

Caucasus Edition

Journal of Conflict Transformation

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ANALYSIS

Warmongering as State Propaganda and its Effect on the Eventual Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

By Hashim Gafarov

Both Azerbaijani and Armenian societies are under heavy state propaganda regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have created the image of the “other” as an external enemy that has existed in their memorable past and will exist forever. The histories of both nations are rewritten and presented as a never-ending struggle between them. Both parties obviously understand the importance of myths in nation-building that is a crucial part of the post-Soviet transition. School textbooks, TV and radio shows, newspaper and Internet articles in both Armenia and Azerbaijan not only glorify the “unprecedented historical achievements” of their nations but also (un)consciously participate in the fierce state propaganda in portraying the “other” as an irreconcilable enemy. The result is the total lack of trust between two nations.

From a realist perspective, these steps are important not only in the nation-building process but also in being prepared for another enemy attack. The new generation born after the 1994 cease-fire is reaching the compulsory military service age and should be cultivated as “patriots.” Having a different opinion of the enemy — even a relatively mild one — is ultimate betrayal.

However, on the other hand, this time from the constructivist point of view, it is interesting to see how the image of the “other” is being (re)constructed. Ironically, both Armenians and Azeris used to live together in peace in Nagorno-Karabakh and still do so in other regions of the post-Soviet Union, including Georgia and different parts of Russia. In fact, the inter-marriage levels among Azeris and Armenians were higher than among, say, Georgians and Armenians (both Christian and with other cultural similarities). But now, both sides are described as eternal enemies and the stories of friendship and tolerance are consciously buried.

What impact will this phenomenon have on the eventual resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? The answer to this question will depend on how this conflict is resolved. If it is resolved militarily, then without a doubt this propaganda will serve both states in their recruitment efforts for a new war. The younger generation will be sent to their death (or “martyrdom”) more easily. The irreconcilable approach toward the enemy will be easily justified and those who advocated a milder approach will be easily condemned for their “naiveté and foolishness.” But if the conflict is resolved peacefully, then the implementation of this resolution will be under question. How will the state leaders who, thanks to their propaganda machines used to slam the “enemy” in every suitable occasion, sell the new peace offer to their respective publics? How can an eternal enemy become a friend overnight? How easy will it be for radio and TV shows, newspaper and internet articles to change their rhetoric? How long will it take to review our history books and stop portraying each other as eternal enemies? Obviously, this will not be easy.

As for now, the step-by-step resolution of the conflict is an apparent way out in which both conflicting parties will take different steps one by one to resolve the conflict. But before this happens, both parties should ensure that any step taken by the opposite side should not be considered as a victory of one’s own and the defeat of the “enemy.” Then this vicious circle will prevent any further steps from either side. Both publics should be prepared to understand that the peaceful resolution of the conflict (and as quickly as possible) is in the interest of everybody. That is why a conciliatory step taken by one should be seen as a trust-building measure, which will in turn facilitate the next step.

For example, Armenians could withdraw from five regions (out of seven) surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This could then be received by the Azerbaijani public as goodwill from the Armenian side and not as a victory for Azerbaijani diplomacy and thus the defeat of Armenians. The Armenians could do this not because “they finally understood that they do not have any other choice” but rather because they trust the Azerbaijanis and believe in their intention for the peaceful resolution of the conflict and expect them to act accordingly. The next step then would be opening the borders and all communications between the two republics and between Turkey and Armenia. This might in return lead to the Armenians releasing control of the other remaining regions (Lachin and Kelbajar) surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh without fearing to lose the connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Thus, the process will become a virtuous circle.

Now, let’s ask ourselves how many people would see the first step taken by either side in this way? Not many. Under the current defamation company and warmongering, any goodwill will be seen and presented as the victory for one side and defeat for the other side. Thus, to avoid this both Armenia and Azerbaijan

should stop their propaganda machines and start looking further down the road when both sides will have to make some painful concessions. Any leader who wants to avoid being portrayed as a betrayer of the “national cause” needs to take small but important actions to prepare their society for the eventual peaceful co-existence of two nations.

