AVİM Commentary • No: 2020 / 43 •

THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH IS SWINGING ON A PENDULUM, AND THE CLOCK IS TICKING

Tutku DİLAVER

Analyst

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is becoming a more complex issue day by day. It is becoming more apparent through the Karabakh conflict how conflicts can be managed through hybrid war tactics and how frightening the power of post-truth is in the new world order. It is possible to say that baseless claims have found resonated in the public opinion at the international level, especially with the help of countries such as France.

The wind that was blowing against Armenia in the first days of Azerbaijans operations seems to have slowed down for now. At the same time, it does not seem that Armenia has the full support of Russia. Despite humanitarian truce having been declared twice, the fact that Russia did not take any decisive steps to establish a permanent ceasefire environment weakens Armenia's hopes in Nagorno-Karabakh. As the worlds agenda gets busier, the Minsk co-chairs (Russia, France, and the US) are being forced to juggle more and more issues. Meanwhile, by continuing to give its full support to Azerbaijan, Turkey is reminding Azerbaijan that it is not alone.

Nagorno-Karabakh v3.0

Since the beginning of the clashes with Azerbaijan, Armenia and the illegitimate Armenian administration in Nagorno-Karabakh have created tremendous amount disinformation in the international arena through various accusations. Much speculation has been made especially on Turkeys role in the region. In fact, the basis of this policy had already begun to be established even before Tovuz skirmishes. It was seen that - Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan followed the same post-truth strategy in the open debate with President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev during the Munich Security Conference. Likewise, after the Tovuz attack, delusive claims such as there being no country named Azerbaijan anymore because it was seized by Turkey[1] begin to be published in the domestic media in Armenia. It is possible to say that it was aimed to create the perception of the Archenemy Turkey and to prepare the public for war. As a matter of fact, Armenian politicians have continued to express similar points in many countries they have visited.

After the last clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh started, it was seen that a similar line was

adopted in Armenia's discourses. The perception of genocide that had been created by Armenian lobbies through much effort in the public opinion at an international level has also begun to be used. The press was supplied with reports that Turkey is sending jihadist militants to Azerbaijan and that these militants are persecuting the Armenian people. At this point, France acting as the spokesperson of Armenia in Europe had a significant effect. This perception that has been created has once again demonstrated the validity of the concept of post-truth. Despite being untrue, the fake news spread by Armenia has managed to make an impact in the public opinion at the international level.

As the clashes dragged on, these policies implemented by Armenia have distracted public opinion Azerbaijans just cause and have caused the perception that the problem is between Turkey-Armenia. The operation that was launched against the separatist Armenian regime in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan began to be presented as a clash of civilizations. In this respect, the description of the first Christian state in history has begun to be added next to the name of Armenia. By this way, it was aimed to create the perception that there is a Muslim persecution against Christian people instead of a war against the separatist regime in Nagorno-Karabakh. Especially the allegations that a church in Shusha city of Nagorno-Karabakh was bombed by Azerbaijan has become an example frequently used to strengthen this perception. In this respect, Armenia has mostly benefited from Islamophobia and Turcophobia that are rising in the West.

On the other hand, the efforts to make use of the perception of the 1915 events through Armenian lobbies show that Armenia is putting all the cards in its hands on the table. A campaign has been launched for the recognition of the independence of the separatist regime in Nagorno-Karabakh in order to prevent the persecution in Nagorno-Karabakh and the massacre of the Armenian people. In this context, diaspora organizations were called on to apply pressure to governments in their countries. Armenians living in the diaspora in many countries took to the streets and chanted Recognize Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh].

Despite this call not get a full support at a state level, it was still quite remarkable that this issue was proposed in the US House of Representatives[2] and in the French Parliament[3]. Expressing his opposition to this proposal, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian said that France should maintain its neutrality as the co-chair of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group[4]. As the French Minister of Foreign Affairs also stated, France should adhere to the principle of equality and impartiality as co-chair, according to the authorization text adopted in 1995 by the OSCE Minsk Co-Presidency Group[5]. These principles must be followed by all co-chairs. However, it has been seen many times in the process we are in that France, especially President of France Emmanuel Macron, has violated this neutrality. Apart from the supportive decisions of the French parliament, news continues to come that the city councils of France have decided to recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh[6]. It can be easily seen that central and local governments of France have lost their neutrality.

