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Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

Geopolitical Implications

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Vivekananda
International
Foundation

Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh: Geopolitical Implications

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Cover Image: Armored personnel carriers of the Russian peacekeeping forces drive along a road near Lachin in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, on November 13, 2020. | Reuters

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Foreword

The region of Nagorno-Karabakh is sandwiched between Iran, Turkey, Russia and Georgia. It lies at an intersection of political, ethnic and religious borders. At stake in this conflict is Russian, Turkish and Iranian regional influence, an ethnic battle with memories of genocide and a religious component of Christian Armenia, Shia Azerbaijan and Sunni Turkey.

Samuel Huntington's theory of "Clash of Civilizations?" has come into focus. Religiously, Azerbaijan is more closely related to Iran as both are Shia-majority countries, unlike the Sunni-majority Turkey. But, Iran is Armenia's second most important backer after Russia. Turkey's support to Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in the early 1990s was negligible. Today, the Shia-Muslim Iran is more closely aligned with Armenia while its Shia-majority Azerbaijan maintains a strategic partnership with Israel. It is a crushing argument against the clash of civilizations discourse in the Karabakh Conflict.

On September 27, 2020 the war broke out with Azerbaijan launching an offensive with artillery, armour, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), cluster munitions, ballistic missiles and infantry forces to retake Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding previously Azerbaijani-populated regions.

Russia brokered a peace deal on 10 November 2020, when Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a Russian-mediated settlement. This ended the six-week war. The cease-

fire is seen as a victory in Azerbaijan and as a capitulation in Armenia.

Russia has pulled off a remarkable geopolitical coup in successfully reasserting its influence in the South Caucasus. Moscow shut out the West from South Caucasus, put boots on the ground in Azerbaijan, showed Turkey its place and asserted its dominant power in the South Caucasus.

Post cease fire sustained hard work is needed on a host of issues including facilitating the safe return of refugees, demining, reconstruction, addressing human rights abuses, humanitarian support and facilitating access by international and UN agencies to the isolated region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The end of the war suggests a sweeping redrawing of the security map of the southern Caucasus, a volatile region wedged between Turkey, Russia and Iran. The settlement sealed a role in the region for an increasingly assertive Turkey.

Maj Gen PK Mallick, VSM(Retd) has carried out a detailed analysis on this conflict. He has explained the background of the conflict, its geopolitical dimensions, details of the cease fire deal and the role of different stakeholders in this conflict. I hope that readers will find this paper interesting in understanding the conflict.

**Dr Arvind Gupta,
Director, VIF**

Abstract

Nagorno-Karabakh is a disputed enclave populated largely by Christian Armenians. It broke away from Muslim Azerbaijan as the Soviet Union collapsed. Armenia supported it, and seized a huge chunk of Azerbaijani territory to connect with it, during a war that killed tens of thousands of people and displaced around one million people. A ceasefire was reached in 1994.

The region is sandwiched between Iran, Turkey, Russia and Georgia. It lies at an intersection of political, ethnic and religious borders. At stake in this conflict is Russian, Turkish and Iranian regional influence, an ethnic battle with memories of genocide and a religious component of Christian Armenia, Shia Azerbaijan and Sunni Turkey.

On September 27, 2020 the war broke out with Azerbaijan launching an offensive with barrages of artillery and the deployment of heavy armour and drones along the Line of Contact separating Armenian controlled Nagorno-Karabakh to retake Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding previously Azerbaijani-populated regions.

By Nov. 8 Azerbaijani forces had gained control of the strategically important city of Shusha. Armenia's strength collapsed quickly. After 45 days of hard fighting the war came to an end. President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan agreed to a cease-fire deal brokered by Russia on November 9, 2020. The deal required Armenia to relinquish its military control

over Nagorno-Karabakh and allowed Russian peacekeepers to guard the region for five years. The cease-fire is seen as a victory in Azerbaijan and as a capitulation in Armenia. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan described the deal as “incredibly painful for me and my people”.

The cease-fire has consolidated Russian and Turkish influence in the region, and sidelined outside powers such as the United States and France, who were not involved in the agreement.

Sustained hard work is needed on a host of issues including facilitating the safe return of refugees, demining, reconstruction, addressing human rights abuses, humanitarian support, and facilitating access by international and United Nations agencies to the isolated region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The only countries that can prevent war without end are Armenia and Azerbaijan themselves. This would require them to conclude that resolving their conflict is more in their common interest than persisting with military force or allowing others to resolve it for them.

For decades Nagorno-Karabakh has been one of the Russian periphery’s so-called frozen conflicts. After its brief and unexpected unfreezing, whether it becomes one again is a question the world will seek an answer.

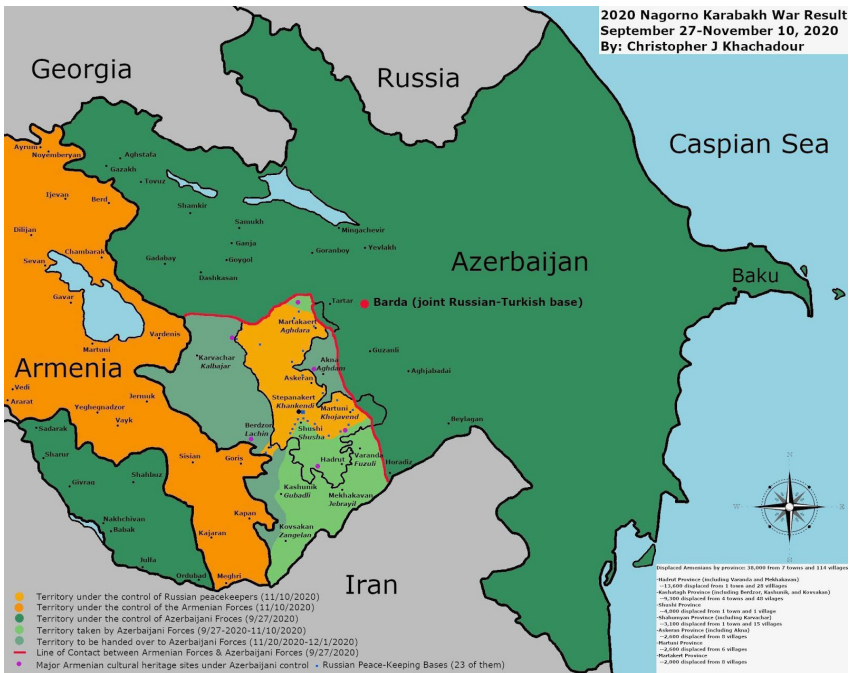
Introduction

Since the last days of the Soviet Union Armenia and Azerbaijan, the two states have been locked in an intractable conflict over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Nagorno-Karabakh, is an autonomous province of the former Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, a self-declared country whose independence is not internationally recognised. Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions have seen periodic outbursts of violence in recent years, but the current war is the most serious since Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire in 1994.

The war broke out on September 27, 2020 with Azerbaijan launching an offensive with barrages of artillery and the deployment of heavy armour along the Line of Contact separating Armenian controlled Nagorno-Karabakh to retake Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding previously Azerbaijani-populated regions. The aim was to liberate areas which are all part of Azerbaijan under international law but have been controlled by Armenia since the 1990s war. Both countries declared martial law. The war involved artillery, armour, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), cluster munitions, ballistic missiles and infantry forces. The drone footages started an extensive information war on social media. There were heavy casualties and damage due to the brutal ground war. This is the first inter-state war fought by conventional forces in recent years.

Azerbaijan lost the previous war a quarter-century ago. This time Azerbaijan's firepower proved superior, with the country's oil wealth funding a fleet of drones and other modern weaponry. With the help of Turkish and Israeli drones Azerbaijan was able to liberate large swathes of its territory from Armenian occupation. Armenia is estimated to have lost approximately 40 per cent of its equipments including hundreds of tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery pieces.

After 45 days of hard fighting, almost three-decades-old conflict was brought to an end. President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan agreed to a cease-fire deal brokered by Russia on November 9, 2020. The deal required Armenia to relinquish its military control over Nagorno-Karabakh and allowed Russian peacekeepers to guard the region for five years. The deal calls for Armenia to give up territory in and around the breakaway region, which lies within Azerbaijan's internationally recognised borders. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called the deal "incredibly painful."



Source: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/why-nagorno-karabakh-cess-fire-wont-end-conflict>

The deal also guaranteed that Xankändi (Stepanakert) would retain access to Armenia through the Lachin Corridor mountain pass. Azerbaijan retained control of the hilltop town of Shusha, a place of historic and strategic significance to both countries, which it captured after a bitter fight. Under the agreement, around 2000 armed Russian service members and 90 armoured vehicles will be deployed for at least five years to guard the Line of Contact between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces along the road connecting Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

The end of the war suggests a sweeping redrawing of the security map of the southern Caucasus, a volatile region wedged between Turkey, Russia and Iran. The settlement sealed a role in the region for an increasingly assertive Turkey.

This war threatened to destabilise the South Caucasus region. Azerbaijan produces about eight hundred thousand barrels of oil per day. It is a significant oil and gas exporter to Central Asia and Europe. Continuation of the war could have disrupted oil and gas exports from the region. Since Russia has promised to defend Armenia, Turkey has pledged to support Azerbaijan and Iran has a large Azeri minority, which could escalate a crisis and further complicate efforts to secure peace in the region.

Russia is by far the dominant military force in the Caucasus. Russia's leading role in stopping the fighting also shows that Moscow continues to be the most influential player in the southern Caucasus. Turkey, which boasts the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) second-largest army after the U.S., has shown with recent interventions in Syria and Libya that it can rapidly deploy military forces. Turkey's growing involvement in a conflict in which Russia has long been the dominant player opened up a new front in the Turkish-Russian rivalry that has already engulfed Syria, Libya and to a lesser extent Ukraine. Iran is another regional power, which has relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. It had called for a cease-fire and negotiations.

This war has raised a lot of issues. There are many unknowns about the future of the region including the peacekeepers' precise role and as to how soon Azerbaijanis

will resettle the recaptured areas. The Azerbaijani victory has triggered intensive interest among military analysts about the conflict's lessons for future war-fighting. The wearing down of Armenian air defences and armoured platforms by UAVs has led to significant debate over the continued utility of main battle tanks for high-intensity military operations.

In this paper, the background of the conflict, clash of civilisations, geopolitical dimensions, the cease fire deal and the role of different stakeholders would be analysed. It is proposed to analyse the geopolitical implication of the war in following parts:-

- Part 1: Background
- Part 2: Clash of Civilisations?
- Part 3: The Geopolitical Dimension
- Part 4: The Cease Fire Deal
- Part 5: Stakeholders
 - Azerbaijan
 - Armenia
 - Turkey
 - Russia
 - Iran
 - Georgia
 - USA
 - The European Union (EU)
 - Israel
 - India
- Conclusion

Part 1: Background

In the 1920s, the then Soviet Union created the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region within Azerbaijan. In this autonomous region, 95 per cent of the population is ethnically Armenian. Nagorno-Karabakh is a 4,400-square-kilometre enclave. The problem appeared when the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia gained independence. The enclave is internationally recognised as a territory of Azerbaijan. It is inhabited by about 150,000 people ethnic Armenians. The conflict between the two countries had been kept in check under the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union began to disintegrate its grip on Armenia and Azerbaijan was considerably reduced.

In 1988, the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region officially declared independence. But that stance is not recognised by the international community, including Armenia. With the Soviet Union dissolving in 1991, the Nagorno-Karabakh legislature passed a resolution to join Armenia. War started between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region, leaving about thirty thousand casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees. By 1993, Armenia controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and occupied 20 per cent of the surrounding Azerbaijani territory. Russia brokered a cease-fire in 1994, which remained in place since then¹.

Understanding the Geography of Transcaucasia and History of the Conflict

Trans-Caucasia is a mountainous area that includes territories now held by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Due to its close closeness to Eastern Europe, the Anatolian Peninsula, Central Asia, the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, it has often been at the crossroads of imperial ambitions. Since the region was one of the spots where their corresponding spheres of influence overlapped, both the Persian Empire and the ancient Rome often fought over direct or indirect control of the region. When use of force was not an option, uneasy diplomatic settlements had to be negotiated².

The Byzantine Empire held Western Armenia which strengthened the regional presence of Christianity and the Persians affirmed their suzerainty over what was called 'Persarmenia'. In turn, Islam arrived there due to the new religion's growing military might and soft power. Ultimately both Russians and Ottomans would gain their own footing in the region through an active combination of geopolitical, military, diplomatic, cultural and religious influence³. Nagorno-Karabakh has historically been an integral part of Armenia comprising the Kingdom of Greater Armenia, the Bagratid Armenia, a part of the Kingdom of Urartu (Ararat), the Ostikhanate of Arminiya and the Zakarid Armenia (12-13th centuries)⁴.

Though falling under the rule of various conquerors including Turkic nomadic tribes in the subsequent centuries under the Persian Empire, Nagorno-Karabakh continued to exercise its internal sovereignty in a semi-independent and quasi-state manner. By the Treaty of Gulistan, in 1813, Karabakh became a part of the Russian Empire. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the self-determination initiatives of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh restarted. The region went through harsh turmoil in the 20th Century, as reflected by various tragedies⁵:-

- The Armenian genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire.
- Derailment of the project to create a Trans-Caucasian Federation.

- Local wars involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.
- Turkish as well as Russian invasions. Finally, the Soviet Union took over and assimilated the entire region.

Moscow's unquestionable control put a temporary end to regional conflicts. It tried to implement aggressive policies to dilute identitarian nationalism and religious fervour. However, it failed to erase old rivalries or vengeful attitudes.

In 1918-1920, Nagorno-Karabakh contained all the elements of statehood, including an army. In 1918, the Turkish command issued an ultimatum to Karabakh's government to accept Azerbaijani sovereignty. The Armenians of Karabakh sustained their resistance until the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allied Powers and withdrew from the First World War in October 1918. Later, a British command came to occupy the area. The Azerbaijani Democratic Republic launched a war in 1918 to establish claim over the region but was unable to succeed.

Role of Soviet Union

The Bolsheviks' 11th Army, in 1920, threw out invading Turkish forces from the Caucasus, defeated the two newly independent republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia and took control of the disputed highland region. After the founding of the Soviet government in Armenia, on November 30 1920, Soviet Azerbaijan declared Nagorno-Karabakh, Nakhijevan and Zangezour as inseparable parts of Armenia⁶.

Armenians mostly populated Karabakh. Karabakh also had an Azerbaijani town, Shusha, which was within the area of Azerbaijan. Karabakh was a region of great significance for each nation. Neither the Azerbaijanis nor the Armenians could afford to live without Karabakh. The Armenians and the Azerbaijanis did not have much say in the settlement of the dispute. The 'Caucasus Bureau', of the Bolsheviks' under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, on 05 July 1921, gave a verdict that a newly devised region called Nagorno (mountainous)-Karabakh

would be formed inside Soviet Azerbaijan. Stalin turned Nagorno-Karabakh into an autonomous region two years later. This would inevitably prove problematic later, as Nagorno-Karabakh's population was over 90 per cent Armenian. While Azerbaijan is majority Muslim, most Armenians are Christian. This decision effectively turned the territory into a Christian majority enclave in a Muslim majority nation⁷.

On the onset of World War Two the region was overwhelmed in turmoil. Capture of the Caspian Sea's oil fields was one of the geostrategic objectives behind the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany. However, the attempt did not succeed due to the defeat of the Wehrmacht in the Battle of Stalingrad⁸.

During the Soviet period, Armenian leaders in Nagorno-Karabakh complained to Soviet Union that Azerbaijan suppressed their community's cultural and educational rights. In 1988, during the early glasnost period, they called for the region to join Soviet Armenia. They had the backing of many leading Russian liberals⁹. Gorbachev ultimately decided to leave Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan. He entrusted its administration to a select committee from Moscow. This decision pleased neither side. Violence broke out between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis.

