

INTRACTABILITY OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT:

A MYTH OR A REALITY?

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The only way into Nagorno-Karabakh(N-K) nowadays is via Armenia. ... In my journey back and forth between two sides [Azerbaijan and N-K] I had been forced to travel hundreds of miles around, going by road through Georgia or flying via Moscow. Now, moving between one side and the other within minutes, I was hit by both the strangeness and the logic of it: the two areas on the map did join up after all. DeWaal.¹

INTRODUCTION

This article is intended to call in question the myth of the intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It provides a stakeholder analysis and examines political, economic, security and socio-cultural dynamics of the conflict. Distinguishing between the positions and the interests of the main actors, the paper evaluates the peace process, reveals the factors accounting for its continuing failure and develops recommendations on how the conflict can be resolved.

The recent phase of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a small region of 1,699 sq mi (4,400 sq km) with a population of almost 200,000², began in 1987. It started as a land dispute between the Soviet Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia over the predominantly Armenian-populated autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijani SSR. After the break up of the Soviet Union the dispute was transformed into a full-scale war between two neighboring countries. The death toll is estimated at approximately 25,000 to 30,000 people³ and the number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) is estimated to be over a million.⁴

The ‘intractability’ of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not attributable to the lack of vitality of a particular solution. Any agreement that establishes a definite solution would require some concessions, would dissatisfy one or both parties and would produce powerful ‘spoilers’ that could sabotage the peace process. Therefore it is necessary not to look for a fast solution, but to develop a long-term strategy of addressing underlying issues of the conflict such as mutual perceptions, security issues and democracy, and cultivate a ripe moment when the core issues - the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and its

¹ De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden : Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. P. 2.

² Soviet census of 1989.

³ Mooradian, M., and D. Druckman. Nov, 1999. “Hurting Stalemate or Mediation? The Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh”, 1990-95. *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 36, No. 6., pp. 709-727.

⁴ <http://www.hrw.org>

relation to Armenia and Azerbaijan - can be addressed. At present, the moment is not ripe. Only secondary parties of the conflict, Armenians in Armenia, and refugees/IDPs in Armenia and Azerbaijan are experiencing a so-called “hurting stalemate”⁵ and they are not in a position to resolve the conflict. The immediate parties to the conflict, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and the majority of Azeris, do not see themselves in a “hurting stalemate” and would rather resort to violence than compromise on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In my search for a solution, I consciously do not address the issue of status of Nagorno-Karabakh. As I argue in my paper, the ‘intractability’ of the conflict largely originates from the desire of parties to have a sense of the final status of the region, before addressing the underlying problems. I suggest that if this approach is reversed, all other issues are resolved, and an acceptable level of stability and cooperation in the region is achieved, the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh will become less significant, which will make it easier for parties to come to a compromise.

Formation of Armenian and Azerbaijani/Azeri identities: their salience to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Armenians developed as a distinct ethnic group in the sixth century B.C. Their identity consolidated as a “unique, identifiable, ethno-religious community when they adopted an exclusive form of Monophysite Christianity” and a common language in the fourth century A.D.⁶ For some brief periods of its history Armenia was an independent state, but for the most part it was under the domination of different Empires - Roman, Persian, Byzantine, Arab, Mongol, Ottoman, Russian and Soviet. According to some historians, Nagorno-Karabakh, unlike the rest of Armenia, always remained autonomous or independent. And while Armenians in other regions were assimilated, it was in Nagorno-Karabakh where they preserved their identity.⁷ From the point of view of Armenians, therefore, Nagorno-Karabakh is considered the ‘last stronghold’ the ‘surrender’ of which will result in the loss of Armenia identity.

Another historical factor that influences Armenian perceptions of the conflict was the Genocide of Armenians in 1915 in Ottoman Turkey, in which 1,500,000 Armenians were killed. A recent poll shows that 90.1 percent of Armenians believe that persisting memory of the genocide makes up the Armenian national identity along with the language, culture and history.⁸ Largely associating Turkish-speaking Azeris with the Ottoman Turks, Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh fear another genocide if the region becomes part of independent Azerbaijan. The nationalistic public rhetoric of Azerbaijani

⁵ “The concept is based on the notion that when the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful ... they seek an alternative policy or a way out”. Zartman, W. in Darby, John and Roger Mac Ginty. 2002. *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 19.

