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NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT AS A THREAT TO SECURITY IN SOUTH CAUCASUS

Açar sözlər: Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişəsi, Cənubi Qafqaz, təhlükəsizlik, Ermənistan, Azərbaycan

Ключевые слова: Нагорно-карабахский конфликт, Южный Кавказ, безопасность, Армения, Азербайджан

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, South Caucasus, Security, Armenia, Azerbaijan

Multiple armed conflicts emerged among post-Soviet states following the collapse of the USSR. The South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia remain critically affected by these conflicts. While these conflicts remain semi-dormant for now, there are no guarantees that these “frozen conflicts” will not erupt. This poses a serious threat to the sovereignty, security and economic development of the region. This paper tackles the question of why the twenty-year negotiation process in the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict has failed to deliver a peaceful resolution and what can be done about it. It gives an overall idea of the security, social and political situation in the South Caucasus and examines the interests of the main actors in the region. The paper further assesses the negotiation process, explains the major obstacles preventing the reconciliation process and develops recommendations for a possible resolution to the conflict.

The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh erupted into violence in 1988 as a result of a referendum that declared the region independent from Azerbaijan (1). Azerbaijan did not recognize the legitimacy of this referendum because the Azerbaijani population neither participated nor had a voice in this vote. The war escalated until both sides reached a ceasefire agreement called the “Bishkek protocol” in May 12, 1994. The consequences from the conflict were devastating: approximately 30,000 people died and about 1,000,000 Azerbaijanis were displaced from their homes (2). The conflict resulted in the occupation of 20% of Azerbaijani territory as Armenian forces occupied not only Nagorno-Karabakh, but also seven adjacent regions. The UN Security Council passed four resolutions on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (822, 853, 874, 884(3)) demanding the immediate release of Azerbaijan’s occupied territories, emphasizing the right of IDPs to return to their former homes. The UN General Assembly recognized the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and repeated the demand for withdrawal of armed forces from the occupied territories in March 2009. But, unfortunately, neither the four resolutions of the Security Council nor the demands of the General Assembly have been implemented. Some officials, such as former US ambassador to Azerbaijan Matthew Bryza, argue that countries sometimes do not act on Security Council resolutions, as there is no enforcement mechanism (4).

This conflict is a clash between the principle of self-determination of nations and the territorial integrity principle of states, both of which are included as fundamental human rights in the charter of the United Nations. The Armenian side argues that the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) has the right of self-determination under the UN Declaration on

the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 3 and provides three supporting arguments (5): NK declared its independence (02.09.1991) before the Azerbaijan Republic (18.10.1991); Azerbaijan refused to be a successor to the Soviet Union, so it cannot claim its borders under the Soviet Union; and all principles of international law are equal and no principle can be prioritized over another. Therefore, the principle of territorial integrity cannot be overridden by the self-determination principle. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani side makes a strong point through its claim that the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh has already used its right to self-determination (1923) and decided to stay under the rule of Azerbaijan SSR (6), and that Azerbaijan's territorial integrity has been violated under the "UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" article 46.1. Nothing in this declaration "may be interpreted as implying for any state, people, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations" (7).

The leaders from both sides have met several times to derive a peaceful solution to the conflict. For example, the OSCE Lisbon Summit (1996) laid out basic principles for the resolution of the conflict (8). These stipulate the political status of NK; the withdrawal of the Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories; security guarantees for Karabakh and Armenia in case the occupied territories are returned; and the return and resettlement of the Azerbaijani IDPs. These four issues are at the core of the "Madrid principles," the main framework for the peace process led by the Minsk Group (9).

Despite the many efforts to peacefully resolve the conflict, agreement has remained elusive. Speculation suggests influence from third parties, interested in maintaining the current status quo, may be involved. The armed attack on the Armenian parliament, October 27, 1999, is sometimes offered as evidence for this conjecture (10). A group of five armed men killed the two de-facto decision-makers in Armenia's political leadership - Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan and the Parliament Speaker Karen Demirchyan. While some argue that the killings resulted from an internal power struggle, others suggest that Russian Special Services instigated this terrorist attack to undermine the peace agreement, which was about to be signed at the Istanbul summit of the OSCE (11). Such suspicions appear to be well grounded. Russia's actions in the region are based on historic colonialist claims and preference for weak neighbors willing to follow Russia's interests. The emergence of its close neighbor, Azerbaijan, as a major international energy supplier setting its foreign policy independent of Russia, while forging closer economic ties to Europe and the US presents Moscow with security concerns.

Given this impasse, an obvious question must be asked: what is necessary to achieve a peaceful resolution to the conflict considering the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus? The conflicting parties believe that alliances with external actors are necessary in the event of renewed hostilities. Both Armenians and Azerbaijanis are continuously trying to expand their military capability, inciting the other to react accordingly. This creates an "arms race" that, inevitably, results in further destabilization of the region (12). Mediators since 1994 have attempted to induce each side to accept concessions, but unfortunately, little tangible progress has been made.

In order to understand the complexity of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict one has to examine the interests of the region's major influential actors. External actors can be categorized into two main groups: those interested in keeping the current status quo (Russia, Iran and the US), and actors interested in cooperation and peaceful resolution (Turkey, the EU, and Georgia).

As co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, Russia has direct influence in the conflict resolution process. Russia's position is clearly ambiguous given its direct involvement in the conflict as a security provider for Armenia. The close partnership with Armenia enables Russia to have a strong strategic foothold in the Caucasus and strengthens its position as the most powerful actor in the region when compared to its main rivals - Turkey and Iran. As a security guarantor of Armenia, Russia still maintains its military bases in the country. The peaceful resolution of the conflict is not favorable for Russia, as peace would facilitate Armenia's economic cooperation with Azerbaijan, which would eventually weaken Russia's foothold in the region and damage its influence on Armenia.