As the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991, Armenians, Azeris, and Georgians could reaffirm their independence as sovereign nations. As there was no external power to keep regional conflicts under check, it also opened a Pandora's Box. The two sides took diametrically opposite positions. While the Azerbaijani parliament officially abolished the territory's autonomy altogether, the Armenians declared Nagorno-Karabakh an independent state,

The Conflict Before

In 1991, the two nations went into a war over the control of Nagorno-Karabakh. With Russia attempting to restrain both sides while also providing military assistance to both, the conflict became a pursuit for total victory. After much

bloodshed, in 1994, the Armenians eventually won and took control of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding Azerbaijani territories, in the process displacing half a million Azerbaijani civilians. The conflict was infamous for the participation of both mercenaries and militant Islamists, its number of casualties and the huge refugee flows it produced. Some twenty to thirty-thousand people were killed and more than a million displaced. Official reunification did not take place though the outcome was an Armenian military victory. Ultimately, Russia successfully brokered a cease-fire in 1994. The ceasefire established a 'Line of Contact' and brought fragile stability to a 'frozen conflict'. The fighting stopped but the rhetorical and political war continued. Each side visualise Nagorno-Karabakh as a mono-ethnic region exclusive of the other community.

On the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions in 1993. The UN resolutions stated that¹⁰:-

- “This situation endangers peace and security in the region.”
- It reaffirmed ‘respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region.’
- It condemned the occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and adjacent territories.
- Immediate ceasefire, suspension of hostilities was demanded.
- Withdrawal from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan was called for.
- It expressed ‘grave concern at the displacement of a large number of civilians and the humanitarian emergency in the region.’

Since then there have been sporadic military clashes between the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the last most intense fighting happening in 2016. Both the sides did not accept the status quo. Political and economic developments in Armenia and Azerbaijan altered the military balance, hardened negotiating

positions and created potential domestic political incentives for aggressive action. It increased prospects for renewed fighting. Earlier all sides frequently expressed support for a political solution via negotiations. When no such settlement was forthcoming, Azerbaijan insisted that, if necessary, it would restore control over its territory by force. In April 2016, a significant flare-up occurred along the Line of Contact, what is now known as the 'Four Day War'. Azerbaijan recaptured a small amount of land. 350 people including civilians were killed in the war before Russia brokered another cease fire. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan claimed victory.

State of Diplomatic Play

Nagorno-Karabakh is perhaps the most dangerous flashpoint across the post-Soviet Eurasia. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was formed to address the dispute. It is co-chaired by the United States (U.S.), France, and Russia. For the past twenty-five years, OSCE has been the principal international entity charged with advancing a peace settlement. The group has successfully negotiated cease fires, but the territorial issues remain as intractable as ever.

In 1992, at the zenith of European multilateralism, the OSCE founded the Minsk Group consisting of Russia, Belarus, France, Turkey, the U.S, and several Western European nations, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan, to resolve the conflict. But the process could not achieve much. It could not address the democratic deficit at the heart of the conflict by engaging civil society, talking to marginalised communities or tackling the toxic hate speech that fuels the conflict. Negotiation and mediation efforts, led by the Minsk Group of OSCE, have failed to produce a permanent solution to the conflict. Eventually Russia assumed the leading role in determining the region's fate.

Under the auspices of the Minsk Group, the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan got together in October 2017 in Geneva, beginning a series of talks on a possible settlement of the conflict. However, talks did not produce concrete results. Long years of discussions resulted in adoption of the 'Madrid Principles',

2009, that called for Armenia to return the territories surrounding Karabakh to Azerbaijan in exchange for Baku by accepting a referendum on Karabakh's final political status. Such peace never materialised¹¹.

Relations between the three co-chair countries have diminished under the Donald J. Trump administration. The lack of stronger engagement and greater movement on the diplomatic front in recent years is an important factor behind the renewed hostilities. The current disarray in OSCE leadership has not helped; neither has Washington's distraction with other priorities.

The Current Conflict

Azerbaijan is an existential threat to the ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and potentially to even Armenia itself. Conversely, having the mountainous enclave back into its fold is integral to the idea of Azerbaijan as a country. It is a deeply personal issue for the thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) scattered throughout the nation.

The current conflict erupted on September 27, 2020, when the Azerbaijan military went on the offensive with artillery barrages and deployment of heavy armour along the Line of Contact separating Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan proper, with the stated objective of recapturing territories lost to Armenia in 1994. Azerbaijan used its full arsenal including missiles, heavy artillery, tanks and air force along the entire Line of Contact.

It was a war that had to happen. After Azerbaijan had been defeated so miserably in 1994, it had never digested its defeat. During the days of oil price hovering around one hundred dollars per barrel, Azerbaijan armed itself to the teeth by modernising its army with state-of-the-art weaponry, imported advanced weaponry like Israeli drones and air defense systems and Russian surface-to-air missiles. Whereas Armenians were convinced of their invincibility, especially in a defensive war on mountainous terrain. Azerbaijan's military expenditures in recent years approached \$2 to \$3 billion annually. Arms imports by Azerbaijan

were twenty times higher than those of Armenia from 2012 to 2016. Armenia is not in a position to match its rival's spending power. However, it did acquire additional heavy weapons and sophisticated missile systems from Russia.

The fighting initially covered an Azerbaijani offensive against Fizuli and Jabrayil, two of the Armenian-occupied districts outside Nagorno-Karabakh whose relatively flat terrain facilitates offensive operations. Military outposts, villages and the capital city of Stepanakert were struck by artillery fire and missiles. Turkey got directly involved in military actions through its F16 multirole fighter jets, attack UAVs, military advisors, special forces and many Turkish-sponsored Islamist fighters transferred from Syria, Iraq and Libya.

By early November, the fighting had turned against Armenia. Azerbaijani forces captured the Nagorno-Karabakh region's second largest city and cut-off a key access road needed for military supplies from Armenia to reach the mountain enclave, thus starving its defenders of hope of holding out. The historically symbolic town of Shusha/Shushi, towering over Karabakh's capital Stepanakert, fell to the Azerbaijan's forces. Armenia suffered devastating losses on the battlefield after six weeks of the brutal war. The war caused loss of thousands of lives on both sides, including both combatants and civilians and left many more displaced. Armenia's Soviet-era arms and strategy were no match for the fast-moving, high-tech, twenty-first-century war that Azerbaijan, with Turkish support, waged.

After three failed cease fires, Russia brokered a peace deal and on 10 November 2020, when Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a Russian-mediated settlement. This ended the six-week war. The deal allowed Azerbaijan regain full control of all the occupied territory surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, with the exception of a five kilometer wide corridor in Lachin that retains a territorial link between Armenia and Stepanakert but not Shusha. The Azerbaijani internally displaced persons and refugees could hereafter return to their homes under the supervision of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugee. Armenia is to hand over other areas, but the capital of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Stepanakert, is to

remain under Armenian control, protected by Russian peacekeepers. For the first time since the 1990s war Azerbaijan obtained a direct connection to its enclave Nakhichevan, and thus a transport link to Turkey.

Part 2: Clash of Civilisations?

The Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has framed the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh hostilities as a “civilizational frontline” clash. Pashinyan stated in his interview to *The Globe and Mail*, “The borders of Artsakh (the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh) have become a civilisational frontline. Artsakh is fighting against international terrorism, which does not distinguish between the geopolitical borders of its targets. Artsakh, Armenia, and Armenian nation are fighting for global security.” The Armenian leadership has constantly emphasised Nagorno-Karabakh’s belonging to the European international community and European civilisation. Former President Bako Sahakyan of Nagorno-Karabakh famously stated, “Some even say that Europe ends in Artsakh, but Armenians say Artsakh is where Europe begins.” The narrative has drawn on Armenia’s long running promotion of itself as a cradle of Christian civilisation and the first Christian nation.

Azerbaijan feels that its sovereign claims to Karabakh and the surrounding occupied territories remain on firm ground in terms of international law. The four United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions reiterated the inviolability of Azerbaijani state borders.

The most visible feature of the present conflict has been the mutual accusations among the warring parties that ostensibly religiously motivated mercenaries had been imported into the conflict zone. Turkey’s involvement in this conflict

with the use of Turkish sponsored warriors from Libya and Syria changes this local conflict into a regional one and communicates its civilisational nature. Such accusations reanimate a ‘clash of civilizations’ discourse upon the conflict, a “Christian Armenia” against “Muslim Azerbaijan,” that has been picked up to various degrees by various major international media outlets.

Theoretical origins of the clash of civilizations discourse on the Karabakh Conflict can be traced directly to Samuel Huntington’s famous 1993 Foreign Affairs article “Clash of Civilizations?” Here, the Armenian-Azerbaijani War serves as one of the reference points in developing his thesis. Huntington calls Turkey and Azerbaijan “religious [...] brethren,” with the former country supporting the latter¹². However, his argument has major contradictions. Religiously, Azerbaijan is more closely related to Iran as both are Shia-majority countries, unlike the Sunni-majority Turkey. Furthermore, Iran is possibly Armenia’s second most important backer after Russia. Turkey’s support to Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in the early 1990s was almost non-existent or negligible. Today, Turkish support is based more on Ankara’s realpolitik and national interests. As Huntington himself admits, religious beliefs shape identity but do not determine national interests, much less the state behaviour¹³. A report by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) notes that Syrian mercenaries have also joined the Armenian forces in Karabakh. The SOHR pointedly alleges that foreign fighters have primarily been attracted to the war zone for economic, not religious reasons¹⁴.

A 2008 analysis at the Danish Institute of International Studies had concluded that Islamist presence in Azerbaijan was unwelcome by the authorities. In the 1990s, when Azerbaijani army was weak, foreign fighters wanted to fight in Karabakh “for gold, not for God.” The conflict was therefore “much more ethnic, nationalistic and territorial than religious”¹⁵. The online and offline appeal of the Karabakh Conflict to religiously motivated foreigners remains nearly nonexistent, with effectively no evidence that might be reminiscent of the flocking of many religiously motivated Christians to the Balkans or Muslims to Chechnya in the 1990s¹⁶. The storylines publicised by many international media outlets have convinced a portion of the Azerbaijani public of a widespread pro-Armenian

bias in Western news coverage allegedly rooted in “Christian solidarity” with Armenia. In early September, French President Emmanuel Macron declared, “I say to Armenia and to the Armenians, France will play its role” to prevent Azerbaijan from retaking its occupied territories. In response, Baku called for “Islamic solidarity” on the issue, a phrase it incidentally also periodically employs to rebuke Tehran for its support for Armenia.

The fact that Shia-Muslim Iran is more closely aligned with Armenia while its Shia-majority neighbour Azerbaijan maintains a strategic partnership with Israel is a crushing argument against the clash of civilizations discourse in the Karabakh Conflict. The War is inherently religious neither for Armenia nor Azerbaijan. Still, some foreign actors’ propensity to see it through Huntington’s civilisational paradigm encourages Azerbaijan and Armenia to exploit such international attitudes to push their own positions¹⁷.

Part 3: The Geopolitical Dimension

Implications for Regional Geopolitics

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter, put forward in 1997, the geopolitical analytical framework in which he stated that the Caucasus was within the very core of the so-called 'Eurasian Balkans', a highly volatile area due to the following reasons:-

- Its vast deposits of natural resources, including energy and minerals.
- Its heterogeneous blend of peoples whose bitter interethnic rivalries have lasted for centuries.
- The prevalence of arbitrary borders that are often contested.
- Its pivotal strategic position in terms of geopolitical influence and international trade flows attracts the interest of both local and extra-regional powers.

Transcaucasia is important for its location as a corridor from the Caspian to the Black Sea. The geo-economic importance of the Baku—Tbilisi—Ceyhan oil pipeline needs to be taken into account. The region has its natural resources rich in industrial metals, gold, gemstones and construction materials. It has oil deposits, minerals and arable land which is suitable for producing agricultural

goods like fruits and wine. The region also covers much of the post-Soviet Republics of Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan, the Levant, the entire Arabian and Anatolian peninsulas, southern Russia, Xinjiang, Pakistan. Experience of past three decades show that Brzezinski's forecasts turned out to be prophetic. The "Eurasian Balkans" have witnessed a wave of conflict, rising geopolitical tensions and strategic competition in this period.

Russia and Turkey play unique roles in the South Caucasus, the region comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. They introduce additional complexity and danger. Russia is bound by treaty to protect Armenia which excludes the Nagorno-Karabakh region. It operates a major military base in the Armenian city of Gyumri. Russia is also the primary source of sophisticated weaponry for both Armenia and Azerbaijan.



Source: <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/russias-search-for-strategic-depth/>

Turkey, a NATO member, has pledged to defend its ethnic brethren in Azerbaijan. It has maintained an economic blockade on Armenia since 1993. The Turkish involvement in the war in Nagorno-Karabakh is not limited to the protection of Azerbaijani interests but has far reaching geo-strategic objectives in line with the ideology of Pan-Turkism and Turanism. Turkey is seeing itself as a leader of the Turkic-Speaking countries, with Neo-Ottoman aspirations. The territory of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (sharing 17 km border with Turkey) has

a central geopolitical significance. Armenia's Syunik province and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic are seen as a wedge towards the geographical continuity of the Turkish world. Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan perceives the Armenian factor as a "pawn" on the grand chessboard of Eurasian geopolitics, which needs to be removed on the way to its Pan-Turkist dreams. Some analysts believe that Turkey poses a serious threat to peace and stability in the European neighbourhood and therefore to Europe.

It is not in the interest of Russia or Erdoğan to risk conflict between their two nations. The potential for miscalculation, which could even lead to questions about possible NATO involvement, certainly exists. This could lead to complications in Syria and Libya, where the two powers back opposing sides in their respective civil wars. Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) under which an act of aggression against one member requires all other members to render support and military assistance. Iran has close relations with Armenia. Georgia, nominally neutral, receives substantial U.S. military financing and training assistance and engages in trilateral military exercises with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

As per the Russian strategic thinking of 'near abroad', the whole post-Soviet space represents a region in which for reasons of national security - related to the protection of Russia's vulnerable flanks and the preservation of its strategic depth - either favourable geopolitical attitudes toward Moscow or at least neutrality must prevail. The Kremlin's anxieties are the presence of great powers potentially hostile toward Russian interests and the probability of contagious anarchy and chaos that might reach into Russia itself. As a way to manage these concerns, Russia has been sponsoring regional relationship through organizations like the CSTO, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and others.

George Friedman has analysed Russia's geostrategic dilemma in detail. His critical evaluation is given below¹⁸.

'If an European country wants to conquer Russia decisively, it would have to capture Moscow. The great distance to Moscow would wear down any advancing

army. At the zenith of the Cold War, Moscow was about 1,300 miles from NATO forces and St. Petersburg was about 1,000 miles. In the present day, St. Petersburg is about 100 miles away and Moscow about 500 miles. NATO does not have the interest or capacity to engage Russia. The primary threat to Russia is from the west.

Russia was protected by the rugged, mountainous region of Caucasus, which discouraged any attacks in a way that NATO never considered this option. However, if somebody were able to overcome the mountains, they would be away from Moscow by about 1,000 miles. The terrain is flat, open with far better weather conditions than attackers from the west would face.

Out of the two mountain ranges of Caucasus the northern range is far more harsh. The southern (range) is somewhat less intimidating. The North Caucasus includes Chechnya and Dagestan, both have Islamist separatists. Chechnya which is at the center of the northern range, creates a serious challenge to Russia.

Shrinking Buffer Between Russia and NATO Member Countries



Source: <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/russias-search-for-strategic-depth/>

The South Caucasus comprises of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. They had left Russia and formed independent states. If the South Caucasus states formed an anti-Russia coalition, and the U.S. supported a rising in the North Caucasus, the barrier might be shattered and a path northward opened. Therefore, Russia followed a strategy of imposing strong controls in the North Caucasus while engaging in a war in 2008 with Georgia, its most significant southern threat, based on geography and Georgia's alliance with the U.S. The war demonstrated the limits of American power while U.S. was engaged in wars in the Muslim world. It was a successful strategy except that the long-term threat from the south was not eliminated.