Some Thoughts on Peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh

By Hovhannes Nikoghosyan

Once more, while elaborating on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, perhaps we should not start by drawing all the obvious advantages of peace against war, and/or present the "status quo" against any type of grassroots-level cooperation. This would mean doing the same as fiercely proving that being healthy and wealthy is much better than being sick and poor.

With the major peace initiative in the Caucasus — the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement — falling apart on April 22 as Armenia legally suspended the ratification process blaming Turkey for setting preconditions, the viable peace process on Nagorno-Karabakh¹ has become a target for greater attention. Moreover, on April 23, the Azerbaijani leadership warned that, "Armenia cannot achieve anything in the region without a solution to the Karabakh conflict" and declared that its army was ready "to hit any target on the territory of Armenia" (Mehtiyeva & Robinson, 2010).

Even before this, the Russian-Georgian five-day war was a real alarm to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. It broke out in a relatively short period of time — nearly 30 days of extensive militaristic build-up and bellicose statements won an excuse in early August for Georgia to try getting back the breakaway province with coercive measures and for Russia, the legal pretext to invade Georgia proper. That showed how explosive the region is, no matter what programs and soft-power projects are carried out by the United States or European Union. When this short but bloody war upset the poorly established status quo in the South Caucasus — on the outskirts of Europe — the expert community seriously began to consider fostering peace efforts in the regional conflicts in a more comprehensive manner. The deployment of robust peacekeeping forces is perhaps one of the most established tools available in the hands of the international community.

The following year, in early August 2009, when the international community remembered the August War, then-ambassador of Azerbaijan to Moscow Polad Bülbüloğlu made a very interesting statement, later reiterated by others in Baku, which was not in line with the common language of Azerbaijani officials: "If the recent initiatives don't bring tangible results and the peace agreement isn't achieved, *peace enforcement measures* [against Armenia] will be the right of Azerbaijan, and we should employ it" [emphasis mine].³

Despite all the follow-up commentaries made, this statement was not merely a political one but had obvious legal meaning, which now needs to be explored. Perhaps this had been used as an add-on to a regular rhetoric, as discussed above. Still it has additional meaning as well, and the statement comes as a reminder that at some point, the lands surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh will probably host peacekeepers who will, similar to UN traditional Cold War-era peacekeeping operations, stand between the adversaries — Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan — and try to secure the truce while parties will finally shape the "Big Deal" (i.e., comprehensive political solution and legal accords with regards to the conflict). While the "Big Deal" is still a dream, which unfortunately doesn't seem achievable in the mid-term perspective, deployment of peacekeeping forces, if it happens, will be dislocated on a permanent basis.

Furthermore, obviously this deployment will have its consequences on the developments around the Iranian nuclear dossier, which is a high priority in the international security agenda. The recent developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, or, to put it more precisely, absence of any viable developments may, at first sight, kick off the issue of peacekeeping forces deployment, unless the patience of the international community gets “dog-tired.” Although with this in mind, if someone really wants to see any achievement of the OSCE Minsk Group, it worth noting that, despite all the bellicose statements, the parties are conscious enough not to violate the 1994 cease-fire with serious steps. Of course, this "no war — no peace" situation is not what we deserve. In the past few years, the mediators have made optimistic statements claiming the real breakthrough is not so far off or even that, "we are on the verge of a breakthrough" as stated by the

former US envoy to the Minsk Group Matthew Bryza in a farewell meeting last April in Tsakhkadzor, Armenia. But no breakthrough so far has been achieved (Nikoghosyan, 2009). In fact, the irony is that the international mediators — the key players in the South Caucasus — do not unambiguously warn the sides that resumption of war is totally unacceptable and risky.

Instead, underscoring the commitment to peaceful resolution through negotiations has little effect, considering the growing magnitude of warlike statements. Of course but unfortunately, a new war, truly, is the most straightforward way to solve the problem. Hopefully, the sides of the conflict do not and will not consider this option seriously, taking into account the obviously tragic outcomes of such a "solution." With this in mind, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan's idea "to sign an agreement not to use force" sounds not so well thought out by the addressee and the international community.

