas de Waal

DETACHMENT BY DEFAULT: THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE KARABAKH CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 1991, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict changed from being an internal conflict inside the Soviet Union to being an international dispute between the newly independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Since then, the overall international context of the Karabakh conflict has changed surprisingly little. On the one hand, there is a broad international consensus that the conflict needs to be resolved through mutual compromises; yet no outside power, either singly or in combination with others, is sufficiently strongly committed to bending the will of the conflict parties to make that conflict resolution happen. As a result, by default there is a second international consensus, of concerned detachment, in which international actors strive merely to create an enabling environment that will persuade the conflict parties to reach an agreement by themselves.

In contrast to other sovereignty disputes, the two principal actors in the dispute are now the international capitals of Baku and Yerevan. Karabakh Armenians – much to their discontent

– have had only a limited role in post-conflict diplomacy. They attended talks in Rome in the 1990s and signed the ceasefire deal of 1994 (Karabakh Azerbaijanis have had even less of a role in the process). Diplomats from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) still visit Stepanakert. Yet Nagorno-Karabakh itself, the territory at the heart of the dispute, and its people, have become more or less a blank space as far as most of the world is concerned.

Both Baku and Yerevan have facilitated this state of affairs. Baku's isolation tactics mean that there is a minimal international presence in Karabakh – the Red Cross is the only major international organization with an office there. For its part, by not recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh's declaration of independence in December 1991, Yerevan effectively took on itself the main burden of international diplomacy in the conflict. This situation became more entrenched after the Karabakh leader Robert Kocharyan became president of Armenia in 1998.

Thus, for all intents and purposes, at the OSCE, UN and other international forums, the Karabakh conflict is a dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This status of being chiefly an inter-state dispute between two international capitals distinguishes the conflict from other post-Soviet conflicts – Abkhazia, Chechnya, South Ossetia,

Transnistria – where the territory at the heart of the conflict has had a seat at the table.

This has helped to create a state of equilibrium, in which the Karabakh Armenians – in contrast to Abkhaz, Chechens and other aspiring separatists (as most of the world sees them) – have a fully supportive international advocate. At the December 1996 OSCE Lisbon Summit, Armenia openly dissented from a document affirming the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Ever since then, international actors have been less forthright and more ambiguous on this issue than they have on the territorial integrity of Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine. There is an international perception that this is a conflict not just of two sides, but of two countervailing and equally powerful forces.

Equilibrium facilitates international stasis. For both Baku and Yerevan, the Karabakh conflict is the No.1 national issue, an essential matter of identity and security. It is probably the one question which a president cannot decide without support from society – as Levon Ter-Petrosyan discovered to his cost in 1998, when he was forced out of office after giving his agreement to an OSCE draft peace plan. Societal resistance to international mediation is so strong that although the international community shares a consensus that the conflict needs to be resolved

for the sake of regional stability, it is not willing to put excessive pressure on the two capitals which hold the key to that resolution.

This cautious approach also applies to Russia. The fact that Moscow has multiple interests in the region and is the most active international actor does not mean that it is in control. Rather, mediation in the Karabakh conflict competes with other issues for attention in the Kremlin, ranging from Armenian Diaspora politics to gas deals in the Caspian Sea to the money that can be earned by Russian defence contractors. When asked about the conflict, President Vladimir Putin repeatedly expresses reluctance to get more fully involved and says that it is not up to Russia to “knock heads together.” For example, in 2010 at a press conference with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Putin stated,

Both Russia and other participants in this process are ready to help, but we cannot take Armenia or Azerbaijan's place. Russia will not take on any additional responsibility to press the countries to act, only to be viewed as guilty of some misdeed by one or both of the countries later on. Our relationship with Azerbaijan and Armenia spans centuries. We do not want to be seen as having pressured one side to accept an unfair outcome. I would like

to stress that we can only guarantee any agreements that are reached.¹

THE MARKETPLACE OF GLOBAL OPINION

From the very beginning, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has not just been a territorial and military contest but a competition for international support and solidarity, waged both by diplomats and “information warriors” from each side.

The battle lines in the virtual and diplomatic space between the two sides have continued to change, even as the Line of Contact on the ground, the ceasefire line fixed in May 1994, has barely altered. Each side appears to believe that it must be tireless in winning this battle in even the smallest corners of the globe.

In the early phases of the conflict, the Armenian side had a clear upper hand in the information war. This began in the late Soviet period, when the Russian intelligentsia, beginning with Andrei Sakharov, displayed a clear sympathy for the Armenian position that Karabakh Armenians, by being put under the rule of Soviet Azerbai-

¹ “Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hold a Joint Press Conference Following Russian-Turkish Bilateral Talks,” Archive of the Official Site of the 2008-2012 Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, June 8, 2010. <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/pressconferences/10922/>

jan, were the victims of an injustice, perpetrated by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s.

From the late 1980s, a steady stream of information, in both Russian and English, was published supporting the Armenian side of the argument. The Armenian Diaspora, after initial equivocations about whether or not to support the Karabakh Movement, began to lobby enthusiastically on behalf of their ethnic kin in Europe and the United States. In the early stages of the war, media reporting on the bombardment of Karabakh Armenians elicited more sympathy for their plight than for Azerbaijanis. The first substantial book in English on the conflict, *The Caucasian Knot*, by three Diaspora Armenian authors, was published in 1994 and gave a detailed historical account of the conflict which was highly favourable to the Armenian side.

Azerbaijan began to put itself on the international map only in the early 2000s, when investments began to flow to Baku, thanks to its new west-bound oil pipelines. Azerbaijan made friends and money which allowed it to mount a serious international information campaign on the Karabakh issue for the first time. By the end of the decade, Baku had opened more embassies around the world than Yerevan. In 2011, Azerbaijan won a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and in 2014 it secured a

six-month chairmanship of the Council of Europe. Lobbying organizations, such as the European Azerbaijan Society, were founded. A new generation of young Azerbaijani English-speakers defended their country's position and attacked Armenians in Internet wars. Thus parity – or even advantage – was secured in the international diplomatic and information space.

The Armenians and Azerbaijanis who engage in these ferocious skirmishes in international space, whether it be at sessions of the OSCE or in the comments sections of articles on the conflict, apparently believe that there are “swing voters” in the middle ground of global public opinion who can be swayed by their arguments, or their lobbying. In actual fact most global opinion-makers either care little about the Karabakh conflict or are alienated by the aggressive tone of both sides – but this does not deter them in waging endless verbal combat.

It must be said that the international community also indirectly encourages the diplomatic and propaganda warriors to continue the fight. Diplomats with knowledge of the conflict do not articulate in public a “third narrative” of peaceful co-existence that pushes back against nationalist narratives. They also take an agnostic position on the issue at the heart of the conflict, the question of the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh. That is

because the world has never given a clear judgement on the almost irreconcilable contradiction at the heart of the conflict, between, on the one hand, the Armenians' claims of self-determination and to have changed the facts on the ground, and on the other hand, Azerbaijan's assertion of territorial integrity. The fundamental idea in the OSCE Minsk Group's Basic Principles framework – the only viable plan on the table – is to thread a thread of brilliant equivocation through the tiny sovereignty needle, by granting Nagorno-Karabakh “interim status” while a vote on final status is postponed into the future as far as possible. That still leaves a lot of space for the parties to the conflict to try to tilt the status issue in their favour.

Both sides see opportunities in this situation of deliberate ambiguity on final status. And it is true that there seem to be cyclical fashions on the issue of to what extent the big powers of the world are willing to tolerate separatism. In 2008 the idea of “standards before status,” first advanced by the UN – the notion that an aspiration for independence can be granted if certain standards are met – was granted a certain legitimacy when the United States and several major European powers recognized Kosovo as an independent state, without the consent of Serbia.²

² UN Security Council, Standards for Kosovo, December 10, 2003. <https://www>.

Even though those powers insisted that Kosovo did not set a precedent, their act of recognition nonetheless changed calculations and perceptions in all the sovereignty disputes in Europe. The Armenian authorities hailed the fact of the recognition of Kosovo, even as they did not recognize Kosovo itself – or indeed Nagorno-Karabakh. Serzh Sargsyan, then prime minister, said, “If countries recognize the independence of Kosovo and then don't recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, we'll think of double standards.”³

In the same fashion, in 2014 Armenians cheered as Scotland voted in a referendum on independence from the United Kingdom. London, one commentator remarked approvingly, was not fighting for “Great Britain's territorial integrity.”⁴ Unsurprisingly, a prominent Azerbaijani commentator

.....
[securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/Kos%20Standards.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/Kos%20Standards.pdf)

³ Margarita Antidze, and Hasmik Mkrtychyan, “Kosovo “Will Boost Karabakh Recognition Drive”,” *Reuters*, February 17, 2008. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-serbia-armenia/kosovo-will-boost-karabakh-recognition-drive-idUSL166671420080217>

⁴ Aram Abrahamyan, “Peaceful Referendum of Independence,” *Aravot*, September 10, 2014. <https://www.aravot-en.am/2014/09/10/166844/>

wrote that the cases of Karabakh and Scotland had “nothing in common.”⁵

In 2014 however, the idea of separatism was again less in vogue in Western capitals because of the case of Crimea, forcibly taken over by Russia. In the United Nations resolution 68/262 on Crimea of March 27, 2014, reaffirming the territorial integrity of Ukraine and declaring the referendum in Crimea to be illegal, Armenia was one of only ten countries which supported Russia. Azerbaijan enthusiastically backed Ukraine’s territorial integrity and used a statement to condemn “extremism, radicalism and separatism in all their forms.”⁶

Crimea is indeed an uncomfortable case for the Armenian side. Despite the many differences, Crimea and Nagorno-Karabakh are twins in their Soviet-era status. In Soviet times they were both autonomous regions inside one Union Republic, Ukraine and Azerbaijan, whose majority population had a strong allegiance to another Union Republic – Russia and Armenia respectively. For that reason and because of Armenia’s strong alliance with Russia, Yerevan supported Rus-

sia in the UN resolution, even though that caused diplomatic damage with Ukraine and Western countries.

For its part, Azerbaijan evidently sensed that the Crimea crisis signalled another “change in the weather.” Since 2014 Azerbaijani officials have insisted that firm Western declarations of support for the territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine must also be applied to Azerbaijan – and that not to do so is a case of “double standards.”⁷ This issue was at the top of the agenda for Azerbaijan at the latest Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017. In the final declaration the EU expressed its “support to the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all its partners” but did not mention the Karabakh conflict at all.⁸

In this pull-and-push dynamic over the status issue, the voice of the mediators – their calls for compromise and their concept of postponing the issue so as to work on other more achievable issues – is mostly silent. The end result of this is that the ambiguous international environment informs Armenians and Azerbaijanis that there is a “global marketplace” in which they can

⁵ Vugar Seidov, “Scottish Independence and the Nagorno-Karabakh Separatism: Nothing in Common,” *Azerbaijan in the World*, December 25, 2012.

⁶ Sabina Ahmadova, “Azerbaijan Condemns all Forms of Extremism, Radicalism and Separatism,” *Trend*, March 28, 2014. <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2256798.html>

⁷ “Azerbaijan against West’s Double Standards on Karabakh Conflict - Top Official,” *Trend*, February 12, 2015. <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/2363446.html>

⁸ General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, 14821/17 COEST 324, Brussels, November 24, 2017.

bargain with the international community over competing versions of the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

THREE BIG NEIGHBOURS, POWERFUL BUT CONSTRAINED

The three big powers, Russia, Iran and Turkey, which have an interest in the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, have differences in their vision for the preferred outcome, but all share features in common. All three are neighbours; all are former imperial powers in the region; for all of them the Karabakh conflict has a bearing on domestic policy as well as foreign relations.

The policies of Moscow in the conflict – both as the “centre” in the final days of the Soviet Union, then as chief mediator and external actor post-1991 – deserve a whole article in itself. Suffice it to say that, in contrast to the other post-Soviet conflicts, Moscow has never “pulled the strings” of the Karabakh conflict. It has always struggled to find a resolution for it and employed a variety of instruments, ranging from economic investment to military pressure, to exert its influence – generally without success.

One thing has not changed since 1988, when Moscow first pulled off the feat of being blamed by both sides for its role in the conflict – by Azerbaijanis for not having forcibly repressed the Karabakh Armenian movement,

and by Armenians for not having met their demands and transferred Karabakh to the jurisdiction of Soviet Armenia. Twenty-eight years later, in the “four-day war” of April 2016, both sides were still resentful and suspicious of Moscow’s intentions towards them.

As early as 1988, it was impossible to talk about a single policy in Moscow towards the issue. Mikhail Gorbachev’s principal liberal adviser was more sympathetic to the Armenians, his conservative right-hand man Yegor Ligachev strongly supported the Azerbaijani position. That dysfunctional attitude continued, as different actors in Moscow backed first one side, then the other. In 1990-91, the conflict became caught up in the Gorbachev-Yeltsin power struggle. The central Soviet authorities supported Baku and Azerbaijani leader Ayaz Mutalibov and authorized the punitive “passport-checking” exercises known as Operation Ring. At the same time, deputies in the new Russian Supreme Soviet held out a hand of friendship to the Armenians, who during that period were rebels against Soviet power on a par with the Baltic States.

The contradictions deepened further after the end of the Soviet Union and reached their zenith in the summer of 1992 when Russian soldiers – acting in at least a semi-freelance capacity – fought on opposite sides of the same

battle in the northern part of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The overall impact is that Moscow is regarded as both indispensable and untrustworthy by both sides in the conflict. Sharing this attitude, on one occasion Armenians and Azerbaijanis covertly worked together and blocked Moscow’s plans to send a peacekeeping force to the region after the 1994 ceasefire.

Under the Putin presidency, we see the fruit of this dynamic in what I have described elsewhere as a “Project Minimum.”⁹ This is a conservative policy towards the conflict which still seeks its resolution, but which comes second to a more important agenda in Moscow: maintaining good relations with both Baku and Yerevan. In this way, lobbyists, business interests and defence contractors can be kept happy, while Russia’s mediators occasionally probe for openings that might lead to a resolution of the conflict in a way that preserves Russian influence.

Iran and Turkey, not being formal mediators of the conflict, are, if anything, even more subservient to this dynamic of the “tail wagging the dog.” Iran has a very large ethnic Azerbaijani population and a smaller Armenian one. It acts very carefully so as not to

upset either side and import the conflict onto Iranian soil. Iran’s only attempt at mediation, in May 1992, ended in disaster, coinciding with the Armenian capture of the town of Shusha. Since then it has been shut out of diplomatic initiatives to mediate the conflict, even though, as the one outside country which borders the conflict zone, it has a strong stake in the issue.

Turkey of course supports one side in the conflict, Azerbaijan, and has no diplomatic relations and a closed land border with the other, Armenia. The remarkable feature of the Turkey-Azerbaijan relationship is that the smaller partner, Azerbaijan, is the demandeur. Turkey has a real interest in seeing the Karabakh conflict resolved, something which would give it new access to the South Caucasus and open up new communication routes to Central Asia and beyond. Above all, Turkish officials say, this would be the key to opening bilateral relations with Armenia. Yet, effective lobbying efforts by Azerbaijani politicians and appeals for solidarity were the chief reason why the Turkish government pulled back from the 2009 rapprochement process between Ankara and Yerevan.

In sum, big power status and geographical proximity do not translate into effective influence over the Karabakh conflict, as none of the three powerful neighbours judges it to be in its interests to use its leverage with one side

⁹ Thomas de Waal, “The Karabakh Conflict as ‘Project Minimum,’” Carnegie Moscow Center, February 20, 2018. <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/75584>

or the other to seek resolution of the dispute. Shorter-term bilateral relations and domestic considerations trump the long-term strategic imperative.

THE OSCE – OVER-STRETCHED AND UNDER-FUNDED

In 1992, almost by chance, Europe's newly-invigorated multi-lateral security organization, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the CSCE, decided to engage with the Karabakh conflict. At a CSCE meeting in March 1992, the representative from newly-independent Belarus offered to host a conference in Minsk to resolve the conflict. The idea of a "Minsk Conference" was born – even though no such meeting has ever been held.

In December 1994, the CSCE turned into the OSCE at its summit in Budapest. Simultaneously it formalized the setting up of what has been called a "three-legged stool" to deal with the conflict. This consists of: the co-chairs of the "Minsk Group," international mediators who work on a political solution; the personal representative of the chairman-in-office who heads the ceasefire-monitoring mission, which for an unprecedented 21 years has been the veteran of the OSCE process, Amb. Andrzej Kasprzyk; and the Vienna-based High-Level Planning Group, which is mandated to work on designing a peacekeeping force.

The first leg of the stool, the Minsk

Group and its three co-chair mediators, is by far the most visible. Its role is most closely discussed and criticized. The Minsk Group co-chairs have become by default the keepers of the international gateway to the Karabakh conflict. Blaming them for their failure to resolve the conflict is close to being a national sport in Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as in some parts of Armenia and some Western analytical circles. I do not propose to revisit these arguments here. Suffice it to say, that mediators can only mediate within the limits of the possible and that in a conflict as intractable as the Karabakh one, the mediators have little room for manoeuvre and few arguments as to why their higher-ups should take a more urgent interest in the dispute than in, for example, the world's other "NK," North Korea. To put it more simply, it is the job of the mediators to provide a form and framework and it is up to the parties to fill the negotiations with real content.

This would be true if the conflict were mediated by the UN, EU or CIS. The particular nature of the OSCE adds some complications of its own. The unfortunate truth about the OSCE is that the organization failed to develop into the pan-European security organization that many in the 1990s hoped it would become – and which the continent still badly needs. It thus suffers from two weaknesses that preclude it from exerting a stronger grip here:

it is under-funded and its consensus-based structure prevents it from taking a more proactive position on the conflict, as one side or the other has blocking powers. The OSCE Secretariat, the executive office at the heart of the organization, has much less authority than its counterpart at the United Nations. The organization’s budget is just three percent of that of the UN.

The result is that each of the OSCE’s 57 nations effectively has a veto, including Armenia and Azerbaijan (even though they paid just 45,000 Euros each into the OSCE budget in 2016, a smaller contribution than that of the Vatican).¹⁰ Both Baku and Yerevan have learned that the budget for the ceasefire-monitoring mission can be vetoed, a visit by the High Level Planning Group (HLPG) blocked. Most egregiously, Azerbaijan used its blocking power to enforce the closure of the OSCE office in Yerevan in August 2017 on highly debatable grounds.

The most serious effect of this phenomenon is that no serious planning has been done for a peacekeeping force for Nagorno-Karabakh. “The third leg of the stool” – the HLPG – has not been allowed to function properly since the mid-1990s, while the OSCE has not developed a peacekeeping capacity as was anticipated in 1994. That means that there is a big hole in the

Karabakh negotiating process when it comes to security provisions, one that the OSCE cannot fill, and other more powerful actors, such as the UN and the EU, have not been asked to address. Elsewhere I have described working on the political side of the process without addressing the security side as “building a house without a floor.”¹¹ Achieving a peace-deal requires international security guarantees which are simply not being discussed. That is even more true in 2018 than before, as the Line of Contact gets ever more militarized.

GLOBAL GAPS AND ABSENT ACTORS

In April 2016, a moment of real crisis and tragedy in the Karabakh conflict, the big powers of the world briefly showed that they were capable of acting together and demanding progress in the faltering Karabakh conflict resolution process. The U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov were joined by the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini in meeting the conflict parties in Vienna.

However, within a few months, stalling and equivocation by both Ar-

¹⁰ OSCE, *Annual Report 2016*, April 10, 2017.

¹¹ Thomas de Waal, “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Resolving the Karabakh Security Dilemma,” Carnegie Europe, June 16, 2016. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/06/16/prisoners-of-caucasus-resolving-karabakh-security-dilemma-pub-63825>

menians and Azerbaijanis meant that the process reverted to a status quo and an international agenda of minimal diplomacy, mostly defined by Baku and Yerevan, and to a lesser extent by Moscow.

In an old Irish joke, a driver on a remote country road in the West of Ireland stops a local farmer and asks him how to get from here to Dublin. The farmer looks doubtful and replies, "If I were you, I wouldn't start from here." The current less than favourable international environment around the South Caucasus is unfortunately the only one there is. But you have to start driving anyway.

If one were to start again and redesign a more enabling and dynamic international framework so as to promote a peace agreement for the Karabakh conflict, it would look very different from the current one.

The most striking flaw in the process for anyone familiar with other peace processes is that there is no direct channel or bilateral negotiating framework between the parties to the conflict. They only talk directly when invited to do so by the mediators. It is a good year when the presidents talk once face to face. This is a recipe for conflict management, not conflict resolution.

A different international format would also include actors who have a direct interest in resolution of the

conflict but who for various reasons were not ready or available to do so in the 1990s. Iran has already been mentioned. Georgia, a close neighbour of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, which would stand to lose more than any other third country if conflict were to restart is another example. A third case is the European Union, which is now a strong presence in the South Caucasus in a way it was not 25 years ago.

Again, this is not a prescription to change the format of the OSCE Minsk Group. It has the strong benefit of being inclusive and preventing the conflict from becoming a geopolitical battleground between Russia and the West. Re-formatting the process would be costly and of questionable purpose. At the very least the current format both keeps Russia at the table and gives two other big powers, France and the United States, a de facto brake on Russian unilateral initiatives (when Moscow is in a more assertive mood) and an opportunity to share the burden (when it is in more cooperative mode). What would be more helpful would be a more inclusive international context in which outside actors would be encouraged to offer expertise, funding and diplomatic levers to help solve the conflict. Yet for that to happen, there needs to be a fundamental strategic rethink on the part of the conflict parties on the ground to move away from the status quo.

Stephen Neil MacFarlane

A
COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF
PROTRACTED
CONFLICT
IN THE
FORMER
SOVIET
UNION

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the comparative context of civil conflict in what we used to call the former Soviet Union. My focus is the countries in the EU's Eastern Partnership: Azerbaijan with respect to Nagorno-Karabakh; Georgia concerning the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia; Moldova – Transnistria; and Ukraine – Crimea and eastern Ukraine.¹ The analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is brief, because it is already well covered in the conference. The discussion of Georgia's conflicts is more substantial, while mention of Moldova and Ukraine is brief and intended to see whether the conclusions emerging from Karabakh and Georgia resonate in other loci of conflict.

I shall address two issues: origin (why did these conflicts occur?) and protraction (why are they so difficult to resolve?). The approach is analytical, rather than descriptive; the history of these conflicts has been written many times. All these conflicts have ended up in more or less the same place: protracted conflict that varies in intensity

¹ The names and spellings of these territories are a subject of some controversy. I have chosen according to the usual usage in the English-language literature on these cases. That is simply a convenience rather than a statement of political preference.

across time.² None has been resolved. How do we explain this? What do they have in common and what sets them apart from one another?

Lev Tolstoy began *Anna Karenina* by declaring that “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” From a social scientific perspective, that is an odd statement. One would expect variation within each category; why should all happy families be alike and each unhappy family be different? Presumably, cases in each category have their own specificities, as well as evincing general patterns. The conflicts I’ll be talking about are analogous to the “unhappy family.” Each conflict has its specific elements; they are all different. But, as a group, they have common qualities that allow us to explore the possibility of meaningful comparison.

Several general causal interpretations of post-Soviet conflict come to mind:

- the conflicts are rooted in longstanding intercommunal animosity,³ grounded in historical memory and legacy,⁴ including the Soviet legacy of autonomy, but also in the experience of recent conflict and collective trauma;
- the origins and the protraction of conflict are produced by the effort of competing political elites to manipulate identity and memory in their quest to gain and to maintain political power;
- state weakness⁵ and economic collapse,⁶ in the first instance the weakening of institutional restraints, and, in the second, desperation.
- the conflicts were provoked and are sustained by Russia;⁷

³ Robert Caplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2005).

⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁵ John Gledhill, “When State Capacity Dissolves: Explaining Variation in Violent Conflict and Conflict Moderation,” *European Journal of International Security*, 2:2 (2017).

⁶ Here I note Barry Posen’s 1993 application of the realist notion of “security dilemma” to substate politics in “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” *Survival* 35:1 (Spring 1993), 27-47.

⁷ This version is common in most of the countries that have experienced civil conflict within their borders, as is the scepticism about the level of commitment on the part of other external state and multilateral actors.

² I note that the largest conflict coming out of the collapse of the USSR – the civil war in Tajikistan (1991-1997) was resolved through the mediation of Russia and Iran, and producing a seemingly stable, though deeply corrupt, authoritarian solution. This paper does not deal with that conflict. The other major conflict was within Russia – Chechnya. Russian government control appears to have been restored over the territory by force, but that remains an open question.

- their initiation and protraction reflect insufficient engagement by the “international community.”

There are other, more exotic, variants, for example in the greed and grievance literature, which suggests that people (notably elites) draw personal gain from the initiation and prolongation of civil conflict, since the weakness or absence of state regulation and control in affected regions creates opportunities for individuals and groups to harvest rents.⁸

These possibilities and others can be lumped together into two groups, systemic (international and regional), and domestic. The systemic level includes intervention, and also the general structure of international engagement with the conflict. The domestic level covers the “state of the state” and regime politics, but also the historical and socio-economic background underlying the conflict. Another cross-cutting way to group explanations would be material (the competition for power and territory) versus ideational/identity factors, notably “constructed” historical memory and nationalism.

⁸ See for example, Paul Collier, “Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective,” in Berdal and Malone, *Greed and Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), and David Keen, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *International Affairs* 88:4 (2012).

These dichotomies are not mutually exclusive. For example, the phenomenon we are examining could be a product of international and domestic, and material and ideational factors, each necessary but none sufficient. Moreover these levels may not be independent one from another – systemic pressure, for example, may affect domestic political and identity processes⁹ and vice versa.¹⁰ If the two levels are co-determinant, then they should not be treated as independent or alternative.

Likewise, it is intuitively obvious that materiality may affect identity¹¹ and that identity might affect materiality.¹² Posen’s argument¹³ is in part about the decay of state protection (material) as a trigger for the activation of ethnic

⁹ For contrasting perspectives, see Robert Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization* 42:3 (Summer 1988); Peter Gourevitch, “Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,” *International Organization* 32:4 (Autumn 1978).

¹⁰ Michael Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12:3 (Summer 1983).

¹¹ For example, Fernand Braudel’s commentary on mountain peoples in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley, CA: 1995), 25-52.

¹² For example, the relationship between protestantism, industrialism, and capitalism claimed by Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 1978, translated from the original German work completed in 1905).

¹³ Posen 1993.

exclusivity (constructed). On another trajectory, constructed memory and identity might influence home state engagement in the affairs of a contiguous neighbour that hosts a minority that has ethnic affinity with the home state.¹⁴

The task I have been given is not one of theory-building or of theory testing. It is problem-driven, bottom-up. For reasons alluded to above, this task does not lend itself to parsimony and requires “analytical eclecticism.”¹⁵ All these conflicts resulted from multiple (often interdependent) causes; it would be very difficult to identify one as determinant. A more appropriate construct is that of critical juncture, the coming together of a multiplicity of mutually reinforcing factors, some domestic, some systemic, some material, some ideational, to produce and sustain violent conflict.

THE ORIGINS OF CONFLICT

Why did these conflicts begin? Turn-
ing first to Nagorno-Karabakh, the

¹⁴ For a broader discussion, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a more policy and legal treatment of the phenomenon, see OSCE HCNM, *The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* (OSCE HCNM/The Hague, 2008).

¹⁵ Rudra Sil, and Peter Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytical Eclecticism in World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

roots of conflict go back a long way. The region has been contested actively or passively since the collapse of imperial rule in the region in 1917, and the foundation of the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1918. The trauma experienced by Armenians in Anatolia in actions committed by Ottoman authorities during World War I, the post-imperial massacres of Armenians and Azeris in Baku, and the contestation of Karabakh itself between the new republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan left enduring historical memories on both sides. When Soviet authorities suppressed the newly independent Caucasian republics (1920-21), they allocated Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, but with autonomous status. This assignment of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan was not accepted by Armenians either within Nagorno-Karabakh or in Armenia itself.¹⁶

Towards the end of the Soviet period, the Soviet capacity (and will) to sustain the imposed peace declined. Given that the issues surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh had never been resolved and that there had never been any reconciliation of Armenian

¹⁶ This echoes a comment made by a Baltic participant at a seminar on ethnic conflict in the early 1990's: the question of why such conflicts erupted at that time was simple. They had been present before Soviet power was imposed, and were suppressed during the Soviet period. When Soviet power collapsed, they re-emerged.

and Azerbaijani expectations, the weakening of the centre permitted the re-emergence of the conflict. The local authorities in the region were no longer confident of the protection provided by Moscow; the two union republics were no longer convinced of the centre's deterrent role. The Azerbaijani leadership doubted the central Soviet government's commitment to their territorial integrity. Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region were unhappy with the Soviet unwillingness to contemplate their transfer to Armenia. The communist leaderships on both sides had to cope with increasingly sceptical and nationalistic movements within their populations.

In other words, at the end of the 1980s, the region's leaderships faced a situation where a territorially compact minority population in an autonomous area of Azerbaijan was contesting its allocation to the host country. Much of the majority population of Azerbaijan considered that minority to be interlopers occupying historically significant Azeri territory. The territory in question was central to the national myths of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The minority's kin state (Armenia) was faced with a national movement (the Karabakh Movement) that argued that the enclave was historically Armenian, under occupation by "Turks." These competing perspectives fed on each other. There was no

credible external constraint impeding the resumption of violence, and no obvious solution around which a compromise could merge.

At the beginning of 1988, Aleksandr Yakovlev, a key political adviser of Gorbachev, wrote to the latter in the following manner:

*Some mathematics problems have no solution. Mathematics has methods for proving that a problem is unsolvable. Karabakh is such a problem. There is no optimal solution. Any conceivable solution will be unacceptable to one of the two sides.*¹⁷

The conflict resumed in February 1988, a month after Yakovlev wrote his letter. Ignoring Yakovlev's advice, the Soviet government intervened in the early stages through Operation Ring, a forceful police operation around the edges of Karabakh to disarm Armenian militias active in the region and in the neighbouring Shahumyan District. The latter resulted in the flight of that district's Armenian population. The rationale for this operation remains unclear, but its effect was to create a legacy of "ethnic cleansing."

Both sides (Armenians and Azerbaijanis) were affected by state collapse in the 1990s. Armenia's economy was cut off at the knees when Azerbaijan embargoed the country, including

¹⁷ As cited in Masha Gessen, *The Future Is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (London: Granta, 2017), 81.

the supply of energy. In 1993, Turkey did likewise, shutting down movement and trade. Armenia's GDP shrank by 50%, Azerbaijan's, in the same period, fell from 8.8 to 3 billion dollars.¹⁸

At a deeper level, the manner of collapse may have been conditioned by political culture. In democratic theory, much is made of the habit of compromise within democratic systems: the acceptance that conflicts within the system should be and will be resolved through dialogue, persuasion, and constitutionally constrained competition for power rather than through violence. This form of conflict management was weak in the Soviet era. Decisions originated in central political institutions controlled by a single party and then passed down for implementation at lower levels. Most people had little meaningful experience of participation in consultative democratic decision-making. The collapse of the central authoritarian system left society at sea, in the absence of structures and habits that fostered peaceful dispute resolution.

OSCE (then CSCE) efforts to mediate a solution to the conflict under the auspices of the Minsk Group were unproductive, since the group was not

cohesive and lacked the means to impose a solution, while the parties to the conflict were not ready to accept the cessation of conflict. In May 1994, when the lines of the conflict had stabilised, Russian mediation produced a ceasefire. Attention then turned to conflict resolution, spearheaded by the Minsk Group.¹⁹ Thirty years after the beginning of active violence, Yakovlev's remark seems eerily prescient. Step by step approaches, comprehensive settlement packages, the promise of international guarantees and/or peacekeeping forces, the proposal to postpone final determination of the status of the region, have all failed to produce a resolution of the conflict. These themes will be taken up in the next section.

To sum up, several contributing factors come to mind in addressing why this conflict broke out. There was no consensus on who "rightfully" owned the region in question. A second is the underlying identity conflict briefly discussed above, and the historical legacy of intercommunal conflict. A third is that Nagorno-Karabakh was granted territorial autonomy as part of the award of the region to Azerbaijan. Local elites congregated within and around the institutions of autonomy,

¹⁸ The World Bank, Armenia Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/armenia?view=chart>. The World Bank, Azerbaijan Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/azerbaijan?view=chart>.

¹⁹ The Minsk Group was established by the CSCE (now OSCE) to organise a conference in Minsk, the purpose of which was to deliver a peaceful resolution of the Karabakh dispute.

and developed a political and economic interest in the continuation of autonomy. That autonomy was threatened by re-emergent nationalism in Azerbaijan and Armenia.²⁰

A fourth was the deterrent and enforcement power of the Soviet centre, which degraded fatally in the 1980s. A fifth was ideational: nationalism did not disappear when the Soviets established their rule in the Caucasus in 1920-22. Instead it retreated into society, culture, and family networks. As Soviet ideology gradually unravelled in the late 1980s, the logical ideational alternative was nationalism of the ethnic variety. Sixth, a neighbouring kin state – Armenia – intervened on behalf of their co-ethnics in Nagorno-Karabakh. That intervention was decisive in preventing Azerbaijani victory. The final factor to mention was the comparative indifference of international actors involved in mediation with a view to resolution and reconciliation, which persists to this day (see below).

THE COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

My own case study expertise lies in Georgia: the conflicts in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia. These discussions

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²⁰ For a comparative treatment of the role of autonomy status as a factor contributing to conflict, see Svante Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: the Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics* 54:2 (2002), 245-276.

will be more extensive. They will also extend into the post-ceasefire period. This will lead reasonably smoothly to the more general discussion of protraction.

South Ossetia

The conflict began at the end of the 1980s and lasted until 1992. It originated in a dispute over autonomy, aggravated by the Osset leadership's advocacy of reunification with their co-ethnics on the northern side of the Caucasus range and within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

These demands occurred in the context of the resurgence of Georgian ethnic nationalism in the late 1980s, aggravated by Soviet use of armed force against peaceful protesters in front of Georgia's Parliament in April 1989. The incident in which many died or were injured, not last by the use of chemical agents, effectively ended prospects for Georgia staying in the USSR. A year later, Georgians elected a new government led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, committed to exit from the USSR and to the creation of a "Georgian" Georgia. This included the trope to the effect that Ossets had no real place in Georgia, since they were allegedly guests who came in the 18th century.