The matter is more complex here. The Russians are allied with Armenia and would not have wanted their ally defeated. Russia would not like Turkey to be a significant force in the Caucasus. Russia knew of Azerbaijan's plans and tacitly accepted those plans. Finally, it was Russia that helped negotiate the end of the war and, more importantly, decided to send a decisive force of about 2,000 troops as peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh for at least five years. No one will dare to engage them. Armenia now has Russian forces to its east, and Azerbaijan has Russian troops to its north and west. A similar situation Georgia faces now. Russia now has a major element of control in the South Caucasus. The presence of a major Russian force eliminates a long-standing threat. There is a problem of presence of U.S. troops in Georgia. But in the present circumstances the U.S. is unlikely to invest major forces in the region. Presence of U.S. trainers in Georgia does not worry Russia much. Turkey has been excluded from the peacekeeping force. Russia's efforts to reverse the strategic consequences of the fall of the Soviet Union probably meeting with success in Belarus and now in the South Caucasus.

Strategic depth is vital in the very long term, and its importance is burned into Russia's memory. Russia's pressing problem continues to be its economy and reliance on energy exports as a major revenue source, on which it has no control. Russia has affected a strategic coup, but it continues to experience the financial and internal political stresses. Without a transformation of its economy, Russia will remain in crisis.

Part 4: The Cease Fire Deal

On November 9, over a video conference, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed an armistice agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Mediated by Russia between the two belligerent countries, this armistice dramatically changes the situation on the ground.

Russia negotiated this deal after the Azeri army liberated four of the seven regions under Armenian occupation and then pushing on into Karabakh. On November 09, the Azeri army captured the historical Azeri town of Shusha, 10 miles from Stepanakert, the administrative center of Armenian-controlled Karabakh along the main road connecting the territory to Armenia. The exhausted Armenian army surrendered. The deal requires a 10-mile-long Lachin Corridor linking Armenia proper to Karabakh in return for a 30-mile-long corridor through Armenia linking Azerbaijan to the Azeri enclave of Nakhichevan bordering Turkey. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) would police the corridors. The agreement is silent on the future status of Karabakh and how a final settlement of the conflict would be reached.

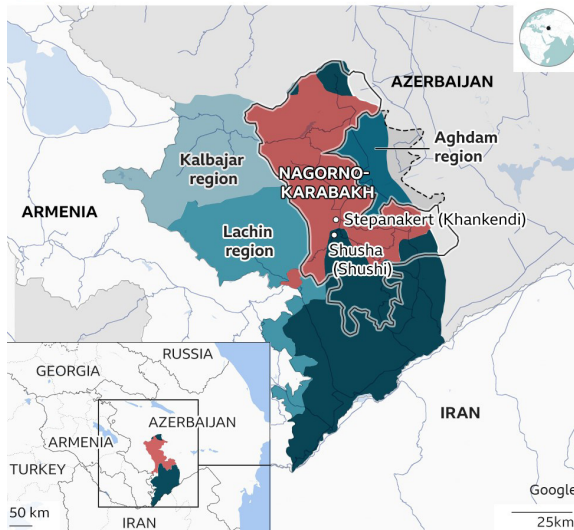
Armenia stated that it had counted 2,425 dead soldiers. More than 100,000 civilians were forced to flee their homes for safer parts of the territory or Armenia. From Azerbaijan Turan News Agency reported 2,783 of its forces were killed between 27 September and 10 November in the Nagorno-Karabakh War and

another 100 missing in action. DNA tests were being carried out to identify 103 bodies. Another 1,245 wounded soldiers were being treated in hospital. At least 143 civilians were also killed on both sides and tens of thousands more were displaced by the fighting^{19,20}.

The cease-fire agreement stopped six weeks of fighting between Azeri and Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan won many of the concessions it wanted. The deal has been received as a victory in Azerbaijan and as a capitulation in Armenia. The agreement requires Armenia to relinquish much of the territory it controlled in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. The countries are exchanging war dead and prisoners. Armenian forces are required to withdraw even from territory not lost in the fighting. To protect the corridor between Armenia proper and Nagorno-Karabakh for at least five years Russian peacekeepers have arrived.

Armenia-Azerbaijan peace deal

- Date of withdrawal of Armenian forces: 25 Nov
- Date of withdrawal of Armenian forces: 1 Dec
- Area of deployment for Russian peacekeepers
- Date of withdrawal of Armenian forces: 20 Nov
- Areas regained by Azerbaijan in the war



Source: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55174211?utm_source=dailybrief&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=DailyBrief2020Dec4&utm_term=DailyNewsBrief

The cease-fire has consolidated Russian and Turkish influence in the region, and sidelined outside powers such as the U.S. and France, who were not involved in the agreement. For Russia, it involves a continued military presence in one of its spheres of influence and opens the door for Kremlin to preserve its ties with Armenia without neglecting its links to Azerbaijan. Armenia's now fragile position after the cease-fire could force Yerevan to seek even closer economic, political and security cooperation with Moscow to prevent any attempts by Azerbaijan to make new territorial gains. For Turkey, the cease-fire consolidates its backing of Azerbaijan and opens the door to a greater military presence in the region.

The complex implementation of the cease-fire and historical tensions between Azeris and Armenians means that sporadic episodes of violence are probable. Many Armenians have set their homes and other infrastructure on fire as they left the areas that will be transferred to Azeri control to prevent Azerbaijan from using them. Azerbaijan will probably push to repopulate those territories with Azeris, making it harder for Armenia to try to retake them. Baku has little interest in breaking the cease-fire, considering the territorial gains it secured in the agreement. Presence of Russian troops in the region will also reduce the probability of Armenia or Azerbaijan seeking to restart the war in the short term. But this will only freeze and not resolve the conflict, leaving open the door for new fighting in the future²¹.

Russia has shown remarkable tactical flexibility in its approach to the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict. Moscow has now the control. It has to be seen whether it can avoid being seen to take sides and can instead focus on the important goal of workable relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan²².

The process of cease fire has not been smooth. After 14-days of war Kremlin brokered a ceasefire on October 10. It did not last long and within hours the ceasefire was broken. A few days later the Azerbaijani army broke through into the southern flank of Armenians'. This indicated that rather than incremental shift, this War was headed towards a fundamental remaking of the *status quo ante*. Russia's subsequent responses with hopes for a real ceasefire apparently dashed.

Russia had a well thought out plan for the cease fire. Small Russian army outposts were established near Armenia's borders around October 20, which could have been interpreted as a delayed show of support to Armenia. If hostilities continued it also left options open. On October 26, airstrikes were conducted by Russia on the Syrian National Army faction Faylaq al-Sham, killing around 80 people. That sent a signal to Turkey that the deployment of Syrian mercenaries in the South Caucasus was not acceptable to Russia. As Azerbaijan was preparing to capture the symbolic Shusha, in the first week of November, the trilateral agreement to be signed was already prepared and leaked to the media by Turkish officials.

Details of the Agreement

The trilateral document is significantly more detailed than the failed accord signed on October 9. This includes a well-defined schedule for the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Aghdam, Lachin and Kalbajar. The pact calls for both sides "to stop at their positions", for economic and transport corridors to be reopened and for exchange of prisoners of war and collection of the bodies of those killed in the fighting. The future status of Karabakh is not mentioned in the document. (The Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation of November 10, 2020 on the cease fire agreement can be read at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>)

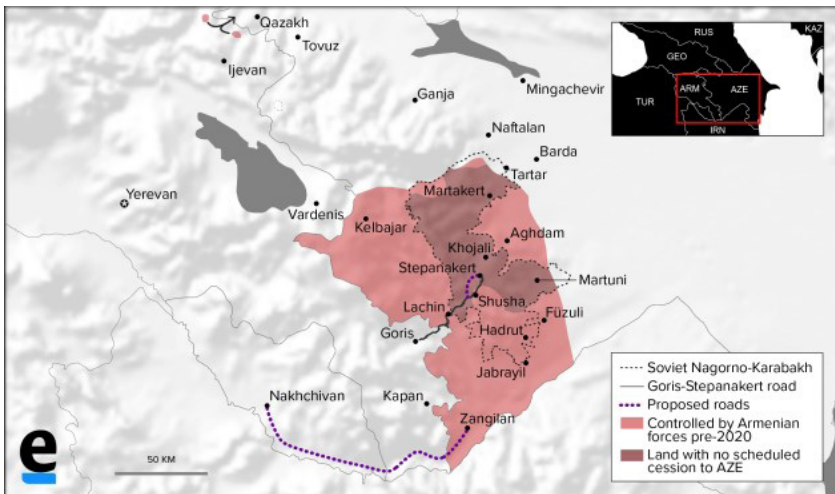
The Timelines^{23,24}

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to a timetable for Armenia's withdrawal from its 'security buffer zone' around Karabakh. The schedule is as under:-

- By November 15, all Armenian forces to be out of Azerbaijan's Kalbajar District; next,
- By November 20, from parts of the Agdam and Gazakh districts; and,
- By December 1, from the Lachin District.

Stipulations of the Agreement

To assert control over the 'Lachin Corridor' - a highway from Armenia to Karabakh - through the city of Lachin and to guarantee the ceasefire and supervise execution of the trilateral agreement, some 2,000 Russian peacekeepers were to move into Karabakh. The UN was to supervise the return of refugees to Karabakh and the formerly occupied surrounding districts. A land corridor was to be established from the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic to mainland Azerbaijan through the Armenian territory bordering Turkey. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Border Guards are to supervise the transit of goods and people from Nakhchivan to mainland Azerbaijan.



Source: <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-did-russia-win-the-karabakh-war>

By the agreement, Azerbaijan's forces regained the districts of Fizuli, Gubaty, Zangilan and Jabrail in the campaign just concluded. The November 10 contact line allows Azerbaijan to retain these districts. Armenia is to return the Kelbajar and Aghdam districts to Azerbaijan by November 15 and November 20 respectively. The Lachin district will be handed over by December 1. By this, Azerbaijan will recover the seven districts adjacent to Upper Karabakh. Moreover, the November 10 contact line permits retention of the southern part of Upper Karabakh by

Azerbaijan. This means military and administrative partitioning of the Upper Karabakh. Upper Karabakh's administrative center of Stepanakert/Khankendi continues to be under Armenian control while the city of Shusha comes under Azerbaijan's control.

The Agreement specifies that in the next three years, Armenia and Azerbaijan shall jointly make a plan to develop a new road connecting Armenia with Upper Karabakh via Azerbaijan's Lachin district (Lachin Corridor). The corridor's width will be of five kilometers. Azerbaijan will not interfere with traffic through the Lachin Corridor. It is not clear whether the proposed road would run parallel to it or replace the existing road in parts or in toto. Khankendi/Stepanakert, the terminus of the existing Lachin road, will continue to remain the terminus of the new road. The proposed new road is intended to bypass the Azerbaijani-controlled Shusha.

Further, a Russian 'peacekeeping' contingent shall be positioned within the area of Armenian-controlled Upper Karabakh along the Armenian-Azerbaijani contact lines. Its deployment to the area began on November 10 and is being synchronised with the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Upper Karabakh. The size of the Russian contingent size is fixed at 1,960 infantry troops with light weapons, 90 armoured personnel carriers and 380 vehicles. Helicopters have not been mentioned. Location of the command headquarters will be 'in the Stepanakert area'. Duration of the mission is initially set at five years. The duration will be prolonged automatically at five-year intervals unless Armenia or Azerbaijan refuses that with advance notice of six months.

The Lachin Corridor's existing and future road will be guarded by Russian peacekeepers. In Azerbaijan's sovereign and effectively controlled territory this will be the sole Russian military presence. The Armenian controlled rump of Upper Karabakh is now recognized as part of Azerbaijan. Under this agreement it shall henceforth host Russian peacekeepers with Azerbaijan's consent. Though Shusha can be taken as a part of the Lachin Corridor, it has been exempted by the armistice agreement both from the notion of the Lachin Corridor and from the

Russian peacekeepers' area of responsibility. This may explain the intention to make a new Lachin road.

The agreement conceives a 'peacekeeping center for ceasefire monitoring' on the ground. This is done to accommodate a minimal Turkish presence in the armistice-implementation system. This bilateral Russian-Turkish military observer mission will be located in Azerbaijani territory with its own technical equipment to monitor the ceasefire at certain distances from the Upper Karabakh contact lines. This does not bring Turkey into Russia's peacekeeping operation and does not change the latter's mono-nationalist character.

The armistice agreement stipulates "reopening of all economic and transportation links in the region". Armenia pledges not to interfere with traffic via its territory that separates the western part of Azerbaijan from Azerbaijan's exclave of Nakhchivan, Traffic of goods and passengers via that Corridor will be controlled by the Russian border troops. Subject to mutual consent of Armenia and Azerbaijan, additional roads could be built. Here involvement of number of Russian troops, the forms of control and whether it would apply to the highway, or the railroad, or both, is not specified. Russian troops have long been positioned in that part of Armenia guarding the border with Iran. It seems additional Russian border troops would be required for this transportation-control mission.

With assistance from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), displaced persons and refugees may return to their places of origin in Upper Karabakh and the seven adjacent districts. There was no Armenian population in these seven adjacent districts.

The core issue of this conflict, the legal-political status of Upper Karabakh, has not been addressed in the Armistice Agreement. The Agreement divides that territory between an Azerbaijani-controlled part and a locally Armenian-administrated part. The former part is free from Russian troops and the latter guarded by Russian troops with Azerbaijan's consent.

Follow-up

Russian peacekeepers sped toward the region before the ink was dry on the tripartite agreement. They were getting ready for their new role before the deal was announced. To transport peacekeepers and equipment to Armenia for deployment to Karabakh, Georgia permitted Russia to fly transport jets through its airspace. This included 90 armoured personnel carriers, 8 helicopters and other equipment from the 15th Motor-Rifle Brigade (Ulyanovsk). These were meant for the Lachin Corridor.

Russia deployed 1,960 Russian peacekeepers to Nagorno Karabakh on November 10. These Russian personnel came from the Roshchinsky-based 15th Separate Motor Rifle Brigade, unspecified elements of the Ulyanovsk-based 31st Airborne Assault Brigade and unspecified elements of the Kubina-based separate 45th Guards Spetsnaz Detached Brigade, a special operations unit of the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV)²⁵. Putin ordered the deployment of peacekeepers to Karabakh and FSB border guards to the Nakhchivan transport corridor by signing an *ukaz* (proclamation). Russia will finance the deployment. Troops will be rotated twice a year.

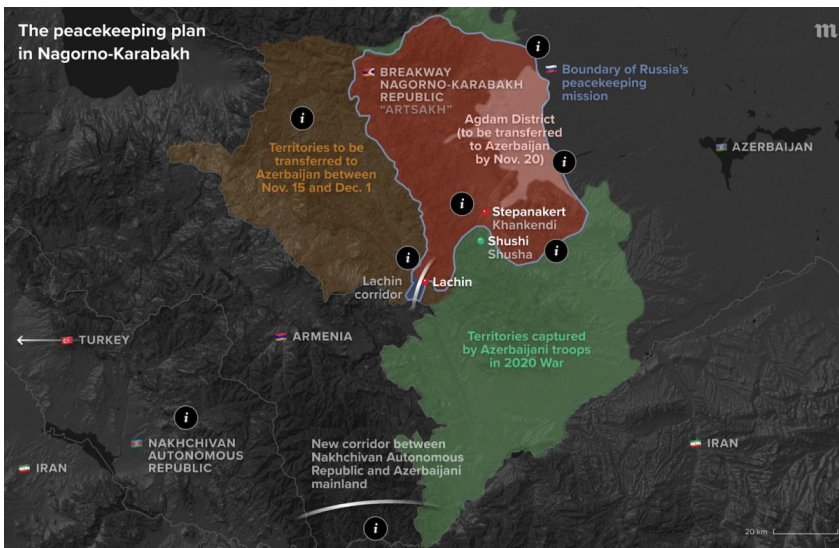
Fallouts

The long-term survival of post-war remnant of the 'Artsakh', or the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and its Armenian population under Russian peacekeepers' protection is unclear. The Agreement is in Moscow's long-term interest. Armenia will need Russia both to rebuild its military and to guarantee the survival of the rump Artsakh and that of Armenia itself. It has been weakened by its defeat, its army is in tatters. Position of Pashinyan has been seriously weakened and he may be ousted anytime.