⁶ Suny, Ronald. *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. P.7.

⁷ Hovannisian, Richard. “Nationalist Ferment in Armenia”. *Freedom at Issue*, no 105 (Nov.-Dec. 1988):29.

⁸ <http://www.acnis.am/>

authorities that often directly calls for ethnic cleansing⁹ does not encourage the deconstruction of those perceptions.¹⁰

Formation of Azerbaijani identity is another factor contributing to the intractability of the conflict. Unlike Armenians, whose identity developed in opposition to ruling powers, people who lived in the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan tried to develop a close sense of identification with the rulers. They adopted Iranian culture and Shi'a Islam and later Turkish language and ethnicity.¹¹ Distinct Azerbaijani identity developed in the nineteenth century. After the conquest of Caucasus by Russians, people who lived in contemporary Azerbaijan, and who for centuries were part of the Muslim majority in Muslim empires, suddenly became a minority in an Orthodox Christian state. Tsarist policies of assimilation and of favoritism toward local Christians, and particularly Armenians, provoked the growth of Pan-Turkism, a secular form of nationalism among Muslims. Azerbaijani (or Azeri) identity developed in protest to Russian policies, but it was directed not so much against the Russian colonizer as against the local Christians – Armenians.¹² Consequently for Azerbaijanis, who recently gained independence after two centuries of Russian rule, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represents another attempt of Russians to colonize Azerbaijan with the help of local Armenians. The Russian-Armenian military alliance and the continuing presence of the Russian army in Caucasus reinforce those fears.

Hence, one of the sources of ‘intractability’ of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the so-called ‘primordial’ Armenian-Azerbaijani enmity, is a reflection of two overlapping security dilemmas and historic sense of insecurity of Armenians and Azeris toward Turks and Russians respectively, and so should be examined in the larger regional context. A crucial deficiency of all peace initiatives until now has been their inability to address this underlying security concerns. As a Fulbright fellow from Armenia at Stanford University noted, all the mediations have dealt with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict “only on a super-structural level, addressing only the immediate time and territory of the hostilities. Thus, these negotiations have confined themselves to the narrowest possible framework, reaching only the proverbial tip of the iceberg, and leaving off the agenda the deeper conflicting patterns of behavior and strategic thinking of the various parties to the conflict.”¹³

Nagorno-Karabakh in the 20th century

From 1918 till 1920, independent Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war over Nagorno-Karabakh that weakened them and made them an easy target for the Red Army. For first two years after the Sovietisation of Caucasus the status of Nagorno-Karabakh

⁹ As the then Azerbaijani President Elchibey said in June 1992, "If there is a single Armenian left in Karabakh by October of this year, the people of Azerbaijan can hang me in the central square of Baku". <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199798/ldhansrd/vo970701/text/70701-19.htm>

¹⁰ An Azeri confessed to a western journalist: “If I were a Karabakh Armenian, I wouldn’t want to be united with Azerbaijan!”. De Waal. p.280.

¹¹ Croissant, Michael P. *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1998. P.7.

¹² *ibid.* p.8.

¹³ Carley, Patricia. “Nagorno-Karabakh: Searching for a Solution”. A United States Institute of Peace Roundtable Report. December 1998. <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks25/pwks25.html>