Also in play were significant socially constructed historical memories of conflict during the first Georgian

Republic (1918-1921). Ethnic Georgians remember alleged Osset collaboration with the Bolsheviks to destroy Georgia. Ossets remember the violent suppressions that occurred in their region in the context of land reform and also the Georgian government's effort to secure control over its sovereign territory.

A ceasefire ensued in June 1992, mediated by Boris Yeltsin. It provided for a mixed peacekeeping force composed of Russians, Ossets, and local Georgians. Russia's role in this force re-established a Russian military presence in the region that remains to this day. The CSCE took on observation responsibilities in South Ossetia (not least as a result of the presence of Georgians in several villages throughout the region), and along the line of contact between Osset-controlled territory and government-controlled territory. The ceasefire was reasonably stable until 2004 when the Georgian government attempted to establish customs control over South Ossetia, incurring substantial casualties, and ultimately abandoning that project.

The Georgian challenge to the status quo in South Ossetia initiated a gradual deterioration in Russia's relations with Georgia. That deterioration accelerated as the Saakashvili government adopted an increasingly militant pro-Western orientation at a time when Russia's relations with Georgia

were decaying. In 2006, after the arrest of a number of Russian citizens for espionage, the Russian Federation embargoed Georgian exports and began a process of passportization in the breakaway territories. They also embarked on a series of military exercises along Georgia's northern border. Between 2006 and 2008, Russian forces engaged in numerous probes of Georgia, notably the air and artillery attacks on Kodori, but also air incursions into Kartli. In the 2008 exercise, the units involved did not disperse, but remained in the vicinity of the border. Simultaneously, there were increasing numbers of Ossetian attacks on Georgian settlements in South Ossetia. The Georgian government alleged that the Russians deployed forces into South Ossetia in violation of the 1992 ceasefire agreement.

The Georgian government decided to resolve the South Ossetia question by force.²¹ In August 2008, they at-

²¹ Responsibility for the outbreak of war is a controversial matter. Most would agree that it was the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali that began the war, but Georgia's attack was preceded by the escalation of incidents between Osset-controlled territory and Georgian villages in the vicinity. Russia also reinforced its troop contingent in Abkhazia a few months earlier. The frequency of Russian incursion into Georgian airspace increased during the summer, and Russian forces involved in the annual Kavkaz military exercise in the North Caucasus did not disperse as they had usually done after the exercise was concluded.

tacked across the line into secessionist-controlled territory, focusing on Tskhinvali. The Russians were ready. The Georgian military was driven out of South Ossetia, along with ethnic Georgians who had remained in the region after the 1990s war. Taking advantage of the consequent disintegration of Georgia's armed forces, the Russians then moved south and southeast of Tskhinvali, cutting Georgia's central east-west artery and advancing within artillery range of Tbilisi. The Russian invasion can be linked more or less clearly to the April 2008 decision of the NATO to offer future membership to Georgia and Ukraine.

Once the South Ossetian war had begun, reinforced Russian units broke out of Abkhazia into government-controlled territory in Mingrelia, seizing the port of Poti, thereby securing control over the major shipping point for Georgian imports and exports.

The mediation of Nicolas Sarkozy, then president of the European Council, produced a ceasefire, and the withdrawal of Russian forces back into Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It also provided for a monitoring force along the lines of contact. At the end of August, the Russian Federation recognised the independence of the two territories, established diplomatic relations with both, and followed by an ambitious series of bilateral agreements on military and security coop-

eration, trade, and economic assistance. By Georgian account, they have gradually pushed the administrative boundary line between Georgian and Osset-controlled territory southwards since the ceasefire.

Abkhazia

In the case of Abkhazia, historical grievances date back at least to the mid-19th century, in view of the mass displacement at that time to the Ottoman Empire as part of Russia's war with the Circassians. In the early Soviet era, Abkhazia was absorbed and granted the status of a union republic of the USSR, but somewhat ambiguously linked by treaty to the Georgian SSR. In the 1930s Stalin removed the ambiguity by eliminating Abkhazia's Union Republic status and reunifying Abkhazia with Georgia. Abkhazia formally retained autonomy within Georgia, but with very close central supervision. The mass settlement of Mingrelian Georgians in vacated territories of Abkhazia in the Stalin era generated grievance owing to the shift in the demographic balance against the autochthonous Abkhaz population. As Gorbachev settled in, as with Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia, Abkhazian opinion leaders sought dissociation from Georgia.

With the collapse of the USSR and the removal of Soviet federal security guarantees for minority autonomies,

Abkhaz elites again moved towards the exit. Their preference for the Soviet status quo was evident in the 1991 USSR referendum on reform of the federal structure. Abkhazia participated with a substantial majority favouring staying in the Soviet Union. The rest of Georgia did not participate in the referendum, because the elected government was moving towards a declaration of independence.

Matters deteriorated further with the eruption of the Zviadist rebellion in Mingrelia in 1992, when the rebels used the south-eastern part of Abkhazia to hide Georgian government officials they had kidnapped. From interviews around that time, I gather that the catalyst of war was a Georgian incursion into the Gali region in Abkhazia to deal with Zviadist rebels. This action was reportedly agreed with the Abkhaz authorities. However, since there was no Abkhaz resistance, the Defence Minister, Tengiz Kitovani, decided to move farther into Abkhazia, attacking Sukhum(i), burning the Abkhaz parliament building and pursuing Abkhaz irregulars northwards towards the border with Russia. The Georgian advance resulted in a large number of atrocities against the Abkhaz population.

Abkhaz forces regrouped under the protection of legacy Russian forces in Gudauta, drawing support from the North Caucasus, and also from Rus-

sian units in Abkhazia.²² External interference thus became a significant factor in the conflict. The secessionists and their North Caucasian allies fought their way back to Sukhum(i) and then cleansed the entire region of Georgian forces and most of the Georgian population by October 1993, producing a large population of displaced persons in Georgian-controlled territory.

After several false starts, a ceasefire was (again) mediated by the Russian government. The ceasefire agreement was accompanied by the renewal and extension of a UN observer force, which took up a role along the Line of Contact. The ceasefire was reasonably stable, not least given the presence of a Russian (CIS) peacekeeping force along the line. As noted above, conflict around Abkhazia re-ignited during the 2008 war.

In short, in considering why the Georgian conflicts occurred, both Georgian cases display factors also encountered in the Nagorno-Karabakh case: ethnic diversity, lingering cultural memory, state collapse, the rise of nationalism, and the relationship between institutions of autonomy and the practice of secessionism.

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²² It is not clear whether this engagement was ordered by the Russian government, whether it was ordered by factions in the Russian government without central authorization, or by local commanders who has been cast adrift.

There were also significant degrees of external involvement. One element is Russian engagement – sometimes diplomatic, sometimes with arms assistance, and sometimes through the direct use of military force. Throughout the late 80s and early 90s, Russian policy was poorly coordinated and badly executed. Russian interference was not a major contributor to the outbreak of conflict. But some early aspects were clearly motivated by a concern to retain influence over their new neighbours, for example the deal struck in late 1993 between Shevardnadze and Yeltsin around the Abkhazia ceasefire. In return for Russian help in ensuring a cessation of hostilities and also in suppressing the Mingrelian rebellion, the Russians sought and obtained Georgia's accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States, and acquiescence in Russian military basing in Georgia.

Moldova and Ukraine

Before turning to protraction, it is useful to expand the comparison to include Moldova and Ukraine. In the case of Moldova, many of the same causal factors are present. Transnistria has a pretty complicated history, bouncing back and forth between the USSR and Romania for the first part of the Soviet era, having periods of autonomy and periods when autonomy was removed. Demographically, Rus-

sians (and Ukrainians) constituted the larger part of the region's population. The region unilaterally declared autonomous status in 1990. That declaration was rejected by the Soviet government. In the meantime, Moldovan ethnic nationalism grew stronger and one position within it was that the foreigners (Russians and Ukrainians) should be removed. The government of Moldavia (Moldova) then declared Moldovan as the official language, demoting Russian, and seemed to hope for reunification with Romania.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a short and sharp conflict ensued between Transnistria and the Moldovan government in 1992, before intervention by Russian 14th Army units to bring open hostilities to a halt. Russia then deployed a small peacekeeping contingent. As with the Georgian case, the product was an area outside central government control, protected by Russian peacekeepers.

Ukraine is exceptional in this analysis. The conflict was not directly associated with the breakup of the USSR and the political and economic collapse that resulted. It began in the context of Russia's state consolidation, its re-emergence as a clearly dominant power on its western periphery, and the maturation of a clear Russian objective to control its neighbourhood and to contest NATO and then EU penetration of this space. When Rus-

sia wooed Ukraine away from the intended EU partnership agreement in 2013, the incumbent government was overthrown as a result of the Maidan protests at the end of the year. The new government resumed the EU Partnership process and pulled back from the prior agreement between Presidents Putin and Yanukovich. This led to the Russian annexation of Crimea and violence elsewhere in regions of the country with substantial Russian or Russian-speaking populations, who generally supported Yanukovich's Party of Regions and whose fear of deepening Ukrainian nationalism was exacerbated by western Ukrainian statements and by Russian propaganda concerning a fascist takeover in Kyiv.

The situation crystallised in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk when local political figures declared independent governments and (with Russian assistance) overcame Ukrainian forces there. Despite several efforts at establishing a ceasefire and political settlement mediated by the Normandy Format²³ through the Minsk Protocols, conflict continues on the line of contact, while separatist *de facto* authorities control their border with the Russian Federation.

In short, the quest for commonalities regarding the origins of these conflicts produces a short list of domestic causal factors: legacy, autonomy, state and economic fragility, and rising ethnic nationalism/identity politics. It is worth noting at this stage that the Soviet legacy, post-Soviet state and economic crisis and the destabilization and halting reformation of identity were shared by all states that emerged from the USSR, whereas conflict emerged in only a minority of those states. As such, they are not a sufficient explanation for conflict. To some extent, variation in the incidence in conflict may be explained by the varying intensity of these factors and the specificity of each case.

There is also significant variation in the nature and degree of external engagement. There was little or no engagement in international organizations and major actors outside the former Soviet area at the time the conflicts in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova emerged. Concerning the 2008 war in Georgia, and the subsequent outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, the outbreak of conflict can be linked to NATO enlargement policies and the intensification of the EU's partnership arrangements.

PROTRACTION

Here it is important to question the prevailing presumption in conflict

²³ The Normandy format brought together France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine to discuss options for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

studies that conflicts can be brought to an end. There are many examples where this is, so far, not true. The classic one is the Israel-Palestine conflict, which began before I was born, and shows no evidence of movement towards durable resolution as I write. Despite lengthy international engagement in efforts to mediate in Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia, none of these conflicts appears to be close to settlement.

This leads to a brief discussion of protraction. The notion of protraction does not imply that the situations are frozen. To state the obvious, very little in social life is frozen. The drivers of state weakness and economic collapse have become less compelling over time. The states in question have made varying degrees of progress in reconstructing themselves and exercising effective control over the territory they control. The process of state-building, decriminalization and political and security sector reform is most obvious in Georgia, but applies in all cases. The economies of all the states involved have surpassed GDP levels that applied when the Soviet Union collapsed.

Also, the distribution of power changes owing to asymmetrical growth in economic and military capacity. That might encourage the advantaged state towards greater intransigence in negotiations and a greater propensity for military options. The increasing ca-

capacity and assertiveness might, in turn, push the weaker party to seek external support to balance the equation. Azerbaijan's energy revenues and defence buildup, on the one hand, and Armenia's closer defence relationship with Russia, on the other, come to mind. Or domestic attitudes to compromise might change over time, as bitterness wanes and people become tired of the issue. The seeming resolution of the Northern Ireland "troubles" comes to mind. On the other hand, if national narratives of historical memory and victimization are embedded in school curricula and in popular culture, new generations may retain the grievances of older ones.

Change in external strategic incentives may also alter the conflict dynamic. It is pretty clear that as Russian capacity has grown and its strategic objectives on its periphery have evolved, Russia has become more forthright and forceful in its efforts to build influence over its neighbours.

The EU's role in Moldova also comes to mind in terms of the effect of international engagement in a more positive vein. Thomas de Waal suggests that Transnistria's inclusion in Moldova's Association Agreement with the EU has given the region's authorities a strong incentive to press for de-escalation of tensions and improvement of access to government-controlled territory, and Russia's burden in Ukraine

has caused it to reduce support for the region. That strengthens the effect of European engagement in Moldova and perhaps enhances prospects for a final settlement.²⁴

Nonetheless, all these conflicts remain unresolved; some are active, some are inactive. Lacking resolution, the inactive ones, to varying degrees, all carry the possibility of resumption. Why, despite years of disruption and of seemingly futile mediation, is peaceful settlement so elusive?

One answer might be that the stakes in these conflicts are indivisible. In some cases, the stakes involved when conflict begins can be disaggregated and compromises can be made. In others, the *casus belli* is allegedly indivisible.²⁵ Each side wants the whole thing and neither is willing to slice off bits in order to achieve durable peace. The conflicts under consideration here all have elements of indivisibility. In many respects they are about who controls physical territory and who enjoys the right to self-determination. There are problems with this line of analysis. Conceptually, things are “indivisible” because people think they are. There are many historical examples of previ-

²⁴ Tom de Waal, “Moldova’s Conflict: Unfreezing, in a Good Way,” Carnegie Europe, March 6, 2018.

²⁵ See also James D. Fearon, “Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation,” *International Organization* 52:2 (Spring 1998), 269–305.

ously non-negotiable issues becoming negotiable. People can and do change their minds. Territory can be shared. Self-determination can be internal or external; it does not require sovereign statehood.

However, flexibility is impeded by the experience of conflict itself, by historical memory and mythology, but also by the penetration of conflict-related issues into domestic politics. The latter may be exacerbated when ruling regimes base their legitimacy on intransigence in matters related to the conflict, or where they perceive a serious threat of loss of power in the event of compromise. This link from identity into the domestic politics of conflict resolution appears to be present in both Armenia and Azerbaijan re. Karabakh, and also in Georgia re. Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It also underpins the reluctance of the Ukrainian government to operationalise the Minsk process principle of special status for districts within the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. This reluctance is also an impediment in Transnistria. In any event, the approaches of the states affected by these conflicts do not show much movement towards substantial constitutional change of this type to reassure their internal adversaries.

Finally, the international environment is not conducive to settlement. On the one hand, the major international organizations involved in these

conflicts do not appear to have the will to deploy diplomatic resources and economic incentives to nudge the parties towards settlement. That reflects dissonance among members of those institutions and also where the conflicts fit in their ordering of priorities. Russia, the most influential major actor in the former Soviet region, appears to be resistant to conclusive settlement, not least because it finds “shaky situations more in its interests, as the inherent potential for local or regional conflict creates a highly convenient excuse for persuading the governments of the region to seek help from Russia in order to survive.”²⁶ It also reflects its discomfort with Western-led reform and democratization policies that could have spillover effects in Russia itself.²⁷ Evolving differences between Russia and Western states and institutions on the nature of the region have intensified the exclusionary aspect of Russia’s policy towards the region. As one Russian author put it recently in an article on Russian policy towards Georgia:

*The objective reality is disagreement between Russia and the West on European security. Georgia finds itself on the frontier of this confrontation, which makes it necessary to choose sides – with Russia or with the West? Undoubtedly Georgia’s striving to enter NATO and the European Union is its sovereign choice. But, given the interrelationship between the security of Russia and that of Georgia, the Georgian choice damages Russian security. Thus Georgia is becoming a hostage of the confrontation between Russia and the West.*²⁸

In short, the absence of peaceful settlement reflects factors pertinent to the origins of these conflicts, but also the shifting landscapes of the domestic and leadership politics of the parties, and an increasingly unfavourable international environment.

CONCLUSION

This paper took Nagorno-Karabakh as a starting point to identify a baseline for comparison with other regional conflicts on two vectors: why did conflicts begin and why do they remain

²⁶ Alexey Malashenko, *The Fight for Influence: Russia in Central Asia* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 3. Malashenko’s comment focuses on Central Asia, rather than the south-western and western neighbourhood of Russia, but seems applicable to the cases considered here.

²⁷ Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 279.

²⁸ Andrey Sushentsov, “Three Dilemmas of Russian-Georgian Relations” (in Russian), Valdai Discussion Club, March 12, 2018. <http://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/osnova-dlya-dialoga/>; See also Dmitriy Trenin, “European Security – from ‘if Only There Were No War’ to the Search for New Equilibrium” (in Russian), Carnegie Center, February 26, 2018. <http://carnegie.ru/2018/02/26/ru-pub-75620>.

unresolved? It then applied that baseline to the conflicts in Georgia, and, in outline form, to Moldova and Ukraine. Concerning the origins of conflict, they have many differences but a number of key commonalities: ethnic distinction and antagonistic historical memories; Soviet legacy in political culture; the weakness of state institutions; the use of ethnic nationalism by political elites to compete for and consolidate power; significant, though clearly not determining, engagement by Russia (or Russians); and the relative indifference of key states and their security institutions (the USA, NATO, the European Community, the United Nations).

The discussion of protraction suggests the reluctance of the parties to make compromises that might produce peace for reasons of identity and domestic political incentives or constraints. At the international level, external actors are reluctant to provide incentives sufficient to move the parties, and the conflicts are increasingly affected by growing assertiveness in Russia's regional policy and a worsening European security environment.

Laurence Broers

BETWEEN
STRATEGIC
PATIENCE AND
COMPELLENCE:
AZERBAIJAN'S
EVOLVING
POSITION WITH
RESPECT
TO THE
ARMENIAN-
AZERBAIJANI
CONFLICT

This article surveys the drivers of Azerbaijan's policy with respect to its rivalry with Armenia. It identifies long-, medium-, and short-term factors shaping the Azerbaijani position, with a view to explaining the escalation of violence along the Line of Contact in April 2016. The impacts of the "four-day war" and more recent developments are also briefly considered.

The analysis here represents an outsider's perspective. Summarizing more complex debates, Azerbaijan's own position can be understood as follows. The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is the unfinished business of the Soviet collapse and re-emergence of an independent Azerbaijani Republic in 1991. Regaining jurisdiction over the territory – understood as an inalienable part of the modern Azerbaijani nation's historical-cultural patrimony – is the foundational mission of contemporary Azerbaijani identity. Without it, Azerbaijani statehood remains incomplete. Baku defines the conflict as an irredentist one and its quarrel is with Armenia, not the Armenians of Karabakh. The latter are defined in Azerbaijani thinking as one of two equal communities, alongside Karabakh Azerbaijanis now displaced from the territory. Azerbaijan has borne the cost of a massive humanitarian disaster in the form of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons from Nagorno-

Karabakh and the adjacent occupied territories, as well as Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia. Although past and current proposals posit alternative outcomes, President Ilham Aliyev has stipulated a high level of autonomy for Karabakh Armenians within a reintegrated Azerbaijani state as the only appropriate mechanism for resolving the conflict. This accords with a legal argument asserting the primacy of territorial integrity and the non-violent alteration of borders in international law, and qualifying self-determination as a limited right that does not imply any right to secession.

LONG-TERM DRIVERS

Although the restoration of its territorial integrity is indeed an emblematic moment where international legal opinion and the claims of the Azerbaijani government appear as one, things are not as clear-cut as they seem. Azerbaijan is in many ways Eurasia's awkward "parent state."

On the one hand, the Azerbaijani position is formally upheld by the territorial integrity and *uti possidetis juris*¹ norms, in addition to four United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

resolutions dating from 1993.² On the other, Western support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity has never been as unequivocal as for that of Moldova, Georgia and especially Ukraine. Since 2014 Azerbaijanis have been observing the collective action characterising Western responses to the Ukrainian conflict, which they read as analogous to their own, with considerable frustration.³ Numerous commentators, Azerbaijanis and others, have highlighted what they see as a double standard, or what former Azerbaijani ambassador to Canada Farid Shafiyev calls "liberal hypocrisy."⁴ As a senior Azerbaijani diplomat put it in 2014: "We have been very impressed by the West's defence of Ukraine's territorial

² These are UNSC resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884. Each of them affirms the principles of territorial integrity and the inadmissibility of the use of force to change borders. The resolutions can be accessed at <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1993/scres93.htm>

³ Murad Gassanly, "Azerbaijan, Karabakh Conflict and the Crisis in Ukraine: Challenges (Our Analysis)," *Azeridaily.com*, August 28, 2015. <http://azeridaily.com/analyt-ics/10312>

⁴ Farid Shafiyev, "Liberal Hypocrisy on Post-Soviet Separatism," *The National Interest*, June 13, 2016. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/liberal-hypocrisy-post-soviet-separatism-16575>; on this point see also Svante E. Cornell, "The European Union and the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict: Lessons not Learned," in ed. Svante E. Cornell, *The International Politics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 149-172.

¹ *Uti possidetis* means "as you possess" in Latin, and in modified form the norm validates former internal administrative boundaries (such as those of the former union republics in the Soviet Union) as the legitimate borders of sovereign successor states.

integrity. We've been waiting for that for 20 years."

Yet, inconsistency in Eurasia is not only reflective of attitudes towards Azerbaijan, but also symptomatic of global approaches to internal conflicts over the last 15 years. Several conflicts, such as those in Sri Lanka, Kosovo/Serbia, Libya and Syria, have divided world opinion and the UNSC. This has diluted the perception that there is unified and viable legal approach to such conflicts, to which Azerbaijan can realistically appeal, and strengthened the idea that persuasion is more important than principle. It has also solidified a perception that, other circumstances allowing, there would be little international cost associated with a military solution, such as that enacted by the Sri Lankan government against Tamil secessionists in 2006-2009.

This uncertain outlook shapes Azerbaijan's perspective on the structure mandated to mediate the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the Minsk Process of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).⁵ Of course, Azerbaijanis are wary of mediating states with large Armenian diasporas, but the real problem is the dilemma between progress and postponement. The Azerbaijani

⁵ This paragraph draws on arguments from Laurence Broers, *The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict: Defaulting to War* (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 2016), 9.

understanding of the Minsk Process is that if allowed to progress, it could easily lead to the ratified secession of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijani suspicion is reinforced by the fact that this is indeed the predominant Armenian understanding of the process. Yet the indefinite postponement of the Minsk Process enables Armenia to pursue its best alternative to a negotiated agreement ("BATNA"): the entrenchment of a de facto entity in Nagorno-Karabakh strategically embedded within an Armenian political order. This only makes those gains that Azerbaijan could with some certainty expect to receive from a successful conclusion of the Minsk Process – the return of surrounding occupied territories and of Azerbaijani populations to them – ever less likely. Hence, despite being on the "right" side of the international consensus on territorial integrity, Azerbaijan is on the "wrong" side of either a design for liberal peace or its indefinite postponement. Viewed in this way, Azerbaijan confronts some difficult choices: accede and enable a process likely to lead to ratified dismemberment, or stand by and watch as Armenian control of Nagorno-Karabakh is consolidated free of international censure (unlike Russia's actions in Ukraine).

While Azerbaijani perspectives tend to foreground external, geopolitical factors as primary, it can be argued

that domestic factors are more crucial. The single most important factor driving policy outcomes in Azerbaijan, not just on the rivalry with Armenia but all other issues, is regime security. Azerbaijan is the only post-Soviet state to have undergone, 15 years ago, a dynastic succession. Unless Kazakhstan follows suit, it is quite possible that Azerbaijan will remain the only Eurasian state that has kept the top job within a ruling dynasty. The succession election in 2003 was met with widespread protest in Azerbaijan, and since then there have never been elections deemed by reputable international observation as free and fair. Divergence from expectations of post-Soviet transition was marked by subsequent constitutional referenda abolishing limits (in 2009) and then extending (in 2016) presidential terms, the persistent silencing of regime critics, and the progressive removal of international representative offices in the country (including that of the OSCE).⁶ These developments are reflected in corresponding assessments, for example according to Freedom House, of Azerbaijan as a “consolidated authoritarian” regime.⁷

⁶ “Azerbaijan Orders OSCE to Close Baku Office,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 5, 2015. <https://www.rferl.org/a/27055923.html>

⁷ Freedom House, *Azerbaijan/ Nations in Transit 2015*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2015/azerbaijan>

Debates highlighting compliance with liberal-democratic norms as the basis for conflict resolution make a great deal of Azerbaijan’s autocratic image. Yet in terms of a regime calculus towards conflict, the image of autocracy may obscure more complex dynamics. Azerbaijan functions through an elaborate informal politics of patron-client relations. A standard view sees Ilham Aliyev, whose own background is in business, at the apex of an intricate pyramid of networked interests controlling every significant economic sector in Azerbaijan. Continued stability is essential to the distribution of patronage on which this system is founded. This suggests that pragmatism and the safeguarding of reliable economic flows, rather than ideological and power factors, are more likely to predominate in the leadership’s calculus towards conflict.

Yet a top-down view of the Azerbaijani power structure may underestimate what American scholar Audrey Altstadt terms the president’s role as a “keystone.”⁸ By this view, rather than real dictator, his role is to supply an equilibrium among several competing factions. It is instructive, for example, that a presidential tandem preserving lip-service to transitional norms,

⁸ Audrey L. Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (Washington DC/New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Columbia University Press, 2017), 233.

as practiced by Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev in Russia, was not attempted in Azerbaijan.⁹ This is suggestive of the regime's brittleness, rather than its strength: whereas Prime Minister Putin could still be certain of control under President Medvedev, this does not appear to be the case in Azerbaijan. It may well be that cultural norms are more significant in that playing even formally subordinate roles involves costs to prestige and standing.¹⁰

Whether we see Ilham Aliyev as apex or keystone, however, there are disincentives to actual war. Patronage in either scenario relies on stable sources of wealth to keep the system going. But in a keystone scenario his situation is more complicated, because unlike a true authoritarian, he does not have the political immunity for a controversial peace strategy. And the persistent insecurity associated with the conflict offers a crucial resource in managing political competition both inside and outside the regime. This is a scenario not conducive to decisive policy in the direction of either war or peace, but to a balancing act between them that keeps domestic challengers off-balance and cultivates international legitimacy.

This has resulted in a fractured domestic policy environment divided between inner circle, outer circle and

Azerbaijani public opinion. The inner circle of those fully briefed on the formal negotiations with Armenia is limited to two or three people. An outer circle within the Azerbaijani foreign policy establishment is tasked with presenting Azerbaijan's position relative to the negotiations to the outside world. Domestic audiences are meanwhile socialised into an exclusive and hegemonic ethno-cultural historical narrative through key speeches, education and the media, with no attention to the content of negotiations. Keeping these three spaces – the formal negotiations, the international audience and the domestic audience – separate is central to the development of a single, dominant narrative and its role in preserving a hegemonic political order.

This fractured environment has several long-term effects. The first is inconsistency in the ideas and discourses being discussed in each field. Azerbaijan has in the past seriously considered compromises that are completely at odds with its dominant narrative today. There is some evidence of internal whitewashing, with those parts of the negotiations history that do not accord with today's narrative disappearing from institutional memory. A second effect is that those actors who do try to broker between these spaces, such as Track II peacebuilders, have very limited room for manoeuvre. This situation can be contrasted with that

⁹ Altstadt 2017, 231.

¹⁰ Altstadt 2017, 152.

in Georgia, for example, where civil society-led processes have generated concepts for the constitutional status of Abkhazia that later fed into official policy positions of the Georgian government (although were not the policy options ultimately chosen under President Mikheil Saakashvili).¹¹ Third, this tripartite structure consequently has very low capacity for generating conflict resolution models. For example, although promises of autonomy are regularly made, in a quarter-century Azerbaijan has never produced a document detailing its “autonomy offer” to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan’s long-term rhetorical and strategic position towards the conflict has instead been based on investment in a *power transition*. This describes a scenario in which the once weaker challenger Azerbaijan overtakes status quo power Armenia in terms of resources, capabilities and strength, allowing it to intimidate and compel Armenia into submission. Since the onset of the oil boom in the mid-2000s, Azerbaijan has cultivated the sense of a growing power asymmetry with Armenia in wealth, military spending and demography. Twice in the first decade of Ilham Aliyev’s presidency, in 2006 and 2011, Azerbaijan doubled its military budget. The asym-

metry captured in the juxtaposition of Azerbaijan’s military and Armenia’s entire state budget has become part of the discursive framing of the conflict in countless speeches, articles and reports at home and abroad.

The power transition narrative accorded with the wider context of recovery, growth and transformation from the fractured and demoralized country of the 1990s. Azerbaijan featured the fastest growing economy in the world in 2005-2007; between 2002 and 2013, growth averaged an astonishing 12.6%. A non-stop succession of high-profile mega-events and architectural displays profiled Azerbaijan’s new brand. On aggregate, Azerbaijan’s military spending displays an impressive advantage. But aggregated statistics overlook real-world, situational contexts for such economic flows. Military procurements have been as vulnerable to corruption and kickbacks as other areas in Azerbaijan (see below). Nevertheless, the perception of a coming power transition was successfully rooted at home and abroad. This sense of anticipation substituted the risks of actually going to war with the more palliative alternative of simply bankrupting Armenia into submission. It also upheld the sense of a constant mobilization of society justifying political centralization and the non-implementation of reforms. Embedded over the years of Azerbaijan’s oil boom, the ex-

¹¹ Civil Society Working Group, *Concept on the Special Status of Abkhazia in the Georgian State* (Tbilisi: Conciliation Resources, 2004).

pectation of a power transition created a sense of confidence, a feeling that Azerbaijan might have lost the battle but was “winning a Cold War” with Armenia, and not least, substitution of a victim identity with a more satisfying emotional narrative.¹²

MID-TERM FACTORS

Over the mid-term from the early 2010s, the psychological comfort zone created by world-beating economic growth and the anticipation of overtaking Armenia began to be challenged by a range of factors. First, Azerbaijan increasingly found itself implicated in diverse regional challenges and sources of instability. The Syrian conflict saw another dynastic regime in the Middle East confronting deeply entrenched rebellion, subsequently internationalized into a massively destructive civil war. The conflict had direct repercussions for Azerbaijan in the resettlement of Armenian refugees from Syria in Nagorno-Karabakh (over-estimated, to be sure), and the emergence of the Islamic State (IS). Numbers are not certain, but as many as 800 Azerbaijanis are thought to have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight for the IS by 2016, and at least 200 killed.¹³ In 2013-2014

the Euromaidan events in Kyiv saw a fellow post-Soviet regime toppled by popular protest, followed by Russia’s annexation of Crimea and conflict in eastern Ukraine. These developments overturned several assumptions about conflict resolution in the former Soviet Union, and further reduced already flagging Western policy attention in the South Caucasus.¹⁴ For Azerbaijan this context frustratingly juxtaposed the emergence of a conflict in Ukraine that it sees as vindicating its position with reduced attention and policy bandwidth for its own. The 2015 nuclear deal struck between Iran and the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, China and Germany also challenged Azerbaijan’s strategic value as a friendly rampart in the troubled Western-Iranian relationship.¹⁵

These developments ran in parallel to awareness of a slowly but steadily approaching post-oil horizon. According to British Petroleum’s official

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Jihadism in Azerbaijan,” *Caucasus Survey* 4: 3 (2016), 239-260.

¹⁴ Fiona Hill, Kemal Kirişci, and Andrew Mofatt, *Retracing the Caucasian Circle. Considerations and Constraints for U.S., EU, and Turkish Engagement in the South Caucasus* (Washington, D.C.: Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings, 2015).

¹⁵ Michael Cecire, and Lincoln Mitchell, “Beyond the Lobbying: Crafting US Policy on Azerbaijan,” *New America*, July 16, 2015. <https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/87/beyond-the-lobbying-crafting-us-policy-on-azerbaijan/>

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¹² Chapay Sultanov, *Azerbaijan’s Victory over Armenia in the Cold War* (Baku: Çaşioğlu, 2015), in Russian.

¹³ David Lonardo, “The Islamic State and the Connections to Historical Networks of

statistics, Azerbaijani oil production peaked in 2010 at just over one million barrels a day, and declined gradually since then to 826,000 barrels in 2016. This represented a 1.6% drop relative to the previous year, and accounted for 0.9% of global production.¹⁶ Estimates of Azerbaijan's proven oil reserves have remained at 7 billion barrels for more than a decade, evidence that many explorations have not yielded discoveries of viable new oil reserves. Azerbaijan's gas reserves may plug the gap to an extent, but Azerbaijan will be competing as "a minor supplier in a saturated market" to supply Europe's gas.¹⁷ Instead of joining up to now defunct schemes for the westwards transportation of gas from across the Caspian, Azerbaijan is moving forward with the Trans-Anatolian and Trans Adriatic pipelines (TANAP and TAP). In the medium-term Turkey may be the main recipient of Azerbaijani gas, rather than Europe.¹⁸

These developments were all the more troubling in the light of mounting evidence of inequality undermining the narrative of development. Official statistics indicate an impressive drop in poverty from 49% in 2001 to 6% in 2012, as per capita GDP tripled and Azerbaijan became a middle-income country.¹⁹ Yet within an overall picture of aggregated poverty reduction, there is a more nuanced picture of sustained socioeconomic vulnerability for large parts of the population. Despite rhetorical commitments to diversification, Azerbaijan's economy remains undiversified and marked by the distortions of the oil industry. Employing 1% of the workforce, oil accounts for 75% of government revenue. By contrast, agriculture employs around 38% but generates less than 6% of GDP.²⁰ Moreover, the agricultural share of GDP has been in stark decline due to neglect and low investment; in 2001 agriculture accounted for 20% of GDP. An inefficient policy of subsidization preserves political stability, but prevents farmers from breaking out of

¹⁶ BP, *BP Statistical Review of World Energy*, June 2017. <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/statistical-review-of-world-energy.html>

¹⁷ Pavel K. Baev, "Russia: A Declining Counter-Change Force," in Svante E. Cornell ed., *The International Politics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 78.