Russia as Primus inter Pares

In this environment, we see that Russia stands out more than the other co-chairs. France's support to Armenia continues to remain limited and physically distant under the current pandemic conditions. It is Russia who is trying to keep the process under control on behalf of the OSCE.

In the Russian media, it is frequently being expressed that Russia should be the only authorized mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. However, the fragility of the truces announced under the leadership of Russia does not give the impression that enough effort is being made.

According to the international law practices, under humanitarian truce regime, parties should stop clashes for a certain period, and exchange prisoners and the remains of fallen soldiers and civilians. However, truces announced on October 10 and October 18 show that this is not being followed. In the text released by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov on October 10, it is stated that the humanitarian ceasefire will only be based on the criteria of the International Red Cross committee, but no time limit is given.

In such uncertainty, it was not surprising that the truce fell apart within hours of its implementation. Immediately after the truce, the ammunition-laden vehicles of the Spayka Company, which belongs to former President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan's son-in-law, were caught on the Georgian border[7]. It is also being reported in the press that Georgia shows no tolerance on this issue[8]. In addition, on the night of October 10 when the truce was in effect, missile attacks were carried out against Azerbaijan by Armenia. Even though the Armenian side pointed to Azerbaijan as the side to violate the ceasefire regime first, the current situation shows the opposite.

Organizing a large-scale attack on the city of Ganja, where civilian population lives, is completely against the conditions of ceasefire and the laws of war. In fact, the attacks on Ganja and Terter are closely related to the 7 principles doctrine announced by the Security Council of the separatist regime in Nagorno-Karabakh on 5 September. According to this doctrine, it is stated that ☀ the war can be carried to the territory of Azerbaijan. A counter-attack tactic was adopted against the operation launched by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, the aim being to spread the war to a wider area, to create fear behind the front, and most importantly, to call international forces to the region.

In the press, this situation was interpreted as a tactic to be used to provoke Azerbaijan to attack Armenian lands and to thus draw in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to the clashes. Of course, this was not a weak possibility. However, President of Russia Vladimir Putin stated that Nagorno-Karabakh is not within the scope of CSTO[9]. This indicates that Russia is not motivated enough to help Armenia yet.

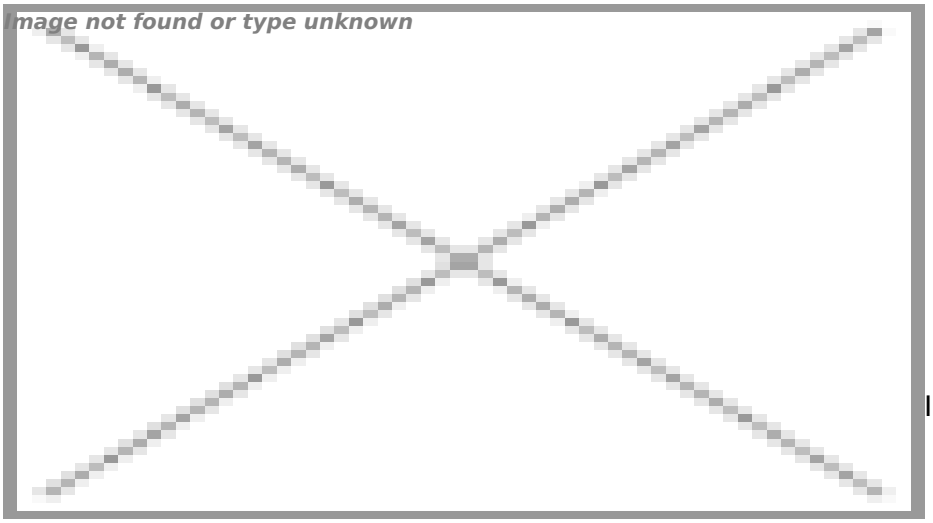
While emphasizing Russias historical, military, and commercial ties with Armenia on the one hand, Putins statement that Russia stands equidistant to both Azerbaijan and Armenia [10] on the other hand points to important matters[11]. It seems that Russias resentment against the Pashinyan government will not fade easily and, as we have mentioned before, it will not easily forgive the Pashinyan governments pivot to France and the West.

