

Caucasus Edition

Journal of Conflict Transformation

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No Exit in the South Caucasus

By [Asbed Kotchikian](#)

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‘We are lucky to have only one conflict and only two borders closed’

By [Phil Gamaghelyan](#)

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Scapegoats of the Karabakh conflict: gloomy present, uncertain future

By [Sasun Khachatryan](#)

The pain and anguish of a parent having lost a son in the army can hardly be relieved, especially when there is no officially declared war, but rather a situation under a fragile cease-fire accord sporadically breached in different parts along the line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan on the one hand, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the other... **Read more on Page**

ANALYSIS

No Exit in the South Caucasus

By Asbed Kotchikian

The title of this piece, which was also a title of a talk presented at a conference at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy almost a year ago, is derived from Jean-Paul Sartre's 1944 play "No exit" where Sartre describes three characters locked in a room with each other for eternity. In the play, the term "hell is others (l'enfer, c'est les autres)" captures the essence of the play as well as the talk delivered at Fletcher. Similar to the play, the three countries of the South Caucasus are, for better or worse, locked in a geographical region and each views the other—to some extent—as hell.

Several months ago while attending a day-long symposium on the future prospects of peace in the South Caucasus, a realization occurred that among policy analysts and policy makers in the West (as well as for those from the region), there is a complete lack of understanding of what the region is all about, or what are the possible solutions to solve the problems in the region. Before continuing, a clarification needs to be made about the above statement. "Lack of understanding" does not, in any way, refer to the knowledge about the region or its problems; rather it is the surreal and sometimes oblivious expectations as to how to resolve those problems.

That being said, this piece does not try to offer any solutions to the conflicts and tensions, nor does it attempt to assume that the author knows more about the region than others. It is rather a simple attempt to point out to some issues related to how living with "others will not be hell."

The first issue to tackle is to realize that the region has become captive to a repetitive political rhetoric on a constant feedback loop. In other words politicians—be those from the region or from outside—seem to be one of the major problems in looking for possible de-escalation of tensions. More often than not, in policy gatherings or during political meetings, the words and statements coming out of are nothing new and have been so, for at least a decade now. Then we are faced with a question as to how could a diverse region with complex nuances and conflicting historiographies have political solutions of their problems by excluding politicians. The short answer is that there is "no exit". Governments and their officials keep shouting at the top of their lungs about what they believe are their inalienable right over territory and history and have complete disinterest in changing the status quo, even if that might mean improvement of the lot of their citizens. So perhaps one way of approaching this issue—if there is a sincere interest in creating a less "conflictual" region—is to depoliticize it and "hijack" the process from politicians.

A second point related to the previous one is the complete and utter disinterest in promoting citizen's rights in each country. This issue stem from the need to make sure that citizens in each of the three countries have some of their basic rights preserved as well as receive a voice in the overall political processes that involve their respective countries. Usually a term that describes these is "democracy" which, unfortunately in recent decades or so, has been abused and appropriated by politicians who seem to have no understanding of the essence of that word nor do they have any respect for their citizens. What aggravates this situation more is the lack of commitment and interest by governments and analysts outside of the region, mostly in the West, to encourage democratic processes and rather be satisfied by just using that term as a mantra without the serenity that usually is associated with mantras.

The advocacy of democracy is not just an academic endeavor, nor should there be a illusion that if by some miracle the three countries in the Caucasus transform into thriving democracies there would be an overnight resolutions of the conflicts. However just like mentioned above, citizen's of the region are held captive to political, nationalist and self serving rhetoric which is transmitted to the public in a "1984"esque style, overshadowing any attempt for developing critical thinking at a mass level.

Yet a third point, which also happens to be the bleakest one is the issue of generational change. The possibility of future prospects of co-existence in the region become next to impossible as new generations of Armenians, Azeris, Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians come of age without actually knowing the people with whom they are supposed to share the space. The logic behind this statement is that up until almost a decade ago, a generation of Armenians, Azeris, Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians could remember times where not only could they live together but actually lived together as neighbors, friends and colleagues. That generation is on the decline and the newer one taking its place is completely at unease to be associated with their respective “demonized” counterparts. While this is a bit of an overgeneralization and there are individual links and cooperation between Armenians and Azeris, or Georgians and Abkhazians, these interactions rarely transcend academic and/or think-tank settings and more often than not most participants’ views of each other—even if they are not manifested openly—are based on the stereotypes and perceptions that persist in their respective countries.