In a nutshell, the peace enforcement that the Azerbaijani leadership was referring to did not fall under UN Charter's Article 51 (the right of self-defense), since the peace process under the auspices of the OSCE is an internationally recognized "chamber" for this conflict and is still not cancelled or exhausted. Instead, that would constitute *trans-boundary* use of military force without the proper UN Security Council mandate, which is under Chapter VII (threats to peace) and would, sooner or later, directly or indirectly engage the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, or CSTO (Armenia), and NATO (Turkey).

With regards to the peacekeepers, obviously the deployment and its mandate should pass UN authorization under Chapter VI (peaceful resolution through negotiations). The forces will most probably be lightly armed to act only in self-defense and in defense of the mission's mandate. And the core component of the forces should include civilian and police personnel for the sake of state-building efforts after the refugees' return. There is nothing new to be invented in the mission and the mandate since Nagorno-Karabakh, at large, is not a unique case in itself. Yet one of the core questions is — who will be mandated, in other words subcontracted to contribute forces? A couple of exceptions immediately arise. Armenia has announced several times that it would not allow for Turkish soldiers on Karabakh soil. Considering the Iranian and Russian factors, official NATO forces are also a no-go. Another regional security organization, the CSTO, has recently (March 18) signed an agreement with the UN that will enable it to be authorized by the UNSC to manage peace operations. Theoretically, the CSTO can deal with Karabakh more easily in case Azerbaijan joins it as a member. This will not be, at least, disputed by Iran, which definitely will have its say in the deployment issue.

Right now, the only legal way to move forward is with the OSCE mandate, which is the only framework legally authorized to deal with this peace process. The legal part of the issue, in other words the mandatory deployment of peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone, was established under the CSCE/OSCE Budapest Summit in 1994, right after the bloody phase of the war ended with a cease-fire agreement in May. A year later, on August 10, 1995, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office created a post of his Permanent Representative that was assigned with the duty to "assist the High Level Planning Group in planning an OSCE peace-keeping operation in accordance with the Budapest Summit Decisions" (OSCE, 2009, p. 34).

In a very limited manner the OSCE special envoys conduct a regular monitoring of the contact-line between the armed forces of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. With a certain degree of reservation, this can be labeled as traditional-type peacekeeping, which, despite its lack of permanence on the ground, keeps the sides alarmed of cease-fire violations and creates the basis for a peace process. The OSCE monitors operate as the international community's "watchdogs," which has its positive impact on the process. Of course, this limited supervision would be fruitless if the sides — Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan — will not be able to determine a peaceful resolution.

In any case, no matter who will be mandated to act as a real, on-the-ground peace-builder in Nagorno-Karabakh, the efficiency in the wider context will be determined and conditioned by the readiness of the governments to be bound by the international community's rules of the game. However, considering the scores of bellicose statements at this stage, showing absolute unavailability of the sides to move forward with the comprehensive solution, in the absence of any readiness to compromise, any peace operation can turn into a catastrophe. Moreover, the absolute majority of experts dealing with the issue are certain that faced with the warlike rhetoric of Azerbaijan, the international community is unable to give security guarantees to the Nagorno-Karabakh population after some of the regions of the "security belt" will be handed to peacekeepers and, subsequently, to Azerbaijan. On the flip side, the efficiency of the Blue Helmets will be totally conditioned by the mandate they will get and the set of compromises the sides will be ready to handle. If the latter will be absent, no matter what mandate and force composition, it will either fail in the mid-term perspective while keeping the "peace," or will silently watch how the adversaries shoot at each other, without being authorized to engage, as had been the case with the UN-authorized operations.

One can turn to the cases of DRC, Rwanda, or Sudan as examples of this occurring in the past. Hopefully, we will not see this happening again, especially in such a volatile region.