The impact of the conflict on domestic politics

It seems that Pashinyans loss of Karabakh will lead him to be completely erased from politics. In particular, he will suffer a heavy defeat against former presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, from whom he grabbed power and whom he criticized by calling them the Karabakh clan. However, there is no sympathy for either Kocharyan or Sargsyan within the country. There is an overwhelming view that the war is being lost due to the corruption by the former rulers and the establishment of an army system based on old Russian weapons. The Kocharyan and Sargsyan governments are seen as the reason behind this situation. Although Kocharyan and Sargsyan went to Nagorno-Karabakh in the first days of the clashes and have been following the clashes closely, they have not been able to win the support of the people. The fact that the situation progressing to Armenias detriment affects their political future as much as Pashinyans future.

Therefore, it seems that Pashinyan's fall from power may cause Armenia to drift into political instability. For Russia, there is a risk that this situation may further fuel anti-Russian opposition. For Russia, it seems more advantageous for Pashinyan to stay in power for a while.

Where will the peacekeeping force be deployed?



In the current conjuncture, Armenia has come to a point where it looks in favor of the peacekeeping force proposal offered by Russia. The most important factor in Pashinyan's acceptance of the idea of a peacekeeping force was that the Azerbaijani army reached Khudaferin Bridge and completely captured the border between Iran and Nagorno-Karabakh in the following days. In this process, bilateral contacts with Moscow did not produce the desired result and the expected support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) could not be obtained[12]. President of Armenia Armen Sarkissians claims on the Turkish attacks on Armenia expressed during the meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg failed to elicit the desired response. Stoltenberg stated that NATO is not a party in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and it supports the current OSCE format.

Considering that Ganja and Tovuz are on the energy route and their importance for Azerbaijan, Armenian attacks had considerably increased the possibility of Azerbaijan saying yes to an international peacekeeping force. Indeed, Ilham Aliyev said on 22 October that he is not against the idea of international peacekeeping forces. Thus, the issue of what the future of Nagorno-Karabakh will be is becoming clearer. It can be easily seen that the operations of the Azerbaijani army are proceeding in line with the OSCE Minsk Groups Madrid Principles. There are reports that the Azerbaijani army is rapidly advancing towards Lachin and that as of 23 October, gunfire has started to be heard from the city[13].

On the other hand, it seems possible for the peacekeepers to settle in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Lachin corridor in line with the Madrid Principles. In addition to these, international assurance for the E002 Highway (Mengri-Mincivan Corridor) connecting Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan is also possible in connection with the corridor formula proposed in the past. In this way, a road connection will be established between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan.

In conclusion, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh continues to be a dynamic one. Russia's variable attitude and the possibility of Turkey being on the negotiating table are important factors that will shape the outcome of the current clashes. After the complete liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh, it seems that there will be a lot of discussions (such as what the regions status will be) on the table in the coming period.

*This is the English translation of a Turkish-language article that was published on 23 October 2020. To view the original article, please click: https://www.avim.org.tr/tr/Yorum/DAGLIK-KARABAG-SARKACIN-UCUNDA-SALLANIYOR-ZAMAN-DARALIYOR

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About the Author :

Tutku Dilaver graduated from the Department of International Relations of Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences in 2015. In 2020, Dilaver completed her Master degree in the Caucasus Studies Program under the Department of International Relations at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Institute of Social Sciences. She has been pursuing her doctoral studies at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University.

After her completion of a six-month trainee program in the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) in August 2017, she joined AVİM as a Scholar in Residence. She worked as an Analyst at AVİM between 2019-2023.

To cite this article: DİLAVER, Tutku. 2020. "THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH IS SWINGING ON A PENDULUM, AND THE CLOCK IS TICKING." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Commentary No:2020 / 43. October 30. Accessed October 30, 2026. https://avimbulten.org/public/en/Yorum/THE-NAGORNO-KARABAKH-IS-SWINGING-ON-A-PENDULUM-AND-THE-CLOCK-IS-TICKING

Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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