In conclusion, while this piece might come across as critical and pessimistic, which it is, about the future of the region, its aim is not so much as to depress the reader. It is rather to point out that most of the energy and resources used to examine the possibilities of solutions for the conflicts and tensions in the Caucasus, rarely go beyond rhetoric and not only maintain the stereotypes and the existing order of things, but also strengthen it.

Psychological/ Political Dimensions of Nagorno- Karabakh conflict (Based on the “regression” theory of Vamik Volkan)

By Zamira Abbasova

Conflict analysis is a detailed study of the dynamics of the conflict which gives chance to peacebuilders, humanitarian and development organizations to create a strategic plan to investigate, and stop active violence from occurring. Many analysts and practitioners do research in the local, national and international level, connecting all of these levels based on the remembered history and the development of events before and after the violence. It is important to build systematic linkage between researched areas and conflict catalysts. But at the same time this is unfortunate fact that mistakably these kinds of symptoms of the conflict are discovered and documented as root causes.

From psychological perspective, conflict is lack of moral satisfaction like trust, safety, security and physical satisfaction like basic human needs. Scarcity of all of the above creates psychological resistance and insurgency which is called conflict. Since conflict is a psychological condition of individuals and large groups involved in clash, it requires serious attention and analytical research. Alas, this approach is missing point in different conflicts of modern history including Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Nagorno-Karabakh case

Sixteen years has passed since the war has been stopped in Nagorno-Karabakh. In every sense of a word-be it physical or psychological, conflict brought huge destructions to Armenia, Azerbaijan and “conflict zone” Nagorno-Karabakh. Political instability, destroyed economy, illegal militia groups, conflicting interests of neighboring countries and many other things welcomed war, accepted conflict, hosted trauma and planted hatred in South Caucasus. Outside parties like Russia, Turkey and Iran played a crucial role in development of this conflict as well. Analysts and practitioners had touched upon different issues including political, economical, and religious factors which triggered the conflict. Again the psychoanalysis of this conflict became one of the factors least researched and analyzed.

Armenia and Azerbaijan, both were part of USSR under fake “strong brotherhood” which kept them together without looking at minor incidents occurring from time to time for about six decades. The USSR rules and mentality of togetherness kept apart Armenians and Azerbaijanis from coming together and discussing their problems. Dependent on USSR politically they relied on Moscow for finding solutions to their problems which were always coded as a secret ‘threat to unity’& ‘brotherhood’ and ignored.

If we look at the dynamics of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its development process, we can see the psychological pattern is present in this conflict. Vamik Volkan^[1], the psychiatrist who is the author of number of theories explaining the large group behavior in conflict explains this situation based on his theory of “regression”. He explains the regression as “...mental mechanism developed for fighting with anxiety”. According to him, the regression could be explained in two different conditions: “ individual’s mental condition which may have been fixed from childhood in a regressed state; and adult’s mental condition whose childhood fears and desires have been revived by recent events in their external environments”. If the nation will have both of these conditions, it will certainly lead to regression of a large group. Vamik Volkan categorizes following when the large group regresses:

- v Group members lose their individuality
- v The group rallies blindly around the leader
- v Sharp “us” and “them” division between itself and “enemy”
- v The groups chosen trauma and chosen glories are reactivated, resulting in time collapse

v Shared images depict and dehumanize enemy groups with symbols or protosymbols

When conflict erupted in late 1980's and early 1990's, Armenia and Azerbaijan were having hardest time of their history due to political instability and chaos in the region. The fact that leaders could not handle the situation, the regression expressed itself in a different way. Different groups and parties within Azerbaijan and Armenia and other outside parties manipulated with people's emotions and previous fears, which created tension and fueled the conflict. As a result of weak governing and regressed society, hatred was channeled towards each other, created so called "us" and "them", polarized them and swept away shared positive thought and feelings. During the stalemate process, both Armenia and Azerbaijan created different mechanisms for proving the liability of their thoughts and validity of their actions. Educational materials were published and distributed; information, stories and facts for proving the other side's enmity were added to the curriculum. Media under the control of government translated the current conflict differently trying to use the narrative history. Communication between two nations by any means was "prohibited".

As Pollock stated "for the vulnerable individual a specific time of the day, specific day of the week, a specific holiday can serve as a trigger or activator for the appearance of a symptom related to anniversary reactions". When the large group regresses, conflicting parties have the same type of reactions towards those specific days, times, and anniversaries. The grassroots are kept under control by trauma-celebrating or commemorating the events occurred during the war. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, every year calendar is marked with events like the beginning of war, the occupancy of different cities, dates of battles, birth of national heroes and so on. It proves that groups are developing 'ritualistic behavior' remembering history and reminding it to future generations either as part of chosen trauma or chosen glory. Anniversary reactions like the one I described above could "re-emerge the repressed conflict". Re-emergence of the conflict also revived the image of enemy and created automatic reminder of the "event".