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Footnotes

¹ As we had multiple chances to mention, the "Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" or "the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh" or other similar wordings do not absolutely reflect the whole mosaic and tough background of this ethnic conflict and its present. From our perspective, the better term, which will also illustrate the established frameworks for the peace process, is "unresolved dispute over the legal personality of de facto independent entity." The same goes legitimately true about "partly resolved" South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts. For the sake of this contribution, to frame the discussion in a scholarly nature, the following neutral, but right wording will be used in the text: "Nagorno-Karabakh peace process."

² Refer to the Russian-language newspaper article that can be retrieved from <http://vz.ru/politics/2009/8/5/314795.html>

BLOGS

Tears of Helplessness

By Anahit

Can you imagine a group of Armenian and Azerbaijani young people sitting in a conference room and amicably crying? Yes, it happened.

That day we all cried.

We gathered in a third country for a dialogue workshop to talk about Karabakh and the war, about how we feel about each other, the problems we share, our needs and concerns.

That day we were discussing how the Karabakh war has affected each of us personally. Everyone had a story to tell. Whether directly or indirectly, the conflict has affected all of us leaving negative memories and perceptions one wouldn't like to talk much about.

The war happened during our childhood years. And even though most of us were too small to understand the war in its entirety, some vague memories have left irremovable traces on our lives, and our generation was deprived of many things because of that war and its consequences.

I really can't remember from what point it all started but soon, trying to hold my tears out of fear that I might appear too emotional, I realized that that's what everyone else — both girls and boys — were trying to do and were eventually failing.

That day I was trying to analyze what was the reason behind those tears. It seemed to me that we cried simply because we couldn't bear the pressure of our perceptions and emotions towards each other, and because each side had the feeling that it were them who were the victims in the conflict. That's how I thought first.

But later, analyzing all over again, it struck me when I realized that these were not tears of suffering and victimization. During the workshop each of us proved to be strong personalities with our own views and visions of the conflict, and we were definitely not considering us to be victims but rather challengers of the current situation.

So why did we cry? I think we cried because we have understood the absurdity of the situation, and because we could do nothing about it. These were tears of helplessness.

During this dialogue workshop, while talking to each other and sharing our visions we all managed to understand and accept each other the way we were. We didn't need a resolution to the conflict to talk to each other and be friends. But it was obvious that our feelings were anyhow not shared and supported by our friends and other people in our countries.

In fact where we — young Armenians and Azerbaijanis struggling for peace and reconciliation — have found ourselves is an absurd situation.

On one side we have the willingness and the capacity to start talking to each other and face the problems that exist between our countries, maybe from a more constructive perspective than previous generations could do, even if it's not about the final resolution of the Karabakh conflict but simply about communication and friendship on a human level. On the other side there's a huge pressure and "censorship" from the part of our societies that limit us and bind our hands for our possible actions and initiatives.

But now that the political resolution of the Karabakh conflict does not seem to give any results, it is obvious that some new principles should be applied to break the deadlock on a human level. It is really encouraging to see that there are many people who try to break common perceptions and in a sense go against their societies by promoting peace and dialogue before the yet-unseen political resolution is achieved.

And even though these people will always be in minority and at times have that feeling of helplessness and inability to change anything in their societies, from my personal experience I know that it is sometimes useful to go through that feeling. For me those tears of helplessness were the most encouraging tears of my life. Because after that I have decided to devote some part of my life to making peace in the region, not to the political one, but to the one on a human level. And I am happy that I was not the only one to cry of helplessness.

Beyond Politics — Music as a Tool in Building Dialogue

By Arzu

When Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire back in 1994, little did the two sides know of the outcomes of the conflict and how long would it take to actually come to a mutual agreement. It has been 16 years since the cease-fire and a peace agreement is yet to be signed. Numerous initiatives taken either by the governments or civil society representatives have shown little success, and there is still much work to be done in bringing the two sides together and reaching mutual ground.

But on the positive side of the spectrum, the long-lasting dialogues and endless conversations also pushed peace actors to find new ways and new solutions in breaking down stereotypes, prejudices, and hatred. As a result, while traditional meetings are still happening, a new wave of initiatives has joined the peace-building movement in this region.