Azerbaijan also has been weakened by victory. It will require years and lots of money for repopulating the reclaimed territories and developing the shattered infrastructure. Azerbaijan requires Russia to ensure that Armenians fully comply

with the terms of the November 10 Agreement. Russia believes its long-term strategic aim of making both Armenia and Azerbaijan Russian vassal is now possible.

Turkey supported Azerbaijan's war effort both politically and militarily. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has declared that together with Russia Turkey will participate in the Karabakh peacekeeping operation - initially, the Russians declined that. Russia and Turkey have consented to create a joint Russo-Turkish peacekeeping observation center. Russia insists this Center will be placed "outside of Nagorno-Karabakh" and the Turkish personnel will have to "observe remotely, using drones". The Armenian defense ministry now has announced that "Russian and Armenian forces have established a no-fly zone, including flying of drones over Karabakh". Neither Russia nor Armenia currently have any assets on the ground that can stop Azerbaijani /Turkish drone over-flights of Karabakh – that might be a pointer of troubles ahead.



Source: <https://jamestown.org/program/the-karabakh-war-ends-as-russian-troops-move-in/l-map>

As of now, the War is over. Implementation of the ceasefire was comparatively easy, as both Azerbaijan and Armenia need peace. But it would be much more difficult to figure out a regional equilibrium with Erdoğan involved. The Russian-

brokered Agreement cements Moscow's predominant position in the region. Russian soldiers left Azerbaijan in 2012. Now they return to Azerbaijani territory as peacekeepers. Earlier this option had been rejected both by Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, now Russia has obtained the two countries' consent to deploy forces which will stay for at least the next five years.

Notable Upshots

Russia is able to strengthen its military position on the ground in the vicinity as well. There are two geopolitically sensitive projects in the region: The multi-billion-dollar energy infrastructure of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC); and the South Caucasus pipelines carrying Caspian-basin oil and natural gas to Europe as well as the regional 'Silk Road' transit projects backed or promoted by China.

Notably, the November 10 trilateral ceasefire statement does not refer to the 'Minsk Co-Chairs' - the U.S., France and Russia. Moscow has kept all other Western actors outside the discussions while brokering this latest deal. Now, Turkey seems to be finding a place for itself in the equation. As per statement of the President of Azerbaijan, Turkey would officially play a role in future settlement of the conflict and the Turkish service members would be involved in monitoring the Ceasefire. Leyla Abdullayeva, the spokesperson for the Azerbaijani ministry of foreign affairs, confirmed that stating that although "no country's name was [explicitly] mentioned [...] Turkey will be part of the [Karabakh peacekeeping] control-and-monitoring center with Russia."

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) expert Maxim Suchkov argued that he did not believe Russia would be willing to raise Turkey's influence in the Caucasus. Though he acknowledged that this could change depending on developments on the ground. On October 14, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov gave a radio interview in which he expressed Russian discomfort over Turkey's position in the conflict despite the country being a close partner, though not a strategic ally, of Moscow.

The key issue that lies ahead will surely relate to the actual withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories. The accord suggests that the Peacemaking Center will monitor both parties' fulfillment of the Agreements. But the Agreement does not specify a specific enforcement mechanism. Whether Armenia abides by the given schedule will remain a critical question for the next few weeks.

One of the most unexpected upshots of the Agreement was that Russia will control a transport communication corridor between western Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via a sliver of land along Armenia's southern frontier. The simultaneous creation of dual corridors in Lachin and between the two parts of Azerbaijan will greatly improve attractiveness of the South Caucasus' trans-regional connectivity. This would lead to a new age of prosperity for the region's inhabitants.

Major peacekeeping operations in Nagorno-Karabakh will substantially increase Russian commitments. There will be conflicting pressures from Armenia and Azerbaijan. A significant challenge for Russian diplomacy will be to manage the hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan and yet preserve friendly relations with both²⁶.

Win-Win Situation for Russia

The accord is a win-win situation for Russia. It has pulled off a spectacular geopolitical coup in successfully reasserting its influence in the South Caucasus, independent of Western powers. Moscow shut out the West from South Caucasus, put boots on the ground in Azerbaijan, showed Turkey its place and asserted its dominant power in the South Caucasus.

Russia's relative restraint throughout the six-week War had been the subject of avid speculation. Facing an all-out war in its neighbourhood, Russia initiated a series of pragmatic tactical moves that consciously sought to avoid over-committing. This is Russia's policy toward its 'near abroad', emphasising on the

ground realities. Now, with its decisive intervention in brokering and enforcing the agreement, and thus cementing its authority in the region, Russia showed its diplomatic and military finesse. Today the new situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is reminiscent of the breakaway region of Transnistria in Moldova or the South Ossetia and Abkhazia splintering from Georgia, where Moscow emerged as the arbiter from the very start.

The war has played into Putin's hands by reducing the status of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Propelled to power by street protests back in April-May 2018, the former journalist very much fits the profile of a "colour revolutionary" the Kremlin views as a threat.

Long Term Solution

Many questions remain unanswered. The matter of Nagorno-Karabakh's final status is not addressed in the Agreement. Some Armenians feel that the local Armenians will have to vacate on their own in next five years before Azerbaijan takes over Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan is likely to encourage such an exodus. But Russia could offer the region some protection with its open-ended peacekeeping role.

Critics argue that the agreement addresses the symptoms, but not the cause. It does not deal with the deeper roots of the conflict. There is not much in the Agreement other than peacekeeping and transit corridors. Efforts of reconstruction, development and peace building over the next five years will leave the threat of revived war in the background. It will be very difficult for Armenians to stomach the territorial losses. Dynamics of the conflict have not radically changed, they have simply turned over. Previously Armenia was the dominant victor and Azerbaijan the aggrieved; the reality has now reversed, with the same ominous possibility for future violence.

Attaining long-term peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia is a difficult proposition. Stability and prosperity resulting from a settlement could help the

two countries to finally reconcile and move on. Both the countries would have to abandon their maximalist demands driven by rigid nationalism and opt for pragmatism²⁷.

Russia's Peace-keeping Role²⁸

This peacekeeping mission is an entirely Russian undertaking and does not include any CSTO personnel, structures or frameworks. However, CSTO is supporting this Russian military deployment. Russia is also likely to leverage the CSTO to manage perceptions about Russia's military deployment in Nagorno-Karabakh. The CSTO plans to conduct negotiations with the UN in 2021 to hold CSTO peacekeeping operations under the UN's auspices. Russia is likely to cite its Nagorno-Karabakh peacekeeping mission in its 2021 bid to legitimise the CSTO as a UN recognized peacekeeping force. Current CSTO members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan. Russia seeks to blur the lines between Russian and CSTO activities as part of a hybrid warfare technique to obfuscate Russian activities.

The Russian Defense Ministry began constructing an 'Inter-departmental Center for Humanitarian Response' in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh's capital, on November 15, 2020, as part of its operations in that region. The Center will coordinate Russian-led refugee resettlement and humanitarian efforts. This effort would help Russia to frame its military personnel deployed abroad as legitimate humanitarian actors.

The CSTO will further formalize agreements on CSTO peacekeeping by equipping its Rapid Reaction Force (RRF), and promoting coalition security, military-technical cooperation and counter-narcotic efforts. Russia is likely to deploy CSTO peacekeepers to the Belarus using the CSTO RRF. President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, in an interview on November 13, praised deeper integration with Russia via the CSTO as the "main remedy" for 'colour revolutions.' Russia may call a future conventional Russian military deployment to Belarus as a CSTO multinational peacekeeping mission. This would help conceal

Putin's intent to use such a deployment to further integrate Belarus into Russia.

Experts believe that the United States and NATO should take serious note of this happening. In their opinion, Russian-led peacekeeping missions are shown as humanitarian in nature even when these could support hybrid wars, and that it might be a Russian effort to manipulate the information space by characterizing its hybrid operations as peacekeeping missions.

Part 5: The Stakeholders

Regional Contentions

The Trans-Caucasia region under discussion is sandwiched between Iran, Turkey, Russia and Georgia. It lies at an intersection of political, ethnic and religious borders. At stake in this conflict is Russian, Turkish and Iranian regional influence, an ethnic battle with memories of genocide and a religious component of Christian Armenia, Shia Azerbaijan and Sunni Turkey. The present conflict places the world in a dangerous situation. Involvement of so many powerful interests has the potential to spiral out of control from a single miscalculation²⁹. A protracted war this time threatens to make this a front for sectarian and jihadist fighting in Russia's and Iran's backyard, since both countries have recent history of fighting Sunni jihadists in the region.

Armenia has legitimate fears that Azerbaijan intends nothing less than ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh's 150,000 Armenians. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev proclaimed in a televised address on Oct. 4 that "Nagorno-Karabakh is our land.... This is the end. We showed them who we are. We are chasing them like dogs"³⁰.

The position of different stakeholders on the conflict are discussed under the following part.

Azerbaijan

Prominent thinkers have long acknowledged Azerbaijan's importance. Zbigniew Brzezinski stated in 1997 that Azerbaijan can be described as the vitally important 'cork' controlling access to the 'bottle' that contains the riches of the Caspian Sea Basin and Central Asia. An independent, Turkic-speaking Azerbaijan, with pipelines running from it to the ethnically related and politically supportive Turkey, would prevent Russia from exercising a monopoly on access to the region and would thus also deprive Russia of decisive political leverage over the policies of the new Central Asian States³¹.

Vladimir Socor has written that "Azerbaijan is the irreplaceable country as a gas producer for...the Southern Gas Corridor's first stage. Azerbaijan will again be irreplaceable as a transit country for Central Asian gas in those projects' follow-up stages"³². Azerbaijan is the crucial lynchpin of any future Southern Gas Corridor that will bring Caspian gas to Europe while bypassing Russia and Iran. Azerbaijan's strategic location offers Central Asian energy producers and littoral states an excellent alternative to dependence on Moscow. Azerbaijan has also shown its growing ability to provide a significant alternative to Russia in provisioning Southeastern Europe with gas, particularly as the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline through Turkey links up to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TANAP-TAP) which continues to move forward³³.

South Caucasus as a Strategic Region. The region serves as an important energy corridor. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan started building its own pipeline network to export its oil and gas without relying on the Russian pipeline. Late last year a gas pipeline was completed which runs close to the conflict zone. It is intended to help ease Europe's reliance on Russian gas imports and stretches across Turkey. This network of oil and gas pipelines permits Azerbaijan to access international markets without passing through Russia. Analysts say that Armenian armed forces are unlikely to target Azeri pipelines because significant damage or destruction would dent international support for Armenia.

Energy Corridor

A network of oil and gas pipelines allows Azerbaijan to access international markets without passing through Russia



Sources: Geopolitical Intelligence Services (natural gas); MOL Group (oil)

What is at Stake? Beyond control of a territory that has a population of 150,000, the standoff raises the question of whether country borders inherited from World War II should be inviolable or evolve when they don't match with ethnic aspirations. Some experts ask whether Armenians and Azeris would ever be able to live side by side if Nagorno-Karabakh returns under Azerbaijan's control. Although tens of thousands of Azeris had to flee Nagorno-Karabakh when Armenians took control of the province three decades ago, Azerbaijan has pledged to guarantee the rights of Armenians if it reclaims the territory. Armenians say they were discriminated against by Azerbaijan in Soviet times and will never feel safe under Azeri rule.

Azerbaijan's Military Offensive and the Russian Ceasefire. Several factors motivated Azerbaijan to launch its offensive. After its miserable defeat in 1994, Azerbaijan invested in boosting the capabilities of the Azeri military, particularly with technologically advanced weapons³⁴. Though Azerbaijan largely relies on Russian equipment, it has diversified its suppliers, notably with the purchase of surveillance and attack drones from Israel. Azerbaijan has taken care

not to attack civilian areas in Armenia proper. Doing so might have triggered a defence treaty Russia has with Armenia requiring Moscow to come military aid in Yerevan's defence. Baku claimed that Nagorno-Karabakh forces were hitting Azerbaijan's second-largest city Ganja, located about 62 miles outside the frontline near Nagorno-Karabakh, with long-range missiles. Azerbaijan also claimed that Armenia was shelling the industrial town of Mingachevir along with the smaller ones of Tartar, Barda and Beylagan.

Factors Affecting Moscow-Baku Diplomatic Relations. Several contributing factors elucidate the present diplomatic downturn between Azerbaijan and Russia. These interrelated and not mutually exclusive factors are³⁵:-

- Following the July clashes, Turkey and Azerbaijan held massive military exercises in response to Russian-Armenian drills. The exercises were followed by pronouncements and rallies in Baku urging the Turkish military to create permanent bases in the country, worrying Moscow.
- Azerbaijan has purchased more arms from Israel and Turkey than Russia in recent years. This was due to the Russian-made equipment's reported ineffectiveness, in Syria and Libya, against "game-changing" Turkish drones and electronic warfare technology.
- Azerbaijan has overtaken Russia as the top hydrocarbon supplier to the Turkish market. This competition with Gazprom will soon be extended to Southeastern Europe. Baku is frustrated with Moscow's *de facto* lack of neutrality regarding the Karabakh Conflict. Azerbaijan had expected a more even-handed Russian approach because of the perception that the Kremlin holds antipathy toward Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his Velvet Revolution.
- Recent Azerbaijani cabinet reshuffles dismissed the head of the presidential administration, Ramiz Mehdiyev, widely depicted as "the leader of pro-Russian forces" in Baku, along with other figures in his circle.

How have Azeris Reacted to the Peace Agreement? With the announcement of a peace deal brokered by Russia and Turkey, state television and social media in Azerbaijan were awash with celebrations. Azeris danced in the streets and showered praise on their military and on President Aliyev for what many Azeris view as moving a step closer to reclaiming Nagorno-Karabakh, which both they and Armenians contend rightfully belongs to them. Crowds swarmed the city and flocked to the Alley of Martyrs, a memorial to fallen soldiers. They wrapped themselves in Azerbaijani and Turkish flags, sang the national anthem and praised their victorious leader, Ilham Aliyev. Azerbaijan's recovery of Armenian-occupied territories crowns a 44-day military operation featuring sophisticated equipment and tactics, amid a groundswell of domestic popular support. The campaign's success transcends the battlefield. It signifies another stage in Azerbaijan's maturation from a nation and state building project to a fully consolidated nation-state³⁶.

The Scale of Azerbaijan's Triumph. For Azerbaijan, this was no halfway success, it was a huge victory. Aliyev got what he wanted most. Occupation of all Azerbaijani territory other than Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenia was over. It made possible the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Azerbaijan also retook Shusha, the Nagorno-Karabakh town that had the largest Azeri population thirty years ago³⁷.

Diminishing Returns and Rising Risk. Azerbaijan will face much greater problems trying to go beyond the victory to retake all of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia's military leadership will presumably do everything it can to fortify Nagorno-Karabakh, making another round of warfare less predictable. And because the remaining population of the enclave is almost completely Armenian, regaining it would force Azerbaijan to choose between ethnic cleansing and a potentially violent occupation.

After the military phase of the conflict has finally ended, it is Azerbaijan's sovereign right now to decide as an independent state as to how best to resolve any lingering issues that might persist. The South Caucasus is now on the threshold of

transformational change which will certainly work out to its diverse people's benefit and the Eurasian super-continent will be more closely connected because of it. Furthermore, the realist interest permeates³⁸. Azerbaijan is not only a significant oil supplier, but also the key to Europe's Southern Gas Corridor strategy with BP having led the investment in the sector since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lack of democratic credentials of Azerbaijan has not been an impediment to its purchase of Western arms. Azerbaijan is Israel's largest supplier of crude and has been a major buyer of Israeli arms as well³⁹.