remained indeterminate. Finally in 1923 Stalin, as part of his ‘divide and rule’ policy, placed the region as an autonomous entity within Azerbaijani SSR and personally drew Nagorno-Karabakh’s borders “so as to leave a narrow strip of land separating it physically from Armenia.”¹⁴ With some rare exceptions,¹⁵ during the Soviet period the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations were calm. But the ‘time bomb’ called the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast exploded in 1987 when the Gorbachev ‘glasnost’ created some room for popular expression of grievances. Armenians in Armenia and in Nagorno-Karabakh organized rallies that gathered tens and even hundreds of thousands of people demanding the unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. In February 1988 the Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast passed a resolution by a vote 110-17 requesting incorporation into the Armenian SSR.¹⁶ It was the turn of Azerbaijanis to object to the move with a wave of demonstrations. The first cases of mass violence were recorded in Sumgait, an industrial town located not far from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, when in February of 1988 an angry Azerbaijani crowd took to the streets and for three days engaged in massacres in the Armenian quarter of the town, killing at least twenty-six and injuring hundreds of Armenians.¹⁷ The local police did nothing to prevent the violence. The Soviet leadership proved itself incapable of managing the crisis. Moreover, its violent crushing of some of the peaceful demonstrations contributed to the further radicalization of the conflicting parties. By the time of the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the crisis had transformed into a full-scale war between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, the latter enjoying the full support of Armenia. In 1994, after three years of fighting, a cease-fire brokered by Russians was established, leaving most of the Nagorno-Karabakh proper and the surrounding Azerbaijani territories under the control of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. The human sufferings included 25,000-30,000 people dead, 250,000-350,000 refugees from Azerbaijan in Armenia, and 750,000-1,000,000 refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from Armenia, Karabakh and occupied Azerbaijani territories in Azerbaijan.

The cease-fire still holds today, but no agreement has been reached and the conflict is farther from being resolved than it was at the time of the open warfare. Both Armenian and Azerbaijani leaderships used the cease-fire to regroup their forces, to build alliances, to create semi-democratic, semi-feudal, authoritarian and corrupt states, and to raise a generation of young people charged with hatred toward the ‘other’.

Stakeholders of the conflict: their positions and interests

Positions

One should just look at positions of the main stakeholders to understand why the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is considered ‘intractable’ (Table 1). Thanks to the oil resources of Azerbaijan and the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus located between

¹⁴Walker, Christopher. *Armenia and Karabakh: The Struggle for Unity*. London: Minority Right Publications, 1991. p.109.

¹⁵ In 1964 2,500 Karabakh Armenians sent a petition to Krushchev with a detailed description of discriminations that they were facing on the hands of Azerbaijani government and asked for the reincorporation of the autonomy into the Armenian SSR. Petition was ignored.

¹⁶ Libaridian, Gerard, ed. *The Karabakh File: Documents and Facts on the Question of Mountainous Karabakh, 1918-1988*. Cambridge: The Zorian Institute, 1988. p. 90.

¹⁷ Croissant, Michael. p. 28.

Russia, the Middle East and Central Asia, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has attracted the attention of many influential external actors. Irrespective of their real intentions, the formal positions of most of the external stakeholders to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are for the peaceful resolution of the conflict through the negotiation process. Those actors include large states - the US, Iran, Russia, France, Britain; supranational and international organizations - the EU, NATO and OSCE; and local and international peacebuilding NGOs. Iran, Russia, the US, some other states and NGOs all had introduced various peace proposals. The OSCE so-called Minsk group - co-chaired by the US, France and Russia - is the official mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh 'peace process'. NATO has included all three South Caucasian Republics in its 'Partnership for Peace' program. The EU offered them membership in The European Neighbourhood Policy "to share in the peace, stability and prosperity that the European Union enjoys."¹⁸

The public position of some other actors, namely of neighboring Georgia and of British Petroleum and American, Norwegian, Turkish, Italian, French and Japanese oil companies (BP&Co) that are developing the Azerbaijani oil fields¹⁹, is that of indifference or neutrality toward the conflict.

The other actors are the conflicting parties themselves and their outspoken supporters. On the one side there are the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh who proclaim that they would rather start a new cycle of violence than agree to anything short of independence. They are supported by the Armenian government, Armenian public, intellectual and business circles, Armenian refugees and Armenian Diaspora. On the other side is the Azerbaijani government that constantly threatens to retake Nagorno-Karabakh by force if a solution that satisfies its demands is not reached. It is supported by the Azeri public, intellectual and business circles, Azeri refugees and IDPs, and Turkey.