¹⁸ Thomas de Waal, "Azerbaijan at Twenty-Five: A New Era of Change and Turbulence," Carnegie Europe, September 23, 2016. [http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/09/23/azerbaijan-](http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/09/23/azerbaijan-at-twenty-five-new-era-of-change-and-turbulence-pub-64671)

[at-twenty-five-new-era-of-change-and-turbulence-pub-64671](http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/09/23/azerbaijan-at-twenty-five-new-era-of-change-and-turbulence-pub-64671)

¹⁹ World Bank Group, *Azerbaijan Systematic Country Diagnostic* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2015), 15.

²⁰ Turkhan Sadigov, "Adoption of Agricultural Innovations in Azerbaijan: No Prospects for Modernization," *Caucasus Survey* 6: 1 (2018), 43.

ineffective subsistence farming.²¹ The informal economy remains significant, with estimates of its share of GDP ranging from 32 to 60%.²² According to International Labour Organization data for 2009, more than a quarter of the non-agricultural workforce, a figure that raises to nearly 42% of women, was in informal employment.²³ Undeclared income evades social security payments, but also inclusion within pensions or unemployment benefits, and vulnerability to informal payments. There is some evidence that a prior culture of favours (*taps*) was monetized and increasingly replaced by cash payments.²⁴ Remittances from family members abroad, above all Russia, continue to play an important role as a safety net for poorer families.²⁵ These realities contrasted starkly with the extravagance of several prestige projects and open secrets on the networked ownership of the republic's assets at all levels.

From 2012, a phenomenon that had been absent from the domestic political stage for a nearly a decade returned: public protest. In Quba in 2012 and in Baku and Ismayilli in January 2013 local governors and

²¹ Sadigov 2018, 56-57.

²² Farid Guliyev, "The Informal Economy in Azerbaijan," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No.75 (July 17, 2015), 7.

²³ Guliyev 2015, 8.

²⁴ Guliyev 2015, 9.

²⁵ Altstadt 2017, 108.

rent increases were the targets for the dramatic return of the Azerbaijani street.²⁶ These developments illustrated the contradictions of a system that sought to pre-empt the social basis for protest through public spending, while remaining reliant on networked clients unaccountable to the law. They coincided with regime-toppling waves of protest of the Arab Spring and revelations of elite financial dealings by local investigative journalists. A crackdown on independent journalism and civil society ensued in 2013-2014, leading to a number of highly publicized trials and increasingly tense exchanges with Western partners.²⁷

The prospect of quelling domestic unrest appears to have provided an additional incentive to the overhaul of Azerbaijan's defence sector. Throughout the previous decade, the Azerbaijani military had essentially been the missing piece to the power transition narrative. Former minister of defence

²⁶ "Uneasy Calm Descends over Azerbaijani City after Unrest," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 1, 2012. https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_protests_clashes_rioting/24501167.html; "Protesting Shopkeepers, Police Clash in Baku," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 19, 2013. <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-protest-shopkeepers-baku-police-dispersal/24877955.html>;

"Azerbaijani Police Break Up Protests in Ismayilli," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 24, 2013. <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-unrest-ismayilli/24882059.html>

²⁷ See Altstadt 2017, Chapter 5.

Safar Abiyev had served for 18 years and was one of the longest-serving defence ministers in post-Soviet Eurasia. There was little evidence that several years of exponential increases to the military budget had done anything other than embed the Azerbaijani army's endemic problems – the privileging of procurement over provisioning, low salaries, absent transparency, embedded informal networks and low operability. Procurements remained mired in wider oligarchic dynamics, with two of the major contractors for military construction and supplies, Azenco and Azersun, being owned by the ruling family.²⁸ More seriously, non-combat-related deaths accounted for 70% of fatalities in the defence sector in 2003-2013.²⁹ Between 2011 and 2013 non-combat-related deaths outnumbered deaths by enemy action by three to one, sparking public outcry.³⁰

²⁸ Afgan Muhtarli, "Bidding Secrets of the Armed Forces Part 2: Azersun Holding," *Meydan TV*, October 20, 2014. <https://www.meydan.tv/en/site/politics/3403/>;

Afgan Muhtarli, "Bidding Secrets of the Armed Forces Part 3: AZENCO's Shjare in our Military Budget," *Meydan TV*, November 3, 2014. <https://www.meydan.tv/en/site/politics/3403/>

²⁹ Author's interview with Jasur Mammadov Sumerinli, Director Doktrina NGO, Baku, 29 May 2014.

³⁰ Shahin Abbasov, "Azerbaijan: Non-combat Deaths Put Military Reforms in Spotlight," *Eurasianet*, November 14, 2011. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64508>; Idrak Abbasov, "Azeri Anger Roused by Soldier's Death," In-

In October 2013 the appointment of a new defence minister, Zakir Hasanov, signalled a new readiness to address these shortcomings. The turnover of dozens of high-ranking personnel followed the appointment, many of them in positions of finance and supply.

The gradual escalation of Line of Contact violence preceded Hasanov's appointment as minister, but intensified after it. Although there have for many years been scattered violations of the 12 May 1994 ceasefire, a new era of growing such violations can perhaps be dated to 3-4 March 2008.³¹ In the aftermath of post-electoral violence in Yerevan, Armenian and Azerbaijani forces skirmished in the vicinity of the village of Leonarkh in Mardakert; at least five Azerbaijani soldiers were reported killed. Skirmishes would become regular if infrequent over the next five years, linked to key political events, the mediation calendar and an annual spike in spring related to redeployments after snow thaw. By 2014, however, a new normal of low-intensity warfare had been established, involving attacks on moving targets, increasing use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), use of heavy-calibre

stitute for War and Peace Reporting, January 18, 2013. <http://iwpr.net/report-news/azeri-anger-roused-soldiers-death>

³¹ Karine Ohanyan, "Ceasefire in Karabakh Has Been Violated" (in Russian), *Demo*, March 15, 2008, 11.

weaponry (mortars and artillery) and increasing presence of contracted service personnel and special forces.³² Over the following years Baku increasingly saw insecurity along the Line of Contact as its principal source of leverage over Armenia.

Running in parallel, and seemingly in response to, these mid-term challenges have been shifts in the emphasis of Azerbaijani nationalism. Azerbaijani nationalism is a complex phenomenon owing to the fact that Azerbaijan is simultaneously a host-state confronting externally supported secessionism at home, and an external power culturally linked to large minorities in neighbouring states. This imposes limits to nationalism as a political ideology where it might incite fears in neighbouring states of irredentism. On the other hand, Azerbaijan's exit from the Soviet Union was marked by nationalist mobilization and demands for more popular sovereignty. A nationalist counter-elite briefly acceded to power in 1992-1993, before the former communist elite was restored under Heydar Aliyev. Azerbaijani nationalism is consequently an ambiguous and contradictory phenomenon: on the one hand a national mission to restore Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh is a powerful consensus issue drawing

on deeply felt popular emotions. On the other, it is the principal cleavage in government-opposition relations and preserves the memory of a political era when public participation was higher than it is now.

Azerbaijanism is the ideological construct that seeks to reconcile these contradictions. Associated with Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijanism defines an ostensibly civic nationalism framed as the citizenry of the Republic of Azerbaijan (rather than an ethnic Azerbaijani nation not contained by its borders). Ilham Aliyev remains formally committed to this doctrine, which ties into an international brand of "Azerbaijani multiculturalism" exported through mechanisms such as the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue or the 'Baku Process'.³³ These exercises frame Azerbaijan as an inclusive, civic nation for international audiences. Yet over the mid-term Azerbaijanism has increasingly co-habited with a more ethno-nationalist variant of Azerbaijani nationalism. Of course, a conflict narrative has been present since the 1990s, but since around 2010 there is noteworthy shift towards an ethno-nationalist politics against which Azerbaijanism had previously defined itself. This is a broad project beyond the scope of this paper, but a few instances can be

³² E. Sanamyan, "Tactics Shift in Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 21, 2015.

³³ Details of the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue can be found at <http://bakuforum-icd.az>

cited. There is a growing tendency in presidential rhetoric to focus on Armenia as a recent imposition on historical Azerbaijani lands. Whereas communal Armenian-Azerbaijani violence was once attributed to “hooligans,” Azerbaijani military officer Ramil Safarov was lionized as a national hero after murdering an Armenian counterpart at a NATO training course in Budapest in 2004. Across numerous media, including maps, school textbooks and everyday popular culture, the Azerbaijani population is being socialised to see the Armenian-Azerbaijani antagonism as the master-narrative of its modern history.

These shifts are in many ways contradictory. They undermine the basis for a future co-habitation of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, on which any solution to the conflict based on Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity depends. They also undermine the discourse of territorial integrity itself, by diluting the clarity and international consensus that Azerbaijanism sought to attach to Azerbaijan’s borders. However, the turn to ethno-nationalism provides a solution to the longer-term legitimacy challenge confronting Azerbaijan’s elite. The long-term governance trajectory represents the non-fulfilment of 1990s public demand for more participation, imposing the quest for an alternative legitimacy formula. Development based on oil revenues has pro-

vided that formula over the mid-term. But beyond the oil horizon is uncertain political territory where abundance will no longer substitute for participation. The growing co-optation of nationalism appears to be a response to this problem. Re-anchoring Azerbaijani identity around the Armenian-Azerbaijani antagonism achieves rallying effects and engages genuine popular sentiments that are not reconciled to the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh.

SHORT-TERM FACTORS

There are three short-term factors that can account for the timing of the 2-5 April 2016 “four day war.” The first is the unprecedented slump in the world oil price beginning in 2014. Azerbaijan’s oil boom had begun after a significant rise in the oil price, and continued to benefit from steady growth. But in June 2014 the global oil price began a steep decline, tumbling from highs of more than \$110 per barrel to lows of around a third of that value in some months by the end of 2015. Azerbaijan’s oil revenue-dependent economy was hit hard: oil had accounted for 90% of its exports and half of its GDP. Initially parsed as a temporary fluctuation, in 2015 the oil price slump became structural. The Azerbaijani manat was devalued twice in February and December, losing more than 60% of its value vis-à-vis the US dollar. Most of Azerbaijan’s foreign currency reserves were lost trying to shore

it up, falling from \$14.9 billion in November 2014 to \$6.2 billion a year later. Lay-offs at major enterprises followed, and protests, albeit small and uncoordinated, ensued across the country in January 2016.

While generating a series of domestic economic and political challenges, a long-term decline in the oil price also reframed the timeline of Azerbaijan’s presumed power transition. The icon of this transition, Azerbaijan’s military budget, dropped by more than a third in 2016-2017 to a – still substantial – sum of around \$1.4 billion. On the one hand, this may have contributed to a sense of urgency to take action while the military balance was in Azerbaijan’s favour. On the other, and more plausibly in my view, this underscored an urgent need to justify still extremely high defence spending in a new economic climate.³⁴

The second factor is the break in Turkish-Russian relations that proceeded from Turkey’s shooting down of a Russian jet aircraft over the Syrian-Turkish border in November 2014. This led to an unprecedented break-

³⁴ Zaur Shiriyev makes this argument in “The Four-Day War: Changing Paradigms in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” in Gulshan Pashayeva, and Fuad Chiragov eds., *Trapped between War and Peace: the Case of Nagorno-Karabakh (Selected Papers, 2011-2017)* (Baku: Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018), 126.

down in hitherto cautious but cordial relations between Russia and Turkey. Moscow imposed sanctions on Turkey in a row that had obvious repercussions for Armenia, Russia’s security ally, and Azerbaijan, Turkey’s geostrategic partner. Equivocal, mutually suspicious, opportunistic and asymmetric to be sure, Russian-Turkish cooperation is a significant reason why Turkey’s role in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has been limited. Russian-Turkish cooperation is rooted in deep and diverse economic relations (Turkey is Russia’s second-most important gas export destination), and a pragmatism that avoids allowing potentially divisive issues from becoming so.³⁵ Russia warned Turkey off from taking action during the 1992-1994 Armenian-Azerbaijani war, and although a member of the OSCE’s wider Minsk Group, Turkey has played no role in the process.

Any decision to wage war or take military action is shaped by predictions about how other states will react. An important deterrent to going to war is the absence of anticipated supportive alignments. The Russian-Turkish diplomatic row offered a window for Azerbaijan to take action with reasonable certainty of support from Turkey

³⁵ Pavel K. Baev, and Kemal Kirişçi, *An Ambiguous Partnership: The Serpentine Trajectory of Russian-Turkish Relations in the Era of Erdoğan and Putin* (Washington, D.C.: Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings, 2017).

temporarily at odds with Russia. This is crucial for a small state in a geopolitically sensitive area surrounded by larger powers. A worst-case scenario for Azerbaijan would be to find itself at war with no support in the surrounding regional and international environment. Turkish moral support was indeed forthcoming in April, when in isolation from the rest of the international community President Erdogan did not call for an end to hostilities but declared he would stand by Azerbaijan “to the end.”³⁶ This analysis is far from suggesting that Azerbaijan behaved as “Turkey’s proxy” and in fact proposes the inverse: small states take advantage of specific conjunctures in the relations of major powers to maximise likely support. The window was not open for long: in July 2016 Turkey offered an “apology” to Russia for shooting down its aircraft, and subsequent comments by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in November 2017 indicated a return to Turkey’s traditional bystander role.³⁷

A third and more arguable factor is the impact of Russia’s diplomatic initiative to move the Minsk Process for-

³⁶ “Nagorno-Karabakh Clash: Turkey Backs Azeris ‘to the End’ against Armenia,” *BBC*, April 3, 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35953358>

³⁷ “Erdoğan Says Russia Can Solve Karabakh Dispute, Expects Putin’s Sensitivity,” *Daily Sabah*, November 22, 2017. <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/11/22/erdogan-says-russia-can-solve-karabakh-dispute-expects-putins-sensitivity>

ward. The Minsk Process has over the years regularly featured periods when one of the co-chair countries – usually Russia – informally takes the lead. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s tenure since 2004 has featured a number of such periods. In 2014–2015 speculation about the content of a so-called “Lavrov Plan” was rife. This terminology may be misleading for a set of ideas re-combining, rather than replacing the Basic Principles on the negotiating table since the mid-2000s (known as the “Madrid Principles” since their formal presentation in the Spanish capital in 2007). The content of Lavrov’s initiative remains a matter of conjecture, but it appears that traditional sticking points between “step-by-step” and “package” approaches were still present.

That Baku looked favourably on Lavrov’s concept is indicated by Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov’s comments in the immediate aftermath of the April violence: “We are working on the ideas put forward in the middle of last year by Sergey Lavrov... We support a solution within this framework.”³⁸ What these ideas looked like can be surmised from comments made by President Ilham Aliyev at the Munich Security Conference in February 2015: “the beginning of de-

³⁸ “Elmar Mammadyarov: We Are Working on Lavrov’s Proposals” (in Russian), *Haqqin.az*, April 7, 2016. <http://haqqin.az/news/67539>.

occupation of some of these districts, taking into that we will continue the negotiations, will immediately change the picture. Immediately there will be no hostility. There will be a cease-fire regime fully observed.”³⁹ In other words, it appears that Lavrov’s initiative was for a phased implementation of the Basic Principles that deferred the determination of Nagorno-Karabakh’s status – the most controversial single item among the Madrid Principles for Azerbaijan – to a later stage.⁴⁰ Through 2015 the Armenian side was engaging but rejecting Lavrov’s initiative, which would be consistent with the traditional emphasis in Armenian

³⁹ “Ilham Aliyev Attended ‘Beyond Ukraine: Unresolved Conflicts in Europe’ Session of the Munich Security Conference,” Official Website of the President of Azerbaijan, February 7, 2015. <http://en.president.az/mobile/articles/14275>

⁴⁰ Foreign Minister Lavrov has openly affirmed the need for a phased approach: “This problem cannot be resolved once and forever in a single document. A phased approach is necessary, reflecting agreement towards those issues that can be solved today and determining the way forward on those issues that need more discussion in order to get to final settlement, including the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. It’s in the parties’ hands.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Presentation and answers to questions from the mass media by S.V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, during a press conference summarizing Russian diplomacy in 2017, Moscow* (in Russian), January 15, 2018. http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/kNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3018203

perspectives on foregrounding status as part of a package. A military escalation might thus have been seen in Baku as a means to pressure Yerevan to accede to Lavrov’s initiative.⁴¹ Contrary statements in the immediate aftermath of violence evoking the step-by-step and package approaches, from senior officials in Azerbaijan and Armenia respectively, suggest that the violence was indeed being read in terms of its leverage for ideas then on the table.⁴²

To sum up, then, by 2016 the long- and medium-term contexts of Azerbaijan’s position were framed by perceptions of the futility of legal-constitutional appeals to international opinion, and frustration at external understanding of the situation as an acceptable “frozen conflict.” The Azerbaijani elite had promulgated a narrative of power transition, which would alter the balance of power and made compromises unnecessary. A highly unstable regional and international environment, and the reappearance of protest politics at home, had unsettled this approach. In the mid-term, the anticipated decline of the oil industry suggested that in terms of wealth and asymmetry vis-à-vis Armenia the

⁴¹ Zaur Shiriyev, “Violence in Nagorny Karabakh a Reflection of Azerbaijan’s Security Dilemma,” Chatham House, April 22, 2016. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/violence-nagorny-karabakh-reflection-azerbaijan-s-security-dilemma>

⁴² Broers 2016, 27.

country was higher than it might be in the future. Military reform had begun in earnest, promising to bring capability more in line with rhetoric. This had enabled a transformation of the situation along the Line of Contact from a sniper war to regular low-intensity warfare. In 2015 deepening economic woes proceeding from the oil price slump undermined the power transition narrative and interrogated the utility of Azerbaijan's high military spending. The Russian-Turkish diplomatic row promised some additional diplomatic cover to ensure that whatever the outcome, Azerbaijan would not be completely isolated.⁴³ There was thus a converging set of factors necessitating some kind of demonstration of Azerbaijan's capacities to validate the elite narrative of power transition, and perhaps also enact an audit of Azerbaijan's new military capability.

THE LESSONS OF APRIL 2016

The violence of 2-5 April is popularly known as the "four-day war," although this is an unsatisfactory description of what was intended as a significant, but limited operation falling short of war. Although it is generally the protocol in Azerbaijan to depict the operation as defensive, it was a textbook case of a limited aims strategy in a context where

⁴³ If it was not for the European Games, a major prestige event taking up the summer of 2015, Azerbaijan might have acted sooner.

alternative conventional strategies – attrition and blitzkrieg – are ruled out.⁴⁴

Speaking in July 2017, Minister of Defence Zakir Hasanov spoke candidly of the objectives behind the Azerbaijani operation: "We fulfilled the objective that we had set ourselves: we liberated two strategic heights which have significant operational-tactical importance along the frontline. These are Lala Tapa in the area of Jabrayil, and the heights in Talish."⁴⁵ In fact, Azerbaijani control over the 14 positions captured in Talish was fleeting and these posts were recaptured by Armenian counter-offensives.

The violence yielded mixed lessons for Azerbaijan. On the one hand, the April escalation demonstrated that the Azerbaijani army could now mount combined arms operations with a functional degree of interoperability between army units, special forces and air support, even if only for limited aims. The vaunted Armenian fortifications could be penetrated, and occupied territory – even if in small amounts – returned to Azerbaijani jurisdiction. In these terms it was the

⁴⁴ For detailed accounts of the "four-day war" see Laurence Broers, *Defaulting to War*, and International Crisis Group, *Nagorno-Karabakh: New Opening, or More Peril?* Crisis Group Europe Report No.239, July 4, 2016.

⁴⁵ "Zakir Gasanov: Negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh Are Too Protracted" (in Russian), *Ria Novosti*, July 13, 2017. <https://ria.ru/amp/interview/20170713/1498376245.html>

first Azerbaijani military success since its partly successful operation in Horadiz in January 1994. The operation had also demonstrated the weak points of Armenian deterrence.⁴⁶ To be sure, the Armenian deterrent could be considered as having been effective, since even this major escalation of violence did not lead to all-out war. But the ambiguity of the Armenia/Russia-centred deterrent in Nagorno-Karabakh itself, where formal Russian and the Collective Security Treaty Organization’s alliance commitments to Armenia do not apply, had been demonstrated. Armenia’s deterrent appears effective against a prolonged, wider war, but not against limited, short-term engagements chipping away at Armenian defences.

Beyond the battlefield, the operation had incurred minimal diplomatic costs. It provided a symbolic focal point legitimating past and future military spending, and reinforced the Azerbaijani elite’s narrative of power transition. The escalation also testified to the popular sentiments that the conflict arouses. The outpouring of popular emotion during the conflict in fact took the Azerbaijani authorities by surprise. Fearful that spontaneous demonstrations in support of hostilities could metastasize into other

agendas, the authorities quickly mobilized to ensure the presence of loyalist groups, and portraits of the president, among war-related protests.

On the other hand, the operation was not an unequivocal success. Several positions initially recaptured in the early hours of the operation were not held onto. While Azerbaijan does not release casualty data, civil society assessments indicated that Azerbaijani losses were similar in number to Armenian casualties – despite the deployment of special forces and the element of surprise. Substantial quantities of hardware, including a helicopter and numerous tanks, were also lost. While gains of 800-2000 hectares were highly symbolic, little had changed strategically. Armenian complacency had been jolted, but the element of surprise also lost. Armenian positions were upgraded, including with thermal imaging equipment. In an incident in February 2017 five Azerbaijani servicemen were apparently killed long before they reached Armenian posts.⁴⁷

If the escalation is interpreted as a lever of pressure on the formal negotiations process, its impact has also been minimal. A short burst of diplomatic

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive overview of Armenian deterrence see Sergey Minasyan, *Deterrence in Karabakh Conflict* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2016), in Russian.

⁴⁷ “Armenians, Azerbaijanis Trade Accusations over Karabakh Fighting,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 25, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenians-azerbaijanis-trade-accusations-over-karabakh-fighting/28331782.html>

activity yielded a meeting of the Minsk Group in Vienna on 16 May 2016 with the presence of the mediating countries' foreign ministers. This meeting produced formal commitments to confidence-building measures in the field of Line of Contact security, and to a "structured negotiations" process – the latter reflecting Azerbaijan's desires to establish entry into a phased negotiation with early territorial gains. None of these commitments have materialized, however. A year and a half later it appeared that even agreement on increasing resources for the OSCE Personal Representative Andrzej Kasprzyk to conduct monitoring of the Line of Contact was stalemated.

Several analyses suggest that war clouds are still gathering, and that April 2016 may have been only a precursor for worse to come.⁴⁸ But a linear understanding of escalation would not be accurate. After a series of smaller incidents in the first half of 2017, the latter half of the year was the quietest since 2013. A familiar dynamic appeared to be in play: a short-term focusing of minds on the conflict was superseded by its perennial obscurity. A collective

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, *Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds*, Europe Report No.244, June 1, 2017; Svante E. Cornell, "Reversing Escalation: The Local and International Politics of the Conflict," in Svante E. Cornell ed., *The International Politics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 208.

effort by the mediators generated a presidential meeting in Geneva on 16 October 2017, at which the presidents reportedly agreed to reduce tensions.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The moderate recovery of the oil price has relieved some of the pressure on the Azerbaijani government. The projected military budget for 2018 is reportedly in the region of \$1.6 billion, a modest rise on 2017. While it appears that no major new acquisitions are planned, Russian deliveries related to a 2010 deal are ongoing and reports circulate of possible deals with Belarus, Turkey and Pakistan. In December 2017 the Azerbaijani parliament approved a new law that appears to centralise control of different entities with men-at-arms under the president.⁴⁹ Interior ministry troops, border guards and units formerly associated with the Ministry of Emergency Situations are now more formally under the president's authority. The new law also makes the Ministry of Defence responsible for its own information security, which according to some observers will make report-

⁴⁹ Zaur Shiriyev, "Azerbaijan's New Law on Status of Armed Forces: Changes and Implications," Eurasia Democratic Security Network, January 23, 2018. <https://eurasiademocraticsecuritynetwork.wordpress.com/2018/01/23/azerbaijans-new-law-on-status-of-armed-forces-changes-and-implications/>

ing on hazing and non-combat related deaths even more difficult than before. Rearmament and centralization thus continue to inform Azerbaijan’s position.

Azerbaijan also continues to experiment with strategies that scholars have analysed under the label “authoritarian conflict management.”⁵⁰ As noted, appropriate responses to conflicts such as Kosovo, Libya, Syria and Ukraine have become a crucial area of dispute among global powers. Prima facie contradictions between legal principles such as self-determination and territorial integrity have not disappeared, but have become submerged beneath a new schism between liberal and authoritarian approaches to conflict resolution and management. A new array of non-liberal norms, discourses and practices has evolved, some championed by regional hegemons such as Russia and China, as routes to conflict management consistent with authoritarian governance. These reject liberal models of peace

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⁵⁰ David Lewis, “Illiberal Peace: Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management,” Working paper, May 2015, unpublished. https://www.academia.edu/18044370/Illiberal_Peace_Authoritarian_Modes_of_Conflict_Management; see also Catherine Owen, Shairbek Juraev, David Lewis, Nick Megoran, and John Heathershaw, eds., *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia Critical Perspectives on Peace and Conflict* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

and peacebuilding based on dialogue among disparate social and political actors, inclusive processes and the airing of grievances.⁵¹ It seeks instead to establish a single hegemonic narrative legitimating the state, to control counter-discourses, and to delegitimize the idea that conflict is rooted in grievance – often by depicting it as the result of external forces and interference.

Azerbaijan has been learning from the authoritarian conflict management toolkit. While liberal peace models propose broadened and inclusive peace processes as the route to legitimate political compromises enabling agreement, in the Azerbaijani elite this prospect is viewed by turns as naïve, unnecessary and alarming. I do not single Azerbaijan out in this regard, but the nuances of the situation dictate that with international legal opinion formally on its side, Azerbaijan can experiment more easily with authoritarian conflict management techniques. Armenians, with international legal opinion formally against them, face greater pressure to perform compliance with liberal-democratic norms, for example, by highlighting democratization in the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Three recent examples provide evidence of

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⁵¹ John P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, 1998).

Azerbaijani efforts to consolidate a single hegemonic discourse about the conflict and to remove counter-discourses from the political stage.

For several years, Azerbaijan has operated a “black list” to which those deemed to have visited Karabakh without permission are added, becoming *persona non grata* banned from Azerbaijan.⁵² In 2017 one of them, Israeli-Russian blogger Aleksandr Lapshin, was extradited from Belarus to Azerbaijan and prosecuted in Azerbaijan for illegally visiting the territory.⁵³ The case generated considerable publicity as the first prosecution of its kind; Lapshin was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment. Although he was released in September, his highly publicized case engages all would-be visitors to the disputed territory in a new risk calculus. This has the presumed effect of limiting the numbers of people willing to visit the territory and thus produce independent, field-based knowledge about developments

⁵² See “List of Foreign Citizens Illegally Visited Occupied Territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan,” Official Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. <http://www.mfa.gov.az/en/content/915>

⁵³ For background see Shahin Rzayev, “Lapshin’s Case: What, How and Why?” *JAM-news*, February 10, 2017. <https://jam-news.net/?p=18176>; For an interview with Aleksandr Lapshin after his release, see “Aleksandr Lapshin: ‘Özümü asmamışam...maskalı adamlar mənə kamerada boğub,’” *BBC Azeri.*, <http://www.bbc.com/azeri/region-42455241>

within it. Those visiting the territory in connection with its electoral processes, and thereby contributing to the counter-narrative of Nagorno-Karabakh’s democratization vis-à-vis Azerbaijan, appear to be a particular focus. Moreover, in contrast to just a few years ago the Azerbaijani government is no longer allowing visits to the territory even by staff from international peacebuilding organizations, whose work it otherwise formally approves.

A second example is the establishment of initiatives that co-opt liberal peacebuilding discourse. In December 2016, a new initiative, the Baku Platform for Peace, was announced. The platform attracted media attention on account of its apparent recruitment of real Armenians, for whom travel to Azerbaijan has been impossible in recent years.⁵⁴ Replicating the discourse and symbols of international peacebuilding organizations, and exercising an unknown degree of pressure on Azerbaijani civil society actors to sign

⁵⁴ There is in fact a history of Armenians appearing in Azerbaijan proclaiming an agenda for peace in accordance with Azerbaijan’s preferences. In April 2004 Artur Apresyan and Roman Teryan, refugees from Azerbaijan, staged a press conference in Baku televised on ANS calling on the international community and Armenia to desist from prolonging conflict. “Two Armenian Residents Came to Baku in Protest against Yerevan’s Policy” (in Russian), *Demo*, April 15, 2004, 9.

up, the platform seemed directed towards becoming the “go-to point” for international interest in peacebuilding. The platform was subsequently denounced by one of its Armenian founders, Vahan Martirosyan, as “a government-run sham.”⁵⁵ The initiative nevertheless attracted a lot of attention, although its future development is uncertain.

A focus on controlling or co-opting counter-discourses may neglect the equally, if not more effective, strategy of promoting discourses *shared* between state and society. The ascent of an ethno-nationalist discourse reifying the ethnic antagonism with Armenians has already been noted. These claims have grown in volume, notably being articulated by Ilham Aliyev after his nomination as presidential candidate by the ruling New Azerbaijan Party in February 2018.⁵⁶ Claims to locations in Armenia were combined with rhetoric regarding Azerbaijanis’ “return” to them. The focus on Armenia as the exclusive source of conflict accords, of course, with the traditional Azerbaijani reading of the

conflict as irredentist in nature. Yet combined with increasing pressures on outside actors not to visit the territory, this discourse excludes both local grievances in Nagorno-Karabakh as a factor in explaining conflict, and corresponding peacebuilding approaches that would take them into account.

CONCLUSION

Azerbaijan’s outlook on its rivalry with Armenia is at an uncertain stage. Baku is caught between the strategic patience awaiting a power transition, and low-intensity warfare serving a variety of goals not all of which are related directly to the conflict. There is neither institutional capacity nor visible public demand for an alternative to militarist posturing, suggesting that Azerbaijan seems likely to maintain a realist approach. Azerbaijan’s “BATNA” remains a tense and fluid situation that prevents the further institutionalization of the status quo, keeps the situation as unresolved as possible and continues to deplete Armenia’s material and demographic resources. Persistent insecurity allows the tactical use of rallying effects as a means to demobilize domestic political challenges. It also generates significant legitimacy effects, by linking popular sentiments genuinely not reconciled to the status quo to a singular hegemonic narrative focused on the Azerbaijani state, and by offering the leadership regular opportunities to be

⁵⁵ Joshua Kucera, “After Denunciation, Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform on Shaky Ground,” *Eurasianet*, May 30, 2017. <https://eurasianet.org/s/after-denunciation-armenia-azerbaijan-peace-platform-on-shaky-ground>

⁵⁶ “Ilham Aliyev Called ‘Return’ of Yerevan a Strategic Goal of Azerbaijanis” (in Russian), *Interfax*, February 8, 2018. <http://www.interfax.ru/world/599092>

presented in statesman-like light with world leaders. Nationalism will remain tactical, however, as the Azerbaijani leadership is also wary of an ideology traditionally associated with the opposition and which embodies both ideals and memories of greater popular political participation than is the case today. Tension has to be kept manageable, however. The irony of Azerbaijan's oil and gas resources is that while they allow funds for rearmament, they also require a stable investment environment that is a crucial deterrent to war. Realising the TANAP and TAP pipeline projects exporting Azerbaijan's gas to Europe and securing a future stream of resource rents, needs a calm domestic context. This is a context that requires a skilful balancing act to maintain sufficient levels of tension without risking an extended conflict that could create opportunities for anti-regime forces. The public demand for a "military solution," traditionally choreographed

to appear high, is uncertain. However, a botched war, in which, for example, Armenians used their weaponry to knock out key economic infrastructure, would expose the Azerbaijani population to the impacts of a long-undiversified economy and reveal the real levels of leadership popularity. Disincentives to permit any such outcome, which would have grave regional consequences, are high among the powers surrounding the South Caucasus.

Azerbaijan's outlook therefore appears more oriented towards continued limited warfare, awaiting opportune conjunctures for other operations like that of April 2016 to wear down Armenian resistance. Renewed if limited violence, timed to respond to domestic and international threats and opportunities, is unfortunately the only prudent forecast.

Tevan J. Poghosyan

FROM A
LIBERATION
MOVEMENT
TOWARD
STATE
BUILDING;
CURRENT
SITUATION AND
DEVELOPMENT
PROSPECTS
OF THE
ARTSAKH
REPUBLIC

In this paper, I will address the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, the significance of which extends beyond the existential interests of the protagonists, as it touches upon the issue of regional stability in general, as well as the political and security concerns of the Russian Federation, Turkey, Iran, the U.S. and the EU.

In the 1990s, a new system emerged in the Caucasus, comprised not just of the three *de jure* recognized independent Caucasus countries: Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also its neighbours: Russia, Turkey and Iran. To make matters more complicated, the major global powers also have an interest in this region, and although they are not a part of the Caucasus, the activities of the U.S., the EU, and China affect this new Caucasus system.

Residents of the Caucasus are tied to each other historically, ethnically and linguistically. There are shared memories, traditions, and cultures. There is a common infrastructure, including communication and transportation. In the Caucasus, which is an inherently unstable system, there are new and old destabilizing elements. These destabilizing elements prevail, causing conflict and friction.

There are many such elements including historical rivalries, ethnic conflicts, the uneven distribution of wealth, particularly oil, superpower rivalry in the region, underdeveloped

economies, and an absence of deep-rooted democratic practices and institutions.

These days, challenges are not just local, they are regional. The news coming from the Caucasus is never dull, and it definitely has not been uninteresting lately.

It is true that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is, at heart, a struggle for self-determination. But the *de facto* status of today's long-term conflicts varies: there are four different categories of self-determination movements defined by the combination of degree of control the state exercises over its entire territory (including the territory occupied by the insurgents) and the degree of self-determination achieved by the secessionist movement.

Quebec and Northern Ireland, for example, fall in Category I. In both cases, the territorial integrity of Canada and the United Kingdom is preserved, while the provinces practice self-determination to such a high degree that they conduct referenda and decide their own legal and political status. The people of Quebec conducted a number of public votes and expressed their will through legal means, free of any coercive intervention from the federal government, and decided to remain in the Canadian Confederation.

