2020 EGF NAGORNO-KARABAKH RESEARCH DIGEST: AN EXPERT PEER-REVIEW OF THE ARTICLES

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How to Break the Current Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution: Strategic Dialogue on the Peace Process within a Boosted Peace Context?

> *The 2020 European Geopolitical Forum Research Digest aimed to explore the resilience of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) peace process driven by the implementation of the Madrid/Basic Principles, and the increased relevance of the peace context, created by various initiatives aiming to incentivize peaceful conflict resolution. It consists of three research papers drafted by distinguished Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian experts, who have been invited to respond generic questions such as: Are the Madrid Principles really dead? Why haven't they been implemented so far? What are the Armenian perceived downsides of the Madrid Principles as the most plausible option for the Karabakh conflict resolution? Why does Azerbaijan support the Madrid Principles, and why does Baku believe they could still lead the way to a breakthrough in the peace process? What structural, institutional, conceptual, or operational changes could unblock the NK peace process, while taking advantage from a much needed boost of the peace context?* READ MORE

When there is so much shelling and yelling in the South Caucasus conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, it is helpful to read a collection of thoughtful essays by knowledgeable authors from several differing countries and perspectives that appeared in The European Geopolitical Forum. Each piece is a welcome contribution, but nevertheless has key gaps and issues. I will comment on each in the order in which they appear. Rashad Tahirov, Khayal Iskandarov and Sadi Sadiyev authored "The Updated Madrid Principles in the 'Karabakh Knot'". The article is better than many Azerbaijani accounts and is useful in its discussions on germane UN resolutions and international law, the lack of formal diplomatic relations between the conflicting states, the importance of energy projects radiating from Azerbaijan into the region, the basic outline of the OSCE Madrid Principles, the quite significant changes in Madrid texts over time. It also differentiates between the original 'autonomous oblast' region of Nagorno-Karabakh in the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan and its surrounding areas, the latter often not well-understood by many outside observers and even some citizens of the warring states. The article noted how past negotiations have stumbled even on the proposed return of five, but not all seven of Karabakh's surrounding territories, highlighting the critical importance of the Lachin corridor linking Armenia and Artsakh. Some gaps, however, do exist in the article. Too often Azerbaijani commentators ignore the historic fact that in 1988 the Nagorno-Karabakh assembly voted on institutional separation from Azerbaijan and in favour of union with Armenia while the Soviet Union and its constitution still existed. The authors also do not mention the critical period of soviet direct rule by Moscow over Nagorno-Karabakh due to the ethnic strife and

killings of Armenian civilians in Azerbaijan. The authors are correct to point out the relatively small Armenian population that dwelled in Karabakh in 1988, but failed to note it was about four times the size of the Azerbaijani population. The Armenians constituted a clear majority and the Azerbaijanis a distinct ethnic and religious minority in the territory. Quite significantly in a world that has seen ethnic slaughter and genocide, the authors failed to acknowledge the past pogroms of Armenians in the soviet republic of Azerbaijan, and the unreliability of the government towards ethnic minorities. No doubt a factor, drawing on the soviet past practice,was the authoritarian nature of the government in Azerbaijan, with its lack of freedoms for civil society activists. In fact, the regime is a three decades old autocratic family dynasty established by the father Heydar Aliyev and continued by the son Ilham Aliyev. Tahirov's and his colleagues' suggestion that any Nagorno-Karabakh status vote now needs the entire country of Azerbaijan to vote is analytically unsound. Following that logic, none of the fourteen republics of the former Soviet Union would have been able to leave the USSR, as they would have been outvoted by the larger Russian population elsewhere who wanted to keep the remnants of the Tsarist and soviet empires. Interestingly, as a Canadian professor of political science, I remember all too well that the backlash to Quebec separatism several decades ago triggered this very same issue by some hardline English Canadians in the rest of the country. It was, of course, not taken seriously by key decision-makers either in Canada or Quebec. While it is important to recognize the size and relative proportion of ethnic populations, the effort to differentiate between 'ethnic people' vs 'ethnic minority' and deny the latter certain rights seems unwarranted. Many smaller indigenous communities across the globe would certainly disagree with the idea. During the dispute between Armenian and Azerbaijanis, two key contrasting political and legal concepts have been advocated by each side. For the government of Azerbaijan, territorial integrity is paramount. For Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, they seek national self-determination as a people. Both are important concepts cited in this conflict. Yet, one can pose whether or not the two key principles of territorial integrity vs right to self-determination are of equal weight in terms of democratic theory. If so, empires would continue to rule large land masses over a multitude of subject peoples. For example, Britain would continue to rule over all of Ireland. The authors' assertion of maintaining territorial integrity of Azerbaijan at all stages of the negotiation process is a major obstacle to meaningful dialogue. Even more problematic is the notion of the inalienable right to restore territory 'by any means'. This sort of language hints at the potential for aggressive war, ethnic purging or even genocide. It seems best to avoid such an assertion. Given Armenians' genocidal experience in the Ottoman Empire in the 1890s and during WW I and more recently massacres in Sumgait and Baku in the declining days of the Soviet Union, Armenians' apprehensions about genocide are important to consider. Tahirov and his colleagues highlight the UN resolutions drawing upon international law regarding territorial integrity, but should also note that other resolutions stress human rights, national self-determination and minority protections. Of course, we have the 1948 UN genocide convention as a document of paramount importance. A South Caucasus workshop devoted to better understanding of these concepts might prove useful as a backdrop to any negotiations. The failures of the OSCE Minsk process and working group to achieve any