Music is one such initiative. And it is not the good old argument, fighting over whose piece of music belongs to which side or whether “Sari Gelin” (“Yellow Bride”) is Armenian or Azerbaijani. No, this type of music is not about who owns what. It is about sharing what is at hand, showing tolerance, understanding, and making music together for peace.

In May of this year, a jazz festival — Kavkaz Jazz — was organized in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, bringing together talented jazz musicians from all three countries of the South Caucasus on one stage. Initiated by the US embassies in all three countries, musicians met “to strengthen [existing] traditions and relations.” As organizers and musicians describe the festival on the Kavkaz Jazz [home page](#), “Jazz is the best means for this, as it is the symbol of tolerance, unity, freedom, peace, and friendship.” It was described as a “[culture bridge](#)” by local online channels. Taking place on two evenings within a ten-day period, the jazz festival turned out to be a total success and was broadcasted live online featuring joint jam sessions, joint concerts, workshops, and master classes.

And it looks like it’s not one of its kind. In 2006, a professor named Dr. Roasling Hackett initiated [The Jazz for Justice Project](#). It is a similar project though unlike Kavkaz Jazz, Jazz for Justice aims at raising funds, awareness, and support in the post-conflict reconstruction of northern Uganda.

Unlike other music events such as the annually held schmaltzy Eurovision song contest, where instead of building contact, the contest only breaks and negatively influences whatever dialogue there is, especially between Armenia and Azerbaijan, these initiatives are perhaps some of the best success stories.

My only hope is to see more of such creative initiatives to come and not only in terms of music but in terms of cinematography, cuisine, fashion, and much more. It is an alternative that could encompass a wider and diverse audience with different backgrounds, interests, and ideas and is a step forward in building dialogue. Perhaps it’s what we all need right now — some jazz...

The Power of Eurovision Revisited

By Erik

Since the very first days of the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, both sides have been using every possible stage for promoting narrow nationalist and exclusivist agendas. Thus, any arena with the participation of representatives from both sides often becomes a battlefield.

Eurovision, the popular pan-European music contest, has not been an exception. For 54 years, Eurovision proved to be one of Europe’s most popular TV shows. Many on the European continent and beyond follow it. Some 1,100 songs and artists have been featured, including world favorites like ABBA, Celine Dion, Cliff Richard, and Julio Iglesias. The contest has become an annual ritual, strongly embedded into Europe’s collective culture.

The 2008 running saw a record of 43 represented countries, as Azerbaijan and San Marino joined the family. The competition has been broadcast throughout Europe, but also in Australia, Canada, Egypt, Hong Kong, India, Jordan, Korea, New Zealand, and the United States, even though those countries do not participate.

This year’s Eurovision song contest featured 39 countries, including Armenia and Azerbaijan. Over 120 million viewers around Europe tuned in to this great show. By June 4, the Eurovision Facebook fan page attracted 167,052 fans.

Eurovision has long promoted itself as an event where national audiences in Europe and beyond can put politics aside and enjoy an entertaining show run in the spirit of friendly competition.

The popularity and the PR potential of Eurovision has been utilized by many participant countries and has yet a lot to offer. It is no surprise that Palestine’s Eurovision partners have applied for full membership in the European Broadcasters Union, hence the Eurovision song contest. The Palestinian organizations inform that they want to tell the big audiences a story different from images people get from the TV news and that Eurovision is a perfect platform for this.

In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan the Eurovision stage has so far been only utilized for ends very far from constructive. Some actions by representatives of any of the two conflicting countries would be negated

or seen as conflicting by the other delegation and fuel reactions evolving into a spiral that does nothing but escalate tensions in the two societies at large.

The tensions between Armenian and Azerbaijani broadcasters/delegations mounted in the 2009 song contest. The Armenian team sparked controversy when the original video backdrop for their performance featured an image of the "Grandma & Grandpa" memorial in Nagorno-Karabakh that is deeply meaningful for Armenians as a one of the symbols of the Armenian identity of Karabakh, while the Azerbaijani delegation boycotted it for reasons described by Azerbaijani news site Day.az, as "the Armenians and their friends from the Eurovision steering committee used this monument for provocative political purposes."