The overwhelming majority of today's secessionists fall in Category II, where the movements struggle with-

out any degree of self-determination and the state continues to fully control the territory in question.

Those in Category III are the cases where the state is not able to crush the insurgents, and the insurgents themselves are not strong enough to maintain control over their territory with any certainty of permanence. The outcome can go either way. East Pakistan, later Bangladesh, was in a similar situation in the 1960s, prior to its recognition as an independent state by the international community. So was Nagorno-Karabakh, prior to Azerbaijan's acceptance of an unconditional ceasefire on May 12, 1994, following Azerbaijan's failure to crush Karabakh's declared independence.

The international community has now seen this reality. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh are ready for, and have already begun through elections and other democratic processes, to build their own society and their own lives. By now the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, or Artsakh, has completed six presidential and seven parliamentary election cycles, and held elections of local governments six times. The people of the Artsakh Republic are committed to rule of law despite continuing adverse social and economic conditions.

As the OSCE and its Minsk Group co-chairs continue to work with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Artsakh towards a

settlement that will determine Artsakh's final status, it is self-evident that only a democratically elected leadership enjoying a popular mandate will be able to actively and legitimately participate in the final negotiations that affect the status of their people.

With this in mind, the 1992 Helsinki CSCE Council of Ministers decided that elected and other representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh should be invited to the Minsk Conference, entrusted with defining the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹ It can be argued that self-determination is more legitimate when accompanied by democratic processes.

Furthermore, democratization and self-determination together become necessary and inevitable when the formation of a new independent entity takes place inside states which are deficient in democracy, and their respect of human rights and UN principles is unsatisfactory. It is worth mentioning that since 2003, Freedom House has assessed the unrecognized NKR as Partly Free whereas the recognized state of Azerbaijan was assessed as Not Free; i.e. the citizens of the unrecognized NKR enjoy more political and

civil rights than those of recognized Azerbaijan.²

Different self-determination struggles have evolved in different ways. Therefore, each should be treated differently. Nothing demonstrates this more than East Timor's membership in the UN. East Timor's engagement is proof that a blanket rejection of all self-determination claims is not valid and does not take into account the fact that these movements are, by their nature, not all the same or even similar.

The international community's challenge continues to be adopting policies that will contribute to the peaceful solution of each and every conflict. In order to maintain adequate policies, criteria must be adopted by which to characterize and judge each case on its own merits in order to reach lasting peace. What the people of Artsakh and the whole region are still waiting for is this kind of lasting peace, and most probably this is what the people of Azerbaijan would want as well.

It has been almost twenty years since the meetings in Paris, Key West and Kazan, when the international

² See Freedom House, Freedom in the World/Nagorno-Karabakh/Country Profile. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2004/nagorno-karabakh>; Freedom House, Freedom in the World/Azerbaijan/Country Profile. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2004/azerbaijan>

¹ CSCE Documents, 20th Plenary Meeting of the Permanent Committee of the CSCE, 19 May 1994, OSCE Documents 1973-1997 on CD.

community put forth their views on the issue. Since then, some Azerbaijani officials, out of desperation or ignorance, have used every means at their disposal to discredit the initiatives of the international community, looking for ways to falsely link them to the critical issues of the day.

After September 11, wide discussions of the threat of international terrorism prompted Azerbaijan to make certain accusations, but things came full circle and damaged Azerbaijan's own reputation. Today, as the international community speaks of countries' responsibilities towards the UN Security Council resolutions, Azerbaijan frivolously makes the same accusations about Armenia, without considering that Armenia has done exactly what the international community expected: it used its offices with the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh to help find a peaceful solution to this conflict.

Azerbaijan has a choice: to continue with manipulation and wishful thinking in hopes for a return to a situation that is long gone. Or else, it can join the international community through the offices of the OSCE's Minsk Group co-chairs to continue with the search for peace. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is being presented as an element of instability in the region. However, the Artsakh Republic itself is a stable, established entity which can contribute to peace.

This idea should be spelled out. This spring, we will mark the 24th anniversary of the world's longest lasting and only self-monitored ceasefire. There are two reasons for this success. Regardless of the Azerbaijani aggression in April 2016, Artsakh once again proved that it has will, ability, and power to control its border. One reason is that the balance had been achieved and recognized. The other, perhaps more important reason, is the political determination on the Armenian sides to avoid bloodshed, and to allow people to continue with their lives as elected leaders work towards finding a solution.

During these 24 years, the people of Artsakh have tried to live normal lives. This summer, Artsakh marked 27 years of independence. Its independent institutions have not only provided security but also laid the foundation for social, economic and democratic development.

In these 27 years, Artsakh has held 7 presidential elections and 7 parliamentary elections, and developed a supportive infrastructure. Perhaps on the anniversary of the ceasefire this spring, Artsakh's leaders and the international community can find the resolve to codify the common desire for a realistic and just resolution. A ceasefire is a temporary peace. We can turn the world's longest-lasting self-monitored

temporary peace into the world's first self-monitored permanent peace.

In all this, the OSCE has its own important contribution to make. And in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the OSCE is in a unique position. For more than 24 years, from the Minsk Group to its co-chairs, the Minsk process has been at the centre of a search for a negotiated peaceful solution to the conflict.³ With elections both in Armenia and in Azerbaijan, 2018 has been a year of inactivity, and the very useful and productive presidential dialogue has been interrupted.

The co-chairs are ready to help the sides to establish trust building measures that will lead to a possibility of resuming the talks. It would be a historic opportunity lost, if the talks, when they begin, return to a *tabula rasa*, rather than take advantage of the principles and frameworks which have already emerged.

And if today a question is asked what the prospects are for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the answer again includes the Azerbaijani unconstructive and maximalist stance with

hope that time and an arms race will help them resolve the issue by force.

It is probably fair to criticize every actor in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Since the ceasefire was established in 1994, they have not taken advantage of the absence of bloodshed and gunfire to actually work on healing the wounds.

Time and distance were allowed to naturally form a scar. There was no active engagement to try to bring Armenians and Azerbaijanis closer and to create an environment which would lead to a lasting solution. The Azerbaijani elite fear that such interaction would justify or legitimize the status quo and lead to a conclusion that was not of their making. But, there is no other choice. Armenians and Azerbaijanis must move on. Somewhere, sometime, they have to draw the line on differences and move on to a future that is unified.

The obvious question is: do Armenians and Azerbaijanis have the starting point to move forward and to normalize relations?

The outstanding dispute between them is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Let's look at the facts. Nagorno-Karabakh's population has always been and remains largely Armenian. Linguistically, religiously, and culturally, the population of Artsakh is Armenian. Legally and historically, Artsakh has been Armenian for centuries. At the

³ John J. Maresca, "Lost Opportunities in Negotiating the Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh," *International Negotiation*, Volume 1:3 (1996), 471-499; Moorad Mooradian, "Third Party Mediations and Missed Opportunities in Nagorno-Karabakh: A Design for Possible Solution" (PhD diss., George Mason University, 1996), 434.

point of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it took advantage of its legal right to self-determination.⁴ Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect the Armenians to give Azerbaijan the authority over Nagorno-Karabakh when it has never legally or historically belonged to Azerbaijan.

The realization of Artsakh's people's right to self-determination may be achieved through peaceful and constructive means within the OSCE process. Actually, it was once freely expressed in a referendum on December 10, 1991, then twice endorsed in referenda: the adoption of the constitution in 2006 and constitutional changes in 2017. In this regard, it is relevant and instructive to consider the implementation of proposals for achieving self-determination in other regional contexts, which may be used as a model for the next steps in the OSCE process. In light of these precedents there is a critical need for a detailed process for achieving self-determination, to which the concerned parties can commit in advance. Thus, existing precedents may help develop an approach of intermediate sovereignty as a basis for crafting a long-term resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Although

the ceasefire between Artsakh and Azerbaijan has lasted for 24 years, for the last 7 years it has been sustained very poorly. The sides have made commitments to the peaceful settlement of the dispute in their official statements. However, Azerbaijan has recently signalled its interest in resolving the dispute through the use of force.

The provision for a third-party and/or international presence to oversee the implementation of the parties' agreement is also crucial for ensuring a smooth and efficient transition to achieving autonomy and monitoring the parties' fulfilment of their commitments to promote peace and normalize relations with each other.

Central to the exercise of the right of self-determination is defining the party's ultimate status and ways in which it will be achieved. The process for a referendum in which the people have the opportunity to express their will concerning their status through a free and democratic process provides more certainty than the precedents for deferred negotiation of permanent status. The efficiency and reliability of the referendum will depend upon the pre-determined agreement regarding the timing, conditions and requirements for the public vote.

On the 24th anniversary of the only self-imposed and self-maintained ceasefire in the world this year, it is desirable that both Armenians and

⁴ Nagorno-Karabakh now meets all of the traditional requirements for statehood set forth by the Montevideo Convention. Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States, Art. 1, December 16, 1933, 49 Stat. 3097, 300.

Azerbaijanis commit to a scenario for a region of peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, this appears to be wishful thinking.

Whether we consider history or geography, adopt a long-term political perspective, or face the facts on the ground, the people of Artsakh have the right to live peacefully in their historic lands. Nagorno-Karabakh was never part of an independent Azerbaijan – neither before the Soviet rule, nor after the fall of the Soviet empire. Except for the Soviet period, Nagorno-Karabakh was never under Azerbaijani control.

The men and women of Nagorno-Karabakh seceded from Soviet Azerbaijan legally in accordance with the constitutional framework of the Soviet Union, which had incorporated Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan, admittedly arbitrarily, in 1923.

During the Soviet years, its Armenian population was oppressed, their rights systematically denied. Hence, they repeatedly sought redress. Since its legal separation more than a dozen years ago, a whole generation has grown up in the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic free of Azerbaijani control.

The world has acknowledged that the Soviet era has ended. Parties concerned must not continue to define regional relations and determination of people's futures based on conditions created by Stalin. His empire is dismembered, his construction of

political and ethnic borders has collapsed, his control has long ended, and nobody has to be saddled with implementing his unjust vision. Armenians and Azerbaijanis together can transcend what history has wrought to reach peace and prosperity that reflect the desires and rights of the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples.

The Armenians of Karabakh are not going to become Azerbaijanis against their will. They were Azerbaijani subjects for the seven Soviet decades, and the experience of those years is still with them. They were second-class citizens in the classless Soviet system: excluded, exploited, neglected.

As a result, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh utilized all available legal channels to protest their condition during the Soviet era and in its final days. Hundreds of thousands of people in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and Armenia took to the streets to create democracy in what appeared to be an unbelievably risky move.

However, the people of Karabakh knew that the greater risk would have been not taking one. They took the risk in the conviction that the world believed self-determination is not just an abstract principle but a real right. They took the risk to determine their own political future, consistent with their right to secure their own physical safety and socioeconomic survival. The very existence of the Armenian population

of Nagorno-Karabakh was threatened by an Azerbaijani government unwilling to provide development and stability for that population. When Armenians rose for that right, they received a response that included massacre and deportation. A peaceful, lawful orderly call for self-determination turned into a military conflict replete with aerial bombings and missile attacks.

This unnecessary and wasteful war was imposed, initiated, and conducted by those without any legitimate claim to Nagorno-Karabakh's territory. The evidence is clear. Azerbaijan's legal claim to Nagorno-Karabakh is void since Nagorno-Karabakh has never been a part of independent Azerbaijan.

In 1920 the League of Nations refused to recognize independent Azerbaijan's claim of sovereign control over territory including Nagorno-Karabakh, and on that basis rejected its membership application to the League. In the Memorandum on the Application for the Admission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the League of Nations, the Secretary General of the League of Nations stated, "it may be interesting to note that this territory [i.e. Azerbaijan], occupying a superficial area of 40,000 square miles, appears to have never formerly constituted a State."⁵

⁵ Vartan Oskanian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Speech at the World Conference Against Racism, Ra-

And it was to that "territory" that the Armenian-populated, Armenian-ruled, and historically Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh was granted by the Soviet rulers. As a result, Armenians were subjected to systematic massacres, deportations, segregation, discrimination and other expressions of intolerance in the ensuing decades.

The only way to escape Azerbaijani discrimination and oppression was to achieve self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians sought this continuously during the seven decades of Soviet rule and continued to expect this basic human right with the advent of "perestroika" and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Massacres and pogroms against the Armenian population were organized in the Azerbaijani towns and cities of Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku. In its turn, this resulted in the exodus of the Armenian population from Azerbaijan. Armenia became home for some 500,000 refugees, between the years 1988-1994. Since then, we in Armenia have done everything to ease the burden of the refugees. They have been granted all the rights and privileges of Armenian citizens. In Azerbaijan, on the other hand, the Azerbaijani gov-

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cial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, 31 August – 7 September 2001. <http://www.un.org/WCAR/statements/armeniaE.htm>

ernment continues to use refugees as pawns, keeping them in camps.

As for the second and current Republic of Azerbaijan, its separation from the Soviet Union coincided with Nagorno-Karabakh's own secession from Azerbaijan, along steps prescribed by the Soviet constitution. Azerbaijan cannot base its claim on Nagorno-Karabakh on Soviet laws and acts while simultaneously denying the validity of the Soviet legislation in providing mechanisms for the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan – mechanisms that were scrupulously followed by the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Ironically, it was these same mechanisms which Azerbaijan used for its own independence.

Azerbaijan's moral claim to Nagorno-Karabakh is equally weak given its intolerant and violent response to Nagorno-Karabakh's calls for self-determination. Armenia's call today is what it has been for the last decade: with the help of the international community, to search for a just and lasting peace for our region which takes into account the realities on the ground and the historical context which brought us here.

Growing military rhetoric in Azerbaijani society can be observed today. Moreover, Azerbaijani government officials and opinion makers continue with their suit of belligerent anti-Armenian propaganda and hate

speech. As Vafa Quluzadeh, the former Foreign Policy Adviser to President Aliyev, put in his interview to *Zerkalo* newspaper (December 4, 2002): "The best option for us is to drive them [Armenians] out of the entire Caucasus and it is a great pity that today we have to demand the liberation of only those Azerbaijani lands that are occupied by the Armenians."

Since 2010, Azerbaijan has initiated more and more escalations, with a culmination on April 2-5, 2016, internationally referred to as a '4-Day War.' During those 4 days of escalated tension, Armenians had about a hundred casualties, while Azerbaijan had about a thousand.

There is a myth in Azerbaijan – a faulty, miscalculated, risky myth about oil revenues used to buy armaments. Azerbaijan is anticipating the day when it will have the resources to pursue a military solution, again. This is self-deception.

Azerbaijan has forgotten that similar fantasies led them to respond militarily to the peaceful demands of Nagorno-Karabakh's population for self-determination in 1992. The military balance was hugely in their favour then, in proportions far greater than what they might hope for in the future. Still, the moral, historical, legal and psychological balance favoured the people of Nagorno-Karabakh who were fighting for their homes, their

families, their security, their lives and their futures. The armaments of Azerbaijan did not then – and cannot ever – break the will of the people of Artsakh to live freely in their own lands.

Indeed, Azerbaijanis are victims, but of their own aggression. They started the war, one-sidedly. They began massacring Armenians and citizens of Azerbaijan's cities: Sumgait, Baku, Ganja. This is most irresponsible reaction that a government can have, using the most inhuman methods associated with pogroms. The war that followed changed the world for two generations of Armenians who have never lived under Azerbaijani rule. Rather than remaining prisoners of a Soviet era, Azerbaijan's leadership, both old and new, can look to a future of compromise, peace, regional cooperation and prosperous development.

The process of finding a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not being made easier by the fact that Turkey provides blanket support for Azerbaijan's claims on the world stage.

The reasons for the Turkish support are many, including ethnic, cultural, linguistic, economic and strategic interests. Azerbaijan has succeeded in convincing Turkey that blockading Armenia will diminish Armenia's economic capacity, undermine its self-reliance and force it to negotiate from a weaker position and hence compel it

to consider concessions it would not otherwise be willing to make in the conflict.

Turkey's and Azerbaijan's continued closures of the borders with Armenia and NKR are based on the demonstrably false premise that Armenia's weak and collapsing economy will force it to accept any solution imposed by friend and foe alike. Perhaps, Azerbaijan, for a variety of reasons, including domestic consumption, needs to create and perpetuate the myth of Armenia's utter vulnerability.

Armenia and its economy are not collapsing. In fact, the opposite is true. Against all odds, Armenia's economy is growing. Our Human Development Index is ahead of even Turkey and Azerbaijan.

We need to bear in mind the effect of Great Power Politics in a complex domestic situation and complicated inter-country relationships. Russia-Georgia, U.S.-Iran, and of course Russia-U.S. relations affect Armenia.

It has been interesting to observe the U.S.-Russia relations over the past 10 years. Unfortunately, Armenia has not just been an observer, but was also affected by the changing and evolving nature of this ambiguous relationship. However, one change is clear: the world is no longer divided into two clean halves. This division disappeared with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The scope and range of Armenian-Russian connectedness is extensive. It is influenced more and more by the presence of a very large and active Armenian Diaspora in Russia economically, militarily, and politically.

There is of course a myth about the degree of Armenia's dependence on the Russian Federation. These assumptions are many. Years ago, it was said we were winning the Nagorno-Karabakh military conflict thanks to Russia. Then, Armenia was Russia's bastion in the South, made to be an obstacle to NATO expansion or Western penetration into the region. Today, it is sometimes still said that Armenia is Russia's stronghold. These myths probably arise from the fact that Armenia has a military pact with Russia. This pact is motivated, however, by Armenia's own interests, as defence against vocal threats from Turkey.

In reality, Armenia's military arrangements with Russia have not hindered either a dialogue or actual cooperation with the U.S. Before the war on terrorism, America itself was reticent to engage Armenia in military matters, given its desire not to offend or irritate regional proxies, allies or rivals.

Armenia has never tried to posture, as some have, as an eager host and partner to NATO or the U.S., in the hope that through such military entanglements, we would expect the U.S. or NATO to come to our rescue

in Nagorno-Karabakh like they did in Kosovo. We have always seen Azerbaijan's strategy to provoke a reverse Kosovo in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as nothing more than crude delusional manipulation or naïve wishful thinking.

Actually, the truth lies elsewhere. The larger, more crucial and geo-strategically contingent relationship between the U.S. and Russia is what will shape the significance and performance of Armenia in that triangle, and that is no myth.

While the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not the only unresolved conflict in the area, it is the conflict where the U.S., together with Russia and France, is the most actively, formally and patiently involved. Everyone expects that larger issues of the U.S.-Russia competition or cooperation, global and regional, will affect every aspect of the process of dealing with this conflict and the search for its eventual resolution.

Mediators pursue two policy goals in all of these conflicts. One is to resist the break-up of the state. The other is to search for a peaceful resolution. This is done by simultaneously protecting the state's territorial integrity while arguing for full political, civil and human rights for all citizens.

Regarding dozens of such struggles around the world, the international community repeats the same chorus. Sometimes it goes so far as to even suggest some autonomy. The hope is that

the offer of such rights will dampen the pressures to secede.

There are those that look at the OSCE's last twenty years of involvement as a failure. It would have been nice if, via the Minsk process, its derivatives and today's co-chair arrangement, peace were at hand. But it is not, and for that, we cannot continue to blame the messengers. Armenia appreciates the coordinated efforts of the co-chairs to establish benchmarks, which came to be known as the Madrid principles. These is a basis, an understanding, on which to build further progress. Armenian officials repeatedly stated that they remained committed to that framework, to the peace process, and would continue to adhere to the progress that has been made.

What is happening in Artsakh today? Actually, the process of state building in Artsakh has never stopped. The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast has transformed into the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and now it is in the process of developing state structures into truly viable institutions, as well as of returning to its historical name of Artsakh. We have to recognize that state building does not just imply existence of institutions but also of a common identity. As mentioned in the 2009 edition of IPR, "the declaration of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic coincided with the process of state building and the creation of

government structures. Initially, the Republic opted for a democratic distribution of power between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government. However, the military aggression of the Azerbaijani Republic against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh introduced slight modifications into the performance of the government branches with a view to withstand the challenges of the war and the threat of physical destruction."⁶

The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh today is a sovereign, democratic, legal and social state. Its government system is based on the principles of division and balance of the legislative, executive and judicial branches, and differentiations of powers of central and local authorities. In the NKR, power lies with the people, who exercise it through free elections and referenda as well as through state and local self-governing bodies and public officials as provided by the Constitution.

The referendum conducted on December 10, 2006 on the adoption of the NKR Constitution was a major step towards democratic governance and the consolidation of the principle of power division. The referendum in 2017 made changes in governance by moving from a semi-presidential sys-

⁶ Institute of Political Research, "Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh: Process of State Building at the Crossroad of Centuries" (Yerevan 2009), 22-23.

tem towards pure presidential. At the same time, the new Constitution envisages the increase of direct participation of citizens in public affairs by providing them with the right to legislative initiative, including proposing amendments to the Constitution.

People in Artsakh value democracy and human rights. As stipulated by the Constitution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, the state protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of people and citizens according to the universal principles and norms of international law. Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the NKR on “Fundamental Human and Civil Rights and Freedoms and Obligations” ensures the protection of the whole complex of human, civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights in the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The Constitution of the Artsakh Republic also ensures the protection of human rights via the democratic institute of the Defender of Human Rights of the Republic. Local self-government is based on elections, where members of the community elect local self-governing bodies, the council of community elders (the representative body) and the head of the community (the executive body) for a three-year term.

The position of Artsakh is based on the idea of the legitimacy of its struggle for independence by analogy with cases worldwide. In their efforts to

persuade the international community that Artsakh has all the recognized principal attributes of statehood, the authorities of Artsakh point in particular to the practice of forming institutes of governance through free democratic elections. For example, in 2007, the then NKR President Arkadi Ghukasyan left the presidential office after two terms; in 2004, an opposition candidate was elected mayor of NKR’s capital, Stepanakert. The leaders of the NKR also constantly point out the fact that the level of democracy in the NKR is much higher than in Azerbaijan.

The foreign policy of the Artsakh Republic is formed and carried out in line with the universal principles and norms of the international law. The republic is independent in the choice and conduct of its foreign policy. It establishes and maintains relations with other international actors and organizations as well as ensures its official representation in both international and regional meetings. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Artsakh Republic from its establishment in 1993 has been in charge of the formation and implementation of the country’s foreign policy. Artsakh has effectively established permanent missions in the largest states and regions of the world: Permanent Mission in the Republic of Armenia (residence Yerevan), Permanent Mission in the Russian Federation (residence Moscow), Permanent

Mission in the United States of America (residence Washington D.C.), Permanent Mission in France (residence Paris), Permanent Mission in Germany (residence Berlin), Permanent Mission in Australia (residence Sidney), Permanent Mission in the Middle East (residence Beirut).

The Nagorno-Karabakh peace process cannot unfold without the participation of the legitimate authorities of Artsakh Republic. As the Deputy Foreign Minister of Artsakh Armine Aleksanyan said recently at the European Parliament, “Karabakh is a country, not a conflict.”⁷

The population of Artsakh cannot forever live in uncertainty and economic isolation. It has a yearning not only for peace but also for democracy and prosperity. The people of Artsakh have fought for their legal and constitutional right for self-determination, as well as for their very self-preservation. The irony is that today, the same people are convinced that only a just and fair negotiated settlement will bring

them what they fought for: the right to live peacefully and securely on their lands. They are willing and ready to negotiate such a settlement. Armenians are voluntary and active members of the international community and organizations such as the UN, OSCE, and Council of Europe because we believe in principles. Individual security is dependent on our collective security. There is no security without cooperation. This is as true for Artsakh as it is for Armenia or Azerbaijan.

Let me finish by citing the former Ambassador of the USA to Armenia, John Evans, who said, “The people of Artsakh just want to live their lives in peace and freedom. Even though the status of the Republic of Artsakh has not yet been finally determined, the people of Artsakh possess, and should enjoy, the same rights as all the rest of us, and ought not to be quarantined by the rest of humanity.”⁸

⁷ Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights, Tufenkian Foundation, and European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy, “Nagorno Karabakh Must Be the Primary Subject and Not an Object of the Peace Process’ Say Prominent International Scholars,” February 28, 2018. <http://eafjd.eu/RemedialSecessionPr.html>

⁸ John Evans, “Will Trump Ignore a Visit from the President of Nagorno-Karabakh?” *National Interest*, March 11, 2018. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/will-trump-ignore-visit-the-president-nagorno-karabakh-24848>

PEACEMAKING

Nina Caspersen

THE NAGORNO- KARABAKH CONFLICT: THE LIMIT OF CONFIDENCE- BUILDING?

Confidence-building measures (CBMs) are widely seen as an effective way to move protracted conflicts closer to a negotiated settlement, or at least avoid a violent escalation. These measures, which span both military and civilian contacts and dialogue, are intended to help (re)build trust and foster more cooperative attitudes. Confidence-building measures in support of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process have long been considered, but they have met considerable obstruction from both sides of the conflict, especially in the last decade. Amanda Paul and Dennis Sammut argue that although “some measures have been enacted in the civilian sphere, none have yet been successful in the military sphere.”¹

The constraints on confidence-building measures have been little analysed in the academic literature. The assumption seems to be that “if CBMs won’t work, nothing else will,”² but the effective implementation of

¹ Amanda Paul, and Dennis Sammut, “Nagorno-Karabakh: Is it Time to Bring Peacekeeping and Confidence Building Back on the Agenda?” Discussion Paper, European Policy Centre (September 29, 2016), 5.

² Marie-France Desjardins, *Rethinking Confidence-Building Measures* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4.

CBMs depends on political will to compromise and a preparedness to engage with difficult political issues.³ Without this, CBMs are at best ineffective and may be counterproductive.⁴ This paper discusses the need for CBMs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and examines the significant obstacles to the effective implementation of such measures. It begins by analysing the purpose of CBMs and why they are so badly needed in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It then examines the obstacles faced, in particular in conflicts involving de facto states. In such conflicts, CBMs tend to be perceived through the lens of maximalist positions on territorial integrity and self-determination. The paper then discusses the lessons learned from other similar conflicts, it analyses the opposition CBMs have faced in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and concludes with an exploration of possible ways forward. The analysis suggests that CBMs should be explicitly linked to the peace process and although they can start out with less controversial, technical questions they should overtime move on to more politically sensitive issues and locations.

WHY BOTHER WITH CONFIDENCE-BUILDING?

A wide range of measures come under the heading of confidence-building measures. The term originates in Cold War measures designed to address specific military concerns, in particular the risk of accidental war between the two superpowers. However the concept was later extended to include measures to increase dialogue and build trust, and came to include civilian as well as military measures.⁵

CBMs are intended to give the conflict parties reason to believe that promises will be honoured: that ceasefires will not be violated and negotiated settlements will be implemented.⁶ The purpose of CBMs is to manage uncertainty,⁷ and putting such measures in place is likely to bolster peace talks.⁸ CBMs may even be

³ Desjardins 2005; Marc Behrendt, "Civil Society and Confidence Building," Discussion Paper, Chairmanship Workshop on Economic and Environmental Activities of the OSCE as Confidence Building Measures (May 30, 2011).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Desjardins 2005; Paul, and Sammut 2016.

⁶ Behrendt 2011, 2.

⁷ Desmond Ball, "A New Era in Confidence Building: A Second-track Process in the Asia/Pacific Region," *Security Dialogue*, 25:2 (1994), 165.

⁸ Timothy D. Sisk, "Peacemaking Processes: Preventing Recurring Violence in Ethnic Conflicts," in Ira Willim Zartman, ed. *Preventive Negotiation: Avoiding Conflict Escalation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 85.

a precondition for serious talks to begin. Pruitt argues that leaders will only be ready to negotiate in earnest once they are optimistic that a mutually acceptable settlement can result from the talks.⁹ The required trust is often fostered through pre-negotiation communication or through concessions made as part of the talks.¹⁰

CBMs can also affect acceptance of risks. Uncertainty poses a challenge to all peace processes: the greater the uncertainty, the less likely the parties are to accept a compromise solution.¹¹ But the willingness of conflict parties to accept uncertainty is affected by the perception of stakes. If the stakes are perceived to be high, for example if the elimination or subjugation of the community is seen as a real possibility, then attitudes are likely to remain essentialist rather than pragmatic.¹² In fact, as Rui de Figueiredo and Barry Weingast have argued, if the risk of getting it wrong is seen as potentially catastrophic, then it becomes rational to refuse compromise, even if the probability of such an outcome is perceived as fairly low.¹³ CBMs are intended to address both uncertainty and the perception of stakes: is the other side likely to honour its commitment and what happens if it does not? This means that CBMs, and their effects, cannot be analysed in isolation from the substantive peace talks and wider conflict dynamics.

THE NEED FOR CONFIDENCE-BUILDING IN THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, CBMs have been proposed for two main reasons. First, CBMs have been suggested as a practical measure to avoid further escalation of the conflict and bring the parties back to the negotiating table.¹⁴ Such calls intensified following the four days of military clashes in April 2016. For example, Carey Cavanaugh and Paul B. Stares argued that the risk of armed conflict could be reduced by military-to-military contacts and other confidence- and security-building measures, such as “notifying the other of planned military

⁹ Dean G. Pruitt, “The Evolution of Readiness Theory,” in Mauro Galluccio, ed. *Handbook of International Negotiation* (Springer, 2015), 123-138.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sisk 2000.

¹² Sisk 2000, 84.

¹³ Rui de Figueiredo, and Barry Weingast, “The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict,” in Barbara F. Walter, and Jack Snyder, eds. *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 261-302.

¹⁴ Paul and Sammut 2000, 2.

exercises.”¹⁵ The US co-chair of the Minsk Group similarly called for confidence-building measures to deter accidental flare-ups of violence, including the removal of snipers from the Line of Contact, deployment of (additional) international observers and new electronic equipment.¹⁶ In addition, Cavanaugh and Stares suggested non-military CBMs such as technical dialogue between the two sides and an increase in civil society contacts.¹⁷

Second, CBMs have been proposed as a precondition for a sustainable settlement. Paul and Sammut argue that a negotiated settlement “needs to be accompanied by CBMs of a civilian and military nature... It is going to take huge effort and political commitment, and not inconsiderable resources, for any Nagorno-Karabakh settlement to last more than a few weeks.”¹⁸ They argue that there is a need for building trust at all levels: from the top of the military hierarchy to the local population of villages and settlements.¹⁹ At least a minimal level of trust will be necessary for the successful implementation of a settlement, especially if a level of co-existence is envisaged.

The Minsk Group has mostly been focused on the former purpose of confidence-building, although some co-chairs have been more open to the need for a broader process. I will however argue that there is a third reason for promoting CBMs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: the framework principles that form the basis for the current talks. The interim agreement that is proposed requires a not inconsiderable level of trust between the two sides. The basic principles, also known as the Madrid Principles, which have been on the table for more than a decade, rely on a core ambiguity. The parties cannot agree on the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the issue of sovereignty is therefore both deferred and fudged. Status is to be determined by a “legally binding expression of will,”²⁰ but only following an interim period, which includes the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. Such a formula only works if both sides are confident that their objective will prevail in the end, and

¹⁵ Carey Cavanaugh, and Paul B. Stares, “A Simmering Crisis Over Nagorno-Karabakh,” Council on Foreign Relations, September 22, 2017. <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/simmering-crisis-over-nagorno-karabakh>

¹⁶ Arman Tarjimanyan, “US Calls for Confidence-Building Measures in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Voice of America News*, August 11, 2017.

¹⁷ Cavanaugh, and Stares 2017.

¹⁸ Paul, and Sammut 2016, 2.

¹⁹ Paul, and Sammut 2016, 3.

²⁰ OSCE, Statement by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries, July 10, 2009. <https://www.osce.org/mg/51152>

are able to sell this interpretation to their followers. The framework is therefore deliberately ambiguous.

This kind of interim framework is associated with high levels of uncertainty when it comes to the length of the interim period, the options available in the “expression of will” and the electorate for this exercise. For the Armenian side, this uncertainty is compounded by a lack of agreement on who will provide security guarantees in the interim period, and thereby ensure that the promised vote is actually implemented. This uncertainty has been deepened further by recent discussions of a ‘Madrid lite’ formula, which would paper over the issue of a referendum²¹ and simply defer the issue of final status. Uncertainty is however also an issue for the Azerbaijani side who are worried that they could inadvertently accept a proposal that will end up with a solution that the leaders cannot accept and cannot sell to their followers: the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.²² Other uncertainties relate to return of Azeri refugees and IDPs and their position during and after the interim period.

Acceptance of a compromise solution requires leaders to take a leap of faith and this necessitates a level of trust in the proposed agreement and its implementation, and therefore in the opposing side. But the leap of faith required appears to be particularly great if the proposal on the table is an interim agreement which defers and fudges the final decision on the core issue of the conflict. Mistrust therefore becomes a significant obstacle, not just to the sustainability of the settlement, but to the willingness of the two sides to sign it in the first place.

There is therefore a pressing need for confidence-building to support the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. However, the obstacles to such confidence-building are also significant and linked to each side’s position on the final status of the contested territory.

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

I.W. Zartman has argued that attitude change is a precondition for successful negotiations. This can either happen separately from the substantive negotiations or concomitantly with these. In the former scenario, the change in attitude

²¹ Chatham House meeting attended by the author, 2016; Laurence Broers, “Decisive Diplomacy Essential to Securing Fragile Nagorny Karabakh Ceasefire,” Chatham House, April 11, 2016. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/decisive-diplomacy-essential-securing-fragile-nagorny-karabakh-ceasefire>

²² Tabib Huseynov, “Mountainous Karabakh: New Paradigms for Peace and Development in the 21st Century,” *International Negotiation* 15: 1 (2010), 19.

is a precondition for positive-sum negotiations. In the latter, the negotiations themselves become a vehicle for, and an illustration of, changes in attitudes.²³ However, the sequencing of CBMs is likely to matter for the willingness of the conflict parties to accept such measures. Moreover, the tensions between the two sides may run so high that CBMs become near-impossible to implement. In these cases, the leaders may worry about a domestic backlash if they agree to CBMs or they are concerned that such measures would confer legitimacy on the opposing side.