The US, another co-chair of the Minsk Group, has limited interest in changing the status quo because of its disinterest in confronting Russia over regional matters (not withstanding the current Ukrainian situation). Friedman (2011), in his book *The Next Decade*, argues that the US is ready to "turn a blind eye" to the Caucasus in return for Russia's concession in Central Asia and to gain more leverage over its troubles with Iran. Therefore, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains a matter of peripheral interest for the US (13).

Iran is another actor willing to maintain the status quo. Although also an Islamic state, its geopolitical and geostrategic interests places it as one of Armenia's key supporters in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. The government of Iran sees the existence of the Azerbaijan Republic as a potential threat to its own security. With more than 30 million ethnic Azerbaijanis living in the Islamic Republic of Iran (14), a strong Azerbaijan taking a leading role in the region could potentially evoke an ethnic movement inside Iran, which could be considered a serious challenge to the national security of the State of Iran (15).

Turkey, however and unlike Russia or Iran, does not need to use the conflict to maintain its regional influence. With its active involvement in multiple international energy projects and large investments in the region's economy its position as a major player in the Caucasus is secure. Peaceful resolution of the conflict and a more stable region is best for Turkey's economic and security interests.

The EU and Georgia are also interested in a peaceful resolution to the conflict because of their own close involvement in regional energy projects, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which decreases Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas. In addition to cooperative economic projects, Georgia also suffers from conflicts with Russia. Georgia's attempt to liberate territories resulted in a five-day Georgian-Russian war (August 2008), which triggered a de-facto invasion of Georgia by Russia. Therefore, Georgia hopes to see Russia's regional influence diminish with a resolution to the Karabakh conflict, which would further serve Georgia's own territorial interests.

In addition to the external actors' interests concerning the status quo, the conflict further remains "frozen" as the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan have little real interest in concluding the negotiation process. The political elites in both countries continue to use the conflict for their partisan gains. The conflict is used effectively as an excuse for perceived shortcomings in each nation's government, the lack of democratic progress, and constraints on freedom of expression. Such reticence to reach resolution is exhibited too by OSCE Minsk group members. As the co-chairs themselves include parties interested in maintaining the status quo, the OSCE Minsk group cannot fulfill its responsibilities as an effective mediator in the resolution process.

A new approach is required to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. After twenty years of unproductive negotiations regional democratization, economic cooperation and

integration remain nascent. If we evaluate the negotiation process with focus on the main dispute we can conclude that there is actually one particular issue over which both sides cannot agree. This is the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan accepts Nagorno-Karabakh as constituent of its own territorial integrity. Armenia, however, recognizes the region as an independent state or a part of the Armenian Republic. Unable to reach Agreement over the legal status of the region is the key to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Only after the legal status of the region has been established will the processes of regional cooperation and integration, and nonviolent Caucasian identity construction, take place and lasting peace and stability have a chance in the region.

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DAĞLIQ QARABAĞ MÜNAQİŞƏSİ CƏNUBİ QAFQAZDA TƏHLÜKƏSİZLİYƏ HƏDƏ KİMİ

Məqalədə Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişəsinin meydana çıxma səbəbləri, regiona təsiri məsələlərindən bəhs olunur. Göstərilir ki, münaqişə xarakterinə görə, ilk baxışdan göründüyü kimi sadəcə etnik münaqişə deyil, geopolitik münaqişədir və bu səbəbdən də həllinə nail olmaq bir o qədər də asan deyil. Bundan əlavə, məqalədə münaqişəyə münasibətdə beynəlxalq təşkilatların mövqeyi nəzərdən keçirilir. BMT Təhlükəsizlik Şurasının qətnamələri, ATƏT-in Minsk qrupunun həmsədrələrinin fəaliyyəti haqda məlumat verilir və onların nəticəsiz qalması səbəblərinin araşdırılmasına cəhd edilir. Həmçinin ayrı-ayrılıqda region dövlətlərinin, ABŞ-ın və Avropa Birliyinin münasibəti məsələləri işıqlandırılır. Göstərilir ki, Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişəsi yalnız Azərbaycan və Ermənistan Respublikalarının deyil, bütünlükdə regionun inkişafını ləngidir, həmçinin bütünlükdə regionun təhlükəsizliyinə hədədir.

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НАГОРНО-КАРАБАХСКИЙ КОНФЛИКТ КАК УГРОЗА БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ НА ЮЖНОМ КАВКАЗЕ

В статье рассказывается о причинах и влияние Нагорно-Карабахского конфликта на ситуацию в регионе. Указывается, что этот конфликт по своему характеру не только

этнический, а геополитический конфликт, что и осложняет процесс ее решения. В статье также рассматривается позиция международных организаций к конфликту. Рассказывается о постановлениях Совета Безопасности ООН, расследуется деятельность сопредседателей Минской группы ОБСЕ, делается попытка выявления причин о безрезультатности их деятельности. Также в отдельности рассматривается позиция США, ЕС и региональных государств в отношении к конфликту. Указывается, что Нагорно-Карабахский конфликт не только тормозит развитие на Южном Кавказе, а также является угрозой безопасности всего региона.

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Bakı Dövlət Universiteti Türk xalqları tarixi kafedrasının 2 dekabr 2014-cü il tarixli iclasının qərarı ilə çapa məsləhət görülmüşdür (pr.№3).