breakthrough over the decades is evident. There certainly have been proposals to expand the Minsk group and number of co-chairs. The current three of Russia, United States and France seem too narrow in the 2020s. Germany might be an obvious additional choice. Proposals by Azerbaijan to include Turkey seem problematic on many fronts. Turkey is currently a repressive authoritarian regime with historic imperial territorial ambitions in the region that has quite significantly closed its borders to Armenia since the 1990s. Some would characterize this act as an economic blockade and even a form of economic warfare. Certainly, Turkey has not repudiated its 1915 genocide of its Armenian subjects in the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps understandably, Armenian reactions to including Turkey as a key Minsk co-chair are of considerable alarm. It is hard to see how such a presence would foster a peaceful outcome or an even calm negotiation settings. Iran, by contrast, could be an interesting addition, given its past history of mediation efforts.The authors' suggestion that Nagorno-Karabakh might have autonomous republic status within Azerbaijan and that this would be sufficient today is to ignore the political mood of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, both three decades ago and currently. Relatedly, it would not be acceptable to either the Armenian government in Yerevan or its Diaspora.

To reiterate, the article by Tahirov, Iskandarov and Sadiyev is a useful analytical paper. It is certainly a catalyst for further discussion. One thing that strikes this reader is the need for a more inclusive common history by both Azerbaijan and Armenia that could be read by all involved. Both sides need to listen more to the other. Some attempts were made to do this with Turks and Armenians with mixed results. Benyamin Poghosyan's "Time to Change the Nagorno-Karabakh Settlement Paradigm: From 'Land for Promise" to 'Independence for Regional Peace and Development'" is a short,but well-presented Armenian-authored article. It correctly notes how the Armenian Velvet Revolution raised expectations on the Azerbaijani side. However, the Pashinyan government's foreign policy seems to have been a frank, but a harder nationalist line, perhaps surprising and definitely frustrating the Aliyev government. Earlier Armenian negotiators, realizing the magnitude of the issues under discussion, opted for a phased or staged approach, tackling the easier problems first and postponing the trickier ones to a later time. Poghosyan offers a sound, if not, damning critique of the phased approach and suggests instead the need for a comprehensive total package. Recognizing that the original 1994 ceasefire was a tri-partite agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Poghosyan suggests that any realistic settlement needs to include the officials of the *de facto* government of Artsakh. Historically, there are several reasons for Nagorno-Karabakh to have been dropped as a formal participant in the official talks. Subsequent opposition by Azerbaijan is the obvious main reason. Another factor is that two leaders from Nagorno-Karabakh went on to become political leaders (either president or prime minister) of Armenia (e.g. Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan). The Republic of Armenia's leader was, in effect, wearing two hats, one official (Armenia) and one unofficial (Karabakh). Thus, the Karabakh negotiator was informally and indirectly present. In the long run, this initially convenient converging of roles has probably proved problematic in that it contributed to cutting out of Nagorno-Karabakh