As a consequence of such obstacles, it can take years for CBMs to be accepted. For example it took almost two decades before the leaders of North and South Korea were willing to engage in direct talks and it was not until 1990 that the prime minister of North Korea visited Seoul for the first time. Yet in 1991 the Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchanges and Cooperation was reached, which included a pledge to promote economic cooperation and the reunion of family members, and a commitment to work towards a full peace treaty. The following year, the two sides accepted each other as legitimate partners in negotiations.²⁴ This example shows that it is possible to overcome deep divisions, and concerns over bestowing legitimacy on the other side, and accept CBMs. However, the acceptance of CBMs was aided by the fact that both sides shared the goal of a reunited Korea.²⁵ Although South Korea preferred a gradual approach to unification, while North Korea favoured a rapid step, they agreed that one Korea was the end goal. Since 2000, the two regimes also agree on the goal of a confederation.²⁶ This underlying consensus has made it possible for the two Koreas to contest some international sporting events as a single team under the Korean Unification Flag.

The sequencing of CBMs *before* substantive peace talks is more likely to be resisted in conflicts involving a separatist claim, especially if the contested territories are beyond the control of the central government. In this context, the government may worry that the initiation of dialogue and civil society contacts will not only legitimise the break-away entity but also normalise and consolidate the separation. Although the Georgian government has adopted an engage-

²³ Ira William Zartman, "Preventive Diplomacy: Setting the Stage," in Ira William Zartman, ed. *Preventive Negotiation: Avoiding Conflict Escalation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 1-18.

²⁴ Sukyong Choi, "Divided States," in Ira William Zartman, ed. *Preventive Negotiations: Avoiding Conflict Escalation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 91-112.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

ment policy for its breakaway regions, with the explicit purpose of enabling their peaceful reintegration,²⁷ such links remain highly controversial. Opponents fear that these CBMs will “cement de facto realities on the ground” and leave no incentives for the contested territories to reintegrate.²⁸ Moreover, opposition parties have alleged that such links are concessions to Russia.²⁹ CBMs could, in case of significant external involvement, be seen to legitimise what the parent state regard as an occupation. Perhaps more surprisingly, the leaders of de facto states may also reject the initiation of dialogue and other links with their de jure parent state, even if they precede substantive talks.³⁰ CBMs risk undermining their arguments for separation,³¹ and extensive links could also lead to charges that their independence is “imagined.”³²

Even so, the willingness to accept CBMs varies significantly between conflicts involving de facto states. In the case of Cyprus, we have seen an increasing emphasis on confidence-building measures, in the form of contacts between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities and bi-communal technical committees that allow for dialogue and collaboration on issues not directly related to the issue of status.³³ In Moldova, we also see a variety of CBMs, both in the form of a technical process, with eight expert working groups, that aim to increase confidence between the two sides of the Dniester river, and sectoral confidence-building initiatives which also contribute to cross-river cooperation and dialogue.³⁴ In both of these cases, CBMs are not separate from talks aimed at

²⁷ Government of Georgia, State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation (2010), 1. [http://gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritories-EngagementThroughCooperation\(Final\).pdf](http://gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritories-EngagementThroughCooperation(Final).pdf)

²⁸ Magdalena Grono, “Isolation of Post-Soviet Conflict Regions Narrows the Road to Peace,” International Crisis Group, November 23, 2016. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/isolation-post-soviet-conflict-regions-narrows-road-peace>

²⁹ Thomas de Waal, “Enhancing the EU’s Engagement with Separatist Territories,” Carnegie Europe, January 17, 2017. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/01/17/enhancing-eu-s-engagement-with-separatist-territories-pub-67694>

³⁰ Nina Caspersen, “Recognition, Status Quo or Reintegration: Engagement with De Facto States,” *Ethnopolitics*, Volume 17: 4 (August 1, 2018), 373-389.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Helge Blakkisrud and Pål Kolstø, “From Secessionist Conflict Toward a Functioning State: Processes of State- and Nation-Building in Transnistria,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 27:2 (2011), 191.

³³ Caspersen 2018.

³⁴ European Commission, Action Fiche for Confidence Building Measures (2013). https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/enpi_2013_c2013_5199_annual_action_programme_for_moldova_confidence_building_measures.pdf

reaching a substantive solution. In fact, the two are closely linked.³⁵ The Cypriot government accepted engagement with Turkish Cypriot institutions as a means to prepare the ground for reunification,³⁶ but insisted that the bicomunal technical committees created for this purpose had to be part of the formal peace process.³⁷ The sequencing of CBMs has also proved controversial in the Transnistrian conflict. A public letter sent to the Moldovan government by several dozen experts and civil society leaders opposed any flexibility on two of the technical questions discussed by the working groups, unless it followed “an explicit agenda of reintegrating the breakaway territory.”³⁸ However, the stalled negotiation process has recently restarted and we have seen progress in both the 5+2 diplomatic talks and the technical issues.³⁹

In addition to the demand for an explicit link with the settlement talks, parent states typically insist on significant limitations on CBMs with *de facto* states, for example when it comes to direct dealings with the *de facto* authorities. The purpose of such restrictions is to avoid normalising and legitimising the status quo, and also to ensure that non-recognition has a cost and reunification can therefore be presented as a carrot.⁴⁰ CBMs in conflicts involving *de facto* states will therefore be constrained, but there is space for manoeuvre, especially if there is progress in the settlement talks and if the breakaway entity is not completely opposed to some form of reintegration. However, there has so far been little space for CBMs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

OBSTACLES TO CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES IN THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be described as a “chronic conflict,” which has become “embedded in the social, political and economic systems of the conflict area.” It has an all-embracing character and neutral space has, as a result,

³⁵ Stefan Wolff, *The Transnistrian Issue: Moving Beyond the Status Quo*, The European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs (October 2012).

³⁶ Author’s interviews with Ambassador Andreas Mavroyiannis, chief negotiator of the Greek Cypriot community, Nicosia, June 12, 2017.

³⁷ Author’s interview with Dr Alexandros Lordos, Director of the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, Nicosia, June 13, 2017.

³⁸ Thomas de Waal, “Ever-Intractable Transdnistria,” Carnegie Europe, November 22, 2016. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/66224>

³⁹ Thomas de Waal, “Moldove’s Conflict: Unfreezing in a Good Way?” Carnegie Europe, March 6, 2018. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/75712>

⁴⁰ Author’s interview with Costa Contini, political analyst, Nicosia, June 13, 2017.

become “squeezed, if not irrelevant or even irrational.”⁴¹ This squeezing of neutral space very much characterises attitudes towards contacts between Azerbaijan and Armenia and, in particular, contacts between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. Any initiative aimed at fostering confidence and trust is interpreted in terms of their perceived effect on the status of the contested territory. The neutral space has become increasingly squeezed over the years and has by now become virtually eliminated. This reflects both changes in leadership on both sides and an increasing consolidation of the status quo – or the perception of such consolidation.

The Azerbaijani government has taken a hard line on CBMs and is refusing even military CBMs along the Line of Contact.⁴² Any measures that are seen to “prolong or strengthen the status quo, or extend the legitimacy of the de facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh” are strongly opposed.⁴³ For example, a proposal to withdraw snipers was rejected out of fear that it would consolidate the status quo, and President Aliyev stated that he would reject an incident investigating mechanism if it was meant to freeze the conflict.⁴⁴ One consequence of this fear of cementing the status quo is the insistence that CBMs are conditional on progress in the peace talks.⁴⁵ When addressing the issue of the investigation mechanism, Aliyev made clear that such a measure would only be considered in the context of “positive dynamics in the negotiation process,” demanding that the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh had to start first.⁴⁶ Sequencing is seen as crucial by the Azerbaijani side and CBMs cannot be a precondition for the start of substantive talks.

As we saw above, this is not an unusual position for parent states to take, but what is unusual is the conclusion that this necessitates the almost complete rejection of CBMs, both in the form of civilian and military measures. The Azerbaijani government is refusing direct contacts with the Karabakh authorities and it is an

⁴¹ Roger Mac Ginty, *No War, No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 77-8.

⁴² International Crisis Group, *Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds*, Europe & Central Asia, Report no. 244 (June 1, 2017), 22. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan/244-nagorno-karabakhs-gathering-war-clouds>

⁴³ Paul, and Sammut 2016, 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Magdalena Grono, “Politics and Security Hold Each Other Hostages in Nagorno-Karabakh,” International Crisis Group, Commentary/ Europe&Central Asia, January 18, 2018. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan/politics-and-security-hold-each-other-hostage-nagorno-karabakh>

⁴⁶ Paul, and Sammut 2016.

offense for Azerbaijani citizens to travel to Nagorno-Karabakh, which is regarded as occupied territory. In other conflicts involving de facto states, we see pragmatic departures from such policies, but Baku does not waver from its policy of complete isolation of Nagorno-Karabakh. Contacts with Armenia are also severely restricted, and a number of Azerbaijani NGOs engaged in people-to-people contacts with Armenian counterparts have been put under investigation and accused of being traitors.⁴⁷ This demonstrates that concerns over implied recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh or consolidation of the status quo are not the only factors at play.

The Armenian side is usually more supportive of CBMs and insist that such measures are implemented before the substance of a future settlement can be discussed.⁴⁸ For example, Aram Sargsyan, leader of the Democratic Party of Armenia, stated, “Progress is impossible unless confidence-building measures are worked out.”⁴⁹ Yet this support for CBMs does depend on the specific form of these measures. Contacts between the militaries of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been a taboo on both sides,⁵⁰ and while the website of the Nagorno-Karabakh office in Washington DC notes that the Karabakh authorities have “called to eliminate the atmosphere of hostility and hatred in the region by a joint realization of minor projects of mutual benefit,” it also emphasises that any conflict resolution initiatives must take into account “the realities in place,” i.e. Karabakh’s de facto independence.⁵¹ This position helps explain the rejection of Azerbaijan’s proposals for promoting relations between the Armenian Karabakh community and the Azerbaijani Karabakh community.⁵² This form of CBM does not legitimise the de facto authorities, by implying that they are of equal status to the Azerbaijani government. Rather it treats the Karabakh authorities as community representatives, and may indeed intend to bypass them altogether, and implies the equal position of the two Karabakh communities. The Armenian position is that CBMs should ensure and entrench the continuation of the status quo.⁵³

CBMs are clearly viewed in an instrumental way, as a means to promoting

⁴⁷ Paul, and Sammut 2016, 6.

⁴⁸ Grono 2018.

⁴⁹ Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Progress in Karabakh Talks Impossible unless Confidence-Building Measures Are Implemented,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, June 15, 2017. <http://www.armradio.am/en/2017/06/15/progress-in-karabakh-talks-impossible-unless-confidence-building-measures-are-implemented/>

⁵⁰ Paul, and Sammut, 5.

⁵¹ State-building/Sovereignty, Office of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. http://www.nkrusa.org/nk_conflict/sovereignty.shtml

⁵² Paul and Sammut 3.

⁵³ Ibid.

each side's preferred final status for Nagorno-Karabakh.⁵⁴ But although we see less pragmatism in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict than in other conflicts, these positions do not result in clear and rigid red lines. Paul and Sammut point out that both sides have been willing to depart from their positions when it serves their interests.⁵⁵ For example, when faced with the risk of exclusion from regional or international governing bodies, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have been willing to make friendly gestures to one another in the framework of international cultural and sporting events. Their position on CBMs has also not been static, which illustrates that they are not determined by the conflict issue and depth of divisions. However, we have seen the neutral space, and thereby the space for CBMs, being squeezed over the years. As Laurence Broers pointed out, "the political environment for peace-building is less favourable than it was five years ago, and much less so than during the 1998-2001 era, the high point for Armenian-Azerbaijani confidence-building measures."⁵⁶ For example, civil society contacts, even between NGOs based in Baku and Nagorno-Karabakh, used to be possible. Thus, in 1994 and 1995, the Karabakh NGO, 'Helsinki Initiative 1992' was able to bring representatives of Azerbaijani NGOs to Stepanakert, and in 2001, 11 members of the Karabakh NGOs went to Baku to visit the Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan.⁵⁷ However restrictions from the Azerbaijani authorities have now made such initiatives virtually impossible. In the past, the Minsk Group co-chairs have also crossed the LoC on foot. Doing so requires a certain amount of coordination between the sides and can therefore be considered a CBM.⁵⁸ The space for CBMs has not only been squeezed on the Azerbaijani side. The South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative (SCPI), which involved members of parliament from Armenia and Azerbaijan, had some success promoting dialogue between 2002 and 2006, but the Armenian MPs subsequently stopped attending meetings.⁵⁹

The four days of fighting in April 2016, and fears of further escalation, led to international pressure for CBMs. In response, the two presidents agreed to in-

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ State-building/Sovereignty, Office of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

⁵⁶ Laurence Broers, "Confidence-Building in the Karabakh Conflict: What Next?" *Journal of Conflict Transformation, Caucasus Edition*, February 18, 2014. <http://caucasusedition.net/confidence-building-in-the-karabakh-conflict-what-next/>

⁵⁷ Vincenc Kopecek, Tomas Hoch, and Vladimir Baar, "Conflict Transformation and Civil Society: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68: 3 (2016), 441-459.

⁵⁸ Paul, and Sammut 2016.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

crease the number of OSCE observers on the front line and create a mechanism for investigating incidents. However, these measures have yet to be implemented and especially the latter is proving controversial.⁶⁰ The small territorial gains made in 2016 have led to hopes in Azerbaijan that the status quo can be broken and the Azerbaijani government is therefore even less likely to accept measures seen to consolidate the current situation.

This analysis has shown how willingness to accept CBMs is closely linked to perceptions of the status quo and to progress in the peace talks, or the absence of such progress. Confidence-building cannot be treated as separate from the peace process and wider conflict dynamics. But this does not mean that they are merely a consequence of changing conflict dynamics. The causality goes both ways: progress in the substantive talks makes it easier to implement effective CBMs, but this will in turn underpin and strengthen the peace talks and make it easier for the two sides to take a leap into the relative unknown and accept a negotiated settlement.

POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

CBMs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict face a number of highly significant constraints. These are related to both the core issue of the conflict (sovereignty/final status) and the tensions between the two sides. The space for CBMs is increasingly squeezed. Rhetoric on both sides has grown progressively worse, the societies are ready for war and even preparing for it,⁶¹ and memories of co-existence are rapidly fading. There is therefore little doubt that CBMs will be difficult to promote. Yet, as I have argued above, they are very much needed in order for the current framework to be a viable option. What are the possible ways forward?

Lessons from other conflicts involving *de facto* states would suggest that these measures have to be explicitly tied to the settlement talks. Otherwise it will be near-impossible to overcome Azerbaijani fears of consolidating the status quo. The two processes should ideally proceed in tandem and they can thereby reinforce each other. Increased confidence would reduce the perceived stakes and result in greater willingness to accept uncertainty. This would facilitate the substantive talks which would, in turn, help foster dialogue and cooperation. However, we are currently very far from such a self-reinforcing positive process. Something is needed to kick-start this process.

Improved rhetoric would help. As Behrendt argues, the effectiveness of

⁶⁰ Grono 2018.

⁶¹ Chatham House discussion attended by the author, February 2018.

CBMs in building trust very much depends on perceived intent and generous gestures could be undermined by bellicose rhetoric, even if this is primarily intended for a domestic audience.⁶² Similarly, Broers points out that a prerequisite for cross-border initiatives is the toning down of rhetoric, otherwise the risk to participants will be perceived as too high.⁶³

It has been suggested that CBMs could be implemented by non-state actors,⁶⁴ and that meetings should take place on neutral ground. Similarly, a focus on technical issues has been recommended⁶⁵ and it is commonly emphasised that such technical dialogue should not include Nagorno-Karabakh, although it could be extended at a later date. The intention behind such depoliticisation of CBMs is clearly to address Azerbaijani objections, but still enable the gradual easing of tensions. The problem is that such CBMs may have limited impact. As Behrendt argues, effective CBMs are not focused on safe issues: they should involve politically sensitive issues and be based on a “conscious buy-in to the need to build the other side’s confidence.”⁶⁶ Ineffective initiatives could undermine support for CBMs and result in a more hardline position.⁶⁷ This is another argument for linking CBMs explicitly to the peace process and be open about what they are trying to achieve, for example by presenting them as a first step of a staged process. This could reassure Baku. Moreover, after the initial phase of technical dialogue, the process should, if at all possible, be extended to Nagorno-Karabakh. In order to address Azerbaijan’s concerns, it has been argued that this may have to be informal and within an explicit framework of “engagement without recognition.”⁶⁸ However, this would have to be presented in a way that is not seen to prejudge the final settlement, as this would almost certainly lead the Armenian side to boycott the measures.

Finally, the high level of uncertainty contained in the Basic Principles is an issue. This increases the need for CBMs, but also makes them harder for the parties to accept. International actors could seek to reduce these uncertainties by providing guarantees for the interim period: lower the stakes by reducing the cost of miscalculating the intentions of the other side.

⁶² Behrendt 2011.

⁶³ Broers 2014.

⁶⁴ Paul, and Sammut 2016, 6-7.

⁶⁵ Cavanaugh, and Stares 2017.

⁶⁶ Behrendt 2011.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Paul, and Sammut 2016, 7.

Sophia Pugsley

CIVIL
SOCIETY
INITIATIVES TO
PROMOTE THE
RESOLUTION
OF THE
NAGORNO-
KARABAKH
CONFLICT¹

**1. OVERVIEW OF
PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES**

Civil initiatives in the early stages of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were spontaneous and largely centred around the humanitarian response. Generally speaking, they were initiated by unofficial community leaders who had unshakeable authority within their societies. Through humanitarian initiatives, lines of communication and relationships of trust were established between some individuals across the conflict divide, setting a significant precedent in wartime. This then led to some of these people developing an active public position on peacebuilding.

Stage I: 1992–1994

During the war, leading intellectuals tried to prevent tensions from being whipped up. In 1993, the Armenian-Azerbaijani initiative referred to as the “Ben Lomond Peace Process” was launched. Following the signing of 1994 ceasefire agreement, for example, the Azerbaijani and Armenian National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly held two meetings in border regions attended by women’s and youth groups.

Stage II: 1994–2000

International organisations, NGOs, and donors launched the first peacebuilding projects on the conflict, with

¹ This paper is partly based on International Alert’s publications: a collection of papers by International Alert’s partners *Advancing the Prospects for Peace: 20 years of civil peacebuilding in the context of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict* (2013) and *A reflection on 20 years of civil society initiative on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict* (2014), authored by Larisa Sotieva.

the participation of local NGOs, the expert community, journalists, and women leaders.

- Operations were carried out to find prisoners and hostages by the Azerbaijani National Committee of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly with the Helsinki Initiative 92 (Nagorno-Karabakh);
- The "Ben Lomond Peace Process" continued (1993–1998);
- In 1994–1996, under the National Peace Foundation (US) initiative "Women for Peace and Democracy in the South Caucasus," meetings were organised between women representatives from the countries of the South Caucasus;
- The Centre for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at Maryland University implemented a programme called "Partners in Conflict: Building Bridges to Peace in Transcaucasia" with academics from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia;
- In 1997 and 1998, the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation funded courses on Leadership in Conflict Prevention and Resolution at the Tbilisi State University for students from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. The project was implemented by the Azerbaijan branch of "Women for Peace and Democracy in the South Caucasus" jointly with partners from Armenia and Georgia;
- In 1997–1999, summer and winter schools for young people were held by the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly;
- In 1997–2000, visits by Azerbaijani journalists were organised to Armenia (1997) and Nagorno-Karabakh (1998), and by Armenian journalists to Azerbaijan (1999), sponsored by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs; and
- In 2000, the Academy of Educational Development (AED) organised three seminars on conflict resolution and women's leadership in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Twenty women from each country attended seminars sponsored by USAID.

Stage III: 2000–2007

This stage marked the start of long-term regional peacebuilding projects involving international organisations and NGOs.

- In 2000–2007, operations to locate prisoners and hostages continued by the International Group on the Freeing of Prisoners and Hostages and Locating

of Missing Persons (known as the Clasen Group). The coordinators of this group operated in Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert;

- In 2001–2006, a regional project entitled “Women for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus” of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was implemented in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Its members participated in many peacebuilding events at country level and also in the regional coalition “Women for Peace,” launched by UNIFEM in 2003;
- In 2001–2006, the Dartmouth Conference on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh held 11 meetings;
- The “Consortium Initiative” was launched in 2003, sponsored by the UK government and implemented by a coalition consisting of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Conciliation Resources, International Alert and LINKS. These organisations with their partners in the region carried out public awareness-raising work on peacebuilding. Working with young people, women leaders, NGOs and the expert community, along with MPs, this project enabled mutual understanding and confidence building between the parties to the conflict; and
- In 2006, in Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert, Conflict Transformation Resource Centres were created with support from International Alert.

Stage IV: 2007–2016

The spikes in activity of the official mediation process – with near breakthroughs in 2010 and 2013 – created openings for civic peacebuilding efforts at higher levels. Therefore, members of intellectual, official, cultural, and religious circles started to get involved. This coincided with the beginning of the negotiations of Azerbaijan and Armenia with the EU about the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements.

- In 2007 and 2009, at the initiative of the Azerbaijani and Armenian ambassadors to Russia, delegations of Armenian and Azerbaijani intellectuals visited Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan and met the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan;
- In April 2010, the Catholicos of All Armenians, Garegin II, visited Azerbaijan for the first time to attend the Baku World Summit of Religious Leaders. During the visit, he also met the president of Azerbaijan;
- In November 2011, the Chairman of the Caucasian Muslims Board, Allahshükür Pashazade, attended a meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent

States (CIS) Interreligious Council Presidium in Yerevan. During the visit, he also met the president of Armenia;

- In 2012, Azerbaijani deputies attended a session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society in Yerevan, and Armenian deputies attended the second Plenary Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly in Baku; and
- Taking over from the Consortium Initiative, the long-term EU-funded EPNK project was launched in 2010 (for more, see below).

Stage V: 2016-2018

In April 2016, there was the worst military escalation since the 1994 ceasefire agreement which for a while fed an extreme radicalisation of the discourse and a rise in militant nationalism. This was a testing time for civil society in all three entities as the few individuals who dared to condemn the violence and call for a peaceful resolution were marginalised. The perceived lack of support from the international community for those people created a sense of powerlessness and disillusionment. This resulted in considerable damage done to the image of peacebuilding in society and played into existing critical narratives about NGOs as being a ‘fifth column’ serving a foreign agenda. Nevertheless:

- The current phase of EPNK started in May 2016; and
- Also in 2016, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation launched the EU-funded ‘Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement’ (PeaCE) programme² as a way of encouraging local civil society actors to contribute to bridging the conflict divide.

2. EPNK

The European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK) is a unique initiative funded by the EU that works with local partners on a wide range of peacebuilding activities to contribute to lasting peace in the region. It is comprised of five member organisations: Conciliation Resources (UK), Crisis Management Initiative (Finland), International Alert (lead agency, UK), Kvinna till Kvinna (Sweden), and LINKS (UK).

In this challenging environment, the EPNK consortium persevered in its efforts to increase the credibility and popular legitimacy of peacebuilding efforts.

² Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement (PeaCE)/Programs, Eurasia Partnership Foundation. <http://www.epfarmeria.am/en/current-programs/cross-border/armenian-azerbaijani-dialogue/peace/>

Through complementary approaches, EPNK pushes to keep open the space for civic peacebuilding to operate and succeeded in engaging broad sectors of the societies on different levels, as well as international actors. At a time when local civil society actors are vulnerable to pressure from the authorities, the media and the public, EPNK provides a supportive umbrella, giving them the stability, networks, space and technical and moral support to build trust across the divide, and widen debate on peaceful, inclusive ways forward in resolving the conflict. In the last two years, EPNK partners have worked to recover some ground lost as a result of the April 2016 escalation.

a. Dialogue

Dialogue is an essential part of building peace. It can help people from across the region to promote change in their societies by engaging with counterparts with differing perspectives on the conflict.

Conciliation Resources focuses on bringing people together – within their own societies and across the conflict divides – to encourage greater understanding and constructive debate about the past, present and future. They facilitate dialogue among experts and activists from all sides of the conflict, creating space for controversial issues to be discussed, assumptions tested and ideas generated. For example, the Karabakh Contact Group³ format creates a space where potentially ‘overlapping voices’ from Armenian and Azerbaijani societies can come up with new approaches, and their analysis and recommendations can be channelled to policymakers, both local and international.

Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) has set up a unique cross-conflict platform of emerging professionals who strive to positively transform their environment. The platform has focused on developing joint confidence-building initiatives between young leaders on different sides. It also helps to establish formal and informal dialogue channels between emerging professionals and local and international officials to inform the official peace process. The aim is to help create demand within the societies for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

LINKS seeks to help prepare all sides for peace by creating opportunities for dialogue, analysing developments, and researching issues that impact the conflict settlement process. This often requires challenging deeply entrenched positions and narratives. Working with the European Policy Centre, the International Peace Institute, and other stakeholders, they conduct research, publish analytical

³ The Karabakh Contact Group/ Donate, Conciliation Resources. <http://www.c-r.org/where-we-work/caucasus/karabakh-contact-group-0>

papers, hold events and disseminate information widely. LINKS is also working with the sides to design, develop and implement confidence-building measures⁴ that can contribute to lasting peace.

International Alert supports a cross-conflict network of journalists and editors from leading media outlets in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh through a series of professional development programmes and collaborative media initiatives. Ongoing dialogue has allowed participating journalists to jointly develop and adhere to a Code of Conduct that guides their work while covering conflict-related issues and is based on principles of journalistic ethics and conflict sensitivity.

Kvinna creates forums for women's organisations and other civil society across the conflict divide to meet and listen to each other's contexts and obstacles, and to find common points to sustain and develop peace activism.

b. Research and Analysis

Research should offer new ideas and analysis of the peace process, enabling people to re-examine key aspects of the conflict in a new and more positive light. It also instils greater confidence in civil society actors to engage in dialogue with policymakers on conflict-related issues.

LINKS runs the web portal commonspace.eu, available in English and Russian, which has established itself as a reliable source of information and analysis on the Caucasus region since 2011. Together with the complementary Facebook page, it reaches thousands of readers every month with unbiased daily reports on the conflict within the wider regional context.

In International Alert's *Unheard Voices*⁵ initiative, journalists write about the suffering caused by the protracted conflict in stark contrast to the pro-war rhetoric widespread in the media. This encourages societies to reflect critically on the human cost of the conflict, allowing readers to view materials from all sides, challenging stereotypes and isolation.

Conciliation Resources has produced policy briefs drawing on discussions within the Karabakh Contact Group. This analysis presents a variety of perspectives and highlights challenges and opportunities in relation to core

⁴ "LINKS Takes Discussion on Confidence-Building Measures to Baku and Yerevan," LiNKS, November 19, 2017. <https://links-dar.org/2017/11/19/links-takes-discussion-on-confidence-building-measures-to-baku-and-yerevan/>

⁵ *Unheard Voices/JamNews*. <https://jam-news.net/?cat=2802>

conflict issues. It is used to engage policymakers and others in critical reflection and dialogue.

Kvinna till Kvinna is carrying out research on the gendered effects of conflict. This will contribute to civil society's and women's organisations' work and advocacy for continued efforts to prioritise the women, peace and security agenda in peace processes.

c. Participation and Inclusivity

Any peace process should include diverse perspectives, analysis and ideas. It is therefore important to find and give a voice to marginalised groups, particularly youth, women and displaced people.

Through CMI's established dialogue platform, emerging professionals from all sides of the conflict divide are reaching out to various groups within their societies, including marginalised ones such as youth, displaced people, refugees, and radicals. Through capacity-building and study visits to other conflict areas, young professionals design impact-oriented and more inclusive peacebuilding initiatives ranging from research and interviews to filmmaking.

Kvinna till Kvinna supports six local women's organisations that work across the conflict divide to strengthen Armenian and Azerbaijani women's ability to play a more active part in grassroots peacebuilding efforts and influence decisions that affect their lives. An important component is giving opportunities to these women to meet and share experiences, fostering solidarity and trust between each other. These women work in their communities to empower conflict-affected women and youth. Local women learn how to advocate for women's rights in the peace process, and communicate to local and international decision-makers the message that women are important actors for peace and should be included in decision-making that shapes the future of their societies.

Conciliation Resources works with Armenian and Azerbaijani partners to engage their societies in internal dialogue around peacebuilding and conflict transformation, including in Nagorno-Karabakh. Through targeted film screenings, roundtable discussions and other activities local partners reach out to various groups, including displaced persons and youth.

International Alert has run a series of events on lessons from other conflicts⁶ where hundreds of people in marginalised communities discussed peacebuilding possibilities through a new lens. The local outreach methodology addresses

⁶ Gegham Baghdasaryan, Avaz Hasanov, Mikayel Zolyan, Masis Mayilian, and Gulshan Pashayeva, "Mechanisms of Public Participation and Multi-Track Diplomacy in Peace Processes.

the need for a more intensive internal reflection on the costs of the conflict, and sensitively visualises how communities perceive and understand peace.

d. Training and Capacity-Building

There are tailor-made training courses, public events and seminars to strengthen societies and to empower target groups.

Conciliation Resources trains and engages journalists, filmmakers and opinion-shapers to interpret conflict-related events in a more balanced and nuanced fashion. Films reach actors in the region and raise awareness among international policymakers.

International Alert has supported the peacebuilding community by building local capacity and enabling analysts and civil society leaders from across the conflict divide to deepen their knowledge of mechanisms for addressing conflict-related issues, and helping them to share this knowledge with local communities. There is a focus on helping journalists and editors to develop professionally, build relationships across the divide, and learn from peacebuilding in other conflict contexts by providing conflict-sensitivity training and professional mentorship opportunities.

3. INTERNATIONAL ALERT

International Alert has been working in the Caucasus since 1993, encouraging dialogue and cooperation across conflict divides. Our work pursues a transformative approach to peacebuilding in the context, working simultaneously on three interdependent levels: personal transformation, transformation of the discourse, and ultimately, transformation of the context.

a. Personal Transformation

Working on the level of attitudes and relationships, Alert fosters people-to-people contacts and dialogue between the divided communities to overcome the lack of trust, fear and resentment on personal level, breaking down stereotypes and enemy images. At the same time, we encourage the emergence of civic-minded societies, where individuals can see their own role and possibilities in influencing and participating in problem solving at all levels (local, national, international), and in so doing become agents of change.

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Lessons from Northern Ireland,” International Alert, May 2014. <http://epnk.org/resources/lessons-northern-ireland#overlay-context=resourceheres>

With the region still divided after 25 years, a whole generation has grown up without the experience of co-existence, and only know the 'enemy' through secondary sources, official narratives, and state-controlled media. The constructed narratives of each side justify a particular political position, a zero-sum game, cultivating the 'enemy image' of the opposing side, promoting nationalist agendas, and emphasising 'patriotic' values and identity. This situation varies throughout the region and, alongside incomplete democracy and the isolation of some communities, serves to control and manipulate the population's thinking, further entrenching the status quo. The foundation of a positive peace requires a de-isolation of minds, greater empathy with the fears and aspirations of the other side, tolerance, and a shift in mental models away from confrontation towards compromise.

b. Transformation of the Discourse

Working on the level of public debate, we aim to transform the discourse around the conflict so that it is informed by evidence, analysis, and dialogue rather than by propaganda, prejudice and assumption. We work with journalists and with political scientists, economists, cultural figures and other opinion-formers to promote a discourse that is more constructive. It needs to redefine conflict-related issues based on common interests and produce concrete suggestions as to how to move forward.

The 'zero-sum' official narratives disseminated through the education system and state-controlled media have a negative impact on attitudes towards the 'other' and hinder prospects of reconciliation and positive peace taking root. The limited discourse prevents creative ideas and alternative solutions being discussed, as much of the discourse is ideologically driven to protect vested interests. The education system does not teach skills in critical thinking or in presenting arguments from multiple perspectives, obtaining evidence and confirming sources. Editorial policies also limit the freedom of journalists and academics to deviate from the accepted narrative. And even if they do not, journalists and researchers lack access to data and perspectives of the 'other' side. If societies and politicians are going to move out of the current impasse, new evidence-based ideas for transforming the context are needed, taking into account fears and interests of all sides. More layers of society need to be drawn into participating in the discourse on peace, e.g. influential cultural figures and marginalised conflict-affected communities, in order to prepare public attitudes for change.

c. Transformation of Context

This means working on more structural issues, such as the de-isolation of communities, increasing civic participation and activism, fostering interaction across divides, engaging with track one peace processes, international advocacy on 'engagement' and other policies towards the conflict regions, including involvement of the disputed entities in other regional programmes. All this can bring about modest transformation of the contexts which might shift interests (whether it be interests of elites or of the people) and adjust the balance of power so as to contribute to a positive peace.

d. EPNK3 - Envisioning Peace sociological study

The aim of this initiative is to produce fresh analysis from the grassroots highlighting the cost of the conflict. An expert group of ten regional experts in psychology, sociology and journalism from the three entities developed an innovative methodology for qualitative research to stimulate self-reflection and examination of convictions. The outreach methodology incorporates internal and cross-divide dialogue and reaches a wide range of communities, providing insights for analysis and policy-making.

A group of young people from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh conducted a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 110 people living in urban and rural areas, including those along the frontline. The respondents ranged in gender, age and social background. All the interviews were held anonymously so that respondents felt free to speak. Keeping a gender balance was not easy as women either refused to talk, deemed their opinions 'unworthy,' or looked to male relatives for approval during interviews. In Nagorno-Karabakh, people appreciated the opportunity to talk about the conflict and problems they face but had difficulty imagining peace. Respondents in Stepanakert and Shushi were most open, while closer to the frontline it required significant support from the senior experts to reassure the communities about the purpose of the activities and get access for the researchers. Despite the difficulties, the collected data presents a rich body of material for analysis by our expert group. The analysis and dissemination of the report along with policy and practice recommendations will take place in late 2018.

e. EPNK3 - Unheard Voices media project

International Alert has worked with journalists since 2010 by facilitating professional dialogue and capacity-building programmes. Our *Unheard Voices*⁷ project works with a joint team of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakhi journalists to produce materials highlighting the social cost of conflict. Materials are published on a joint page in Armenian and Azeri. This remains the only existing dialogue platform bringing together journalists from all three entities in a joint initiative targeting their own societies.