"Politicized/Regressed" peace

Peace negotiations organized by OSCE for resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continue being unproductive. The process of building peace successfully is very challenging process due to its complexity and richness with psychological cases like emotions, values, identity, communication and add to that its context-specific idiosyncrasy and political spectrum, it makes more intricate for practitioners to deal with.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was influenced by domestic as well as regional and international politics. The political situation within both countries proved itself to be the major catalyst in Nagorno-Karabakh case. This is very important fact that, media made it possible for political leaders to manipulate over peoples psychology to gain the power.

In Azerbaijan, the president Ilham Aliyev used the statement of "either Karabakh or death" in his presidential campaign. This rallied the regressed nation around him with the hope that in the resent future, the problem will be solved, be it war or peace. Seven years has passed since the first election without any solution. Government controlled media channels faked the narrative history, revived the image of enemy through commemoration of remembered history and promoted hatred which energized the conflict. Aliyev's administration is very active in negotiations and dialogue process with Armenia, however there is a huge gap of domestic preparedness to peace process. Instead of preparing the nation to future peace, his administration uses all kinds of possibilities to maintain the power by keeping the conflict unresolved.

Armenia had a different kind of internal problem. During the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations in 1997, the president of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan made a realistic assessment of situation and agreed to settle the NK conflict, but intransigent nationalism and 'constitutional coup d'état' of Armenia forced him from office.

As a result of internal political instability both Armenia and Azerbaijan failed to reach the agreement. Finally as Vamik Volkan mentions "it is important to remember that a regressed group can move out of regression under the guidance of a good leader". As it is impossible to predict the position of

grassroots level in this situation, two presidents should have the “political will” to make decisions about a settlement based on peaceful measures and transformative actions.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it is important to mention that behind every peaceful action there is at least one theory of change. Theories of change will help us to be aware of the assumptions, verify the future activities and logically align objectives to identify opportunities for achieving greater results. Any theory created to achieve a social change should be translated into change of attitude and behavior. Only in that case, those theories of change will be considered to be effective.

In case of Azerbaijan and Armenia, two theories of change would be effective to make a change in people’s attitude and behavior which reflects the regression of decades:

v Individual change through civil society initiative: No governmental guidance is needed. It totally depends on individuals who are ready to come to negotiations. Existence of organizations, training groups which would be ready to commit themselves in training youth and children to break the stereotypes and prejudices would be helpful in achieving individual change. Organizing dialogue groups outside conflict zones would be an outstanding change process for young adults to meet each other and learn to treat in individual level and learn to trust.

v Collective change through civil society initiative: Anti-war campaigns, educating youth to resist to military service and military classes in secondary schools, development of human rights, democratization, students exchange programs and etc. Achieving democracy would be an important step due to the fact that people make personal decisions and decision makers make policy decisions based on what grassroots believe is right. Only in that case the existence of public media, TV and radio programs would be beneficial to take people out the regression state and move them towards peace.

References

[i] **Dr. Volkan is a founder of the *International Society of Political Psychology*.** More information about Dr. Volkan can be found at <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/>

Life in Limbo: the Plight of the Displaced in Azerbaijan

By Afa Alizada

For many, violent conflict and its consequences go far beyond rhetoric or a loss of a symbolic homeland. For them it is a matter of existence. Uprooted and not entirely welcomed in their new homes, displaced persons – refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) – live with the daily reminder of the conflict and its consequences. Like most other violent conflicts, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has produced its own uprooted masses on both sides. As the conflict enters its 17th year of post-ceasefire stalemate, the displaced population in Azerbaijan has seen very little improvement in their lives. Their lives are suspended somewhere between the fond memories of home and the hope of going back one day.

Azerbaijan has about 600,000 IDPs and 250,000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia. The living conditions of IDPs are especially dire, since their resettlement and integration is more problematic for the government than that of the Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia. Many IDPs still live in make-shift homes, have little or no access to medical services, education, public transportation, and employment and reside in remote or dangerous (close to the line of contact) areas. Azerbaijan's growing economy has largely bypassed them. While it is true that the lack of governance capacity and corruption has excluded many segments of the Azerbaijani population (and not just displaced persons) from the benefits of development, the reasons for IDPs' exclusion go far beyond that. There are specific institutional/structural as well as political obstacles to improving the lives of the displaced and their integration into the society at large.