Russia, the 2009 Eurovision host, under pressure from the Azerbaijani broadcasters requested the image be removed. The Russian decision caused consternation in Yerevan. Armenia decided to air its protest. As vote tallies were called in from Eurovision's participating countries, a live-broadcast on Yerevan's Republic Square featured a large screen with the mentioned statue. The presenter, Armenia's 2008 Eurovision contestant Sirusho, raised a clipboard as she spoke which also included an image of the monument. Another major scandal broke right after the 2009 show, when Radio Azadligi (Radio Liberty Baku Beuro) reported that the National Security Ministry of Azerbaijan summoned Azerbaijani voters who cast their votes for the Armenian performance at Eurovision. Voters were called to the ministry where officers demanded them to explain why they had voted for Armenia. They were told that this was a matter of national security. Azerbaijani human rights activists voiced concerns over the state controlling personal SMS messages and private voting of citizens based on individual musical tastes. A total of 43 Azerbaijanis voted for the Armenian duo Inga and Anush and their song titled "Jan-Jan." At the same year, 1,065 Armenians voted for the Azerbaijani team (see www.Eurovision.tv) — apparently without consequence — which resulted in a whole one point from Armenia for Azerbaijan.

In response to these scandals of 2009, this year's Eurovision Armenian commentators Hrachuhi Utmazyan and Khoren Levonyan refused to name the country when the Azerbaijani performer started her show, while they did present the other 38 performers and countries they were representing.

Yet the prestigious Eurovision stage has a lot to offer in terms of conciliation, friendship and cooperation. This potential has been successfully identified and employed by the Israeli contestants in 2009. Israel's Eurovision entry was presented by two friends — one Jewish, one Palestinian. Here is what the Guardian had to write about them: "Just as the Israel-inflicted death toll in Gaza reached 900, a third of those children, Israel's entry to the Eurovision song contest was announced. It was the third week of Israel's devastating assault on Gaza, in January, and an Arab-Israeli was going to sing to Europe with a Jewish-Israeli, a song about finding "another way."

An initiative that saw condemnation shelling down on the duo from both sides of the divide, failed to make the duo surrender their mission and art, and the two surprised the multimillion audience with a story well worth the attention. The duo had a message for the Eurovision audience and their own communities and the message was that no matter what the International Community does or fails to do, the Palestinians and Israelis will eventually have to find a way to co-exist. Some enthusiasts tell me that similar cooperation of Armenian and Azerbaijani artists within Eurovision can be possible. Let us hope that the young generation of artists from the two countries, many of who have already had experiences of joining efforts for a mutual cause, will once again get together and come up with a partnership entry, either a mutual one or two separate but linked and coordinated national entries with a mutual, mission and message for Eurovision 2011.

About The Journal of Conflict Transformation

The Journal of Conflict Transformation is an independent online publication that provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, policy analysts, starting researchers and bloggers to analyze as well as discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and issues related to it. The purpose of the publication is to contribute to sustainable resolution of the conflict by expanding scholarship on the subject and encouraging diverse perspectives and analysis.

The Journal welcomes contributions from established researchers and is also committed to include the voices of emerging analysts and writers within the peace process. This inter-disciplinary online publication accepts scholarly and analytical articles, as well as reflective writings, that contribute to the better understanding of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and suggestions for improvement of the peace process and positive transformation of inter-societal relations. The articles can analyze the conflict as a whole or any factor that potentially has implication for the conflict and/or its resolution from the perspective of political science, economy, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, collective memory studies, comparative history, ethnic conflict, identity-conflict, conflict resolution, peace studies, mediation and facilitation, conflict transformation and comparative case studies.

The publication is supported by grants from the Democracy Commissions of the U.S. Embassy to Armenia and the U.S. Embassy to Azerbaijan and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee. Views expressed in the publication are those of its authors. The publication is established and managed by the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation.

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