

WHAT OF ARMENIA?

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By David Davidian, Yerevan, Armenia 11 March 2021

This article attempts to explain the cause and effect on Armenia of the Azerbaijani offensive against the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh in Armenian) and outlying areas. Identifying the topic is a challenge since what transpired last fall in the southern Caucasus has multiple overtones; a US/NATO-Russia rivalry, Turkish-Russian rivalry-cooperation, an Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, staging a Turkish-Iranian conflict, or all of these.

No one has official government documents, if any exist, nor do we know covert plans and agreements of the players. Thus, we will make our assessments using facts, some a generation old, some the results and effects of events during the past three years, and hard facts on the ground. There are competing narratives for why Armenia was attacked. As such, we state facts, submit hypotheses and ask the hard questions in an attempt to make sense of events in the southern Caucasus region leading up to September 28, 2020, the Azerbaijani offensive, Armenia's submission, and the end game.

We will pick up on selected events occurring since the fall of the Soviet Union as such incidents directly affect events today. Azerbaijanis lived in Armenia, Armenians lived in Azerbaijan, Georgians generally resided in Georgia. The largest concentration of Armenians in what became the Azerbaijan Republic lived in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku and Nagorno-Karabakh. As the disintegration of the Soviet Union proceeded, crude forms of nationalism began to surface. In Georgia, it was Georgia for the Georgians. Armenians and Azerbaijanis exchanged populations. Many Armenians from Baku escaped pogroms with just the clothes on their backs to Russia or as refugees to Western countries. By 1990 fighting between Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, volunteers from Armenia, and the Azerbaijani army became fierce. By May of 1994, an armistice allowed Armenians to exercise sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions. Azerbaijan has always claimed Nagorno-Karabakh as an internationally accepted part of the Azerbaijani state.

Armenia's political scene was characterized by its first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan (LTP), promulgating a [philosophy](#) that if a state doesn't overtly appear militaristic it will not appear to be a threat to its neighbors. While it is laudable that a country is unilaterally friends with its neighbors, such a strategy does not work in the real world. Security must never be subservient to an ideology. Further, during the reign of LTP, oligarchs were allowed to reign free and develop mainly in reaction to seventy years of Soviet rule. It is a "false dilemma" that if communism is evil, liberal democracy and capitalism are good. Worst of all, during first few years of Armenia's independence, was the dismantling of Soviet military technology, science, and research and development (R&D). This was characterized by the wholesale dumping of the contents of factories and other facilities to neighboring countries like Iran and sold by the ton. This theft was done without any plan or vetting. Privatization vouchers were purchased from an unsuspecting population en masse by the neo-oligarchs. Armenia was emptied of technology and equipment that could have been used in its self-

defense or nascent defense industry. Human capital was equally neglected as the disappearance of industries and emigration grew. Until this time, Soviet Armenia's contribution to Soviet theoretical sciences, technologies, spacecraft control, and IT infrastructure had been larger per capita than most Soviet republics.

Armenia's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, is a disciple of LTP. According to LTP, peace with Azerbaijan is "the main prerequisite for Armenia's and Karabakh's security, economic development and improved demographic situation." LTP's demagoguery never stated upon whose terms such peace was/is based. Pashinyan's [views](#) include the [internationalization](#) of the very southern parts of Armenia.

Armenian's potential continued to be squandered by every successive government. What passed as Armenian diplomacy was essentially business-related, not policy-related. The demands of the 21st Century and Armenia's precarious geopolitical location demanded a grand strategy centered on security, not in fulfilling oligarchic egos, as was the case. The Armenian Diaspora was actively shunned based on the widespread attitude that the Diaspora was unwanted competition. This unwritten policy went so far as to question who should be considered a "true" Armenian. This policy parallels that of how Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan were viewed and treated. It was not only the far-flung Armenian Diaspora that was vilified. Armenian refugees from Baku were some of the most highly trained Armenians in the region. Armenians were looked down upon in Azerbaijan, yet these Armenians held professional positions within a repressive environment – an achievement in its own right. It is inexcusable to have demolished such human capital because these Russian-speaking "Baku mafia" refugees would be competing with emerging local Armenian monopolies.

Excuses were always generated as to why such human capital could not be integrated into Armenian society and state-building. The situation in Armenia was like that of Italy before Garibaldi. Given that national security was absent from the public agenda, Armenia plodded along as if it were a Luxembourg in an otherwise tame Europe. The deficiency of a national [grand strategy](#), centered around security, ultimately allowed Azerbaijan to capture much of Nagorno-Karabakh and isolate what remains from Armenia proper. Moreover, this Azerbaijan initiative is not finished, as we shall hypothesize.

Armenia continued along on a status-quo policy with regards to a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh exercised sovereignty over their affairs, while Azerbaijan claimed this region based on internationally recognized borders as a Soviet state. It made little difference what government was in power since Armenia's independence for no serious attempts at an indigenous response were made in reply to the increase in Azerbaijan's procurement of high-technology military equipment, nor regarding their training and military alliance with Turkey. For well over a decade, Turkey was on the path of widening its influence through both soft and hard power. In contrast, for Armenia, buying or otherwise procuring Russian arms was not a policy, but a directive. Since the early 2000s, Turkey became NATO's attack dog, eventually nipping at Syria's

Assad's ankles, playing both friend and foe to Russia, and acting as a potential catalyst in the dismantling of the Iranian regime.