Table 1. Official Positions (intractability chart):

→ - perceived support, int-l – international, Arm. –Armenian

Interested in cooperation and peaceful resolution	US EU NATO	OSCE local and int-l NGOs	France Russia Iran
Indifferent or neutral	BP & Co., Georgia		
Non-interested in cooperation and peaceful resolution	Azeri gov-t Azeri IDP/refugees Azri Public Azeri business Azeri intellectuals Turkey	Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian gov-t Arm. Refugees Arm. Diaspora Arm. Public Arm. Business Arm. intellectuals	

¹⁸ http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/index_en.htm

¹⁹ International Alert Reports. Business and Conflict. *Conflict-Sensitive Business Practice: Guidance for Extractive Industries, International Alert. Oil and the Search for Peace in the South Caucasus: The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, March 2005.*

http://www.international-alert.org/pdf/pubbus/oil_and_search_for_peace_btc_pipeline.pdf

Both conflicting parties have a perception that the external actors who have closer relations with one side will support that side in the event of renewed hostilities. Given the unfortunate fact that both Armenians and Azeris see the conflict as a 'zero-sum' game each one of them constantly tries to reinforce its alliances, inciting the other to do the same. This creates a 'security dilemma' when "what one does to reinforce one's own security causes reaction that, in the end, make one less secure."²⁰ This 'zero-sum' vision of the conflict apparently dominates the minds of mediators as well. All official mediators from 1994 till today have tried to persuade the sides to compromise and make some painful concessions. There was no real attempt to find a mutually beneficial solution²¹.

Interests

To resolve the dilemma of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict one should look beyond the positions of actors and the bilateral relations of the immediate parties of the conflict, examine the regional and global context in which the conflict evolves, and analyze the interests of internal and external actors within that context.

First, as noted above, the proximity of former colonial powers - Russia and Turkey - and their open favoritism toward Armenia and Azerbaijan respectively, creates for the conflicting parties security concerns that are not limited to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. Second, the presence of two similar conflicts in neighboring Georgia assures the interconnection of the development dynamics of all three South Caucasian countries. Third, right after the break-up of the Soviet Union the Western attitudes toward the conflicts in the Former Soviet Republics were formed through the prism of necessity to maintain good relations with Russia²² and can be best characterized as 'non-interference'. Later, the general pro-Western orientation of the South Caucasian republics (particularly of Azerbaijan and Georgia) and the geopolitical importance of the region (located between Iran, Russia and Central Asia), contributed to NATO members' endeavors to increase their influence over the region. The US war on terrorism creates incentives to reduce the Russian and Iranian influence on still mostly secular Central Asia and to prevent its potential radicalization and 'Islamisation'. Lastly, the oil resources of Azerbaijan attract the attention of the major Western oil companies. The pipeline that would transport the oil from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Turkish port of Cehlan was intended to go through Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia and become a "peace pipeline" by fostering regional cooperation and integration. The security risks, however, were too high and the pipeline eventually went from Baku to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi and then on to Cehlan, avoiding Armenia. Backed by Britain and the US, this pipeline fostered economic and military cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and the oil companies. For the West, the project had primarily economic

²⁰ Posen, Barry. "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict." *Survival* vol.35,no. 1, Spring (1993):27-47

²¹ Part 4 includes more detailed analysis of the peace process and its failure.

²² Dawisha, Karen and Bruce Parrot. *Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

significance, but for Azerbaijan it was perceived as one of strategic importance that reinforced its military stance vis-a-vis Armenia. For Armenia the pipeline symbolized its isolation and pushed it to seek closer ties with the remaining regional powers – Russia and Iran.

Within the larger context, the interests of the actors do not necessarily correspond to their declared positions (Table 2). The peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will contribute to the resolution of Georgian conflicts and to the stability, security and economic cooperation in the region. Stability and security, in its turn, will reduce the influence of Russia and Iran, who are already largely excluded from the projects of regional economic cooperation and whose influence is conditioned by the necessity for Armenia to counterbalance the alliance of Azerbaijan with Turkey. Stability and security might also open the door for the integration of the Caucasus into the EU and NATO.

Another war would endanger the \$13 billion investments that oil companies made building a new pipeline that links Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. War would make the prospects of regional cooperation uncertain, enable Russian armies to increase their presence in the Caucasus, and might even legitimate Iran to invade militarily to prevent the spillover of the conflict to its territory. War would contribute to the decrease of the Western and Turkish influence in Central Asia and the Middle East and could pave the ground for the proliferation of radical Islam in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Some non-state actors - such as refugees, Diasporas or populations - can also have psychological or socio-cultural interests.