This work gives the societies rare access to a people-centred view of life on the other side and in their own societies, and offers alternative analysis of events and reflection on the cost of the protracted conflict. It showcases and promotes balanced reporting that reflects diverse perspectives, stimulating debate on social issues of public interest related to the conflict, and implications for the peace process.

A distinctive feature of the initiative is Alert's proactive social media engagement through the open Facebook page⁸ where readers are free to comment on the materials. While we are excited to see that people are engaging with the content, the nature of many comments is often aggressive and offensive to the 'enemy,' which is a telling reflection of the dominating public discourse. There are some positive comments, however, and the number of likes and shares is strong evidence that people on both sides value this rare type of information.

4. IMPACT

It is difficult to undertake any kind of formal assessment of peacebuilding. It is even more difficult to convey results of peacebuilding to the general public. Each side in the conflict has its own view and understanding of the desired results of such interventions. Even mediators are often not always that realistic in their understanding of what constitutes an effective intervention, for example, by attempting to quantify 'how many peacebuilders' emerged from a training workshop. At the other end of the spectrum, there is also the risk that effectiveness is discussed only in terms of the 'process.'

Given the long list of factors hindering progress to peace in the region, and the limited nature of international support in this area, contrasted with inflated expectations, it is hardly surprising that there are cycles of frustration over the

⁷ *Unheard Voices/JamNews*.

⁸ International Alert, *Unheard Voices*, Facebook Page. <https://www.facebook.com/unheardvoices.intalert/>

apparent lack of progress. These days, with a deteriorating context, peacebuilders often justify their work in terms of ‘preserving the space for dialogue,’ or ‘preparing the ground for when conditions are more conducive.’ These are valid objectives and have to be put into perspective. In the meantime, looking back, we can appreciate the significant role that post-conflict peacebuilding measures have made in promoting democratic values and institutions in the region. While the current socio-political realities mean that civil peacebuilding has only a limited influence on the political level, it is nevertheless the only bastion of society working against the totalitarian effect of nationalistic, jingoistic ideologies.

a. External Factors Affecting Progress in Peacebuilding

- Geopolitical forces and external powers play a larger role in determining the decision-making process of elite groups than the long-term interest of the population they represent. This can make the peacebuilding agenda irrelevant at that top level.
- There are no real mechanisms for meaningful dialogue between official and unofficial actors and processes. Monopolisation of the peace process by official institutions leads to the marginalisation of civil society. Peacebuilders in some cases are seen as troublemakers and become targets of criticism in their own society.
- Civil society is weak in every community affected by the conflict. Therefore, it needs more support to strengthen and broaden the reach of alternative thinking. At the same time, the rise of government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) undermines the independence of the civil society sector and the credibility of peacebuilding projects in particular. The risk of politicisation of peacebuilding efforts is increasing.
- There is a huge disparity between the level of investment in war and confrontational ideology and the resources available for building peace. As a result, peacebuilders constantly struggle against a tide of adverse forces, and it can often feel like any achievements made are miniscule.
- The lack of long-term commitment or joint strategy by the international community makes any progress piecemeal and staggered. The absence of coordination – and sometimes outright competition – among civil society actors is equally highlighted as a problem.

b. Shortcomings in Peacebuilding Approaches

- Only small numbers of people are involved in peacebuilding activities and, as a result, the potential for wider outreach is limited. Peacebuilders struggle to balance the need to broaden engagement with providing enough time and space for deeper trust-building processes to mature, which in the long-term lays the foundations for sustainable impact.
- Projects are often limited to narrow groups and do not leverage the potential of those left outside the process – such as retired diplomats, diasporas, businesses, and teachers.
- Until recently, not much effort has been made to engage the younger generation. This group has little experience of contact with the other side and is more heavily influenced by nationalistic rhetoric and enemy images promulgated by mainstream media.
- Work on fostering professionalism, ethical attitudes and cross-border contacts in the media has decreased over the years. Previously established contacts and momentum for joint initiatives have weakened. Building relationships between media professionals is especially important for preventing conflict escalation, as it has the potential to play a positive role in mitigating information warfare.
- Awareness of peacebuilding initiatives and their results is low in the societies. Participants lack resources and capacity to share information and cope with challenging reactions from their communities. This feeds into suspicion and cynicism towards peacebuilding in the societies.

c. Impact

The challenges to peacebuilding have meant that its impact can sometimes be difficult to discern. However, efforts to date are an investment in social capital that can be drawn upon in the future to build the trust, compromise and reconciliation required for a sustainable peace:

- **Communication channels:** Cross-conflict projects are the only way to create and maintain channels for personal contacts and continuous dialogue between all parties to the conflict. In a context where the societies are totally isolated from one another, contacts across the divide have been critical in mitigating the radicalising effects of nationalist rhetoric.
- **Non-political platform:** The civil formats for participation offered by peacebuilding initiatives have given groups excluded from official formats a unique

opportunity to contribute to discussions about the future of the conflict resolution process and a peaceful coexistence.

- **Personal transformation:** An important achievement of peacebuilding activities has been the personal transformation of the individuals involved. This impact is difficult to quantify and thus is often underestimated. Nevertheless, long-term participants develop a deeper understanding and greater tolerance of the other sides. They also become more resistant to myths and stereotypes and more open to compromise.
- **Change agents:** Peacebuilding processes have led to the emergence of a cohort of civil society leaders who understand that mutual trust and compromise are essential for achieving peace. These individuals, who have forged relationships across the conflict divide, can play a crucial role in promoting understanding of views from the other sides and increasing openness to dialogue. Their peacebuilding expertise, vision and motivation can be drawn upon to promote a culture of peace and bring about change in their societies.
- **New faces:** This is particularly challenging but even more important in the post-April environment where young people now have direct experience of a major violent confrontation, and civic activism in general is not a hugely popular enterprise. Nevertheless, since 2016 organisations involved in EPNK3 have actively reached out to and engaged with young people who are new to peacebuilding.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthening regional ties and formats:** While it is useful to focus resources on specific issues in the conflict, approaching conflict transformation through the region's wider geopolitical, economic and social connections offers new entry points for peacebuilding efforts. The combined expertise and networks of peace practitioners in the Caucasus offer a valuable asset that has not been sufficiently utilised.
- **Young people:** After over 20 years since the end of the conflict, the societies are going through a generational change. Peacebuilding should focus on bringing in the new generation which has grown up with no experience of coexistence with the other sides. In turn, young people bring new energy, ideas, and long-term sustainability.
- **Social media:** While the idea of 'plunging' into social media may seem daunting, its potential as a peacebuilding tool has been underused. With propaganda prevailing in mainstream media, entire segments of societies turn to social

media in search of alternative information. For some, it has become a window into the 'enemy's camp,' into which some venture to voice their hatred, but others with genuine curiosity.

- **Encourage transparency and strategic communications:** There will always be highly sensitive elements to peacebuilding, especially when looking into taboo topics. However, experience has taught us that the clandestine nature of some initiatives is self-serving and in the long run more damaging as it creates suspicion. Messaging through a coherent and sensitive strategy is a vital component not only of peacebuilding success, but also its very survival.
- **'Humanisation' of the discourse:** Years of state-sponsored propaganda on all sides of the conflict, and regular casualties on the frontline dehumanise 'the other.' Conflict discourse is fixated on geopolitics and military gains/losses, and lacks reflection on the human and social cost of conflict. Yet empathy remains a strong way of building understanding and social connections. This is a difficult task, however, and given the magnitude of the problem, taking a project-based approach would be a serious miscalculation.
- **Closer cooperation between practitioners and donors:** With civil society efforts being so dependent on donor resources and policy, it is important that policy is informed by analysis. Peacebuilders should provide this analysis, clearly defining what change is needed and the methods and opportunities through which it may be brought about. A more systematic approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning in peacebuilding is an effective tool for this.

QUANTITATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Hrant Mikaelian

THE KARABAKH WAR: ECONOMIC COST AND CONSEQUENCES

1. INTRODUCTION. CONFLICT AND ECONOMY: BASIC CONCEPTS

The economic aspects of the Karabakh war, most often assessed in the context of political analysis, include ways in which the war enhanced poverty and reduced development prospects, the human dimension of the war, and the direct damage to the economies of the region caused by the war.

In the meantime, economists view armed conflicts as irrational actions, since they usually lead to lose-lose situations for all parties involved. Moreover, if economy contributes to national power, then governments should primarily concentrate on economic prosperity rather than international relations.¹ However, the fact that the number of unresolved conflicts worldwide is still large, if not growing, suggests that such considerations do not always have decisive influence on politics.

To assess the impact of the 1992-1994 war in Nagorno-Karabakh on the

¹ Fanny Couloumb, *Economic Theories of Peace and War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

economies of the parties involved, and the impact of the ongoing confrontation on the current economic situation in these entities, it does not suffice to look at the economic trends. The wars in the post-Soviet space were triggered by the collapse of the USSR and the ensuing painful economic transition. Estimation of missed opportunities is an even more difficult task, because it requires understanding what prospects actually existed, which is not always possible. Finally, estimation of the conflict's influence on the economy cannot be reduced to the estimation of damage, because the consequences of the conflict are multifaceted.

Many existing assessments of economic costs of war are practical rather than scholarly studies. The most influential economic analysis of war and peace is J. Keynes' "The Economic Consequences of the Peace," in which he discusses the Treaty of Versailles and its consequences for the Central Powers, especially Germany.² It played a role in the appeasement policy of Germany and Italy (1935-1939) and served as an inspiration for the Marshall Plan for Europe. Lewis Fry Richardson analyzed the causes and consequences of war in "Arms and Insecurity"³ and "Statistics of Deadly Quarrels."⁴

In recent years, the most significant event in the field were debates between Steven Pinker and Nassim Nicholas Taleb, which took place in absentia, on the pages of their publications in 2011-2015. Psychology Professor Steven Pinker claimed in his book, entitled "The Better Angels of Our Nature," that armed violence caused by war, terrorism, or crime, has constantly declined since the Second World War and generally has a long-term tendency to decrease.⁵ This point of view, however, has been questioned by a number of authors⁶ starting with Nassim Nicholas Taleb, who pointed out the excessive optimism of this approach.⁷

² John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1919).

³ Lewis Fry Richardson, *Arms and Insecurity: A Mathematical Study of the Causes and Origins of War* (Pittsburgh, Pa.; Quadrangle Books, Chicago, Ill., 1960).

⁴ Lewis Fry Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (Pittsburgh: Boxwood Press, 1960).

⁵ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature* (New York, NY: Viking, 2011).

⁶ For instance, see Erik Kain, "The Decline of Violence and the New Peace," *Forbes*, September 28, 2011. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2011/09/28/the-decline-of-violence-and-the-new-peace/>

⁷ Pasquale Cirillo, and Nassim Nicholas Taleb, "On the Statistical Properties and Tail Risk of Violent Conflicts," 2015. <http://www.fooledbyrandomness.com/violence.pdf>

There have been several investigations on the cost of conflicts in the last decade, namely “The Economic Cost of Conflict” by Hannes Mueller,⁸ looking at various types of conflicts, including interventions and civil wars, and an attempt to assess global economic costs of conflict by Bozzolu, Bruck and Sottas.⁹ Publications on the socioeconomic aspects of war and peace include case studies, such as the war in Syria,¹⁰ Darfur,¹¹ Sri Lanka,¹² the American wars and the wars in the Middle East.¹³

The debate on the economic consequences of armed conflicts in the South Caucasus has been ongoing for a long time amidst a lack of factual evidence. There is no reliable estimate of the cost of economic transition to post-Soviet societies, although it may appear easy enough to make one. In reality, such an estimate requires distinguishing the direct influence of the transition from its long-term consequences, such as the weakening of institutions at the first stage of transformation, the economic policies implemented by new independent states, the increase of crime, and the outbreak of armed conflicts. Finally, it is necessary to adjust existing statistical data, given, on the one hand, the manipulation of official statistics aimed at overstating economic growth rates, and on the other, the unaccounted shadow economy, which prevents adequate assessment of the entire volume of production and consumption and correspondingly understates economic growth rates.

Paata Leiashvili wrote about the necessity to study the economic aspects of post-Soviet ethnic conflicts. He posed a number of questions, many of which he left unanswered; however, the basic assertion of his paper is that the causes of

⁸ Hannes Mueller, *The Economic Cost of Conflict*, The International Growth Centre Report, August 2013. <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Mueller-2013-Working-Paper2.pdf>

⁹ Carlos Bozzoli, Brück Tilman, and Simon Sottas, “A Survey of the Global Economic Costs of Conflict,” *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 21: 2 (2012), 165-76.

¹⁰ Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR), *Confronting Fragmentation! Impact of Syrian Crisis Report* (2016). [http://www.sy.undp.org/content/dam/syria/docs/Framework/SCPR-report-Confronting-fragmentation-2015-EN%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.sy.undp.org/content/dam/syria/docs/Framework/SCPR-report-Confronting-fragmentation-2015-EN%20(1).pdf)

¹¹ Hamid E. Ali, “Estimate of the Economic Cost of Armed Conflict: A Case Study from Darfur,” *Defense and Peace Economics*, Vol. 24: 6 (2013), 503-519.

¹² Renuka K. Ganegodage, and Alicia N. Rambaldi, “Economic Consequences of War: Evidence from Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Asian Economics*, Vol. 30 (February 2014), 42-53.

¹³ Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11*, Congressional Research Service, December 8, 2014; Institute for Economics and Peace, *Economic Consequences of War on the U. S. Economy* (2015). http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-Economic-Consequences-of-War-on-US-Economy_0.pdf

ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus included contradictions between emerging states and the struggle of new elites for resources.¹⁴

Publications dedicated to economic aspects of the Karabakh conflict are scarce. Their authors focused on specific aspects of the conflict without assessing the overall economic consequences of the conflict for both sides. The parties themselves add almost nothing to scholarly understanding of the economic aspect of the conflict. Azerbaijan is limited to calculating its own damages, the assessment of which grows annually and has already exceeded \$800 billion.¹⁵ In Armenia in recent years there have been no publications on this topic.¹⁶

2. CLOSED BORDERS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

The wars of the first half of the 1990s left a legacy of closed borders across the South Caucasus. The entire interstate border between Azerbaijan and Armenia is closed, including the Nakhichevan region. Any kind of movement of people or goods is blocked across the de facto border of Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan. The Armenian-Turkish border is closed as well. Thus, the communications constructed more than a hundred years ago, in particular, the Kars-Gyumri railway and the bridge over the Araks near the village of Margara in Armenia, do not operate.

It is worth noting that the conflicts in Georgia have also led to closed borders. The borders between the main part of Georgia and its breakaway regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – are completely or mostly impassable. Until 1996, the border between Russia and Abkhazia was closed, and in the 2000s the land border between Georgia and Russia was sealed as well. The latter border is now open, and since 2011 there has been a dialogue on transit through the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with moderate progress.¹⁷

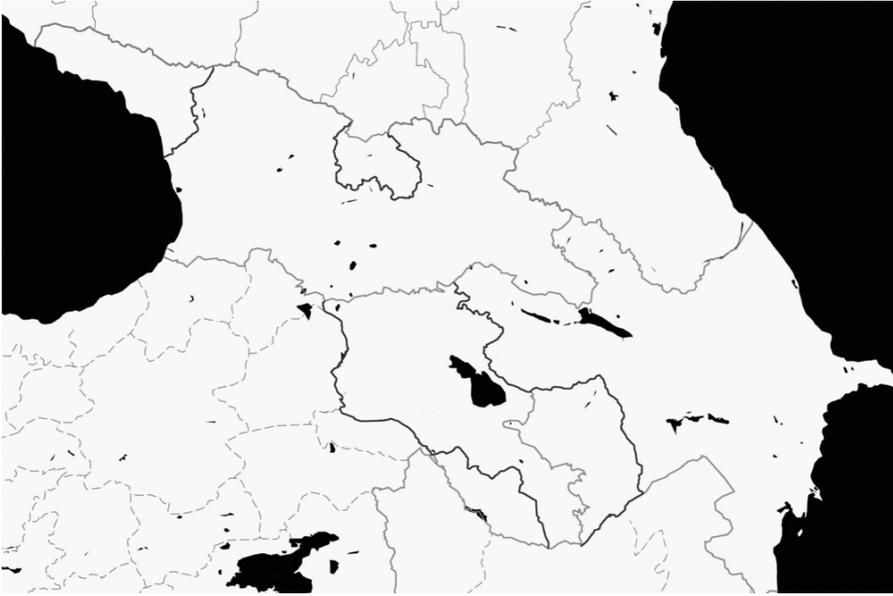
¹⁴ Paata Leishvili, “Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts: The Economic Aspects Require an in-Depth Study,” *The Caucasus and Globalization*, Vol. 1:2 (2007), 34-40.

¹⁵ Rashid Shirinov, “Azerbaijan’s Damage from Armenian Occupation Surpasses \$819B,” *Azernews*, February 21, 2017. <https://www.azernews.az/aggression/109244.html>

¹⁶ See: Phil Champain, “The Cost of Stalemate. Economic Aspects of the Nagorny Karabakh Conflict,” *Accord*, issue. 17 (Conciliation Resources, 2005). http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord17_18Thecostofstalemate_2005_ENG_0.pdf; Magdalena Lis, “No Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh: Economic and Political Incentives for the Perpetuation of the Azerbaijani-Armenian Conflict,” University of Leiden (2016). https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/44244/MLis_Master_Thesis%20final.pdf?sequence=1

¹⁷ Crisis Group International, *Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Time to Talk Trade*, International Crisis Group, Report #249 (May 24, 2018). <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/249-abkhazia-and-south-ossetia-time-talk-trade>

Figure 1. Closed borders in South Caucasus as a result of conflicts



Note: the solid line represents currently closed borders; the dotted line represents borders that were closed at some point but later reopened

Azerbaijan initiated the closure of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border even before the collapse of the USSR. When mass protests began in Stepanakert, the public opinion in the Armenian SSR and subsequently the leadership of still-Soviet Armenia supported the Karabakh movement. With a view to punish Yerevan and influence its policy, Azerbaijan resorted to an economic blockade. The first attempts to prevent the passage of goods to the Armenian SSR via Azerbaijan were made in 1988, and in 1989 the border was almost fully sealed. The closure took place in stages from the end of July to the beginning of September. Officially, the blockade was announced on September 4, 1989.¹⁸ Over 27 days of September 1989, 36,180 railway wagons of various cargo were supposed to enter Armenia from Azerbaijan by rail, but only 6,118 wagons or less than 17% did.¹⁹

¹⁸ Tatul Hakobyan, "The Year of 1989; The Members of Karabakh Movement are Set Free," in Tatul Hakobyan, *Karabakh Diary* (Yerevan: Antares, 2010, in Russian). <http://www.aniarc.am/2015/05/09/karabakh-diary-russian-89/>

¹⁹ Central State Historical Archives of the Republic of Armenia, "On Economic Losses Caused by the Blockade of the Republic" (in Russian), Fund 163, register 145, case 155.

The loss of transportation links was particularly sensitive because the Armenian SSR was heavily included in inter-republic cooperation. In 1988, the share of imports in the consumption of the Armenian SSR was 29%, the highest among all the Soviet republics (7 other republics had similar indicators). 28% of all products produced in Armenia were exported, also the highest indicator among all republics (3 other republics had similar indicators).²⁰ This is not surprising given the relatively high level of consumption and production in Armenia, as well as its small size. Armenia was heavily dependent on transit routes: by the end of the Soviet period, about 85% of Armenia's foreign trade passed via the Azerbaijani SSR, and another 15%, via the Georgian SSR.²¹ As of 2018, around 70% of Armenia's foreign trade takes place via Georgia.²²

During the Soviet period, the blockade of Soviet Armenia by Soviet Azerbaijan was not completed and there was still the option to appeal to the Soviet centre that only disappeared following the disintegration of the USSR. It was still possible to get some cargo across using bribes and arrangements with the authorities, but only in exceptional cases. It is equally important that Turkey joined Azerbaijan in its blockade of Armenia. The Turkish authorities justified the blockade by support to Azerbaijan and protest against Armenians' actions in Nagorno-Karabakh. The blockade operated from the very beginning of 1992, with occasional interruptions for supplies of international humanitarian aid upon the request of the United States.²³ Land communication between Armenia and Turkey has not been re-established to this day.

Azerbaijan was much less vulnerable to border closure compared to Armenia, for several reasons. First, Azerbaijan shares a land border with Russia. Second, Azerbaijan possesses its own fuel reserves. Third, Azerbaijan was less heavily integrated into Soviet production chains. The Nakhichevan region remained Azerbaijan's weakness spot, which, already at the time of independence, became similarly blocked as a result of the war, leading to mass migration of its population.

The economic blockade that exists between Armenia and Azerbaijan implies not only interruption of communication, but also a blockade of goods produced

²⁰ The USSR State Committee on Statistics, Collection of Statistical Materials 1990 (Moscow: Finance and Statistics, 1991, in Russian): 234.

²¹ Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook 1992/ Armenia. <http://www.umsl.edu/services/govdocs/wofact92/wf930017.txt>

²² "President: Georgian Leadership Understands Importance of Gas Transit to Armenia," *Arka*, January 27, 2011. <http://arka.am/en/news/economy/23663/>

²³ Hayk Demoyan, *Turkey and the Karabakh Conflict. Comparative Historical Analysis* (Yerevan, 2006, in Russian).

by the other country. Until the mid-2000s, a large market operated in Sadakhlo, near the Armenian-Georgian border, where semi-legal trade flourished between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. As part of Georgia's anti-corruption policy implemented in 2004-2007, this market was shut down. In addition, after Ilham Aliyev came to power, Azerbaijan banned the entry of Armenians (both Armenian citizens and ethnic Armenians from other countries); scandals regularly arose when Armenian products turned up in the Azerbaijani market. After the April 2016 escalation, which led to significant toughening of attitudes in Armenia,²⁴ such scandals also began to arise in Armenia with regards to Azerbaijani goods in its markets.²⁵

As a result, the countries of the region began to build alternatives to the old transport infrastructure, incurring great costs in the process. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan invested heavily in roads that would replace the railway that used to connect Armenia and Azerbaijan via the Nakhichevan exclave along the Iranian border. Azerbaijan spent \$3.4 billion to build the Baku-Kars railway²⁶ which will eventually connect Baku to Nakhijevan,²⁷ Armenia is building the North-South highway with big delays due to the high cost of construction. Including bridges and tunnels, the highway will cost \$1.5 billion to build;²⁸ a railroad would have cost \$ 3.5 billion,²⁹ and its construction was therefore postponed indefinitely.

In the Soviet times, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was better connected to Baku than Yerevan: communications were oriented towards Azerbaijan and there were no direct roads to Armenia. Once it was blocked by Azerbaijan in 1988-1989, Nagorno-Karabakh found itself on the verge of starvation;

²⁴ Hrant Mikaelian, "Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh," Caucasus Institute, 2017. <http://c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/2017-Karabakh-Working-Paper.pdf>

²⁵ Ara Khachatourian, "Azerbaijani Apples Wind up in Armenian Stores; Authorities Baffled," *The Armenian Weekly*, April 30, 2017. <https://armenianweekly.com/2017/04/30/azerbaijani-apples/>

²⁶ "Case Study: the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway," *ITE Transport & Logistics*, August 2017. <http://www.transport-exhibitions.com/Market-Insights/Turkey-and-Eurasia/Case-study-the-Baku-Tbilisi-Kars-railway>

²⁷ "Turkey seeks to build an alternative road to Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway," *Daily Sabah Business*, May 31, 2017. <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2017/06/01/turkey-seeks-to-build-an-alternative-road-to-baku-tbilisi-kars-railway>

²⁸ North-South Investment Program. <http://northsouth.am/en>

²⁹ "Construction of rail link between Armenia and Iran is not an end in itself, prime minister says," *Arka*, January 17, 2018. http://arka.am/en/news/business/construction_of_rail_link_between_armenia_and_iran_is_not_an_end_in_itself_prime_minister_says/

now its economy is completely reoriented towards Armenia, with two roads connecting Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh already operating (the newly built Vardenis-Martakert highway was opened in 2017)³⁰ and the construction of new communications between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh under discussion.

One way to assess the direct impact of closed borders and war on the economy is to look at foreign trade statistics.

*Table 1. Foreign trade of Armenia in 1990-2003 (mln dollars, at current prices)*³¹

	Foreign trade turnover	Percentile index, 1990=100	Export	Percentile index, 1990=100	Import	Percentile index, 1990=100	Export, % of turnover
1990	4666.4	100	2001.5	100	2664.9	100	43
1991	2413.1	51.7	896.1	44.8	1517.0	56.9	37
1992	288.8	6.2	82.9	4.1	205.9	7.7	29
1993	410.4	8.8	156.2	7.8	254.2	9.5	38
1994	609.3	13.1	215.5	10.8	393.8	14.8	35
1995	944.8	20.2	270.9	13.5	673.9	25.3	29
1996	1146.1	24.6	290.3	14.5	855.8	32.1	25
1997	1125.0	24.1	232.8	11.6	892.2	33.5	21
1998	1123.0	24.1	220.5	11.0	902.5	33.9	20
1999	1043.0	22.4	231.7	11.6	811.3	30.4	22
2000	1183.9	25.4	299.2	14.9	884.7	33.2	25
2001	1218.9	26.1	341.3	17.1	877.6	32.9	28
2002	1493.1	32.0	505.9	25.3	987.2	37.0	34
2003	1964.5	42.1	685.0	34.2	1279.5	48.0	35

Source: National Statistical Service of Armenia, World Bank, author's calculations

As we can see, in 1992 Armenia lost 96% of its export and recovered only a third in 2003. This was caused by poor access to foreign markets due to the blockade, and the heavy burden of transit fees. The total foreign trade turnover of all former Soviet republics that entered the CIS declined by 43% in 1991 and

³⁰ "Armenia Analyst: Key Event in 2017 Was Construction of Northern Section of Road to Karabakh," *Artsakhpress*, January 9, 2018. <https://artsakhpress.am/eng/news/78833/armenia-analyst-key-event-in-2017-was-construction-of-northern-section-of-road-to-karabakh.html>

³¹ National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, *Peculiarities and Stages of Economic Reforms in Armenia 1991-1998* (Yerevan 1999), 11; National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia 1996-1998* (Yerevan 2001), 416. World Bank *Monthly Economic Monitor*.

by an additional 20% in 1992.³² The cumulative decline was 55% compared to 94% in the case of Armenia. Also, the share of exports in Armenia's foreign trade turnover fell from 43% in 1990 to 35% in 2003.

*Table 2. Foreign trade of Azerbaijan in 1990-2003 (mln dollars, at current prices)*³³

	Foreign trade turnover	Percentile index, 1990=100	Export	Percentile index, 1990=100	Import	Percentile index, 1990=100	Export, % of turnover
1990	6922*	100	3653*	100	3269*	100	53
1991	4213*	60.9	2215*	60.6	1998*	61.1	53
1992	2569	37.1	1571	43.0	998	30.5	61
1993	1629	23.5	993	27.2	636	19.5	61
1994	1443	20.8	665	18.2	778	23.8	46
1995	1303	18.8	635	17.4	668	20.4	49
1996	1591	23.0	630	17.2	961	29.4	40
1997	1574	22.7	780	21.4	794	24.3	50
1998	1681	24.3	605	16.6	1076	32.9	36
1999	1965	28.4	929	25.4	1036	31.7	47
2000	2917	42.1	1745	47.8	1172	35.9	60
2001	3745	54.1	2314	63.3	1431	43.8	62
2002	3833	55.4	2167	59.3	1666	51.0	57
2003	5218	75.4	2592	71.0	2626	80.3	50

Note: cells marked with * contain the author's estimate

Source: World Bank, IMF, author's calculation

Table 2 shows that Azerbaijan's foreign trade suffered much less compared to that of Armenia. The rate of decline in Azerbaijan's foreign trade did not differ significantly from the CIS average. The consistently high share of exports in the foreign trade turnover was caused by the prevalence of oil and other hydrocarbons in exports.

It can thus be concluded that while Azerbaijan's foreign trade was affected more by transformational decline than by the war, in the case of Armenia the impact of the war and the ensuing blockade was much higher.

³² Statistical Committee of CIS, Statistical Yearbook (Moscow: Finstatinform, 1993, in Russian), 5. http://istmat.info/files/uploads/36076/strany-chleny_sng_1993.pdf

³³ The World Bank, *Statistical Handbook 1993. States of the Former USSR, Studies of Economies in Transformation*, n. 8 (September 1993), 108. documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/519371468740998853/pdf/multi-page.pdf

3. MILITARIZATION OF ECONOMY AND SOCIETY: SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS

The arms race between Azerbaijan and Armenia has resulted in less spending on infrastructure and social welfare but more spending on security. Depending on the year, between 10% and 20% of the budget spending in both countries was allocated to the army. On average, in 2008-2017, 15.7% of the annual budget of Armenia and 11.5% of the annual budget of Azerbaijan³⁴ was spent on defence,³⁵ way above the 3% average for EU countries. These figures do not include military pensions or investments in the military industry.

Countries' militarization level is calculated by the Global Militarization Index, issued annually by the Bonn International Center for Conversion.³⁶ In the 2017 index (reflecting the situation in the previous year), Azerbaijan dropped from the list of the 10 most militarized economies for the first time since 2010, likely due to reduction in military spending, or the fact that Azerbaijan classified some of its military expenditure. In the official publication of the Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, military spending is not separately allocated and is likely to fall under the category of "other expenses" or be divided between several categories. The share of "other expenses" in the state budget expenditures increased from 22% in 2009 to 28% in 2013 and 36% in 2017.³⁷ As to Armenia, it has for years ranked third in the Global Militarization Index, after Israel and Singapore, ahead of Russia and South Korea.

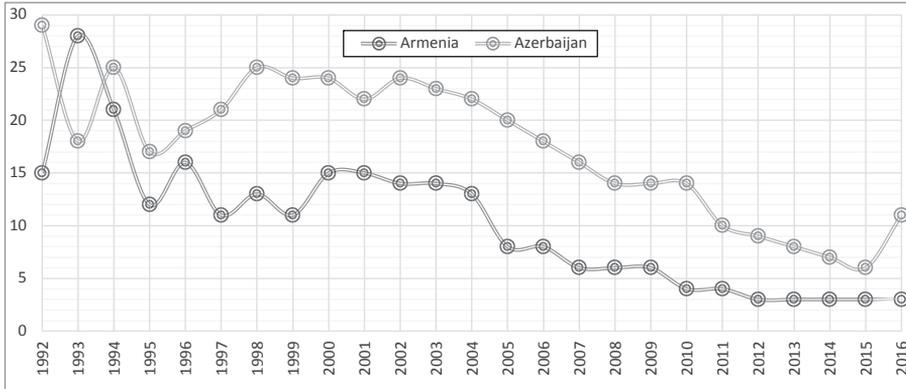
³⁴ According to SIPRI, significant amount of money were spent on "special defense projects" also, which were not included in the military expenditures of Azerbaijan.

³⁵ See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

³⁶ Max M. Mutschler, *Global Militarization Index 2017*, Bonn International Center for Conversion. https://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx_bicctools/GMI_2017_EN.pdf

³⁷ Raw data is available here: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/finance/en/006en.xls>

Figure 2. Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Global Militarization Index 1992-2016



Note: figures in the chart indicate the country's rank in the index

Source: Global Militarization Index, Bonn International Center for Conversion

Even though Armenia's degree of militarization is higher, Azerbaijan's spending on defence is much larger than Armenia's. Over the last 10 years, Armenia spent \$4.2 billion and Azerbaijan spent \$23.5 billion on defence.³⁸ Azerbaijan can afford such expenses almost exclusively due to the export of hydrocarbons, which in 2017 accounted for 90% of all exports of Azerbaijan.³⁹ Armenia, in its turn, increases its militarization in order to balance Azerbaijan's spending on the army.

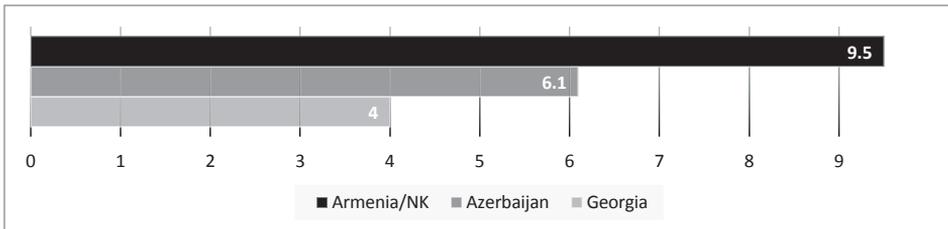
The fact that 36% of Azerbaijan's budget expenditures are allocated to "other expenses" shows that militarization reduces the transparency of public spending, creates conditions for using shadow mechanisms in public administration, and increases corruption risks. In Armenia in the 2000s the concept of a "grey budget" was often discussed, referring to the combined shadow incomes allocated to the army by the state, large businesses and corrupt officials. There is no reliable evidence of the existence of a stable "grey budget" in the past, which, however, does not rule out the possibility that donations from businesses and off-budget funds were used in Armenia to finance the army. In NKR, defence expenditures are not shown in the budget as a separate category so their amount can only be assessed indirectly.

³⁸ See SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.

³⁹ The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Macro-economic Indicators and Social Development of the Country, January, 2018 (in Azerbaijani). https://www.stat.gov.az/news/source/2018_01ay.zip

Another important circumstance is that as a result of the prevailing “neither peace nor war” situation, the army becomes the country’s largest or one of the largest employers. A significant part of the population serves in the army or serves the army. The ratio of military personnel to the working-age de facto male population exceeds 9% in Armenia and 6% in Azerbaijan. We can thus argue that militarization excludes a significant portion of working-age population from the economy.