The latest government in Armenia was ushered in on a platform of eliminating Armenia's oligarchs and corruption. Pashinyan's platform might have been a trendy slogan, but little or nothing was done to retrieve the claimed billions of dollars usurped from Armenia by its own corrupt elements. In fact, Pashinyan's government's modus operandi was to go after those entities, either in government or private domains that had any affiliation with the previous PM, Serge Sargsyan. No attempts were made to ascertain the culpability or competency of those dismissed from important positions. Even the game of chess was frowned upon since Sargsyan was a chess advocate. What slowly became clear was that Pashinyan was placing incompetent people in positions of power. While these new appointees may have been otherwise ordinary, well-meaning people, most lacked experience. The Ministries of Education, Health, and Civil Aviation were among those whose inexperience was most evident. In time, Pashinyan began a push to unseat jurists on the Constitutional Court, replacing them with his preferences. At the time, this latter effort of Pashinyan seemed out of place considering all the other issues facing Armenia. Perhaps Pashinyan expected constitutional battles.

The strategic dismissals and appointments ordered by the Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan reached a peak about a year ago. On September 16, 2019, the following two individuals were dismissed.

- National Security Service Chief Artur Vanetsyan
- Chief of Police Valery Osipyanyan

In February 2020, the following Major Generals were dismissed:

- Military Police Chief Artur Baghdasaryan
- Army's Personnel Department Chief Aleksan Aleksanyan

The following announcement was made in June 2020:

- Lieutenant General Onik Gasparyan was appointed as Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces
- Colonel Argishti Kyaramyan was appointed Director of the National Security Service.
- Colonel Vahe Ghazaryan was appointed Chief of Police.

Interestingly, appointing inexperienced individuals to government positions makes it easier for transgressions to take place. It is not as if the Armenian Constitution has multiple levels of checks and balances. When experienced high-ranking military personnel are replaced, with them go years of experience. However, while these dismissals/appointments could be above suspicion, all were performed without transparency. Along such lines, one may ask many questions: Why did Armenia purchase Russian SU-30M military jets without military armaments?

It has been [theorized](#) that without losing a "fight," the Armenian public would never stand for any

Armenian government or that of Nagorno-Karabakh to cede land to Azerbaijan. Does this mean that Pashinyan knew the outcome of Fall 2020's Second Karabakh War in advance? It might. It is not out of the question considering Pashinyan has done nothing to reduce tension within Armenia since the November 9, 2020 "Capitulation." In stark contrast, he has exacerbated a tenuous situation in Armenia. A few examples include his attempt to fire Onik Gasparyan, Chief of the General Staff less than a month ago; his claim that Armenian-purchased Russian Iskander missiles are ineffective; and his inflammatory public processions surrounded by supporters bused in from other cities. When scores of high-ranking Armenian military officers demanded he step down, Pashinyan claimed an army coup d'etat was taking place. There was no coup d'etat. When Pashinyan used the term coup d'etat, the [Turkish FM](#) came to Pashinyan's defense. Simply stated, Turkey came to the defense of Armenia because Pashinyan must deliver on the November 9, 2020 "Capitulation."

The most noteworthy occurrence during and after the Artsakh War was the lack of the required number of Armenian soldiers to secure borders and citizens, especially in the southern third of the country. It is southern Armenia that the Azerbaijani President Aliyev claims as Azerbaijan lands, regardless that it is internationally recognized as Armenia. On March 8, 2021, Azerbaijani President Aliyev [stated](#), "Armenia tries to prevent the execution of the Zangazur corridor now. But it will not be able to achieve it. We will make them. We will achieve all our desires, just as we expelled them from our territories." Other than a direct threat, Aliyev admits to past and future ethnic cleansing of Armenians. See Zangezur on the map below. We read reports daily about villagers who come face to face with Azerbaijani soldiers demanding Armenians relinquish land with no Armenian soldiers present. This lack of border protection is not arbitrary. That is, at a minimum, an army must protect borders. If the army isn't present, either that army lacks manpower (which is not the case in Armenia), it lacks funding (doubtful if Pashinyan can bring out many hundreds of police to protect his political appearances), or somebody doesn't want to place soldiers at border positions. The question many ask is why the lack of border security?



The Bigger Picture

As a NATO member, Turkey is in a cultural and military position to play roles the US is unwilling to take on; in Syria against Assad; in Libya; in northern Lebanon; and perhaps in other lesser-known locations. Turkey takes gambles the US won't directly take. During the middle of the Second Karabakh War, NATO's official [website](#) posted, "Turkey is a valued NATO Ally." Turkey's role was clear in its active support of Azerbaijan conquering Nagorno-Karabakh, with praise from NATO.