Armenia

Since 1993, Armenia's diplomatic relations with Turkey remain ruptured. Its borders with both Turkey and Azerbaijan are closed. To access the rest of the world only narrow stretches of border with Georgia and Iran exist. The economic consequences have been devastating, increasing its dependence on Russia and complicating its transition towards a more democratic regime.

At the beginning of the conflict, Armenia took a strategic decision to side with Russia and its interests in the region. In the early 1990s that approach paid huge dividends. Russia provided military equipment to Armenia. To ensure victory in the war with Azerbaijan, Russia gave training and even direct assistance. The main pillar of Armenian foreign policy was this over-reliance on Russia which, culminated in a defence pact between the two. Only a few months before the present conflict, the countries held joint military exercises with thousands of troops from both countries.

Armenia is in conflict with Turkey, not Azerbaijan, on a strategic level. Certain factions in Turkey, with President Erdoğan as their representative, have never made peace with the fact that they failed to finish off Armenia completely. Armenia made a strategic mistake by isolating itself from the world stage. The Armenian diaspora in the West, particularly in France and the US, are established, financially prosperous and politically influential. But Armenia's security concerns were not articulated for their respective governments and the general public by them. Very

few small countries can boast of such powerful diaspora. The advantage of this strategic leverage was not utilised⁴⁰.

The cease-fire is seen as a victory in Azerbaijan and as a capitulation in Armenia. Under the deal, Armenian forces have to evacuate from crucial districts outside the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) that the country has held since 1994. A five-kilometer wide corridor, overseen by Russian troops will provide the only access to the Armenian mainland. Officially, more than 1,100 Armenian civilians and 2,783 servicemen are known to have been killed. The majority of Armenian soldiers killed in action have been young recruits, born after 2000. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has defended the deal, arguing that the country's military resources were near exhaustion. Pashinyan accepted that the terms of ceasefire are a blow to Armenian national pride. He described the deal on his Facebook page as "incredibly painful for me and my people".

Following the announcement of the deal, protests flared in the Armenian capital of Yerevan. Agitators broke into the parliament building; others beat unconscious Speaker of Parliament Ararat Mirzoyan in front of his wife and children. Mr. Pashinyan said his official residence had been ransacked, as people vented their outrage over what they view as their government's capitulation. Protesters are demanding the resignation of Pashinyan, who came to power in a 2018 democratic revolution. Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan resigned on Nov. 16 amid a public confrontation with Pashinyan over the terms of the cease-fire. Pashinyan's surrender has even been criticised by President Armen Sarkissian, who is the sole surviving senior government official after the 2018 Velvet Revolution brought Pashinyan to power. He called for Pashinyan's resignation and for the formation of a national unity government. 17 Armenian opposition parties and their supporters have been taking to the streets of Yerevan demanding Pashinyan's resignation and early parliamentary elections. There is a genuine fear that the democratic government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan may not survive the capitulation. So far, Pashinyan has refused to resign. Opposition parties currently lack the parliamentary seats needed to overthrow him. But this could change if

the protests escalate and the members of Pashinyan's coalition government desert him.

The popular anger is understandable. For Armenia, the Agreement is a disaster. Armenians around the world used social media to deride Mr. Pashinyan as a traitor. Some messages thanked him for "stopping the bleeding." However, the bitter truth is that Shusha's capture after weeks of fighting made it clear that Armenia was not in a position to hold-off steady, and extremely deadly, Azeri advances. Such effort would have been disastrous and extremely irresponsible. The Armenian Assembly of America, the largest, non-partisan Armenian-American advocacy organization in the United States, stated that it was "deeply troubled" by the Agreement. It called on Washington to assert its leadership in ensuring that the peace process wasn't usurped by what it described as "the authoritarian regimes of Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan."

The conflict was tough. What came after was tougher. Confusion reigned. There was barely any phone signal, no internet, no hot water, no heat and little food other than bread and instant noodles. There were always lots of questions. There weren't many answers. Immediately after the announcement of an end to the war, there was an exodus of ethnic Armenians people from a land that has literally changed owners overnight. People who could not afford transport simply killed their livestock. Others walked their herds for miles over narrow mountain roads, hoping they would not succumb to exhaustion or an oncoming car. Armenians who are pouring out of Nagorno-Karabakh are leaving little behind. Some villagers, feeling they had nothing more to lose, set their houses on fire, finding solace in knowing their enemies could never sleep in there⁴¹.

Liberal Western countries and media hailed Pashinyan's 2018 Velvet Revolution as a beacon of hope. The Economist conferred upon Armenia the honour of "Country of the Year"⁴². But Yerevan did not get even a fraction of the economic and political support from the West which had been offered to Ukraine after its 2014 Euromaidan Revolution, the Revolution of Dignity. Nor did the West provide any significant support to Armenia in the latest fighting as it did with the

Russo-Ukrainian war. The U.S. and EU might not have said so publicly, but their economic and strategic interests in Azerbaijan prohibited such support.

Pashinyan has been careful to avoid antagonising Russia. He has not moved Yerevan out of the Russian political or economic orbit. Even when criticising Russia's gas politics and arms sales to Azerbaijan, he did so in a delicate manner to remind Moscow of its status as Armenia's strategic partner. A Paris-based historian specialising in Eastern Europe, Galia Ackerman, argued that "Pashinyan was elected after a popular uprising in 2018 and was starting to look a bit too independent, as far as Moscow was concerned. Notably, he got rid of a few people from his pro-Russian security services"⁴³.

Though Pashinyan never challenged Armenia's special relationship with Russia, he did take on individuals and clans connected to Moscow. Serzh Sargsyan, the former president, went on trial for corruption along with several of his ministers. Another ex-president, Robert Kocharyan, who happens to be a personal friend of Putin's, faced justice over the violent suppression of protests in 2008. Pashinyan's overtures to Moscow, both before and during the war, were by and large rebuffed. In July, Margarita Simonyan, the head of Russian broadcaster RT and one of the Kremlin's top propagandists, accused the Armenian leadership of anti-Russian activity and said they should not expect Russia's help in the event of a war. The Russian leadership will not miss him in case he goes⁴⁴.

It has been recommended that the legacy of Levon Ter-Petrosian, the country's first president after independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union should be revived. He advocated pragmatism and recognised the need of conciliation to achieve peace. He understood the importance of having good relations with Turkey. To attain this, he was willing to return the occupied territories. In 1997, he warned the public, "The international community will not for long tolerate the situation created around Karabakh because that is threatening regional cooperation and security as well as [the] West's oil interests ... Karabakh has won the battle, not the war"⁴⁵.

At that time Ter-Petrosian faced massive resistance from hardliners and was even accused of treason. He was eventually deposed in 1998. His line of thinking in Armenia continues to face resistance and as late as 2016 was condemned as a harmful “virus”⁴⁶.

Turkey

The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, which dates back to 1988 in its modern form, can lay claim to being Europe’s most intractable dispute. In the ’90s, the Armenian side triumphed at great cost. On Sept. 27, this year Azerbaijan took military action to reverse that defeat and recover lost lands. Turkey offered an unprecedented level of military-technical and political support to Azerbaijan during the hostilities. This is sharply in contrast with the earlier Karabakh War (1991–1994), when Ankara provided essentially no military or technological assistance to Baku. Even then, Turkey has always been a major supporter of Azerbaijan and an enemy of Armenia. It has a strong religious, ethnic, linguistic and kinship with Azerbaijan. The then Ottoman Empire, present Turkey, killed about 1.5 million Armenians in a genocide in 1915. It is no surprise that in the dispute Turkey sides with Azerbaijan. Many Armenians call Azerbaijanis as “Turks,” due to the closeness between the two sides.

Nagorno-Karabakh Flares up. Prior to the breakout of hostilities on Sept. 27, several months of intense high-level military contacts, joint military exercises and a sudden surge in Turkish arms sales to Azerbaijan helped Turkey prepare Azerbaijan to significantly challenge Russia’s ability to maintain its spread between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The two weeks of military drills featured armoured vehicles, artillery and mortars. Turkey has directly supported the ongoing combat by facilitating the presence of Syrian fighters among Azerbaijani forces and even by deploying its own F-16 fighter aircraft in Azerbaijan during the opening phases of the conflict. Presence of the Turkish fighter aircraft demonstrated direct Turkish military involvement and commitment. Azerbaijan has been using Bayraktar drones provided by Turkey. The same drones were used by Turkey against Russia in Syria and Libya.

Turkish Ambitions. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan provided the opportunity and cover for Turkish ambitions in the Southern Caucasus. Ankara has been trying to increase its influence in Azerbaijan to boost its foothold in the Southern Caucasus where Turkish and Russian ambitions are in competition. Sustained increased activity along the contact line separating Armenian and Azerbaijani forces may have helped obscure preparations for military operations that began on Sept. 27. Turkey has secured the promise of a transport corridor as a gain from the conflict. This corridor effectively becomes a new trade route all the way to Central Asia running from eastern Turkey to the Caspian Sea via the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhichevan. It connects Turkey to Central Asia and China's Belt and Road Initiative. Further, Azerbaijan is now a major gas exporter to Turkey. It is beneficial to Ankara, as the money Azerbaijan gets from the deal comes back to Turkey through weapons purchases. Ankara's gas imports from Azerbaijan rose by 23 per cent in the first half of 2020. Azerbaijan is crucial for Turkey's energy security. SOCAR, Azerbaijan's state oil company, has become the biggest foreign investor in the ailing Turkish economy.

The Turkish-Russia Factor. While Russia continues to remain the most important power broker, Turkey with close historical ties in the region is increasingly wanting to shape the outcome of the conflict. Turkey share close ethnic and cultural ties with Azerbaijan. Commentators and officials, mostly Turks, describe the relationship as "one nation, two states." Turkey's involvement in the row was relatively limited until recently. Now Ankara has adopted a more assertive posture in the Middle East and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is more forthright in its support for Azerbaijan⁴⁷. Even at the expense of Russia, Turkey wants to play a greater role in the region. Laurence Broers, the Caucasus program director at London's Chatham House think tank said, "Turkey has thrown down the gauntlet."

Turkey's role in the ongoing clash between Armenia and Azerbaijan is adding a new dimension to a string of proxy fights putting Turkey and Russia against each other and challenging Russia's longstanding policy of neutrality over the simmering conflict. Moscow regards the two countries as within its sphere of

influence. That stance now is being tested by a more assertive Turkey. It announced its unconditional support for Azerbaijan immediately after fighting broke out. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, "As Turkey, with all our means and with all our heart, we stand with fellow and brother Azerbaijan and we will continue to stand with it, God willing, until Nagorno-Karabakh is liberated from invasion, this struggle will continue"⁴⁸. It is worth mentioning that Turkey did not give similar military or technological support to Georgia during the latter's war against Russia in August in 2008 or to Ukraine when it was invaded by Russia in 2014. That was even when Turkey had been developing economic, political, technological and military cooperation with Georgia for almost thirty years. Its relations with Ukraine were elevated to a strategic level in 2011.

Turkish geopolitical ambitions have been on the rise since the country's failed 2016 coup and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's subsequent consolidation of power. Given the natural competition between Russia and Turkey when both seek to assert influence beyond their borders, stand-offs between the two have been seen in Syria, Libya and to a lesser degree even in places like Ukraine and Georgia. An earlier escalation in the fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia in July 2020 provided the perfect opportunity for Turkey to ramp up its efforts in the region. Supporting Azerbaijan allows Turkey to challenge the effectiveness of Russia's management strategy in the Southern Caucasus, and by extension, to challenge the geopolitical *status quo* along Moscow's vulnerable southern periphery.

This situation provides opportunities for Turkey. Turkey has historically competed with Russia for hegemony in this neighbourhood, something on display in the Ottoman Empire's northward efforts in the 17th century, and more recently in Turkey's Cold War role in a NATO member along the Soviet Union's southern front. Competition with Russia has been central to Turkey's "Neo-Ottoman" ambition of expanding its geopolitical influence and military presence farther into the Middle East and North Africa or even of challenging European powers. Syrian and Libyan adventures by both Russia and Turkey have brought them on the verge of conflict. This has not discouraged Turkey, which is now taking the competition into Russia's backyard. With Ankara's currently swelling

geopolitical ambitions, these two nations are once again in competition in the Caucasus.

Russian authorities confirmed that no Turkish troops will be deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh as per a provision in the cease-fire agreement, which will limit Turkish troops to the Azerbaijani Observation Centre near the disputed region. The Turkish parliament has, however, approved a government motion to deploy peacekeeping forces in Azerbaijan to help monitor the country's recent cease-fire agreement with Armenia. Ankara has not delivered any official statement regarding the details of such a deployment. The deployment highlights how Ankara will push to be as closely involved in monitoring the cease-fire's implementation as Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia will allow. The parliamentary vote means there is wide support in the Turkish government for military deployments abroad, especially in peacekeeping missions.

Turkey has steadfastly backed Azerbaijan from the beginning of the latest clashes, both in military and diplomatic terms. Aliyev repeatedly expressed Azerbaijan's wish to bring Turkey into any discussions of a final political solution to the Karabakh Conflict. The presence of Turkish service members may reflect Azerbaijan's attempt to balance against Russia. Ankara is staying in close contact throughout this process with both Moscow and Baku. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke by phone with Putin on November 10 and discussed the developments in the South Caucasus and Syria. At the same time, a Turkish delegation composed of the ministers of defence and foreign affairs, head of intelligence and commander of the Land Forces visited Baku to meet with President Aliyev⁴⁹.

Another Theatre. Since the fall of 1920, for the first time in 100 years, both Russian and Turkish troops will be on the ground in the region. Then Vladimir Lenin and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk dictated terms to draw new borders and spheres of influence. As many czars and sultans had done before them, Russia and Turkey have now shut Western nations out of the decision-making process⁵⁰.

Direct military involvement in Azerbaijani operations against Armenia risks creating yet another theatre where Turkish and Russian forces directly face each other. The current Turkish involvement has not yet prompted a Russian military response in support of Armenia. Moscow has been reluctant to do so in a bid to maintain a balance in its relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia. Additional Turkish deployments or direct engagement in combat operations may, however, force Russia to deploy forces to Armenian-controlled territory. Even in that situation sustained combat between Russia and Turkey is unlikely. In Syria and Libya, where Russia and Turkey have each supported opposing sides and have even seen limited direct engagements, the two countries have developed a reliable method for de-escalation and stabilisation.

Persistent economic under-performance will limit Turkey's ability to support its external ambitions in the longer term. The Turkish lira has continued to weaken, forcing the government to adjust its monetary policy. The lira took a further hit from Turkish involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. Erdoğan understands the need to adjust his politics in order to address Turkey's economic woes and its international isolation. He has already signaled his interest to improve relations with the U.S. under President Biden. He is aware of the international prestige and leverage that opening borders with Armenia would bring him⁵¹. Its current economic struggles will not, however, impede an aggressive foreign policy or even military intervention in the short-term. For now, Turkey can pursue an aggressive foreign policy.

Ankara probably sees its contribution in Nagorno-Karabakh as a bargaining chip not only in the Caucasus but also with Russia. The participation of Turkish mercenaries from Syria, another theatre where Turkish and Russian interests clash, implies that the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict may not stay confined to the South Caucasus this time⁵².

Russia and Turkey may be sensing the need to change the peace process against the conflict. For the last 30 years, the Minsk Group of the OSCE, co-chaired by France, Russia and the U.S., has been piloting the peace process. Now Azerbaijan

has wished for Turkey to become a new co-chair. Turkey, in turn, recommended renewal of meetings within the Astana format (Russia, Turkey, Iran) that would draw Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia together. The Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stressed that peace and stability in the region cannot exist without Turkey⁵³.

Russia

Russia has declared that the South Caucasus was part of its privileged sphere of influence. Though the U.S. and EU has rejected this outright, they did not bring components of the region into their organizations like the NATO or the EU. Unresolved status of the region was named by experts as a “frozen conflict”. These are the areas of conflict around the then Soviet Union where Russia plays a central role.