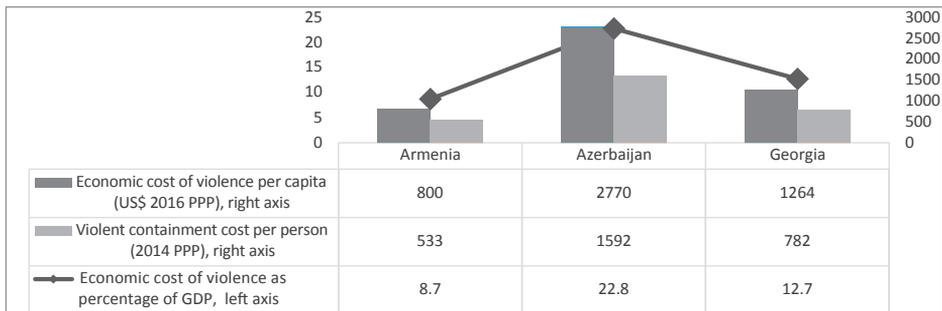
Figure 3. Share of working-age males in active military service (as of 2018)



Source: Author’s estimates

There are various estimates of overall security spending, primarily military expenditure by the government, local government bodies, economic entities and the population itself. If we take the Global Peace Index as the basis, it turns out that Armenia has the lowest security spending among the countries of the South Caucasus, 8.7% of GDP, compared with 22.8% in Azerbaijan and 12.7% in Georgia. These data are presented in the figure below.

Figure 4. Economic cost of violence in 2016-2017 in numbers



Sources: Global Peace Index 2016, Global Peace Index 2017

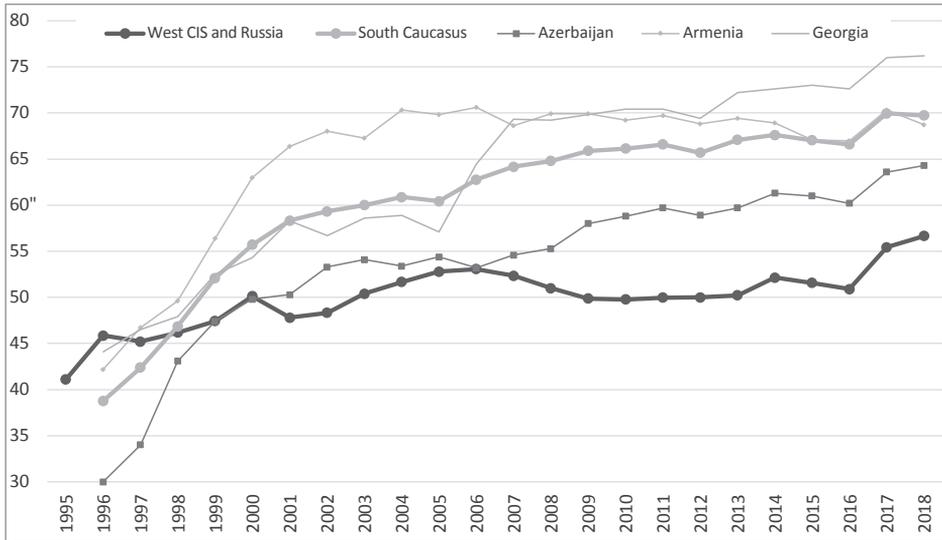
When speaking of economic consequences of the conflict, it is also necessary to discuss its influence on the public administration sector. Military competition implies total mobilization of state resources. However, due to the lack of economic resources, the state is quickly faced with the need to obtain new funds. There are several ways to do this: selling natural resources (short-term), improving efficiency (medium-term) and economic growth (long-term). Relying chiefly on the sale of its fossil fuels, Azerbaijan did not until recently feel the need for reforms. Armenia, conversely, is in an asymmetric conflict with Azerbaijan, and had to improve the quality of its governance in order to be able to compete.

This is evidenced by the prevalence of shadow economy in the South Caucasus states. According to the author's estimates, in 2017 the shadow economy amounted to 24% of Georgia's GDP, 28% of Armenia's GDP and 50% of Azerbaijan's GDP.⁴⁰ At the same time, the most active reduction of the shadow economy in Armenia took place at times when its confrontation with Azerbaijan was aggravating: in 2013-2014 and in 2017. Reduction of the shadow economy has been viewed by Armenian experts and authorities as a resource for increasing public finances, and this has boosted motivation for reforms. The Index of Economic Freedom compiled since 1995 provides reliable indicators on economic and institutional reforms.⁴¹ Some of its data for post-Soviet countries are reflected in the figure below.

⁴⁰ Hrant Mikaelian, "Comparison of the Economic Repercussions of the Post-Soviet Approaches to Integration on the Example of the South Caucasus Countries," in Alexander B. Krylov, Alexey V. Kuznetsov, and Gennadiy I. Chufirin, eds. *Post-Soviet Area: the Role of External Factors. Collection of Articles* (Moscow: IMEMO, 2018, in Russian), 179-198.

⁴¹ At the same time, one should not underestimate EU influence on technical and financial assistance to institutional and legislative reforms and strengthening political agenda for it, especially in Armenia and Georgia.

Figure 5. Index of Economic Freedom



Source: Heritage Foundation

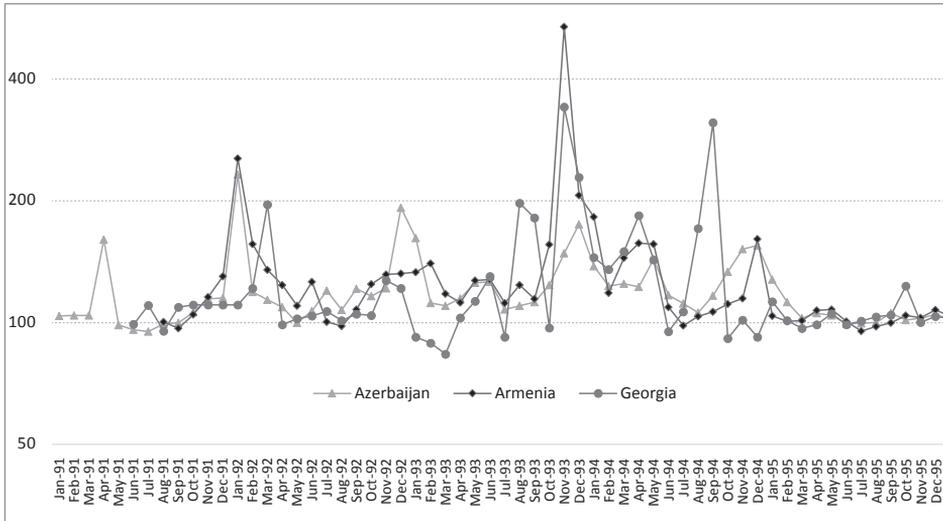
According to data presented in Figure 5, the initially lagging countries of the South Caucasus have improved their performance since the late 1990s. Between 2000 and 2006, Armenia held the leading position in this respect among South Caucasus countries, and in 2010, Georgia took over as the regional leader in economic freedom. Western CIS countries and Russia are in relative stagnation. It is noteworthy that in the 2018 ranking, all three countries of the South Caucasus are ahead of countries of the Western CIS, including Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. This reflects the South Caucasus states' efforts to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of their economies, creating long-term prerequisites for economic growth. Armenia and Azerbaijan may also be driven by the desire to increase resources that they can use for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

4. MACROECONOMIC EFFECT OF THE KARABAKH WAR

Economic data of the early 1990s allow little room for examining the dynamic in real time. Some types of statistical data were only collected from a later period, some (for example, employment statistics) are not reliable. Statistical data on inflation, produced at monthly intervals, are relatively reliable. In the case of the economies of the South Caucasus, in periods when they do not face external shocks, the consumer price index fluctuates within $\pm 1\%$ per month and $\pm 10\%$ per year. However, during the years of the Karabakh war, inflation fluctuated in

a much larger range, exceeding 5000%. In December 1993 compared with December 1992, prices in Armenia increased on average by a factor of 110.⁴² The monthly dynamic of consumer price indicators in the countries of the South Caucasus is examined in detail below.

Figure 6. Monthly consumer price indicators in the South Caucasus, 1991-1995



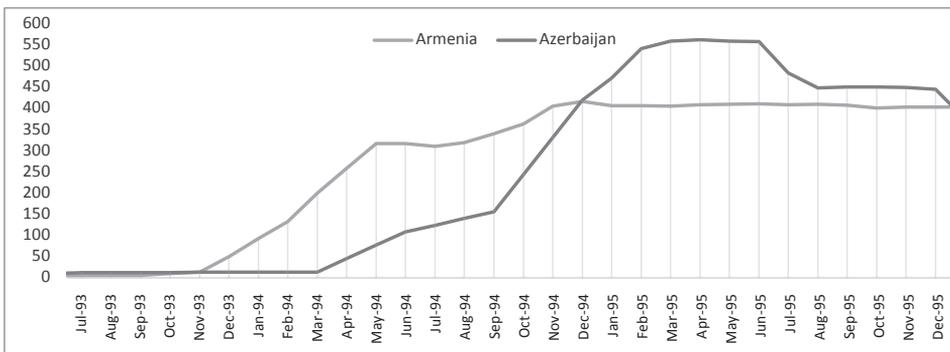
Sources: World Bank, CIS Statistical Committee

Following the surge in prices in early 1992 in both Azerbaijan and Armenia, when the transition to market price regulation was taking place, the prices almost stabilized, and then started growing again in autumn 1992. In Armenia the price increase stopped with the end of the war. By May 1994, the CPI in Armenia amounted to 156.5%; it dropped to 109.1% in June and 98.2% in July. Then there was a short-term surge in December 1994, after which prices did not fluctuate by more than 8% per month. In Azerbaijan, the end of the war did not immediately lead to tangible stabilization; it was only starting from March 1995 that the monthly CPI dropped to acceptable values. This may have been due to contrasting perceptions of the outcome of the war in the two countries: Armenia considered itself the winner and Azerbaijan, the loser.

⁴² Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS, Commonwealth of Independent States in 1996, Statistical Yearbook (Moscow 1997, in Russian). http://istmat.info/files/uploads/53218/sodruzhestvo_nezavisimyh_gosudarstv_v_1996_godu_ezhgodnik.pdf 28

The correlation between the Armenian and Azerbaijani consumer price indicators is quite high: 0.45 for the period from August 1991 to May 1994. If we exclude the surge in November 1993, when Armenia had a CPI of 538% right before the belated introduction of the Armenian dram to replace the Soviet ruble, we obtain a total correlation index of 0.78. This figure reflects the proximity of Armenia's and Azerbaijan's CPI and their dependence on the same set of factors, including the general economic situation in the post-Soviet space and the Karabakh war. The same trends are manifest in the dynamics of the exchange rate of domestic currencies to the dollar. Considering that imported goods make up a significant part of domestic consumption, the consumer price index and the exchange rate are closely interrelated.

Figure 7. Exchange rate dynamics, local currency to USD in Armenia and Azerbaijan

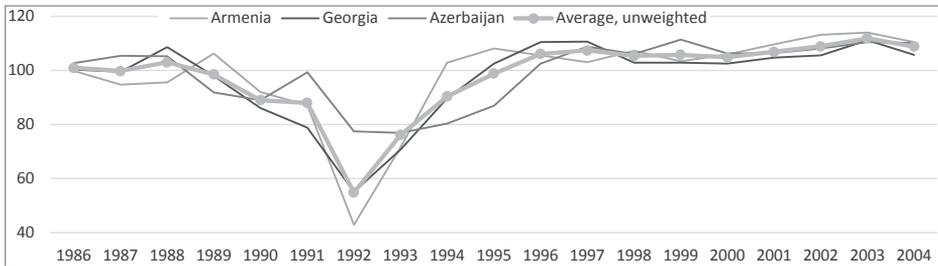


Note: Armenia's data row represents the exchange rate of the Armenian dram to the US dollar after December 1993 (before December 1993, it shows the rate of 200 Soviet rubles per USD). Azerbaijan's data row was calibrated to be comparable to the rate of the Armenian dram divided by 10.

Source: World Bank, Author's calculations

To assess the overall macroeconomic effect of the Karabakh war on the economies of the countries concerned, it is necessary to consider the dynamics of the countries' GDP for the entire period of transit. It is also interesting to compare economic trends in Armenia and Azerbaijan with those in Georgia, a country that was also engaged in ethno-political conflicts and faced two episodes of internal armed confrontation. The data is presented in the chart below.

Figure 8. Dynamics of annual GDP in the South Caucasus during the initial stage of economic transformation

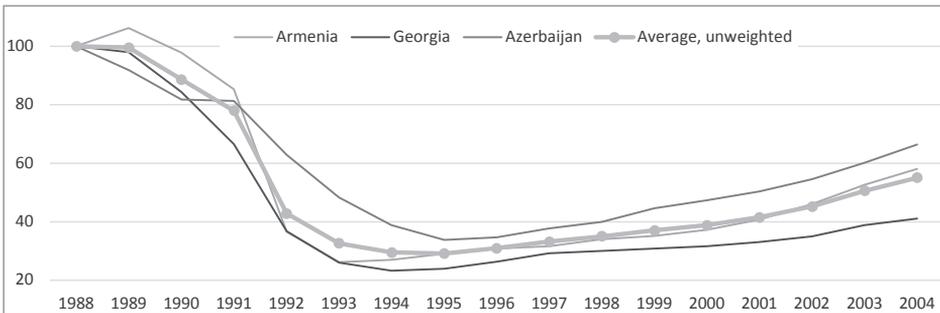


Note: Data for Armenia was recalculated by the author due to low accuracy of the official data of the time.

Sources: IMF,⁴³ Conference Board,⁴⁴ Author's calculations

Considering the significant decline during the transition period, especially in 1992-1993, which happened in all three countries of the South Caucasus, we can estimate the cumulative decline of the economy. By the end of the initial stage of transition, the three economies just reached 50% of their pre-transition productivity.

Figure 9. Cumulative GDP growth in South Caucasus in 1989-2004



Note: The cumulative GDP growth indicates ratio of the real GDP in the corresponding year to the real GDP in the base year. In 2004, Azerbaijan's GDP declined by 34% compared to 1988, Armenia's GDP – by 42%, Georgia's – by 59%.

Sources: IMF, Conference Board, author's calculations

⁴³ IMF, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2017. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/02/weodata/index.aspx>

⁴⁴ The Conference Board, Total Economy Database, Output, Labor and Labor Productivity, 1950-2018. <https://www.conference-board.org/data/economydatabase/index.cfm?id=27762>

Compared to the last pre-Perestroika year, 1985, only Azerbaijan's economy achieved complete recovery by 2017, while Armenia and Georgia still have not reached their late Soviet level of economic development. However, even in Azerbaijan, the GDP has increased chiefly due to increased oil and gas production, which constitutes, according to Azerbaijani statistics, 90% of its total exports.

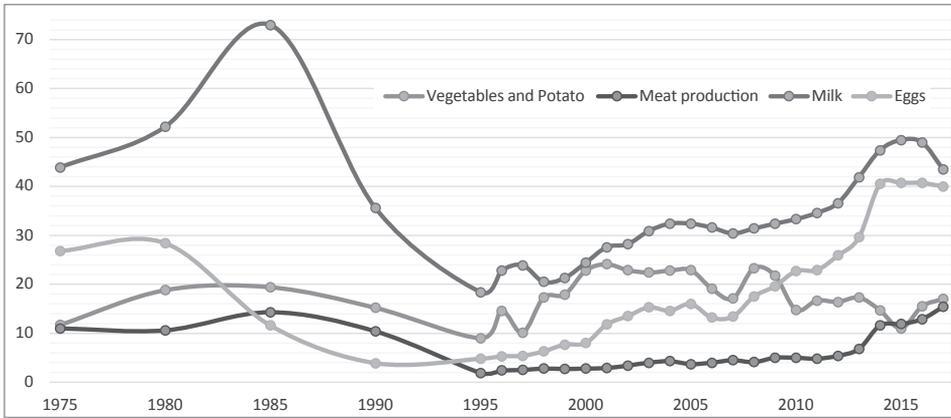
The economy of Georgia experienced the greatest damage. At its worst, recession attained over 75% of total production. For Georgia, this was the time of territorial losses, and since they were associated with economic losses, this may have caused the greater decline in the Georgian economy.

The lowest point of economic decline in the post-Soviet economies was in 1996, except for the Asian crisis of 1998 that hit Russia and a number of other countries. By that time, the countries of the South Caucasus already resumed economic growth. For accurate calculations, it is necessary to accurately model all the circumstances that affected the economic dynamics of that period. If we take as the baseline the average annual unweighted growth rates of the countries of the western part of the CIS (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia) and compare them with those of Armenia and Azerbaijan, we can get an idea of the GDP loss caused by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. By 1996, the GDP of the western part of the CIS decreased by 49.3% compared to 1988. Deviations down from this number may indicate the economic cost of the Karabakh war.

At that time, Armenia's GDP shrank by 66%, and Azerbaijan's, by 60%. According to a rough estimate, Armenia's loss from the actual war amounted to 39.5% of its GDP, and Azerbaijan's, to 31.7% of its GDP. The economy of Azerbaijan suffered less than the economy of Armenia, despite the fact that the territory of Soviet Armenia was almost unaffected by the fighting, since most of the armed clashes took place in the territory of Soviet Azerbaijan. However, Armenia suffered the greatest losses from the blockade that was organized by Azerbaijan, supported by Turkey, and aggravated by the situation in Georgia, communication via which was almost impossible at the time.

It is hard to estimate the losses of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, as little data is available. In Soviet times, gross regional products were not calculated, and the GDP of Nagorno-Karabakh was only calculated starting from 1995. Existing data on the production of certain types of agricultural products make it possible to assess the decline in the agricultural sector caused by the war.

Figure 9. Natural indicators of agricultural production in Nagorno-Karabakh, 1975-2017 (in 1000 tones)



Source: National Archives of Armenia,⁴⁵ Sarumyan,⁴⁶ NKR Official Statistical Publications⁴⁷

The index of agricultural production in 1996 was only 16.3% of the 1990 level (for comparison, in Armenia the 1996 index was 83.9%). The economy of Nagorno-Karabakh suffered much more damage than the economies of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and even the sector of the economy that is least subject to transformational recession – agriculture – may have suffered a 70% reduction of the total production volume because of the war.

Data on total volumes of industrial output in Nagorno-Karabakh is not available for 1991-1996, but it can be estimated based on the dynamics of the light

⁴⁵ Central State Historical Archives of the Republic of Armenia, “Statistical Report of Nagorno-Karabakh, 1985-1996,” Fund 163, register 145, case 372 (in Russian).

⁴⁶ Nune Sarumyan, “Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province in 1960-1988” (PhD diss, Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan: Limush, 2008, in Russian), 130-154.

⁴⁷ Artsakh Republic National Statistical Service, Statistical Yearbook of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, 1995-1999. <http://www.stat-nkr.am/en/2010-11-24-11-18-12/1995-1999>

Artsakh Republic National Statistical Service, Statistical Yearbook of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, 2000-2006. <http://www.stat-nkr.am/en/2010-11-24-11-18-12/2000-2006>

Artsakh Republic National Statistical Service, Statistical Yearbook of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, 2007-2013. <http://www.stat-nkr.am/en/2010-11-24-11-18-12/2007-2013>

Artsakh Republic National Statistical Service, Statistical Yearbook of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, 2010-2016. <http://www.stat-nkr.am/en/2010-11-24-11-18-12/2010-2016>

Artsakh Republic National Statistical Service, The Socio-Economic Situation of NKR in January-December 2017 (in Russian). <http://stat-nkr.am/ru/component/content/article/818-----2017->

industry. The volume of production of the light industry in Nagorno-Karabakh dropped by 88.3% in 1991-1996, and electricity consumption went down by 71.3%.⁴⁸ The volume of trade in Nagorno-Karabakh also declined: the number of trade and catering enterprises decreased from 39 in 1985 to 11 in 1996, and trade areas fell by 73.2%.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

It is hard to assess economic damage caused by the war because the impact of a war is complex in itself. It creates uncertainty, thereby negatively affecting both domestic and foreign investment. Closure of borders seriously complicates foreign trade, thus undermining both domestic consumption (due to higher costs of goods transportation) and production (since it complicates the export of manufactured goods and access to the international market). The risk of war also reduces the flow of tourists to the region. As a result, the level of international cooperation decreases, slowing down the pace of economic growth.

By 2003, Azerbaijan's exports amounted to 71% of the 1990 figure, and Armenia's exports, to just 34%, which can serve as a good illustration of the consequences of the land blockade of Armenia.

Consequences of the war include increase of military and security spending. This leads to budget deficit and greater public debt, as well as reduced investment in infrastructure. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan are at the top of the world's militarization index. Azerbaijan's militarization rating slightly decreased in 2017, while Armenia remains the third most militarized country in the world.

Another factor is the loss of human resources: the war increases emigration of the population, including in the form of a brain drain. Reduced level of professional competence in various areas leads to decline in the quality of education and undermines the long-term basis of economic growth. It should be noted, however, that the conflict stimulates the authorities of the countries involved to carry out reforms and boost the efficiency of public administration, and as a result, may have a positive effect on the competitiveness of the economy. An indicator of this is the index of economic freedom, in which the countries of the South Caucasus occupy a higher position than the countries of the Western CIS, which were less severely affected by ethnopolitical conflicts.

⁴⁸ Central State Historical Archives of the Republic of Armenia, *Statistical Report of Nagorno-Karabakh, 1985-1996*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The war exacerbated the post-Soviet shock phenomena in the economies of Armenia and Azerbaijan, expressed in strong fluctuations of consumer prices. E.g., in November 1993, the consumer price indicator of Armenia stood at 538%. However, the end of the war put an end to the devaluation of the Armenian dram and to the skyrocketing of prices in Armenia, whereas in Azerbaijan these phenomena persisted for several months.

All the factors mentioned above ultimately influence the gross domestic product and its dynamics.

The current paper is just an attempt to evaluate the impact of various factors that need to be taken into account for an accurate estimate of the cost of war to the economies of Armenia and Azerbaijan. An approximate and preliminary calculation shows that the war has caused 39.5% GDP loss in Armenia and 31.7% GDP loss in Azerbaijan. In Nagorno-Karabakh itself, there is insufficient data to assess the decline, but its depth exceeds those of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and, arguably, approaches 70% of the GDP.

Sona Balasanyan

PUBLIC
PERCEPTIONS
OF THE
NAGORNO-
KARABAKH
CONFLICT
IN ARMENIA:
LONGITUDINAL
DATA
ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to better understand the dynamics of public perceptions on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Armenia, the analysis presented here explores the data of the Caucasus Barometer produced in 2004-2017 by the Caucasus Research Resource Centres (CRRCs).¹ Analysis of the data aimed at locating variables of interest, hypothesised as being associated with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in order to measure the probability that respondents in Armenia name the conflict as Armenia's main concern. Quantitative data (binary, nominal, and scale) from the Caucasus Barometer were explored, and inferential statistical techniques were applied to test theory-deductive sociological hypotheses. A series of binominal logistic regressions were run. Correlation analysis, along with regression, was applied to test hypotheses at the 95% confidence level. Statistically significant models were developed using a series of binary logistic regressions.

Longitudinal data of the Caucasus Barometer has its limitations. It has transformed over time, as data collection procedures have been changing and improving. In fact, only 2011 and 2017 Caucasus Barometer surveys

¹ CRRC-Armenia, Datasets of the Caucasus Barometer (2004-2017). <http://www.crrc.am/caucasusbarometer/documentation?lang=en>

covered a range of dedicated questions about the conflict. Data for other years could be explored through only one variable: the outcome variable in the analysis. “The main issue of Armenia” is disaggregated by sub-categories of those respondents who mentioned the unsolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as Armenia’s main issue. From a sociological perspective, the analysis provides insight that can be taken into further account in the upcoming waves of surveys, including those of the Caucasus Barometer, and in the analysis of the conflict referencing the dynamics of public perceptions. New analytical models covering data across several years are presented with potential to inform theoretical and practical reasoning, and measurement of the conflict as a social phenomenon.

Based on the sociology of war, it may be noted that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and associated militarisation need to be traced and analysed in terms of their fundamental and diverse modes of embodied experience and apprehension within the Armenian society. This analysis thus invites social scientists to extend and rethink the conflict as embodied within the crucial and enduring social institution of war – a wide-ranging display of fundamentally personified social experiences, practices, regimes of truths or ideologies. It has been emphasised that the phenomenon of war remains overlooked within the sociological and associated scientific discourse.² Indeed, even though the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is characterised as frozen, the societies engaged in it are dynamic, ever-changing, and reflexive towards it.

Departing from the dynamics of public perceptions, the conflict is observed as a multi-layered complex phenomenon, which has its modes of evolvment.³ Carl von Clausewitz famously argued that war is a contest to define political reality.⁴ It has never simply been about the deployment of a distant instrument of political violence at the periphery. It has dual nature, which led von Clausewitz to argue that limited conflicts often occur not because protagonists’ means precluded greater effort or their relationship faltered, but because their intentions were too limited to justify anything more. This said, war is an all-encompassing vigorous social space. It has been a container of historical social change, which mutates social relations at the core of those societies that have continuously

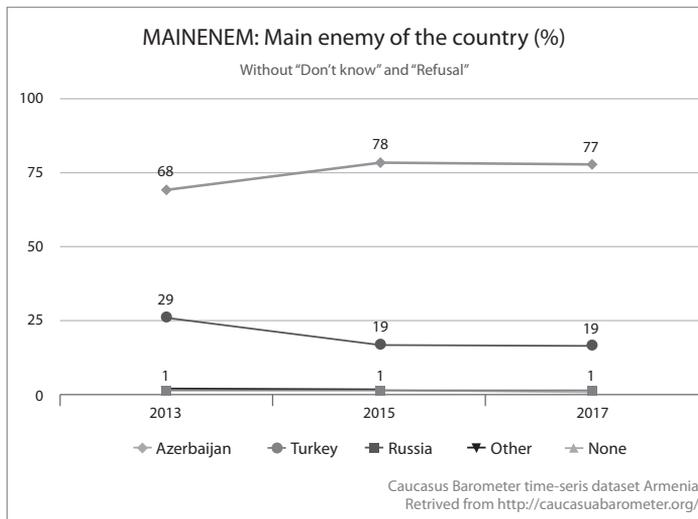
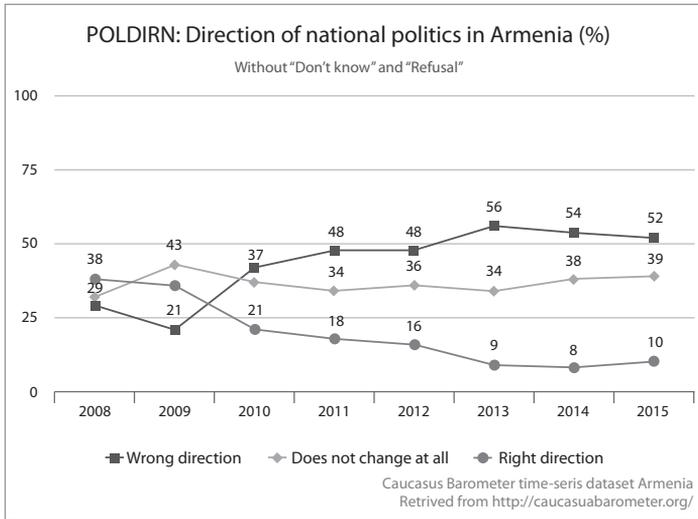
² Kevin McSorley, “Towards an Embodied Sociology of War,” *The Sociological Review*, 62: 2 (2014), 107-128.

³ Hrant Mikaelian, “Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh,” Policy Paper, Caucasus Institute (2017).

⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

made it.⁵ The following analysis illustrates the accuracy of the aforementioned theories in regards to the Armenian society relative to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIVE DATA



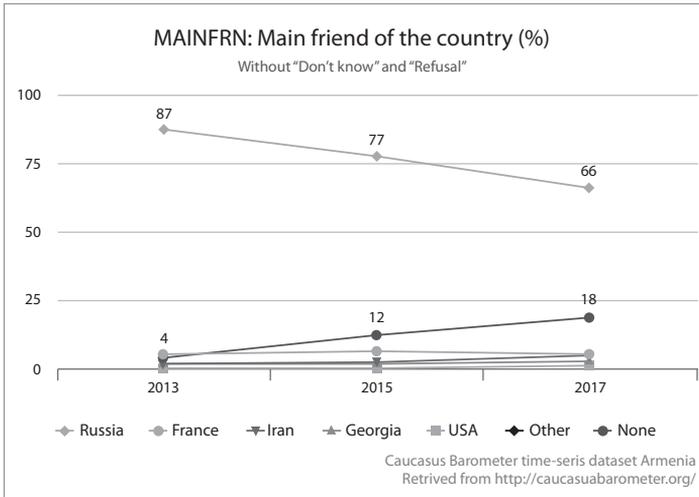
⁵ Taraq Barkawi, "From War to Security: Security Studies, the Wider Agenda and the Fate of the Study of War," *Millennium*, 39: 3 (2011), 701–716.

Based on the online data analysis tool, several important aspects of the change in public perceptions across years in regards to the political context of Armenia were observed.⁶

In particular, beginning from 2009, the Armenian public has expressed the opinion that the national politics of the country is going in the wrong direction. Regression models presented below show that perception of national politics has been a significant predictor of the probability that a respondent would regard the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as Armenia’s major issue.

Gradually, perception of Azerbaijan as the main enemy of Armenia has been growing and perception of Turkey as the main enemy of Armenia has been going down.

Although Armenians generally perceive Russia as an ally, the frequency of this perception has been decreasing since 2013, while positive perceptions of Iran have become more frequent. One percent of the population has consistently named Russia an enemy of Armenia; however, the percentage is too low to make accurate predictions.

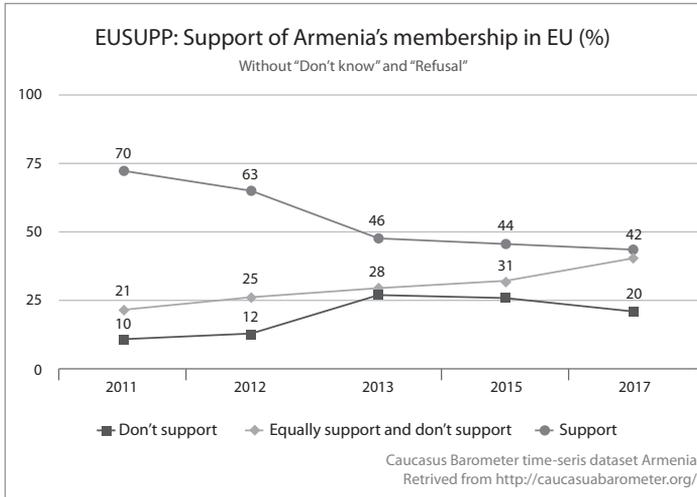


The variable (*main friend of the country*) was inserted in the regression models as a predictor to account for the perceived role of Russia in the resolution of the conflict.⁷ On the other hand, the option *none* was chosen more and more

⁶ CRRCs, Online Data Analysis for the Caucasus Barometer (2008-2017). <http://caucasuabarometer.org/en/>

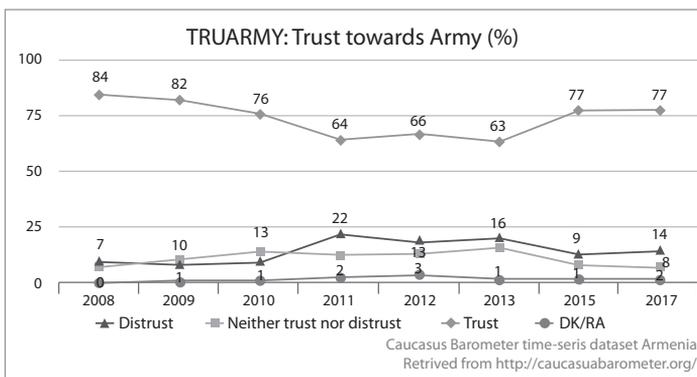
⁷ Sergey Minasyan, “The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Context of South Caucasus Regional Security Issues: An Armenian Perspective,” *Nationalities Papers* 45: 1 (2017), 131-139.

often. As seen in the figure, there has been a 16% increase of the number of respondents who stated that none of the countries are the main friend of Armenia.



Support of Armenia's membership in the EU has followed a declining trend since 2013. Hence, 2013 may be seen as an important turning point. The 2015 logistic regression model provided rather significant results accounting for the data gathered after 2013.

On a descriptive level, trust towards the army was carefully examined. It is hypothesised to be a significant predictor for Armenians to regard the conflict as main issue of Armenia. Here again, 2013 was a significant turning point from which the self-reported level of trust began to increase. Before this, in 2012, distrust towards the army significantly predicted the perception of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as Armenia's most important concern.



METHODOLOGY FOR LONGITUDINAL DATA ANALYSIS

As one can infer from the above, the unsolved territorial conflict mentioned as the main issue of Armenia was observed as an outcome variable in the course of the logistic analysis. Annex 1 lists the variables within the Caucasus Barometer datasets that were included in regression models.

From a methodological perspective, binomial logistic regression attempts to predict the probability that an observation (naming the unsolved territorial conflict as the main issue of Armenia) falls into one of two categories of a dichotomous dependent variable based on one or more independent variables that can be either continuous or categorical.⁸ Unlike linear regression, this analysis did not determine the predicted value of the dependent variable, but revealed the probability that the dependent variable would fall into a particular category, given the independent variables. An observation is assigned to whichever category is predicted as most likely. The data answers the following research question: which representatives of the public are predicted to be most likely to mention the unsolved territorial conflict as the main issue of Armenia across years (2004-2017)? The analysis then makes an attempt to identify sub-categories of the Armenian society members who were most likely to be concerned about the conflict. It describes the social context of the conflict rather than the conflict itself. The aim was to characterise the public and its perceptions *in connection with* the conflict (and not *of* the conflict directly) through relevant predictor variables.

As with other types of regression, binomial logistic regression uses interactions between independent variables to predict the dependent variable. The dependent variable, *the main issue of the country*, was regarded as being a nominal variable with two outcomes: (1) probability of the *unsolved territorial conflict* to be regarded as the main issue of the country and (2) probability of the *unsolved territorial conflict* not to be regarded as the main issue of Armenia. Meanwhile, independent variables predicted the possibility for respondents to fall into either category. In the formula below, b_0 is the sample intercept (aka constant) and estimates β_0 , b_1 is the sample slope parameter for X_1 (predictor) and estimates β_1 , and so forth, e represents the sample errors/residuals and estimates ϵ . A logit is the natural log of the odds of an event (probability of mentioning the unsolved conflict as the main/not main issue of Armenia) occurring.