For all the above mentioned reasons, the peaceful resolution of the conflict, irrespective of the details of the agreement, corresponds to the political, economic and security interests of the US, NATO and the EU, but even more so to those of the oil companies and of Georgia.²³ The latter two have leverage and resources to influence the conflicting parties, but are largely removed from the peace process, as are the local peace building NGOs. If engaged more actively, Georgia, oil companies and the NGOs could play a pivotal role, since they are genuinely interested in the peaceful resolution and they would suffer more than any other external actor from the renewal of hostilities.

For the same reasons, as well as because of its interest in the large Russian market (which will remain inaccessible until the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not resolved), Turkish economic and security interests would best be served by lasting peace and stability in the region. As a large neighboring country, Turkey is in the position to pressure Armenia and Azerbaijan to reach a compromise, and also to provide economic and security incentives to foster regional cooperation. If devoted to peace, Turkey could make the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process meaningful and could become the pillar supporting stability and economic development of the region. Politically, however, the Turkish government is not in a position to play that role. Pro-Azerbaijani feelings are strong within the Turkish elite and public. The introduction by Armenians in parliaments around the world of resolutions recognizing the events of 1915 as genocide creates resentment and mistrust toward Armenians within Turkey. This mistrust is reinforced by fear that the recognition of genocide could be followed up by Armenian territorial claims

²³ The continuing support of Russia of two separatist regions of Georgia, makes the prospect of increased presence of Russia in South Caucasus unacceptable for Georgia.

against Turkey and by demands for reparations. Turkey, therefore, can be considered an actor interested in peace and cooperation, but not ready to acknowledge its interests openly because of internal political considerations.

The OSCE Minsk group, who is the official mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan, can not be regarded as an actor that has a particular interest because it is co-chaired by the US, France and Russia, with each having a different agenda. The US interests were discussed above. France has some economic and security interests in the resolution of the conflict: it is a member of the EU, and the French oil giant “Total” owns five percent of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. On the other hand, France has a large Armenian Diaspora and has little incentive to broker a compromise that will require Armenian concessions, which would dissatisfy French-Armenians. France, therefore, has bias toward the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh and not every peaceful resolution is in its interests.

It can be argued that the long term economic and security interests of Russia and Iran would be better served if the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were resolved peacefully and the region were stable.²⁴ In the short term, however, Russia and Iran benefit more from the instability in Nagorno-Karabakh. A stable peace is likely to reduce the political influence of both countries and will enable NATO to penetrate South Caucasus, while bringing no direct economic benefits.

More than a million Armenians and Azeris are refugees or IDPs as a consequence of the conflict. Intensive nationalistic propaganda led them to believe that the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh will have an influence over their future. This creates extreme anti-Azerbaijani and anti-Armenian sentiments among them. But only 50,000 of the refugees and IDPs are from Nagorno-Karabakh. Others are from Armenia and Azerbaijan. Normal relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, therefore - and not the status of Nagorno-Karabakh - is the necessary condition for the return of the overwhelming majority of the refugees.

The economies of Armenia and Azerbaijan are often described as “shadow economies” controlled by clans that have close ties with the corrupt government officials. The beneficiaries of the “shadow economies” are mistakenly considered proponents of the *status quo* of the conflict and as a major obstacle to the peace process.²⁵ The region has no diamond, drug or other illegal industry that could explain why local businessmen would prefer an unstable “shadow economy” to a developed open market. Quite the opposite: given a chance to support a peace process with a prospect of economic development, they will become the driving forces behind regional integration.²⁶

24. Wallander, Celeste. “Priorities for U.S. Foreign Policy after the Russian Presidential Elections” Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center. CSIS report, March 2004. p.8. Available on-line at: http://www.csis.org/ruseura/040315_wallander.pdf

²⁵ For more information about the perceived impact of “shadow economies” on the conflict, see International Alert Reports: *Oil and the Search for Peace in the South Caucasus*.