Russia is obsessed with the threat of “colour revolutions” and is determined to lead the struggle against this. This has brought Russia closer to Azerbaijan and the personal rapport between Putin and Aliyev works to reinforce this counter-revolutionary “axis”. Simultaneously, the most important material reality on the South Caucasian ground is the presence of the 102nd Russian military base in Armenia, which hosts some 5000 troops and two Air Force squadrons (including Mig-29 fighters and Mi-24 helicopters)⁵⁴.

Great Powers in the South Caucasus. In the Trump era, Russia had been eager to insert itself into the hotspots of the Middle East and Africa to highlight U.S. failures and to portray itself as a major power on the world stage. But Russia is not a problem solver and its interventions generally aggravate instability. China is also more assertive globally and eager to benefit from a dysfunctional West. But while it has the cash to spend, cash does not solve issues. The number of difficult conflicts is growing. The dynamics that hold in parts of, Libya, Africa, Syria, Yemen, Eastern Ukraine and Venezuela are now spreading to the Caucasus. West is no longer capable or willing to lead this messy world. Regional powers like Iran, Turkey and the Gulf states, are coming up but are unable to bring order. It is

a bad omen for Azerbaijan and Armenia⁵⁵.

The Ceasefire Deal. While the world was glued to the TV on the result of the U.S. elections, Russia achieved the near-impossible task of arranging for a ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Kremlin satisfied the Azerbaijani leaders and their backers in the Turkish capital Ankara, though at the expense of Armenian leaders in Yerevan. The deal strengthens major battlefield gains by Azerbaijan's forces and will leave Baku in control of about 40 per cent of Nagorno-Karabakh itself besides all of the territories around that had long been held by Armenian forces. Before the start of the conflict in late September, the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh and parts of the seven surrounding districts amounting to around 13 per cent of Azerbaijan territory was controlled by Armenian-backed forces. Azerbaijan will now control a sizable chunk of the territory it lost in the early 1990s.

This ceasefire, backed by Russian peacekeepers appears to stand a chance though the previous ceasefires did not hold, The current deal may offer the kind of opportunity the region has not seen since the collapse of the Soviet Union and conclusion of the earlier war over Karabakh in 1994. The Kremlin was able to reassert preponderant Russian influence in the Caucasus, part of Russia's "near abroad" where Russia claims it should have a dominant voice. This would require a recognition that Russia is the leading player.

Putin took advantage of Armenia's dependence on Russian military power and compelled Yerevan to accept this defeat by the Turkish-backed Azerbaijani push. It was a clever strategy. Putin forfeited some goodwill and trust in Armenia by failing to come to its aid and then imposing this humiliation on it. No other state could defend Armenia from Turkey or Azerbaijan, Yerevan has nowhere to go. Putin could have stopped or reversed the Azerbaijani gains. But his rally around his Armenian allies would have been at the cost of driving Azerbaijan much more firmly into the Turkish camp. Erdogan miscalculated Putin's willingness to sacrifice an ally temporarily to make a bigger, longer-term gain.

Is Russia the winner? As the ink is drying on the three-page peace deal aimed at halting the worst fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan in decades and smoke clears from the battlefields around Nagorno-Karabakh, the one thing seems to be clear: The Kremlin has won. Moscow increased its clout in a region further where an intense fighting between two former Soviet republics threatened to shrink the Kremlin's influence. Under the aegis of the Western nations and NATO allies, France and U.S., through the Minsk Group of OSCE had a strategic role to play for conflict resolution in Russia's area of influence. With this peace deal, Russia gets its troops on the ground and pushes U.S. and France out of the picture once and for all.



Source: <https://www.rferl.org/a/as-guns-fall-silent-in-nagorno-karabakh-there-s-one-winner-in-the-conflict-you-might-not>

Matthew Bryza, former Minsk Group co-chair who also served as U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan from 2010-12 said, “Yes, the Minsk Group is dead. Seems so. Russia has filled the vacuum. As did Turkey, for that matter. Russia did well in this long-standing diplomatic effort to resolve the conflict. Putin has dominated. He’s the kingmaker in the situation.” Richard Giragosian, Director of the Regional Studies Center in Yerevan, stated, “The terms of this new agreement grant Russia the most important of Moscow’s objectives: A dominant military presence on the ground. Prior lack of Russia’s direct military presence in Nagorno-Karabakh was one of the most distinctive aspects of the Karabakh Conflict, standing in stark contrast to every other such conflict within the former Soviet space. And that absence was a long-standing irritant for Moscow.”

Moscow also achieved another objective: Putting pressure on Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Since he came to power in 2018 in a popular uprising known as the Velvet Revolution, Pashinyan’s independent foreign policy streak has annoyed the Kremlin. Moscow was uneasy with the kind of political change. Giragosian said, “This enhanced Russian leverage will not only keep Armenia well within the Russian orbit, but it will also further limit Armenia’s options and orientation in seeking closer relations with the West”⁵⁶. Aleksandr Gabuyev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center, wrote, “Whatever its potential downsides for the Kremlin, the deal in many ways addresses core Russian interests in the conflict and is perhaps the best outcome at least in short term (that) Moscow could get out of the situation.”

Notably, Russia rejected Turkey’s offer to join the Nagorno-Karabakh peacekeeping force and gave them an observer role. Russia is unwilling to tolerate Turkish competition close to home, as well as in distant Syria and Libya. Azerbaijan is aware of Moscow’s limits of tolerance, aware that any misstep or overreach by Baku that favours Ankara may well result in Moscow tilting heavily in defence of Armenia. Whereas Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has to reverse his government’s previous pro-West leaning policy and increase its strong reliance on Russia as he has no choice, although he had valid reasons to be angry with Moscow’s performance during the six-week war.

For the continued existence of Armenians remaining in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian support will be crucial, as one-third of Nagorno-Karabakh including the city of Shusha has fallen into Azerbaijan hands. Moscow's intervention has not permitted a complete Azerbaijan victory. It saved Azerbaijan from the future problem of a likely uprising in the Armenian-populated areas of Nagorno-Karabakh. Now Russia will have a new military base in the middle of Nagorno-Karabakh, in addition to other bases in Armenia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Contra View. Some analysts said that there are potential difficulties for Russia in the future. A London based political observer and specialist on Russian security agencies, Mark Galeotti, said that deployment of Russian troops in the region wasn't necessarily a big win for Russia. "This is an additional burden on its military and treasury. It does bake a role for itself into the geopolitics of the region to be sure, but this was a part of the world in which it was already meant to be dominant." In an article published in *The Moscow Times*, he wrote, "When you have to escalate your commitment to retain your position, that does not seem a sign of progress so much as labouring to hold back decline"⁵⁷.

Steven Mann, a former co-chair of the Minsk Group in the mid-2000s and a retired U.S. diplomat, said that Azerbaijan is the clear winner, given its win in the battlefield. As for Russia, its leading role in cementing the peace deal was no surprise, and given its long-standing dominance in the region, deployment of peacekeepers is not a major coup for Moscow. He said, "Russia has always been the predominant military power, so I don't think the deployment of the peacekeepers changes that overarching fact. I reject the idea that Russia has any special rights over its former republics. They're independent countries. They have the right to choose their own policies. But frankly, if you wanted peacekeepers on the ground, it's hard to see where they would have come from but Russia."

A former U.S. diplomat, Carey Cavanaugh, who helped organize the 2001 talks in Key West, Florida, between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, said the deal was a clear victory for Azerbaijan because of its military gains. He differed that Russia was a clear winner. He suggested that Moscow had been forced by

the circumstances to find a way to avert a major escalation. Cavanaugh said that a continued fight by Azerbaijan, which could have threatened Armenia and potentially sparked desperate military acts was the danger that Moscow had faced. A missile attack on Baku, or targeting the Caspian-to-Mediterranean oil pipeline would then have sucked Russia and Turkey into a deeper conflict. He told, “The deal was a way to staunch the bloodletting. They had to stop it from going any further, over the precipice, where it would have been ‘desperate-times-call-for-desperate measures.’”

After brokering a November 10 Peace Agreement, Russia would appear to be in the geopolitical driver’s seat in the contested and strategic South Caucasus. At this early stage to suggest that Russia is the net winner of the conflict will be premature. There are various important and pressing issues that are left unresolved. Moscow could still lose if the peace falls apart. Russia is now directly entwined in a complex theater of conflict that will be costly, long with uncertain outcomes. It is not clear yet if Putin’s post-conflict mediation will be enough to make up for the geopolitical capital lost in the war. The Agreement on paper may not convert into an agreement in reality. Moscow will protect the crucial Lachin Corridor, but it is not clear when the promised road connecting Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan will come up. Russia is suspicious of Turkey’s possible exploitation of the link to enhance its presence in the region. There will be different opinions about Russia’s role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and its ‘waiting game’, followed by active mediation and muscle-flexing. As per the Agreement the enclave is recognized as Azerbaijani territory. Nagorno-Karabakh will come under Baku’s control the moment Russia terminates its peacekeeping operation.

In recent times, Russia has been witnessing tumult on its borders, with the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, a coup-cum-revolution in Kyrgyzstan and an unrest in Belarus. This has raised questions about Putin’s control on Russia’s vaunted “near abroad.” It has been argued by some that this deal represents a potential loss for Moscow compared to Ankara’s success. Turkey is likely to refrain from any action that would risk upsetting its relations with Moscow. How active Turkey will be in this peace process remains to be seen. The Russia-brokered Agreement may well

be a stop-gap prelude to the next war because of lack of a clear political consensus on the Armenian side⁵⁸.

Deft Military Diplomacy. The war in Nagorno-Karabakh ended on Russia's terms 36 years after another Russian-brokered ceasefire. Putin scored a major long-term gain for Russian strategic objectives in the Caucasus while showcasing Russia's stronger diplomatic vigour and experience over that of Turkey's. Turkey failed to influence the conflict's end despite its significant military success in backing Azerbaijan. Putin's upset victory in Nagorno-Karabakh will have profound effects on the future of two former Soviet states in the Caucasus and Turkey-Russia competition across multiple theatres⁵⁹. The outcome in the Second Karabakh Conflict highlights that as an uber-realist power Moscow is able to turn such situations to its advantage in comparison to the West that preaches liberal values but fails to follow through on them. Unless the West adopts a more realist approach, it is likely to remain in retreat not just in the South Caucasus, but across wider Eurasia.

Russia's Peacekeeping Operations⁶⁰. The armistice agreement brings Russian peacekeeping troops into Upper Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin Corridor. Russian border troops will control transportation routes between Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhchivan across the Armenian territory. Deployment of Russian peacekeepers to Azerbaijan began within hours of the armistice agreement's signing. Russia will hold pressure levers with Russian troops controlling Lachin and Russian border guards controlling Azerbaijan's overland connections with the Nakhchivan exclave. It can be activated or held in reserve as the situation might warrant. This move reinforces Russia's self-appointed monopoly on peacekeeping in former Soviet-ruled territories. The methodology of Russia is to impose a unilateral peacekeeping operation without any international mandate in a given conflict theatre and after that reject any proposals to internationalise the operation. Examples are Abkhazia, South Ossetia and the now-forgotten operation in Tajikistan in the 1990s. In Ukraine's Donbas, Russia had ruled out an internationally mandated peacekeeping mission. From time to time, Russia has sought Western recognition or expression of acceptance of a special prerogative

for peacekeeping in the post-Soviet space. Such recognition never materialised. Russia's peacekeeping operation in Upper Karabakh can be seen as the latest case study. This is entirely Russian in composition of its personnel. It does not have the mandate of any international organization. Peacekeeping is being done in a territory not controlled by the government (Azerbaijan's in this case) that holds internationally recognized title to sovereignty over that territory - the Armenian-controlled rump of Upper Karabakh. It has obtained Azerbaijan's indispensable but reluctant consent in a swift, opaque negotiation. By stipulating prolongation at regular five-year intervals, it sets the stage for a long-term, potentially an open-ended Russian military presence in this territory, and thus another frozen conflict. In the end, can pain and destruction, losses and gains from the recently reignited war over Nagorno-Karabakh be turned into peace? To bring stability and prosperity, the two countries have to build mutual trust to help them finally end the conflict, establish friendly relation and move on. Both sides would have to show pragmatism and abandon their maximalist demands driven by nationalism. May be, Turkey could actually help⁶¹.

Iran

Luke Coffey, director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at the Heritage Foundation, said, "Iran has many problems. A stagnant economy, political unrest at home, the fallout from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the never-ending costly interventions in places such as Syria and Iraq. The last thing Tehran needs right now is a change to the cozy *status quo* it has enjoyed in the South Caucasus for the past three decades. Unfortunately for Iran, this is exactly what is happening... Iran will have to devote time, resources and troops to adjust to the new geopolitical reality along its northern border with Azerbaijan"⁶².

For historical reasons, Iran thinks that it is allowed a special status in the South Caucasus. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia were once part of the Persian Empire. Iran borders both Armenia and Azerbaijan and at times battles waged close to Iran's borders. Thus, Iran's own national security is directly affected by the conflict. Iran's domestic stability is also influenced by the conflict since over a third of the

population of Iran is ethnic Azerbaijani; the regions of northwest Iran that are contiguous to the conflict zone are populated primarily by ethnic Azerbaijanis, many of whom share family ties with co-ethnics in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Iran's policy toward the conflict and the two main protagonists, Azerbaijan and Armenia, is shaped chiefly by the following factors:-

- Iran's own security interests, including its threat perception of Azerbaijan.
- Its desire to preempt ethnic mobilisation of its domestic Azerbaijani minority.
- Iran's relations with third parties, primarily Russia, Turkey and the United States.

Iran's policy toward the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict is very pragmatic, based primarily on Iran's security interests and not based on either ideology or considerations of shared identity. Iran's policies toward the conflict display no special preference toward Azerbaijan despite their shared Shiite Muslim identity. For most of the post-Soviet period, Tehran has maintained better relations and more advanced cooperation with Armenia than its rival, the Shiite-majority Azerbaijan⁶³.

Iran's trade with both Armenia and Azerbaijan is not extensive, though it is important to the Armenian economy in terms of its volume. In 2014, trade between Tehran and Baku stood at US\$ 500 million, having experienced successive annual declines. By comparison, trade in 2014 between Armenia and Iran stood at US\$ 300 million. Economically for Iran, Azerbaijan is more important than Armenia.

Tehran's decision makers are divided sharply on how to respond to the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh. Both foreign and domestic considerations drive their diverging approaches. Iran is extremely worried about the growing influence of two of its traditional foes in the region - Turkey and Israel.

The Azerbaijan Factor. Iran has been unable to place Azerbaijan, one of the predominately Shiite areas in the Muslim world, under its influence. While on the surface relations between Baku and Tehran remain cordial, there is an underlying tension between the two. During the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1990s, Iran sided with Armenia as a way to marginalise Azerbaijan's role in the region. Iran's relations with Azerbaijan have reflected mutual phobias; Azerbaijan fears the spread of Islamic influence from Iran as more than two-thirds of Azerbaijanis north of the Arax River are Shiites. Iran has been uneasy about the personal loyalties of the millions of ethnic Azerbaijanis inside Iran.

Ethnic Azerbaijanis influence the northwest quadrant of Iran and by some estimates make up a quarter to nearly half of the overall population. They are holding rallies demanding that the Armenian-Iranian border be closed, burning trucks thought to be carrying Russian military cargo to Armenia and collecting money for supporting the Azerbaijani army. "We are not on the side of Azerbaijan: We are Azerbaijanis", they insist.

Azeris are the second-largest ethnic group in Iran. There was a lot of pro-Azerbaijani protests on the streets during the conflict and in social media by ethnic Azeris in Iran. The Iranian regime, though appearing balanced, stifled many of these pro-Azerbaijani protests. The Iranian leadership is sensitive to the constant low-level push for self-determination and increased autonomy in northern Iran for the Azeri minority. There is a possibility, though remote, that some of the nearly 20 million ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran might shift their loyalties away from Tehran and toward Baku.