⁸ Jacob Cohen, Patricia Cohen, Stephen G. West, and Leona S. Aiken, "Alternative Regression Models: Logistic, Poisson Regression, and the Generalized Linear Model," in Jacob Cohen, Patricia Cohen, Stephen G. West, and Leona S. Aiken, *Applied Multiple Regression/Correlation Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 3rd ed., 2003).

$$\text{logit}(Y) = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + e$$

Linearity of the continuous variables with respect to the logit of the dependent variable was assessed via the Box-Tidwell procedure.⁹ Based on this assessment, the continuous independent variables were found to be linearly related to the logit of the dependent variable as required for the logistic regression procedure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A series of binomial logistic regressions were run to ascertain the effects of the below listed variables on the likelihood of respondents mentioning the unsolved territorial conflict as the main issue of Armenia.

Table 1: Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as the Main Issue of Armenia

Socio-Demographic Predictors	Political Context-Related Predictors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Gender • Marital Status • Happiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Direction • Perceptions of Azerbaijan (being friends with, marrying, doing business) • Trust toward the Army • Discussion of Politics

Across the models, there were studentized residuals with a value of greater than accepted 2. However, after inspection of the datasets, these were kept in the analysis.

Logistic regression models with the previously mentioned variables were statistically significant, $p < .05$. The models explained from 3% to 11% (as assessed by Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in mentioning of the *unsolved territorial conflict* as the main issue of Armenia (n for those who mentioned this as the first and the second main issues was around 230 altogether – an approximation across years) and correctly classified 60% to 93% of cases.

Model for 2004: Findings (data for Yerevan only)

2004 was the year when the Caucasus Barometer was produced for the first time; compared to 2017, the formulations of questions and measurement scales were different. Political context-related predictor variables were explored through the

⁹ George E. P. Box, and Paul W. Tidwell, "Transformation of the Independent Variables," *Technometrics* 4 (1962), 531- 550.

following measures or questions (throughout this paper, the codes for questions are kept as they are in the datasets):

- P9. In your opinion, are things in our country moving in the right or wrong direction?*
- P13. What is your attitude regarding cooperation of your country with the following Caucasus countries in economic and political spheres? (Data for Azerbaijan was explored)*
- P16. How do you feel about representatives of the following groups? (Data for Azerbaijanis was explored)*
- S.1. I will list you several social institutions and please, assess your trust toward them by 5-grade scale, where "5" means fully trust, "1" – fully distrust (Trust toward the army was explored)*
- P.2. How often do you discuss politics?*

The outcome variable (P11) was formulated as follows: *Which of the following goals do you consider most important, second most important and third most important for our country?* The answer *restoration of territorial integrity of our country* was explored.

Of all eleven predictor variables, seven were statistically significant: age, gender, country moving in right/wrong direction, cooperation with Azerbaijan in political and economic sphere, trust/distrust, trust/neutrality towards the army. Males had 2.07 times higher odds to name the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Increasing age was associated with increased likelihood of exhibiting concern about the conflict. Increasing belief that Armenia was moving in the right direction was associated with reduced likelihood of exhibiting concern about the conflict. Those members of the society who approved political and economic cooperation with Azerbaijan were twice more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Those respondents who were neutral towards the army were 3 times more likely to mention the conflict, while those who expressed distrust towards the army were 1.9 times more likely to mention the conflict. Those respondents who often discussed politics were 0.4 times less likely to mention the issue (see the model in Table 2).

Data for 2005-2007 was explored for the sake of the analysis. However, as 2005 and 2006 regression results were close to 2004, the 2007 dataset did not have the outcome variable of interest, and the 2008 model did not prove any significance, this data is not reported.

Models for 2009 and 2010: Findings

The situation in 2009 according to the regression model was rather different from 2004, where many of the observed variables were significant predictors. Political context-related predictor variables were explored through the following measures:

FRNDAZE:	Approval of friendship with Azerbaijanis
BUSINAZE:	Approve doing business with Azerbaijanis
MARWAZE:	Approval of women marrying Azerbaijanis
TRUARMY:	Trust in the army
POLDIRN:	Direction of national politics in Armenia
IMPISS1:	Most important issue facing Armenia
IMPISS2:	Second most important issue facing Armenia
INTLPOL:	Interest in international politics
NATLPOL:	Interest in national politics
LOCLPOL:	Interest in local politics

Of all ten (10) predictor variables, seven (7) were statistically significant: gender and whether Armenia is moving in the right/wrong direction. Males had 0.5 times higher likelihood to name the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Increased belief that Armenia was moving in the right direction was associated with increased likelihood of concern about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In a sense, 2009 was not an active year in regards to the identification of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the main issue of Armenia. The model for 2010 exhibited similar results (see models in Tables 3 and 4).

Models for 2011: Findings

The situation changed in 2011 (note that the Caucasus Barometer has the most data for this year). Political context-related predictor variables were explored through the following measures or questions:

BUSINAZE:	Approval of doing business with Azerbaijanis
MARWAZE:	Approval of women marrying Azerbaijanis
POLDIRN:	Direction in which the country's domestic politics are going
TRUARMY:	Trust in the army
IMPISS2:	Second most important issue facing the country
IMPISS1:	Most important issue facing the country
ENEMCNTR:	Biggest enemy of the country

- NK1_1: Should Russia be involved in finding a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
- NK1_2: Should the United States be involved in finding a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
- NK1_3: Should France be involved in finding a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
- NK1_4: Should Turkey be involved in finding a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
- NK1_5: Should the EU be involved in finding a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
- NK2: When will the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict be resolved?
- NK3: Prospects of Nagorno-Karabakh becoming an integral part of Azerbaijan after May 1994
- NK4_1: Solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the next 5 years by peaceful negotiation
- NK4_2: Solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the next 5 years by force
- NKSAR_1: Resolution option for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Nagorno-Karabakh becomes part of Armenia
- NKSAR_2: Resolution option for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Nagorno-Karabakh becomes an independent country
- NKSAR_3: Resolution option for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Creation of a special administrative region jointly governed by Azerbaijan and Armenia
- NKSAR_4: Resolution option for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Nagorno-Karabakh gets high degree of autonomy within Azerbaijan
- NKSAR_5: Resolution option for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Nagorno-Karabakh becomes part of Azerbaijan without autonomy
- ACTDISC: Activities during last 6 months: Discussed politics with friends/colleagues

Logistic regression models were statistically significant. Of all eleven predictor variables for the first model (see Table 5), four were statistically significant. The model yielded interesting results in that gender, age and trust towards the army were not significant predictors of mentioning the unsolved territorial conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Instead, those who reported being happy were slightly more likely to mention the conflict. Those who thought that country was

moving in the right or wrong direction (i.e. had a strong opinion about it) were again more likely to mention the conflict. Additionally, those who approved of business with Azerbaijanis were more likely to express concern about the conflict. Lastly, those who reported discussing politics were more likely to mention the conflict as opposed to the same group in 2004.

One general conclusion would be that generally positive attitudes were drivers for naming the conflict as the main issue of Armenia in 2011.

Of four predictor variables for the second model (see Table 6), three were statistically significant. Those members of the Armenian society who believed that there were prospects for resolution were less likely to express concern, while those who thought that the solution of the conflict would be by force were more likely to name the conflict as the main issue of Armenia.

Of all four predictor variables for the third model (see Table 7), three were statistically significant. Interestingly, likelihood of trusting the army was not predicted by dispositions on peaceful vs. forceful conflict resolution. However, likelihood to trust the army increased with belief in the possibility that the conflict will be resolved and that resolution will take place sooner rather than later. Here, we can metaphorically say that people were not inclined to think in terms of “no war, no peace,” and were affected by the possibility of any type of resolution. The model predicted a societal disposition that can be summarized as “not war, not peace, but a solution” against the background of positively driven concerns.

A wide variety of questions on the conflict were asked in 2011. As discussion of politics was an important predictor variable in the course of the analysis, it was decided to look at the subgroup that discussed politics and check what dispositions they were likely to have in respect to involvement of third parties in the resolution process. It turned out that those who thought that France and EU should be involved in finding a solution to the conflict were more likely to discuss politics (see Tables 5-9 for the 2011 models).

Models for 2012 and 2013: Findings

Compared to 2011, 2012 and 2013 did not exhibit any unique results in the datasets. Political context-related predictor variables were explored through the following measures or questions:

- BUSINAZE: Approval of doing business with Azerbaijanis
- MARWAZE: Approval of women marrying Azerbaijanis
- POLDIRN: Direction in which the country’s domestic politics are going
- TRUARMY: Trust-army

- MPISS1: Most important issue facing the country
- IMPISS2: Second most important issue facing the country
- ENEMCNTR: Biggest enemy of the country
- ARMGEN23: Opening the border: Effect on national security
- DISCPOL: How often do you discuss politics and current events with friends/close relatives

For 2012, out of twelve (12) predictors, only two (2) were statistically significant. In particular, those respondents who thought that Armenia was moving in the right direction were more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue, while those who expressed distrust towards the army were less likely to think of the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. In 2013, more males were likely to mention the conflict as the main issue and the tendency for those who believed Armenia was moving in the right direction was continued: they were more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. It is worth mentioning that the attitude towards the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border was not accurate in predicting the likelihood of mentioning the conflict as an issue.

For both 2012 and 2013, the discussion of politics was not a significant predictor of the likelihood to mention the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. See Tables 10 and 11 for the models for 2011 and 2013.

Models for 2015 and 2017: Findings

The shift that has been shown through descriptive statistics to have occurred starting in 2013 found its manifestation in 2015 and 2017. Political context-related predictor variables were explored through the following measures or questions:

- BUSINAZE: Approval of doing business with Azerbaijanis
- MARWAZE: Approval of women marrying Azerbaijanis
- POLDIRN: Direction in which the country’s domestic politics are going
- CNTPROS: Will the situation in Armenia improve or not?
- SUPTSRER: Condemn or support Sasna Tsrer’s actions
- TRUARMY: Trust towards the Army
- IMPISS1: Most important issue facing the country
- IMPISS2: Second most important issue facing the country
- DISCPOL: How often do you discuss politics/current events with friends/close relatives?
- MAINFRN: Main friend of the country

MAINENEM: Main enemy of the country

In 2015, age and gender were significantly predictive of the likelihood of mentioning the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. In particular, older members of the society were more likely to express concern about the conflict. Males were again more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue. Happiness became a significant predictor again, but in contrast to previous data in 2011, those who were happier were less likely to mention the conflict as an issue. The tendency prevailed for those who thought that Armenia was moving in the right direction to be more likely to be concerned about the conflict. Those who named the U.S. as the main friend of Armenia were more likely to mention the conflict as an issue. Respondents who answered “do not know” to the question about the main enemy of Armenia were less likely to mention the conflict as Armenia’s main issue. Lastly, those who expressed distrust towards the army were again less likely to mention the conflict as an issue.

In 2017, happiness was not a predictor of the likelihood of mentioning the conflict as an issue. Those members of the society who named Turkey as the main enemy of Armenia were less likely to mention the conflict as the main issue of Armenia.

Respondents who expressed disposition, either supporting or condemning, towards the actions of the Sasna Tsrer group, were more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue of Armenia.

Those respondents who reported having discussed politics were again slightly less likely to mention the conflict as an issue (see Tables 12 and 13 for models for 2015 and 2017).

CONCLUSION

The models revealed that from 2004 to 2017, males were more likely to mention the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the main issue of Armenia. In 2004 and 2015, increased age was associated with increased likelihood of exhibiting concern about the conflict.

It was only in 2004 that increasing belief that Armenia was moving in the right direction was associated with reduced likelihood of exhibiting concern about the conflict. Later, from 2009 to 2017, those respondents who thought that Armenia was moving in right direction were more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue.

In 2004, those members of the society who gave positive answers to questions about political and economic cooperation with Azerbaijan were two times more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue. Similarly, in 2011, those who considered doing business with Azerbaijanis were more likely to express concern.

In 2004, those respondents from Yerevan who were neutral towards the army were more likely to mention the conflict as an issue. In addition, those who expressed distrust towards the army were more likely to mention the conflict as an issue, in contrast to subsequent years. In 2010, trust towards the army was not a significant predictor of mentioning the unresolved territorial conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Instead, those who reported being happy were slightly more probable to mention the issue. In 2011, the likelihood of trust towards the army was not predicted by dispositions on whether the conflict would end in peaceful or military resolution, but belief in the possibility of resolution increased, as did trust in the army.

Those who expressed distrust towards the army were more likely to mention the conflict as an issue (in contrast to recent years). Interestingly, in 2012 and 2013, those who expressed distrust towards the army were less likely to think of the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Similarly, in 2015, those members of the society who expressed distrust towards the army were again less likely to mention the conflict as an issue. In 2017, respondents who thought that Armenia should rely on itself in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were more likely to believe that the army had not been ready for the April 2016 escalation.

In 2004, those respondents in Yerevan who often discussed politics were less likely to mention the conflict as an issue. After 2011, those respondents in Armenia who reported discussing politics (as opposed to those in 2004 in Yerevan) were *more* likely to mention the issue.

Those who believed that France and the EU should be involved in finding a solution to the conflict were more likely to discuss politics.

In 2017, those members of the society who reported having discussed politics were again slightly less likely to mention the conflict as an issue. Hence, across years, the discussion of politics was statistically significant in predicting greater or lesser likelihood of mentioning the conflict as the main issue for Armenia.

To reflect on the specificities per year, it is notable that 2009 and 2010, 2012 and 2013 did not exhibit unique dynamics. In 2011, however, positive attitudes were drivers for mentioning the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Gender,

age and trust towards the army were not significant predictors of mentioning the conflict as the main issue for Armenia. Instead, those who reported being happy were slightly more likely to mention it. Those who thought that resolution of the conflict was possible were more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue. Those who thought that the solution of the conflict would be by force were more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue. The greater their belief that the conflict could be resolved, the greater the likelihood that the respondent trusted the army. The attitude was more likely to be affected by the possibility of any type of resolution – hence, the model predicts societal disposition of ‘neither war nor piece, but a solution’ – and this in the context of overall positively driven concerns. Those who thought that France and the EU should be involved in finding a solution to the conflict were more likely to discuss politics.

In 2015, age and gender were significantly predictive of the likelihood of mentioning the conflict as the main issue of Armenia. Older members of the society were more likely to express concern. Males were again more likely to prioritize the conflict. In 2015, happiness became a significant predictor again, but this time, in contrast to 2011, those who were happier were less likely to mention the conflict as an issue. Those who named the U.S. as the main friend of Armenia were more likely to mention the conflict as an issue. The members of the society who answered “do not know” to the question about the main enemy of Armenia were less likely to mention the conflict as the main issue for Armenia.

In 2017, those members of the society who thought Turkey was the main enemy of Armenia were less likely to mention the conflict as the main issue. The members of the society who expressed a disposition (either supporting or condemning) towards the actions of the Sasna Tsrer group were more likely to mention the conflict as the main issue of Armenia.

ANNEX

Table 2. 2004: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Age	.021	.005	14.857	1	***	1.021	1.010	1.032
Gender	1.020	.190	28.662	1	***	2.773	1.909	4.028
Marital status	.181	.187	.940	1		1.199	.831	1.729
Country moving in right direction	-1.312	.191	46.971	1	***	.269	.185	.392
Cooperation with Aze in political and economic spheres	.807	.202	16.024	1	***	2.242	1.510	3.329
Feeling about representatives of Aze (positive vs. negative as baseline)	.007	.232	.001	1		1.007	.639	1.588
Feeling about representatives of Aze (neutral vs. negative as baseline)	.402	.238	2.837	1		1.494	.936	2.384
Trust Army (Distrust vs. Trust as baseline)	1.919	.523	13.473	1	***	6.815	2.446	18.989
Trust Army (Neutral vs. Trust as baseline)	3.175	1.014	9.798	1	***	23.938	3.278	174.822
Discuss Politics	-.454	.184	6.083	1	**	.635	.442	.911
Constant	-8.053	1.255	41.170	1	***	.000		

Note: Gender is for males compared to females.

Marital status is for married compared to singles.

Country moving in right direction is for those who confirmed this compared to those who did not.

Discuss politics is for those who discussed compared to those who did not discuss.

* (p<0,05); ** (p<0,01); *** (p<0,001)

Table 3. 2009: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Age	-.006	.006	1.163	1		0.994	0.983	1.005
Gender	0.527	.212	6.180	1	**	1.694	1.118	2.566
Marital status	-.170	.216	.615	1		0.844	.552	1.290
Fasting	-.347	.477	.528	1		0.707	.278	1.801
Country moving in right direction	0.682	.207	10.831	1	***	1.978	1.318	2.970
Friendship with Aze	.513	.320	2.579	1		1.671	0.893	3.125
Business with Aze	.147	.313	.221	1		1.158	.627	2.140
Marriage with Aze	-.676	.452	2.234	1		0.509	.209	1.234
Trust Army (Distrust vs. Trust)	-0.443	.530	0.698	1		0.642	0.227	1.816
Trust Army (Neutral vs. Trust)	-0.353	0.440	0.643	1		0.703	0.296	1.665
Constant	-2.855	0.354	65.115	1	***	.058		

*($p < 0,05$); ** ($p < 0,01$); *** ($p < 0,001$)

Table 4. 2010: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Gender	0.379	.184	4.256	1	*	1.462	1.019	2.566
Country moving in right direction	0.412	.201	4.207	1	*	1.510	1.018	2.970
Constant	-2.709	0.151	320.970	1	***	.067		

*($p < 0.05$); ** ($p < 0.01$); *** ($p < 0.001$)

Table S. 2011: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Age	.000	.007	0.000	1		1.000	0.986	1.014
Gender	0.405	.251	2.607	1		1.500	0.917	2.453
Happiness	.110	.051	4.639	1	*	1.117	1.010	1.234
Marital Status	.005	.276	.000	1		1.005	.585	1.726
Fasting	-0.298	.534	0.311	1		.743	.261	2.114
Country moving in right direction	.803	.256	9.837	1	***	2.233	1.352	3.688
Business with Aze	.468	.251	3.466	1	ms*	1.596	.976	2.612
Marriage with Aze	-.423	.498	0.722	1		0.655	.247	1.739
Trust Army (Distrust vs. Trust)	-0.540	.320	2.849	1		0.583	0.311	1.091
Trust Army (Neutral vs. Trust)	-0.293	0.391	0.560	1		0.746	0.347	1.606
Discuss Politics	0.551	0.240	5.265	1	*	1.735	1.084	2.779
Constant	-4.301	0.592	52.760	1	***	.014		

Note: Gender is for males compared to females. The variable is statistically significant at 0.05 level, if happiness is removed from the model.

Marital Status is for married compared to singles.

Country moving in right direction is for those who confirmed compared to those who did not.

Business, marriage is for those who approved this compared to those who did not.

*($p < 0.05$); ** ($p < 0.01$); ***($p < 0.001$), ms=marginally significant

Table 6. 2011: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Resolution_yes/no	0.120	.044	7.482	1	**	1.127	1.034	1.228
Prospects_Increased/decreased	-0.238	.113	4.455	1	*	.788	.632	.983
Peaceful solution_likely/unlikely	0.065	.083	0.611	1		1.067	.907	1.255
Solution by force_likely/unlikely	0.172	.076	5.050	1	*	1.187	1.022	1.379
Constant	-1.718	0.525	10.694	1	***	.180		

*(*p*<0,05); ** (*p*<0,1); *** (*p*<0,001)

Table 7. 2011: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Trust towards the Army

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Resolution_yes/no	0.635	.234	7.392	1	**	1.888	1.194	2.984
Prospects_Increased/decreased	0.493	.242	4.148	1	*	1.637	1.019	2.631
Peaceful solution_likely/unlikely	0.029	.284	0.011	1		1.030	.591	1.796
Solution by force_likely/unlikely	-0.194	.256	0.575	1		.824	.499	1.360
Constant	-1.345	0.255	27.722	1	***	.261		

*(*p*<0,05); ** (*p*<0,1); *** (*p*<0,001)

Table 8. 2011: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Involve Russia	0.447	.233	3.676	1	*	1.563	0.990	2.468
Involve the US	-0.116	.142	0.663	1		.891	.674	1.177
Involve Turkey	-0.522	.243	4.594	1	*	.594	.368	.956
Involve the EU	0.001	.153	0.000	1		1.001	.742	1.352
Constant	-3.276	0.688	22.685	1	***	.038		

* ($p < 0,05$); ** ($p < 0,1$); *** ($p < 0,001$)

Table 9. 2011: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Discussing Politics

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Involve Russia	-0.010	.099	0.009	1		0.991	0.816	1.202
Involve the US	-0.059	.079	0.551	1		.943	.808	1.101
Involve France	0.329	.090	13.289	1	***	1.389	1.164	1.658
Involve Turkey	0.023	.084	0.076	1		1.023	.868	1.207
Involve the EU	-0.182	.082	4.939	1	**	.834	.710	.979
Constant	-0.865	0.260	11.084	1	**	.421		

* ($p < 0,05$); ** ($p < 0,1$); *** ($p < 0,001$)

Table 10. 2012: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Age	-.008	.007	1.561	1		.992	.979	1.005
Gender	.288	.231	1.553	1		1.334	.848	2.100
Country moving in right direction	.680	.254	7.160	1	**	1.974	1.200	3.248
Business with Aze	-.307	.260	1.396	1		.736	.442	1.224
Enemy of the country (Aze/Turk/other)	-.191	.206	.858	1		.826	.552	1.237
Trust Army (Distrust vs. Trust)	-.754	.387	3.797	1	*	.470	.220	1.004
Trust Army (Neutral vs. Trust)	-.290	.354	.671	1		.749	.374	1.497
Support or oppose opening of the Armenia-Turkey border with no preconditions (Harmful vs. Beneficial)	.423	.277	2.333	1		1.527	.887	2.629
Support or oppose opening of the Armenia-Turkey border with no preconditions (No Effect vs. Beneficial)	.332	.298	1.237	1		1.393	.777	2.500
Constant	-2.315	.447	26.813	1	***	.099		
Discuss Politics	0.551	0.240	5.265	1	*	1.735	1.084	2.779
Constant	-4.301	0.592	52.760	1	***	.014		

Note: Gender is for males compared to females.

Country moving in right direction is for those who confirmed compared to those who did not.

Business is for those who approve this compared to those who did not.

*($p < 0.05$); ** ($p < 0.01$); ***($p < 0.001$)

Table 11. 2013: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Gender	.457	.238	3.694	1	*	1.580	.991	2.518
Country moving in right direction	.700	.319	4.813	1	*	2.015	1.078	3.767
Business with Aze	-.449	.313	2.061	1		.638	.346	1.178
Discussed politics	.035	.039	0.804	1		1.035	.960	1.117
Constant	-3.258	.222	216.325	1	***	.038		

Note: Gender is for males compared to females.

Country moving in right direction is for those who confirmed compared to those who did not.

Business is for those who approved this compared to those who did not.

*($p < 0.05$); ** ($p < 0.01$); *** ($p < 0.001$)

Table 12. 2015: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Age	.009	.004	5.990	1	**	1.009	1.002	1.016
Gender	0.319	.137	5.408	1	**	1.375	1.051	1.799
Marital status	-.092	.137	.456	1		0.912	.697	1.192
Happiness	.070	.028	6.442	1	**	1.073	1.016	1.133
Fasting	-0.027	.186	0.021	1		.973	.676	1.402

Country moving in right direction	.593	.168	12.453	1	***	1.809	1.301	2.514
Business with Aze	.104	.160	.422	1		1.109	.811	1.517
Marriage with Aze	.078	.182	0.186	1		1.082	.758	1.544
Main friend of the country_Russia	0.542	.264	8.685	4				
Main friend of the country_USA	-0.184	.241	4.196	1	*	1.719	1.024	2.886
Main friend of the country_None	0.153	.286	0.585	1		0.832	0.519	1.333
Main friend of the country_DK	0.175	.216	0.288	1		1.166	0.666	2.041
Main friend of the country_Other	-0.345	.255	0.659	1		1.192	0.780	1.821
Main enemy of the country_Aze	0.115	.226	8.875	5				
Main enemy of the country_Russia	-0.735	.293	1.823	1		0.708	0.429	1.169
Main enemy of the country_Turkey	-0.303	.274	0.262	1		1.122	0.721	1.747
Main enemy of the country_DK	0.046	.320	6.276	1	**	0.479	0.270	0.852
Main enemy of the country_None	-0.860	.202	1.222	1		0.739	0.431	1.264
Main enemy of the country_Other	-0.143	0.022	0.025	1		1.047	0.593	1.849
Trust Army (Distrust vs. Trust)	0.010	0.022	7.242	1	**	0.423	0.226	0.792
Trust Army (Neutral vs. Trust)	-3.258	0.337	0.500	1		0.867	0.583	1.288
Discussed politics			0.204	1		1.010	0.968	1.054
Constant			93.695	1	***	.038		

Note: Gender is for males compared to females.

Marital Status is for married compared to singles.

Country moving in right direction is those who confirmed compared to those who did not.

Business, marriage is for those who approved this compared to those who did not.

*(p<0,05); ** (p<0,1); ***(p<0,001)

Table 13. 2017: Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Identifying the Unsolved Territorial Conflict as Main Issue of Armenia

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Gender	0.305	0.227	1.808	1.000		1.356	0.870	2.114
Happiness	0.148	0.121	1.487	1.000		1.160	0.914	1.471
Country moving in right direction	0.135	0.346	0.153	1.000		1.145	0.581	2.258
Main enemy of the country_Aze			9.243	2.000	**			
Main enemy of the country_Turkey	-1.012	0.381	7.072	1.000	**	0.363	0.172	0.766
Main enemy of the country_other	-1.169	0.729	2.569	1.000		0.311	0.074	1.298
Sasna_Tsrer_support			8.547	2.000	**			
Sasna_Tsrer_neutral	0.604	0.259	5.440	1.000	**	1.829	1.101	3.037
Sasna_Tsrer_condemn	0.784	0.290	7.314	1.000	**	2.191	1.241	3.868
Discussed politics	-0.029	0.043	0.443	1.000		0.972	0.892	1.058
Constant	-2.729	0.273	99.847	1.000	***	0.065		

Note: Gender is for males compared to females.

Marital Status is for married compared to singles.

Country moving in right direction is those who confirmed compared to those who did not.

* ($p < 0.05$); ** ($p < 0.01$); *** ($p < 0.001$)

MEDIA INSIGHT

Mark Grigoryan

SEEKING
SECURITY
IN CONFLICT:
MEDIA
COVERAGE
OF THE
APRIL 2016
ESCALATION
IN NAGORNO-
KARABAKH

While media coverage of wars and conflicts is an important indicator of freedom of speech, it can also be a marker in the sense that it reveals societal attitudes to the events in hand and says something about the human values shared by members of the society.

This article is based on data obtained from two focus-group debates organised by the Caucasus Institute (June and November 2017) and interviews conducted by the author in February-March 2018. The focus groups and interviews were conducted in accordance with Chatham House rules.

The words of a media executive uttered in June 2017 epitomize the general attitude of the Armenian media in the first ten days of April 2016. He said:

Our biggest problem was that we did not know what we could report and what would be unacceptable. We were waiting for directions, but they would not come. At the end of the day, we all tried to do the right thing but were totally unsure of ourselves.

This insight, of course, is important. First of all, it means that, to a cer-

tain degree, there is freedom of speech in Armenia.

At the same time, talking on a superficial level, we can say that it was a typical case of self-censorship, and it really was. The *Collins English Dictionary* defines self-censorship as “the regulation of a group’s actions and statements by its own members rather than an external agency.”¹

However, I will argue that deeper analysis of this insight would lead us to no less significant conclusions about the media situation in Armenia. Amongst other things, it reveals elements of the moral system adopted by the Armenian society. It implies that in terms of values, the perceived interests of Armenia and Artsakh trump freedom of speech. This begs the question, which interests are more important than freedom of speech and why?

I will argue that during the escalation in early April 2016, the work of Armenian reporters was viewed by the journalistic community chiefly as an issue of security, which was seen as more important than freedom of speech *per se*.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

During the first days of April, Armenian journalists found themselves in a situation where they could not get in-

formation directly from the frontline, because physically getting there was extremely dangerous, and also because reporters were not permitted free access too close to the line of fire.

The media had to rely on sources different from journalists’ own eyes. There was almost no immediate reporting from the line of contact, except a handful of cases. However, many were happy to receive second-hand information from the following sources:

- The Facebook page of Artsrun Hovhannisyan, the spokesman of the Armenian Ministry of Defence
- The Website of the Armenian Ministry of Defence
- The Facebook page of David Babayan, the spokesman of the Ministry of Defence of Nagorno-Karabakh
- The website of Nagorno-Karabakh’s Ministry of Defence
- The Facebook page of Edik Baghdasaryan, an investigative reporter who managed to travel to the village of Talish and document the atrocities by the Azerbaijani military
- Facebook pages of a handful of trusted individuals, including popular blogger Samvel Martirosyan
- Starting from the second day of the escalation, a new source of information emerged. It was an International Press Centre established in Karabakh with the goal of providing information to the media

¹ *Collins English Dictionary*. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/self-censorship>

Information from these sources was not double-checked. In general, it was difficult to verify the information from the frontline. For instance, the numbers of casualties or territorial gains and losses were not verifiable. There was another problem: what were the journalists expected to do if the official information turned out to be false? Report that it was false? Official sources were seen as safe in terms of Armenian interests and security of Karabakh and Armenia, which meant that they had to be trusted.

As a result, the Armenian public was receiving unconfirmed information from official sources and from the Facebook pages of several trusted individuals. We can thus assume that *trust* was the keyword in terms of information flows during the April 2016 escalation, or April War, as it is often called in Armenia.

One of the problematic parts of this situation was reporting the losses. In general, official spokespersons in post-Soviet countries are cautious about revealing the true numbers of casualties.

One of notorious cases was during huge ethnic clashes in the Kyrgyz town of Osh in 2010. The clashes were so violent that, according to international estimates, about 400 000 people fled their homes,² and the death toll may

² "Kyrgyzstan Ethnic Violence has Displaced 400, 000, Says UN," *The Guardian*, June 17, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/>

have been over 2000.³ However, official sources spoke of 426 dead.⁴

I was in Osh at that time. On the first night of the clashes, I was approached by the spokesman of a Kyrgyz government ministry, who said that according to confidential information, more than 60 people were dead. "What should I say to the media?" he asked. Being there as a media expert, I said that he should report what he knows to be true, "Anyway, the real death toll will sooner or later become known, and misinforming will not help to build confidence between the government and the public."

In the morning the spokesman told journalists that there were just a dozen dead. He did not do it because he really wanted to disorient the public. He was trying to downplay the seriousness of the conflict because he did not want to "stir up the passions."

Apparently, this concern about "not stirring up" people's emotions and strong sentiments is what drives post-Soviet government officials to try and keep the information flow under control during violent clashes.

..... world/2010/jun/17/kyrgyzstan-ethnic-violence-refugees-united-nations

³ "Death Toll in Kyrgyzstan Clashes Could Be 'Much Higher,'" *BBC News*, June 18, 2010. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10347472>

⁴ "'Detailed Chronology' of Osh Tragedy (Kyrgyzstan) Published" (in Russian), *REGNUM*, June 1, 2012. <https://regnum.ru/news/1537370.html>

While covering the April 2016 events, Armenian media sometimes quoted Azerbaijani media, but these quotes were always set off by information from Armenian sources or quotes from Armenian experts or officials. That said, the general approach was defined by a presumption that the Azerbaijani media serve as a mouthpiece for the government (because “Azerbaijan is a ‘not free’ country in terms of freedom of speech”), hence it should not be trusted, which means that there is no reason to maintain balance between Armenian and Azerbaijani reports.

ADDRESSEES OF MEDIA REPORTS

Reports in the Armenian media targeted various audiences. Reports *in Armenian* were definitely addressed to the population of Armenia and Karabakh. *In Russian*, the reports were seen as a means to reach audiences in Azerbaijan, and to a lesser extent, in Russia. In reality, their audience in Azerbaijan includes mainly media and security officers who specialise on the information war with Armenia. That means that reports in Russian, though disseminated via mass media, had a

distinctive audience of several dozens of specialists. *In English*, the media reports were directed towards the international community and the Armenian diaspora (mainly in the USA). However, with the different audiences, the content of the reports was not substantially different.

In general, the media coverage of those events could also be regarded as a massive damage control operation, with security viewed as a major issue, more important than the freedom of speech; with information coming unchecked from a handful of sources and with editors being very careful not to play into the hands of Azerbaijani military and propaganda.

These approaches show that the majority of media outlets in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh were reporting the escalation of the conflict based on the logic of information war rather than the ‘classical’ journalistic duty to disseminate information. This approach could arguably be substantiated by the active involvement of users (from both sides) of social networks, namely Facebook, in informing – and misinforming – about the situation on the frontline.

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The **Caucasus Institute (CI)** is an independent policy think-tank founded in Armenia in 2002. Its main avenues of activity are academic and practical research, scholarly and public debates, scientific publications, policy recommendations, consulting and advocacy. Trademark CI products include a Yearly Caucasus Conference that it has conducted every spring in Yerevan since 2003, and a Caucasus Yearbook based on presentations made at the conference. The CI also conducts monthly roundtables, ad-hoc workshops and training seminars, and publishes books, research papers and policy briefs.

Research methodology used by CI includes theoretical analysis and empirical techniques such as media monitoring, interviewing, focus groups, database compilation and analysis. The CI has academic ties to research bodies in the recognised and de-facto states of the South Caucasus, and in the Northern Caucasus.

The CI has a strong advocacy potential relying on close ties with the media and links to decision-makers. It has the reputation of a neutral space for dialogue between stakeholders with sharply contrasting agendas, representing the scholarly community, civil society, government, opposition, international organizations and the media. Sensitive issues such as flawed elections and post-electoral unrest, color revolutions, oligarchy and crony capitalism, media censorship and self-censorship, ethno-political conflicts, minorities and intolerance have been researched and discussed at CI in a non-partisan format.

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