from the direct talks. In so doing, it fostered the image that it was originally a bilateral inter-state conflict rather than a secessionist intra-state conflict that spilled over and spiralled into an inter-state war. One of the gaps in Poghosyan's piece is that he needs to note the territorial integrity skew in UN resolutions on Karabakh that do not sufficiently recognize the right of a people to national self-determination. Poghosyan is correct to assert the problematic nature of the phases approach of giving up military 'security zone' land surrounding Karabakh for an Azerbaijani future promise about Nagorno-Karabakh's status. Nevertheless, he could explore further how likely a total package is to be assembled. It is truly a Caucasian knot. When discussing bilateral relations between combatants, Poghosyan seems a bit too optimistic about the capacity of civil society and young experts to reach across conflict borders. How likely is it to be successful, given the authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan? I am reminded that in the midst of the frostiest days of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, Russian representatives did not have a lot of latitude to speak frankly or honestly.

Andrey Areshev's "Nagorno-Karabakh: Madrid Principles –Yesterday's Reality" is a thoughtful Russian analytical view. Echoing other outside commentators, this article is perhaps instructive in reminding the reader that Moscow probably has no break-through solution to the decades-long conflict in the South Caucasus. Areshev is quite clear that the phased approach of 'land for promise' would be, in effect, a form of surrender for the Armenians of Karabakh. Areshev accurately notes that the weapons increasingly being deployed are those of mass destruction rather than the mostly small-scale weapons used in the early 1990s. This has profound implications, not only in terms of human lives lost, but also strategic implications for the region. Analytically, Areshev correctly notes the parallel democratic right of the Azerbaijani people/republic to vote to leave the federal Soviet Union, but also suggests the similar democratic right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to leave the soviet republic of Azerbaijan and relatedly the independent country of Azerbaijan. The institutional status of Nagorno-Karabakh was implicitly recognized when it signed the original 1994 ceasefire as one of the three local entities. While recognizing the increased destructive capacity of weapons imports into the South Caucasus, Areshev disappointingly ignores the dangerous role Russia plays in supplying large amounts of arms to both the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides. Russia is not the only major arms supplier, but it is central, if not pivotal, in arming both sides. It is a dangerous and some suggest a sinister major power role that, in some important ways, perpetuates client state dependency on Russia, particularly in the Armenian case. Areshev is correct to focus on the contemporary setting, but should have briefly mentioned the historic and somewhat unwise decision of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s to award Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan in an effort to appeal to the Ataturk regime in Ankara and Muslims in neighbouring states. It ignored the wishes of the majority nationality and, in so doing, planted seeds for the subsequent ethnic conflict. Other Soviet leaders from Brezhnev to Gorbachev had a chance to rectify this miscalculation, but did not do so. Again, it was a lost opportunity. It would perhaps be useful for contemporary strategists in Moscow to finally recognize past historical injustices as a first step towards finding a solution. Overall,this is an interesting collection of essays on Nagorno-Karabakh found on the The European

Geopolitical Forum's website. It was helpful to read a variety of perspectives. Hopefully, this review essay and accompanying bibliography will continue the difficult dialogue.

List of Nagorno Karabakh Books

List of Nagorno Karabakh Books
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Comments

Mihran Tcholakian – 2020-11-01 23:10:37

Շատ հաճելի Երիզ մըն էր: Գաղափարներն ալ տեղին են. Ճիշտ էր որ Դաշնակցութիւնը ազդու եւ գերիշխող կուսակցութիւն մըն է սփիւռքի տարացքին իր զօրաւոր համակիրներով: Սակայն ինչու եւ ինչ պատճառներով չկարողացաւ իր ուժը պահել Հայրենիքի մէջ: Պատճառները շատ յստակ են, որովհետեւ իր ղեկաւարներու ունեցած եւ վարած ուղեւորութեանց համար, Հրանդներու եւ Աղվաններու անձնաւորութեամբ: Այդ է պատճառը որ Հայրենիքին մէջ չկարողացաւ ժողովուրդի վստահութիւնը շահիլ: Սակայն եւ այնպէս ինչպէս որ Պրն. Հրաչը կը ներկայացնէ՝ Դաշնակցութիւնը կայ ու կը մնայ կենսական ուժ սփիւռքի մէջ. Մաղթենք որ Հայրենիք - Սփիւռք յարաբերութիւնները ըլլան աւելի համերաշխութեամբ եւ համգործակցութեամբ: Միհրան