²⁶ I started my career as a businessman in Armenia and became involved in Conflict Resolution after experiencing all the atrocities of a war-torn economy. My confidence in the peace-building potential of local businesspeople is based on my personal experience and familiarity with thoughts and concerns of many Armenian businessmen.

The interests of Armenian and Azeri governments and their relations to their respective constituencies are similar and interrelated. Large segments of the Armenian government and Armenian people, and the Azeri government and Azeri people understand the importance of economic cooperation for the development of both countries.²⁷ Security is a more controversial issue, as each side sees the other as a threat to its security. However, the resolution of the conflict, irrespective of the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh, will help to resolve larger security concerns of Armenians and Azeris. Nagorno-Karabakh has no strategic importance for the security of either country. It has a small territory, shares no border with a third country and has no significant natural resources. Indeed both countries will remain more insecure if the conflict remains unresolved, and not if it is resolved.²⁸ The real obstacles for resolution are, therefore, the political and socio-cultural factors. Both governments have risen to power on radical nationalistic slogans and mutually exclusive claims to deliver Nagorno-Karabakh to their respective constituencies. Every politician who would take a moderate stand and would try to search for a mutually satisfactory solution is inevitably stamped as a “traitor” and replaced by someone more radical who portrays him/herself as more “devoted to the cause”.²⁹ This has created a cycle of ‘outbidding’ that makes the gap between the positions of Armenians and Azeris larger and larger and has gradually transformed the educational systems and the media of both countries into propaganda machines. An entire generation of Armenians and Azeris has been raised on this propaganda during the fifteen years of the conflict. This propaganda has also influenced the socio-cultural dynamics of the conflict. It has created mutually exclusive myths of attachment of both identities to Nagorno-Karabakh to such an extent that today no politician can make any concession to the other side without producing a public outrage. The polarization of public opinion is so deep that when the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan come close to reaching an agreement, which by some accounts happened at least three times³⁰, they not only fail to implement it, but they are simply afraid to make it public. This polarization has made any negotiation efforts a useless exercise and has reinforced the perception of the ‘intractability’ of the conflict.

But the *status quo* is not in the interest of the leaders either. The *status quo*, as well as any possible quick solution - peaceful or violent - that would determine the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh, is dissatisfactory to at least one party, but more likely both parties. The *status quo* or a quick solution will exacerbate the insecurity and economic deprivation and will decrease the popularity of current leaders. Therefore, for political reasons, for economic and security purposes it is in the best interest of Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, if not to cooperate officially, then at least to remove the obstacles for businesspeople, academics, artists and others to cooperate. It is also crucial for them not to hamper the progress of the civil societies that are ready to work toward the breaking of stereotypes and the searching for a mutually beneficial solution to the conflict. Cooperation would improve the economic conditions of people, would increase the level of mutual trust, would allow ties between the media and intellectuals, would deconstruct

²⁷ Azeris in a lesser extent than Armenians because of oil resources of Azerbaijan.

²⁸ The continuation of the conflict accounts to the continuing presence of Russian military in Armenia, which threatens Azerbaijan, and to Turkish enmity toward Armenia, which threatens the latter.

²⁹ The most obvious example is the forced resignation of the Armenian president ter-Petrosyan in 1998, right after he announced that a compromise was reached with Azerbaijan.

³⁰ De Waal.

negative stereotypes of each other, and would decrease the level of insecurity. As a result, governments would get credit for the improvement of the situation without doing anything and negotiations between them addressing the structural issues, issues of the return of occupied territories around Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan and the return of IDPs would cease being an act of a political ‘suicide’.

Presently, the mainstream intellectuals on both sides are former Soviet dissidents or their followers whose views were formed in adopting nationalism as an alternative to communist internationalism. They largely contributed to the creation of mutually exclusive national myths and nationalistic propaganda and marginalised liberal thinkers. Interpreting the conflict as a ‘zero-sum’ game, they are unable to see the resolution of it as a mutually benefiting effort. The opposite stream exists and, if given adequate support, can become a serious counterbalance to them.³¹

The uncompromising stance of the Armenian Diaspora toward the conflict is determined more by the fact of Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 and Turkish support of Azerbaijan, than by the realities of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict itself. US reluctance to acknowledging the genocide, in its turn, creates resentment within the Armenian-American community and reinforces popular support for radicals and weakens the positions of moderates within the community. If they want to resolve the conflict, increase their influence in Caucasus and advance their economic interests, both the US and the EU must cultivate the moderate elements within the Armenian Diaspora and foster reconciliation between Turks and Armenians.