In Iran, there is a conflict between the position of the government in support of Armenia and the position of the clergy in support of the Azerbaijan. Social pressures have led to a change in the course of the Iranian policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. From being supportive of Armenian faction, it has changed to the support of Azerbaijan's position.

The Armenian Factor. Since Armenia acquired independence in 1991, Iran has had good relations with it. The ethnic-Armenian minority in Iran is only about 150,000. They have given no signs of interest in pursuit of autonomy or closer ties with Armenia.

Maintaining good relations with Yerevan is critically important for Iran as Armenia shares border with Iran in the Zengezur Corridor. Russia uses that passageway to supply its own military base at Gyumri as well as the Armenian forces. Several reports indicate that Iran had supplied arms to Armenia during the first days of the war. There were also reports about Tehran's attempts to shift some of the Armenian militants from Syria and Iraq to Armenia to fight against the Azerbaijani-Turkish front. By that Iran wants to balance against the Turkish intervention in the form of the transfer of weapons and mercenary fighters from Syria to Azerbaijan. Besides, the Iranian support for Armenia is largely due to Russian pressure on Iran for shift of weapons and equipment to the Armenian front. Armenia does not share land borders with Russia, but it is the most important stop for transporting those goods from Russia.

Some of the reasons for the rapprochement between Armenia and Iran at the expense of the Republic of Azerbaijan can be outlined as follows:-

- Armenia is considered an ally of Moscow. This prompts the Iranian regime to view this country as a potential ally in the region under Russian patronage. Conversely, there is an apprehension that Azerbaijan would become a post for the Western camp in the region. In that case, cooperation between Iran and Armenia would be justified.
- In view of the close cooperation between Baku and Tel Aviv, Iran looks to Azerbaijan with mistrust. There are reports that Azerbaijan has granted Israel a reconnaissance and espionage station near the Iranian border. Azerbaijan hosts a group of Azeri opposition organizations that call for secession from Iran. This is a cause of mutual distrust between the two sides.

- Economically, Iran has tried to expand relations with both the sides, especially in light of the sanctions imposed on it. Armenia plays a more important economic role in Iran. It is considered by Iran as a gateway for land export to Georgia and Russia.
- There are many Armenian Christians in the ranks of politicians in countries of the EU as in France. Some analyses indicate that Iran aims to persuade the Western Christian public opinion and tries to influence European opinion in defending its interests and points of view.

New geopolitical reality along its northern border with Azerbaijan will force Iran to devote time, resources and troops to adjust to a new situation. Part of the Azerbaijan-Iran state border, earlier under Armenian occupation since 1994, is now under Azerbaijan's control. Iran will feel uncomfortable with the presence of 2,000 Russian peacekeepers just 100 km from the Iranian border. Though Russia and Iran have enjoyed good relations in recent times, the two have been rival powers in the region for centuries.

It is not clear how Azerbaijan's success in the war will affect its bilateral relationship with Iran. Azerbaijan relied on access to Iranian airspace and territory to supply its autonomous region of Nakhchivan, an exclave of Azerbaijan located between Iran, Armenia and Turkey. Azerbaijan depends on Iran to provide natural gas to Nakhchivan. The recent accord will make Armenia to open up a corridor through its territory to allow Azerbaijan to transport goods directly to Nakhchivan. In addition, Turkey will construct a fresh natural gas pipeline to supply Nakhchivan with energy. For Azerbaijan, Iran is less important now. The dynamics in the bilateral relationship is likely to be changed in Baku's favour ⁶⁴.

Traditionally, Israel and Turkey are enemies of Iran. Israel's contribution in the conflict by its supply of drones and other weapons to Azerbaijan, involvement of militants from Syria in the fighting and expansion of Turkey's influence across the Caucasus because of its links with Azerbaijan are the issues which cause worry for Iran. Iran is made to do a tight rope walking. It wants Azerbaijan to succeed but not by a big margin. It wants to see Armenia withdraw from the occupied

territories but not so abruptly that this would echo inside of Iran. Iran wants to prevent the expansion of Turkish and Israeli influence in the Caucasus⁶⁵.

The crisis represents an important crossroad in terms of the Turkish expansion near the Iranian border, thus encouraging the flames of racial rhetoric and the corresponding impact on Iran's Azeri community. This serves to make Azerbaijan's position as a potential threat to Iranian national security. However, Iran's most prominent worry is the Turkish-Azerbaijani action to transfer armed fighters from Syria to the borders adjacent to Iran. This action has been severely criticised by Tehran, as Iran considers it as a transfer of an enemy to its borders.

Iran could try to pressurise Azerbaijan to amend its policies. Iran can influence Azerbaijan by virtue of the Shiite community in Azerbaijan; it can also utilise the only route of communication running between Azerbaijan and its isolated region Nakhchivan through Iran⁶⁶.

Georgia

Georgia's capital of Tbilisi is only 560 kilometers from the Karabakh region. The war between Azerbaijani and Armenian in this area has raised alarm bells within the Georgian government about the cost of this conflict for the country. On October 3, the National Security Council of Georgia, an advisory body chaired by the prime minister, declared a temporary ban on transiting military cargos through Georgian territory to Azerbaijan and Armenia. The ban covers transit via air as well as land routes. But the civilian goods were allowed to be delivered to Armenia and Azerbaijan via Georgia without any restrictions. The ruling Georgian Dream (GD) and the major opposition parties agreed that Georgia's stance should be neutral and sought a swift de-escalation of the conflict.

Russia showed its displeasure about Georgia's decision to ban the transfer of Russian military supplies to Armenia and Azerbaijan. There were media reports about the possibility of using military force against Georgia to secure the transit of Russian military cargos. It is important to note that Russian troops are stationed

only 40 kilometers from Tbilisi, on territories occupied by Moscow following the 2008 Georgian-Russian war.

Georgia has significant Armenian (4.53 percent) and Azerbaijani (6.27 percent) diasporas. Georgia has avoided Azerbaijani-Armenian interethnic clashes on its own territory for decades due to a strict, long-term adherence to neutrality. But each new escalation reverberates inside Georgia, raising tensions between the local Armenian and Azerbaijani groups. In the meantime, Georgia's ethnic-Armenian community protested the "pro-Azerbaijani" statement of former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, who highlighted that Karabakh is the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. There were damages to segments of transnational fiber-optic internet cables in Kvemo Kartli, a region neighbouring both Armenia and Azerbaijan and densely populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis. While Georgian-Azerbaijanis have not resorted to any mass protest or violent actions so far, any external or internal trigger could ignite inter-ethnic conflict.

Georgia has friendly ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia is a member of the Russia-led EEU and the CSTO. Georgia is aspiring to become a NATO and EU country. Economically, Georgia has more interest in Azerbaijan than Armenia. Around 95 percent of Georgia's natural gas comes from Azerbaijan. Prolonged war could cause problems for Georgia's energy supplies. It would adversely affect the security of the regional oil and gas pipelines, including Baku-Supsa, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the South Caucasus Pipeline. However, Georgian-Azerbaijani relations has its own problems. Christian Orthodox monastery complex David Gareja, located along both sides of the conditional Georgian-Azerbaijani borderline, is a subject of a border dispute and clashes.

The full-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan would have damaged the Georgian economy and worsened the country's socio-economic, financial and security situation. The refugees outflow due to the conflict could seriously impact Georgia having substantial Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities among its populace.

The current conflict is drawing greater international attention to the often-ignored two other unresolved conflicts in Georgia's secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Like Karabakh, these conflicts have also been awaiting resolution for nearly three decades⁶⁷.

The USA

In the past, the two powers have kept a lid on things. America and Russia helped bring about the ceasefire in 1994. Today there is a problem of the absence of global leadership. During the presidency of Donald Trump U.S. has brokered improvements in relations between Arab rulers and Israel. But it has almost entirely abandoned the long, thankless slog of routine peace maintenance. Turkey is a NATO ally. President Trump has no time for NATO, which without the U.S. is rudderless. Past American Presidents had put time, brainpower and muscle into preventing war in the Caucasus, but Mr. Trump showed no such interest. The Trump administration did not issue a coherent policy for the South Caucasus. No wonder that U.S. has become irrelevant during this round of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis.

The U.S., as part of the Minsk Group, is to provide a framework for the two countries to reach a durable peace. The U.S. is one of the three co-chairs along with Russia and France. The U.S. government had taken some responsibility to resolve this conflict earlier. But the Trump administration has shown its unwillingness to get involved despite demands from Armenia and its diaspora. Far-away regional conflicts do not evince much interest from an increasingly isolationist American public and political leadership. The pressing challenges of a pandemic, a fragile economy and deeply rooted racial injustice keep them occupied at home.

It seems Donald J. Trump administration has accorded low priority to this conflict. Ambassador Richard Hoagland, the interim U.S. Minsk Group Co-Chair, stepped down on August 28 and was immediately replaced by Andrew Schofer, who was the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. mission to the UN offices in Vienna, Austria. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in his August letter has indicated to Senate Foreign

Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker that this special envoy position may be cut as part of his pending reorganization of the State Department⁶⁸. Even if the position remains, Schofer may not be given an ambassadorial rank. This would place the U.S. mediator in a visibly inferior position to his Russian and French counterparts and could be interpreted as signaling for waning U.S. interest in or support for the OSCE settlement process.

Immediately after the accord was signed, the French foreign minister came out with a statement, France, with the U.S. being Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group. Within hours of the French foreign minister's statement, the U.S. State Department issued a statement. While welcoming the cessation of hostilities, the U.S. statement ignored Moscow's mediatory role. It said, "Ending the recent fighting is only the first step toward achieving a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. We urge the sides to re-engage as soon as possible with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to pursue a lasting and sustainable political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the Helsinki Final Act principles of the non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the self-determination and equal rights of peoples. As a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the U.S. remains fully engaged in this effort"⁶⁹.

Despite the Trump administration's retreat from global leadership, the U.S. is still the only country to do the duty of global policeman with its military, political and economic ability and global reach. The U.S. should have been the loudest voice on the international stage, condemning this war and holding the provocateurs to account. This is not a singular case of a local war foretelling a humanitarian disaster. By staying quiet, not acting swiftly to condemn the war and mobilise international political and economic pressure, the U.S. is letting a dangerous conflict evolve unpredictably and harming its historic leadership position. The autocratic regimes can see this as an advantage to get away with complicity. In a multi-polar world, with dozens of not-so-frozen conflicts, such disputes are breeding grounds for regional wars or even wider conflicts.

President-elect Joe Biden had urged a more robust U.S. diplomatic response to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. He had called on President Trump “to directly engage the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey to push for immediate de-escalation and stop the advance of Azerbaijani troops into Nagorno-Karabakh.” Mr. Biden said on his election campaign website, “The United States should be leading a diplomatic effort to end the fighting, together with our European partners.”

Greater instability in the South Caucasus would further complicate already strained relations of U.S. with Russia, Turkey and Iran. Introduction of Russian troops into the conflict would reverse the long-standing U.S. efforts to deter Russian revanchism.

Implications for U.S. Interests. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh jeopardises the considerable successes the United States has achieved over the past twenty-five years in promoting the independence and autonomy of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Two very important issues for U.S which could be in danger are: Deterring Russian revanchism; and establishment of a new transportation network to deliver hydrocarbon from Azerbaijan and Central Asia to Western markets. Continuation of conflict could aggravate already problematic U.S. relations with Russia, Turkey and Iran, all of them have interests in the conflict. It could further complicate an already troubled U.S.-Russia relationship by providing opportunities to expand Russian political and military influence in the South Caucasus.

Should there be a protracted conflict, Georgia would be challenged in managing potential refugee flows. The U.S. has made Georgia its leading regional partner and Georgia would expect Washington’s political and economic support. Massive Western investments in the region’s energy sector, particularly the current \$28 billion Southern Gas Corridor project, would also be threatened.

Washington has worked closely with Ankara and Yerevan to improve Turkish-Armenian relations by dealing with their shared past, expanding bilateral trade through lifting blockades and normalising diplomatic relations. The war would

hinder U.S. objectives. Mikayil Jabbarov, Azerbaijan's American-educated economy minister said, "This trade route could transform the entire region and become the main staple of a peace settlement." Perhaps it is the prospect of this geopolitical transformation that has encouraged the American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to visit the region. After four years of Mr. Trump's presidential neglect, he may be very late to the party as there are many pitfalls ahead.

The European Union (EU)

In recent times, Europe is beset with its own problems of: coronavirus infections, 'no-deal Brexit' and tensions prevailing in the Eastern Mediterranean. Recent track record of Europe's conflict resolution is not very great. France, the obvious European power for mediation, is not trusted by Azerbaijan and its most important ally Turkey. Turkey is using low-cost and sometimes deniable methods to carve out influence and fill power vacuums. These are being used in Russia's backyard.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted with absolutely stunning speed to bring about the armistice, catching the international community by total surprise. When the world came to know of the truce in the wee hours of November 10, for peace keeping duties Russian military contingents were already on their way to Nagorno-Karabakh.

On November 7, The French President Emmanuel Macron had called Putin and discussed the "ongoing large-scale hostilities" in Nagorno-Karabakh and reached a "mutual commitment to continued coordinated mediation efforts by Russia and France, including as part of the OSCE Minsk Group"⁷⁰. Three days later, Russian peacekeeping forces were landing in Nagorno-Karabakh. And only six days thereafter President Putin called up Macron "considering that Russia and France are Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group." The official statement stated, "After expressing their readiness to coordinate work between the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group – Russia, France and the US – the Presidents emphasised the importance of addressing urgent humanitarian issues, including returning refugees to their permanent homes, ensuring normal living conditions for the

population, restoring the infrastructure, and preserving Christian temples and monasteries. In this context, Vladimir Putin informed about the establishment of the Russian Humanitarian Response Centre⁷¹.

In spite of the arrival of French and American diplomats in Moscow on November 12, Paris and Washington did not play a role in the ceasefire accord. On November 17, France urged Russia to clarify “ambiguities” over the ceasefire it had brokered between Armenia and Azerbaijan to end fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, notably regarding the role of Turkey and the foreign fighters. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told the French Parliament, “We must remove the ambiguities over refugees, the delimitation of the ceasefire, the presence of Turkey, the return of fighters and on the start of negotiations on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh⁷².”

Both France and the U.S. maintain that Russia cannot act unilaterally and should work through the Minsk Group. France called for international supervision to implement the cease-fire. The French official statement said, “We understand that the Russians are talking to the Turks regarding a possible formula, which we don’t want, that would replicate the Astana process on Syria to divide their roles in this sensitive region. We can’t have on one side the Minsk Group and the on other the Astana Process on Syria. At one point the Russians have to make a choice⁷³.” France has a population of 400,000 to 600,000 people of Armenian origin. Macron has been careful not to back a side in the conflict. He has faced criticism at home that he did not do enough to help Yerevan.

The EU countries felt that Russia and Turkey would not agree on Nagorno-Karabakh, but the opposite has happened. They have not allowed involvement of the western powers. Both Turkey and Russia have stressed relations with the U.S. France and Turkey are in confrontation with each other on various issues ranging from Libya, Syria to France’s problem with “Islamist terrorism”. Recently, Erdogan proposed psychiatric counselling for Macron.

This conflict draw attention to a serious fracture in the western alliance system. Turkey, a NATO member has aligned with the alliance’s existential enemy Russia to humiliate and marginalise two major western allies, the U.S. and France.

Threat of Russia's and Turkey's assertive roles on the EU's doorstep is testing the ability of the EU members to find a common front in an increasingly unstable neighbourhood.

The Baltic and Nordic states, as well as Poland, have traditionally viewed distant Turkey as an ally and are afraid of Russia. On the southern flank of EU, Greece and Cyprus are friendly to Russia and regard Turkey as their main threat. Germany, backed by key EU officials in Brussels, walks a middle line, maintaining an open dialogue with Ankara. Italy and Spain are more accommodating to Turkey. France considers the threat from Turkey is more immediate than from Russia. German officials now feel that EU sanctions on Turkey may become inevitable next month. The U.S. has generally stayed on the sidelines of this tussle between its NATO allies—highlighting Europe's growing need, and apparent inability, to take care of its own security.

Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, said, “Europe over the past decades has become so detached from the real world of international relations and foreign policy that it finds it hard to adequately deal even with its two biggest immediate neighbours. From the EU standpoint, both are bad, and it is not important which is worse. The real issue is that Europe has no tools, techniques or strategy for dealing with either.”

Russia and Turkey are by no means friends. Their proxies are fighting each other in local conflicts that range from Libya to Syria. But despite these disagreements, Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Putin have managed to maintain a strategic understanding, so far⁷⁴.

Israel

On **October 25**, George Deek, Israel's ambassador to Azerbaijan, visited Ganja city to offer condolences to civilian victims of Armenian rocket attacks beyond the Karabakh Conflict zone. Concurrently, Israel delivered humanitarian aid, including medical equipment, to Armenia. But Armenia rejected Israel's offers

of humanitarian aid. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, declared angrily, “I propose that Israel should send that aid to the mercenaries and to the terrorists as the logical continuation of its activities.” He accused Israel of siding with mercenaries, Islamic terrorists and Turkey and active engagement in the Karabakh Conflict.

This outburst was due to Israel’s years-long military-technical cooperation with Azerbaijan. In protest, after just two weeks of having opened the embassy, Armenia had recalled its ambassador to Israel on **October 1**. Israel does not openly advertise its military supplies to Azerbaijan. As early as 2016, it was expected that Israeli weapons exports would change the balance of power in the region by squeezing Russia out of Azerbaijan’s arms market. While Turkish advanced UAVs received the most attention in the conflict, it was Israeli drones that was precursor to this technology’s battlefield superiority and effectiveness for Azerbaijan during the April 2016 Four-Day War.

Dalia Itzik, former Israeli president, sent a letter of support to Azerbaijani President Aliyev amidst the fighting in Karabakh. Azerbaijan had condemned the U.S.’ recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and refrained from opening up an Azerbaijani embassy in Israel. Direct Baku–Tel Aviv flights have been operating regularly for many years. In May 2020, the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin asked his Azerbaijani counterpart to open its embassy soon. Such gestures shows the significance Israel attaches to Azerbaijan. The humanitarian aid from Israel to Ganja was so important not for its material value but rather the politics and symbolism it carried⁷⁵.

Azerbaijan is important to Israel as a possible model for other Muslim countries. Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, during his visit to Baku in 2016, depicted Azerbaijani-Israeli relations as, “What relations can be and should be between Muslims and Jews everywhere.” Moreover, Mark Schneier, Jewish-American Rabbi and the president of the Washington based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding told the Baku Intercultural Forum in 2019 that improving attitudes to and relations with Jews and Israel in Arab countries, including the

United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and others, “is a direct result of Azerbaijan”.

Considering Israel’s volatile relations with Turkey, Turkic Azerbaijan can serve as a potential conduit for normalizing the diplomatic relationship with Ankara. Israel officially offered assistance to Turkey following the earthquake that hit the Turkish city of Izmir on October 30.

The most significant consideration for Israel is the Shia dimension. Azerbaijan is a Shia-majority nation. Shia Iran is home to approximately 20 million ethnic Azerbaijanis, the second largest group after Persians. Unlike in 1992–1993, several members of the Azerbaijani Parliament called on their government to open an embassy in Israel after a footage appeared that seemed to show military cargoes transiting to Armenia via Iran. The Iranian-Azerbaijani relationship remains complicated. The Israeli government hopes that, over the long term, the goodwill it has built up with Azerbaijan will be noticed by the large Azerbaijani minority inside Iran, eventually reversing the negative portrayal or perceptions of Israel within the Islamic Republic.

India

What is India’s Stand? Unlike the policies of ‘Act East’, ‘Neighbourhood First’, or ‘Central Asia Connect’, India does not have a publically articulated policy for South Caucasus. The region has only been on the periphery of Indian radar. As the conflict has evolved, India has adjusted its position.

In 1993, at the initial stages of the conflict, India said it had “followed with great concern the escalation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh with considerable ingress of Armenian forces into Azerbaijan” and had called for “respecting each others’ territorial integrity and inviolability of existing borders”. In 2008, India joined USA, Russia and France and voted against Azerbaijan’s resolution in UNGA which demanded “the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan”. For a long time, India’s emphasis is on peaceful resolution of the conflict through diplomatic negotiations.

India has taken a balanced and neutral stance on the conflict. Expressing concern over the condition which threatens regional peace and security, Indian foreign ministry issued a statement. It said, “We reiterate the need for the sides to cease hostilities immediately, keep restraint and take all possible steps to maintain peace at the border. India believes that any lasting resolution of the conflict can only be achieved peacefully through diplomatic negotiations. In this regard, we support OSCE Minsk Group’s continued efforts for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan”. This implies that India is not in favour of the involvement of any other entity, especially Turkey⁷⁶.

There is an asymmetry in India’s relations with Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Armenia is the only country in the region with which India has a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty signed in 1995. This treaty prohibits India from providing military or any other assistance to Azerbaijan in case Azerbaijan’s offensive goes inside the Armenian territory. Three heads of states from Armenia have visited India, whereas no head of state from Azerbaijan or Georgia have done so. Armenia unequivocally supports India on Kashmir issue, whereas Azerbaijan supports and promotes Pakistan’s storyline.

India’s trade or investment with Armenia are very low. The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC)/ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) has made investments in oilfield projects in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan falls on the North-South International Transport Corridor going from Mumbai to Chabahar via Azerbaijan to Moscow, something crucial for India’s connectivity plans. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars passenger and freight rail link can connect India with Turkey and beyond.

In deference to Russia’s sensitivities and in view of Georgia’s foreign policy priority of integration with Euro-Atlantic structures, India has gone slow on the development of its relations with Georgia.

Overall, India’s stakes in the region can be evaluated as more or less peripheral.

Indo-Azerbaijan Relations. India and Azerbaijan have shared traditional, age old relations. The Ateshgah Fire Temple near Baku is a fine example of the historical

relations and cultural exchanges between India and Azerbaijan. Diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan were established on 28 February, 1992. Over the years, India's bilateral trade with Azerbaijan has increased substantially from around US\$ 50 million in 2005 to around US\$ 922 million in 2018. The important items of direct and indirect imports from India are Rice, electric heating resistors, air and gas compressors, ventilation units, drugs/human vaccine, meat of large horned livestock, machines and equipment to process materials by tempering, bromides and oxides and black tea. The primary import of India from Azerbaijan is crude oil. Azerbaijan has become a tourist and film shooting destination for Indians in recent times⁷⁷.

Bilateral Trade with India (2018)	
Azerbaijan's imports from India	US\$ 103 million
Azerbaijan's export to India	US\$ 819 million
Total bilateral trade	US\$ 922million

Indo-Armenia Relations. Armenia had close and cultural relations with India for centuries. Indian settlements in Armenia existed as early as 149 BC. A few Armenian traders had come to Agra during the Mughal period, long before the Dutch and the English appeared in India. Emperor Akbar granted them numerous privileges and considerable religious freedom as also an opportunity to serve in his empire in various capacities. In 1562, Armenians built a church in Agra and started to expand their influence. Later, Armenian colonies were established in Calcutta and other places. Diplomatic relations was established on August 31, 1992. A large number of Indians, including students, live in both countries. Several high-level visits have taken place between the two countries.

Bilateral trade (in thousand US dollars) in favour of India:-

Year	Export	Import
2017	45462.6	3297.7
2018	77786.7	566.1
2019	128291 . 0	3490 . 0

Main imports from India are: Meat, tea, rice, precious stones, medicines, textile products, jewelry, industrial products, plastics and electronics. Main exports to India are: Precious and semi-precious stones, copper and copper products, aluminium and aluminium products, chemical industry products, non-ferrous metals, metallic scrub and raw rubber.

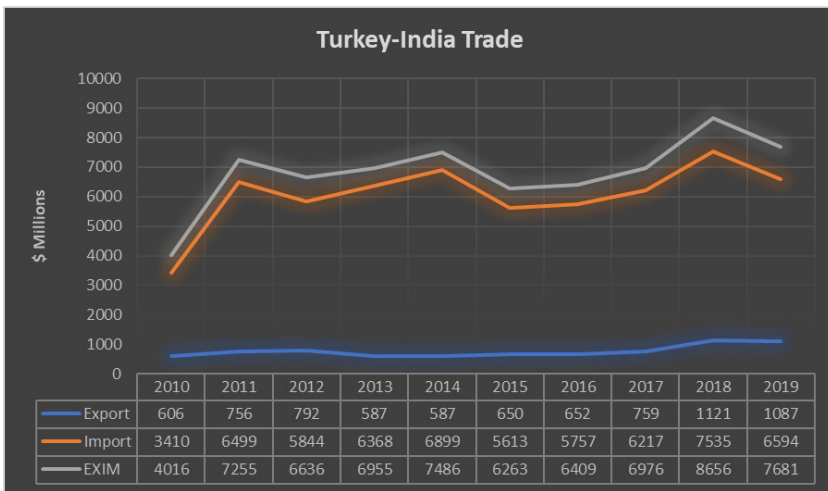
India's defence sector had a major success when it outbid Poland and Russia to win a \$40 million defence deal to supply four indigenously built military radars to Armenia. These radars, known as SWATHI, were developed by India's Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and manufactured by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)⁷⁸.

Relations with Turkey. Turkey and India have deep historic connections. The two had established diplomatic relations in 1948. The ties have undergone a downslide under Erdogan, who sees himself as a defender of Islam, giving Turkey a Sunni identity in a departure from its secular character. This has brought Turkey closer to Pakistan but at the cost of its bilateral relations with India.

Trade relationship, however, has advanced most rapidly. The bilateral trade volume increased from \$505 million in 2000 to \$8.7 billion in 2018. After China, India is now Turkey's second largest trade partner in East Asia, far surpassing the trade conducted with Pakistan (\$803 million). The volume of Turkey's trade with India in 2019 was around \$7.7 billion. President Erdoğan's 2017 visit to India underlined India's growing importance for Turkish policy makers. The center of attention of the visit was largely economic, as the President was accompanied

by a 100-member business delegation. Ankara showed interest in India's 'smart cities' initiative. It wanted to leverage their expertise in construction and in the infrastructure sector.

Erdogan's anti-India stance in recent times has been a trigger for deterioration of Indo Turkey relations. Other reasons are: New Delhi declining to accede to Ankara's request to share nuclear technology with Turkey and Erdogan's ire at India for not cracking down on the institutes of his close rival - Fethullah Gulen.



Source: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-and-india-natural-allies>

To Turkey's provocative narratives against India, India has given a series of well-calibrated responses. Prime Minister Modi cancelled his planned visit to Turkey in October 2019. A naval deal with a Turkish defence company worth \$2.3 billion was also called off. In view of the burgeoning defence ties between Turkey and Pakistan, India cut its defence exports to Turkey. India condemned Turkey's military operations in Northern Syria in October 2019. Recently, when during his visit to Pakistan, Erdogan raised the issue of Kashmir, India responded by issuing a strong demarche to Turkey's envoy to India, stating that Turkey should not interfere in India's internal matters.

Turkey has also noticeably enlarged its defence cooperation with Pakistan. In a deal worth over \$1 billion, Turkey is making four MILGEM medium-sized warships for the Pakistan Navy. In the largest defence deal between the two countries, last year the two countries also inked a \$1.5 billion deal for the supply of 30 Turkish attack helicopters.

Conclusion

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the original “frozen” conflict of Eurasia. It is one of the last pieces of unfinished business from the end of World War I, still fought by the zero-sum rules of the last century: Armenia and Azerbaijan seek to pummel each other into capitulation.

After nearly 30,000 dead, a 1994 cease-fire left Armenia in control of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as much larger lands in Azerbaijan that had been emptied of their predominantly Azerbaijani population. That cease-fire signified a stalemate, but not a solution. Since then Armenia has seen a dwindling of its population and relative international standing. The development of Azerbaijan’s oil and gas resources has meant that its economy is now over six times larger than Armenia’s. Its official defence budget is larger than Armenia’s entire state budget. The economic and political balance between the two countries have shifted considerably.

This time, the 44-day war resulted in a devastating defeat of Armenia. The war shocked the Armenian society who were confident of the military capabilities of the Armenian army and its absolute superiority over of Azerbaijan. The military defeat of Armenia has amplified the economic crisis provoked earlier this year by the pandemic-related restrictions. The public debt of the country has already approached the frightening figure 70 percent of its GDP. The landlocked, resource-poor nation has sporadically tried to seek closer economic and political ties with the European Union. The Russian military presence in the region puts an

end to the pro-West aspirations of Armenia⁷⁹.

The war has restored Azerbaijan's control over the occupied part of its internationally-recognized territories. Azerbaijan is able to get what it had been fighting for on the uninhabited hillsides and at diplomatic confabulations for almost 30 years. The social and political environment in Azerbaijan has changed significantly, generating unanimous public support to the government and its policies concerning the conflict. That has created a remarkable solidarity in Azerbaijan which has the potential to serve as a favourable ground for future economic and political reforms⁸⁰.

Two centuries ago, Russia 'arrived' in the region, gradually annexing a cross-section of Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian communities. The peace deal has boosted Russia's clout in the South Caucasus region, reducing Turkey's role in its own back yard which was once dominated by the Ottoman Empire. Moscow already has a military base in Armenia. Arrival of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh and southern Armenia will mean that all the three ex-Soviet nations of South Caucasus will host the Russian military.

Chris Miller, co-director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy has said that Moscow doesn't "look kindly on other powers, Western powers, trying to engage in the region without Russian participation, Russian consent". But Turkey's support for Azerbaijan has left Russia on the defensive. Turkey is already drawn in two proxy conflicts with Russia. In Libya, it is supporting the internationally recognized government against rebels backed by Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. In Syria, where Moscow is a staunch ally of President Bashar al-Assad, Turkey confronts the regime.

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in both its old and new iterations offers a lesson in the impossibility of an ultimate victory - a victim quickly becomes a perpetrator and vice versa. The pendulum in the battlefield has now swung in favour of Azerbaijan. Yet the Azerbaijanis should heed their own experience of 1994 when the Armenians believed they had achieved "absolute security". Facing the prospect of losing their territory of Karabakh, the Armenians may resort to

desperate measures and continue the war by other means. A sustained insurgency is always a possibility.

The only countries that can prevent war without end are Armenia and Azerbaijan themselves. This would require them to conclude that resolving their conflict is more in their common interest than persisting with military force or allowing others to resolve it for them. The current bitterness and bloodshed sadly suggest that such a decision is not close at hand. Even if the present round of fighting ends in Azerbaijan's favour, Armenians will not give up. The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh will likely remain unresolved for another generation to come. 'Peace Agreements' fail when the grievances underlying them are unresolved and disillusioned parties of the conflict act as spoilers. If this deal is not robust enough, it could fall apart in the same way and set off new conflict⁸¹.

Sustained hard work is needed on a host of issues including facilitating the safe return of refugees, demining, reconstruction, addressing human rights abuses, humanitarian support, and facilitating access by international and UN agencies to the isolated region of Nagorno-Karabakh. These are subjects in which Russia or Turkey have little expertise or interest. In these issues, Western countries and international organizations can offer a lot. A broader international contribution is crucial. What was signed on the night of Nov. 9 was only a deal for Nagorno-Karabakh. Much more is required if it is to bring peace.⁸²

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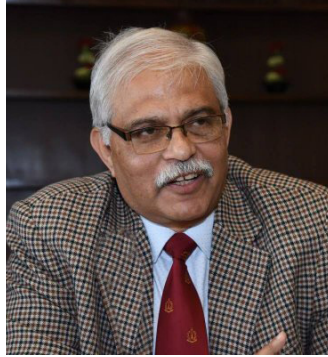
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