An Iranian red line counters Aliyev's hubris. On January 27, 2021, Iranian FM Javad Zarif [stated](#), "Our red line is the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia, on which we've clearly expressed ourselves." Aliyev's hubris finds its roots in Turkey's ever-present thread that takes advantage of any event it can use to expand influence. Those events include; the 1932 Turkish acquisition of Lesser Ararat in a land swap with Iran, the Turkish annexation of the Syrian Alexandretta region in 1938. The French Mandate granted this region as a bribe in exchange for Turkey's promise not to enter WWII on Germany's side. Turkey signed the *German Turkish Treaty of Friendship* on June 18, 1941, anyway. Turkey used the excuse of a Greek coup d'etat in Cyprus to occupy that sovereign state's northern half in 1974. Turkey used the Syrian Civil War as an excuse to occupy much of Syria's northwest and Syria's northern regions. US President Trump finally [gave Turkey](#) the green light in Syria. NATO's support for Turkey's role in defeating the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh only encourages Turkey to take further steps in what appears to be a pan-Turkic expedition.

Informed speculation forces us to make these observations, questions, and hypotheses.

- Turkey and Azerbaijan just finished their [Winter 2021 Combined Joint Live Fire Exercise](#) adjacent to Armenia's border. Turkey is still engaging in [reconnaissance](#) at the Armenian border and [building up military capabilities](#) in Azerbaijan's exclave of Nakhichevan. Such maneuvers are expensive. What threat is this training supposedly preparing to counter? If there is no threat, what offensive capability is being prepared and against whom?
- Other than Azerbaijan supplying half of Israel's oil supply, [Azerbaijan hosts](#) Israeli intelligence-gathering stations. There are diplomatic rumors that Israeli fighter jets are either stationed in Azerbaijan or can be, if necessary.
- Suppose Azerbaijani President Aliyev goes forward with his threat to attack Armenia and create a connection between the lands it captured from Nagorno-Karabakh last fall, through southern Armenia, to their exclave of Nakhichevan, considering the seeming lack of Armenian Army units in southern Armenia. In that case, Iran will take such a move as an existential threat. Iran may be more convinced of such danger with Turkey raising the ante (or a false flag operation) in the increasingly militarized region of Nakhichevan.
- If Armenia's borders are violated, Russia will be CTSO alliance-bound to defend Armenia. However, one must consider the dynamics of the November 9, 2020 "Capitulation" signed by Armenia. Without knowledge of annexes agreed to between the parties, the big question is: What did Azerbaijan receive in the form of assurances that allowed it to agree to have Russian peacekeeping forces on land they have continuously claimed as their internationally

recognized land? We can only speculate. However, ever since the signing of the November 9, 2020 agreement, Baku has consistently used all opportunity to reference transport routes across Armenia between Azerbaijan and Nakhitchevan. Is this a reminder to the parties that a quid pro quo exists? We don't know, but this is a question that must be asked.

- If Azerbaijani and Turkish forces capture southern Armenia, will what remains of Armenia, having been so self-emasculated, have little choice but to become an official governate (as in "gubernia") of Russia? Is this the quid pro quo Baku agreed to when allowing Russian peacekeeping troops in Nagorno-Karabakh? Or more precisely, what caused Azerbaijan's offensive to stop where it did, just short of the Nagorno-Karabakh capital of Stepanakert? This is a question with no official response.
- Will tensions in Armenia bring the country to the brink of civil war, allowing Azerbaijan to march across southern Armenia?
- The Republic of Georgia, which allowed its [airspace](#) to be used for the transport of Turkish troops and arms, ISIS fighters, and Israeli arms, might find a Russian presence on its southern border if Armenia were forced to accept Russian protectorate status.
- Is NATO planning on using its attack dog, Turkey, to force Iran into a confrontation, giving the illusion of an ethnic Azerbaijani insurgence in the Iranian provinces of East and West Azerbaijan? While Iran is busy with Turkey, Israel could destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Of course, if this were to happen, Israel will have to defend itself or preemptively attack the Iranian-friendly Hezbollah in Lebanon simultaneously. Since any form of P5+1 (*aka the UN Security Council's five permanent members – China, France, Russia, the UK and the US, + Germany*) talks with Iran do not fit into Israeli interests, otherwise, the rabidly Anti-Semitic and genocidal Turkey would be the perfect foil.

And what of Armenia? In such instances, what happens to Armenia will be considered "collateral damage."

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Comments



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A very interesting article. Thank you DD. The malaise of the Armenian nation, started by Ottoman Turkey, with the dismantling of Western Armenia and Genocide, before turkey became a NATO-attack-dog-member. Decades later followed the dismantling of the Soviet Union, and chaos in the Unions. Now, after the fact, the world is more aware of the powers behind turkey orchestrated attacks on Armenians, in particular with the push and brazen aggression since September on Nagorno Karabagh/Artsakh. What now in Armenia? Not much seems to be written about the Levon DB "creation" as the first president of Armenia, which is the culmination of the disastrous situation of current Armenia and the Diaspora. The question never answered is "Whose dog is Levon D.B.". Yes "what now of Armenia?" Thanks for great article.