The Nagorno-Karabakh leadership is another ‘uncompromising’ actor. The refusal of Azerbaijan to recognize it as a party to the conflict forces it to oppose any peace agreement.

Table 2: Interests (resolution chart):

Interested in cooperation and peaceful resolution (give peace a chance)	US, EU, NATO, NGOs, BP & Co., Georgia, majority of refugees and IDPs	
Have economic and security interest, but political and psychological obstacles in cooperation and peaceful resolution	Turkey Armenian gov-t, Arm. Public, Arm. Business Azeri gov-t, Azri Public, Azeri business	
Indifferent	France	
Non-interested in cooperation and peaceful resolution (give war a chance)	Azeri intellectuals (mainstream)	Nagorno-Karabakh Arm. Diaspora Arm. Intellectuals (mainstream) Russia Iran

³¹ See for example Tabib Huseynov. “Mountainous Karabakh: Conflict Resolution through Powersharing and Regional Integration.” *Peace, Conflict and Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal*
<http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk/docs/Mountainous%20Karabakh%20final%20version%20edited%2003.pdf>

Analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process: explanation of failure and recommendations

All the attempts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including Iranian, Russian-Kazakh, the ongoing OSCE Minsk Group, and other mediations have failed either at the stage of multiparty negotiations or even earlier. Every possible scenario ever used in conflict resolution from various forms of autonomy, to confederation, independence, power-sharing and even territorial swap has been proposed. At least three times leaders came to an agreement but they were never able to move toward implementation of it. The constant failure of the negotiations created a widespread impression that the conflict is hopelessly ‘intractable’ producing reluctance within the international community to try to resolve it. According to a classification of Crocker, Hampson and Aall, this conflict is a ‘captive’ conflict and “as long as Russia feels it has an interest in promoting autonomy or independence in these separatist regions [Nagorno-Karabakh and other separatist regions of the former USSR], the conflicts will not be resolved”.³²

From a theoretical and analytical point of view, however, the conflict is by no means ‘intractable’. The Table 2 shows, that although there are few actors whose “objective” interests can be considered ‘non well-served’ by stability in the region, the number of actors interested in peace and cooperation is overwhelming. All structural dimensions of the conflict, its economic, security and even political dynamics, favor peaceful resolution over the *status quo* or the renewal of violence. The following facts also speak in favor of the peaceful resolution: there has been no military action for more than ten years, and there is no need of disarmament and demobilization; as a result of mutual ethnic cleansing in the early 1990’s, Armenian and Azeri populations are completely separated and there is no threat of inter-communal violence; all parties to the conflict are well defined and well organized, so there will be no unexpected “spoilers” if agreement is reached; an overarching Caucasian identity, traditions and culture is shared by all the ethnic groups of the region, which can serve as a base for a mutual understanding.

Why then is this conflict so resistant to resolution? The problem is not in the inability of the parties or mediators to find an appropriate solution. The problem is in the inadequacy of the process chosen to resolve the conflict. The secret of failure is in the persistent quest for a solution for a conflict in which any given comprehensive solution by itself is an obstacle for a lasting peace, because it will dissatisfy both immediate parties of the conflict. What the negotiators refuse to recognize is that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has no quick solution or predetermined long-term solution. Pressing Armenian and Azerbaijani governments to sign an agreement until the underlying causes of the conflict are addressed and resolved is the most certain path toward failure and must be avoided.

Resolution of this conflict requires a nontraditional approach. The literature on intractable conflicts would suggest finding incentives for Russia to stop supporting

³² Crocker, Chester, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall. 2004. *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in Hard Cases*. Washington: USIP Press.

Nagorno-Karabakh.³³ But for Iranian and Russian influence to be reduced and incentives to be created for them to act according to their official positions and support the peace process, one should focus not on Russia and Iran themselves, but on the source of their influence. The source of their influence is their alliance with Armenia, because of the fear of the latter of Azerbaijan and Turkey and its perceived need to counterbalance their threat. If the Armenian position were moved closer to its “objective” interests and Armenia achieved a higher level of regional integration with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia, then Armenian dependence on Russia and Iran, and, as a result, their influence over the conflict, would decrease. This, in its turn, can happen only if Turkish-Armenian reconciliation is achieved and Armenia does not see Turkey as a threat.

The belief that the prospects of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation are bleak is widespread. However, the latest efforts of the US State Department can disprove that assessment. With the private support of the Turkish and Armenian governments, in the summer of 2000, a Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) was formed - composed of retired diplomats, academics and Diaspora representatives - to look at the potential for reconciliation.³⁴ TARC's 4-year-long activities provoked debates between and within both countries and within the Armenia Diaspora, and broke the ice in Turkish-Armenian relations. TARC enabled Turkish and Armenian business circles and civil societies to establish contacts. Some Turk academics started using the word ‘genocide’ to describe the tragedy of 1915. A joint request was sent to the New York based International Center for Transitional Justice that produced an analysis that can potentially satisfy both sides. It stated that the term ‘genocide’ can be applied to the events, but no legal, financial or territorial claims could arise as a result of it.³⁵

Much more has to be done, of course, for the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation to be achieved and the Nagorno-Karabakh to be resolved. Existing moderate streams within Turkish, Armenian and Azeri intelligentsia and within their respective Diasporas have to be cultivated and cooperation among them encouraged. The access of moderate intellectuals and local and international peace-building NGOs to media and education have to be promoted, so that they can communicate an alternative view of the cooperative approach to resolution of the conflict, based on shared identity, shared history, shared interests and shared security concerns. The security concerns of all three South Caucasian countries should be addressed by continuing integration within the EU and NATO structures. The oil resources of Azerbaijan should be used to promote regional economic integration and not to reinforce existing conflict lines. The economic and security interests of Russia have to be taken into consideration. The exclusion of Russia will provoke the nationalistic elements within it to seek further destabilization of the Caucasus to preserve Russian influence. The exclusion of Russia's North Caucasian regions from the prospects of regional cooperation would lead to an economic crisis near the northern boundaries of the South Caucasus and could undermine the process of stabilizing the region.

³³ Crocker, Hampson and Aall.

³⁴ For more information about the work of Turkish-Armenia Reconciliation Commission (TARC) see Phillips, David. 2005. *Unsilencing the Past: Track Two Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenia Reconciliation*. New York: Berghahn Books.

³⁵ Phillips, David. P.3-4

Conclusion

Hopes for an imminent solution to the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh have to be put on hold. There is no short-term solution to this conflict. Long-term measures such as democratization, Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, regional economic, security and perhaps political integration, and reinforcement of the overarching Caucasian identity are the necessary preconditions for a lasting peace. The State Department's TARC initiative has contributed to a sustainable peace in the Caucasus more than ten years of the Minsk Group mediations. Armenian and Turkish governments have started to understand, gradually, the benefits of cooperation and reconciliation. If not yet ready to support the move openly, they privately agree not to hamper civil dialogue.³⁶ Azerbaijan has many incentives to join the effort. Its widely publicized military superiority and prospects of retaking Nagorno-Karabakh by force are illusory. As an analyst has noted: "In a matter of minutes Armenian S-300 missiles can reach Baku and destroy Azerbaijani energy industry."³⁷ At the same time if Armenia becomes a partner from an adversary, the Russian threat will be greatly reduced; a land link will be established with Turkey and with Nakhichevan, the autonomous part of Azerbaijan separated from it by Armenia; Azerbaijan will become the bridge between Turkey and Central Asia and its regional role will increase; the prospects of NATO and the EU integration will become more realistic.

Everyone until now, even those who understand the necessity of regional integration, had considered the resolution of the conflict as a prerequisite for peace and cooperation in the Caucasus. I suggest reversing the approach and looking at regional integration as a mean for resolution. Again, if a high level of regional integration is achieved, the question of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh should become by and large insignificant.

³⁶ Phillips, David.

³⁷ Phillips, Davis.p 19.

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