The biggest political obstacle to integrating the IDPs is the presumption that it would jeopardize their right to return home. The main objective of the Azerbaijani government, understandably, is for its IDPs to return home and regain their property. By creating favorable conditions for the displaced, the government fears that they would not want to return home when the opportunity presents itself. Furthermore, since the Azerbaijani government seeks to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent districts, the government risks to be perceived as conceding to the status quo by integrating the IDPs from these regions. Persistence of dire living conditions of IDPs serves the government in seeking international support and sympathy. The Azerbaijani officials point to the IDP situation to emphasize the urgency of regaining its lost territories.

The lack of political will to integrate IDPs is accompanied by a variety of structural obstacles. Governance practices in Azerbaijan restrict IDPs' free movement, land ownership, access to employment, and meaningful representation in the government. For example, despite officially abolishing the Soviet-era propiska system (residential registration), it is still informally in practice, creating difficulties for IDPs to establish residence in places other than what they were initially assigned to by the government. This means IDPs can't easily relocate to areas for better employment opportunities. Similarly, although the government does not legally preclude IDPs from purchasing land or property, the system in place for such transactions requires them to give up their status as displaced persons. Giving up their status, however, is not an option for most IDPs, since many perceive it as giving up the hope of going back home and reclaiming their properties one day.

Furthermore, under the current system, IDPs are not represented by the local government of their current residence, but rather by the officials from their home districts now housed in central government structures. This means that many IDPs have to travel a great distance from their current location to find their local government representative if they need to voice grievances or ask for assistance. Such exclusion disconnects IDPs from their representatives, who in return do not necessarily feel accountable to them.

Given the above-mentioned limitations, there is understandable resistance to integration even among the IDPs themselves. Many believe that the only way to improve their lives is to return home. They live with the false hope that once they return, everything will magically go back to normal. Moreover, the government policies and regulations in place equate integration and improvement of IDP living conditions

with giving up on their ancestral homes. However, do IDPs have to choose between improving their current situation and going back home one day? Are these two ideals mutually exclusive?

I would argue that these ideals are very much compatible. In fact, improving the lives of IDPs is very likely to encourage and aid their return home, if and when the opportunity presents itself. IDPs will go back to ruined communities that they will have to help rebuild. Without proper access to education and jobs, how are IDPs to gain skills, knowledge, and resources to rebuild their communities? By allowing them to fully participate in the social, political, and economic activities, the government will help the displaced to develop skills and acquire capital and other resources that are imperative to reviving devastated economies and contributing to the post-conflict reconstruction efforts back home.

'We are Lucky to Have Only One Conflict and Only Two Borders Closed'

By Phil Gamaghelyan

We often talk about propaganda and government control of media in Armenia. Now I wonder whether the correct label would be 'incompetence'?

Few days ago I gave a lecture at Eurasia International University in Yerevan. My speech was in Armenian. The Armenpress correspondent was sitting in the first row with a recorder. The lecture was titled '[Social Media and its Potential for Conflict Resolution: Nagorno-Karabakh Case.](#)' Imagine my surprise when the next day I see a report at Armenpress titled '[Philip Gamaghelyan: Readiness of the armed forces of Armenia and NKR and the position of international community are restraining circumstances for Azerbaijan.](#)'

Neither the topic of my speech had anything to do with Armenian or NKR armed forces, nor did I mention them at all during my lecture.

The more I read the 'better' it got and phrases and quotes that I never used followed one another.

Armenpress reported me saying: 'there is a negative attitude between the population of Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan, which is conditioned by anti-Armenian policy of Azerbaijan.' This was indeed one of the topics covered. Yet what I said instead was that there is a negative attitude between 'Armenian and Azerbaijani societies conditioned by heavy propaganda in media and education on both sides.'

Progress: here we did not resort to untrue reporting as we had in the title. Incompetence: now we resorted to selective reporting that distorts the meaning.

Next: Armenpress quoted me saying: 'Turkey has assumed suchlike political line both toward Nagoro Karabakh and Armenia, which coincides with the Azerbaijani policy.' To the contrary, I stressed a number of times that I believe Turkey pursues its own interests and its policy DOES NOT coincide with that of Azerbaijan.

So in one short report Armenpress managed to have an entirely misleading title, a selective reporting that distorts the meaning and a quote that is in direct opposition to what I said. Most importantly in the entire 'report' there was nothing close to what actually happened.

I will conclude with paraphrasing a friend of mine who after learning the story said: this is how our media communicates; therefore we are lucky to have only one conflict and only two borders closed.

Scapegoats of the Karabakh Conflict: Gloomy Present, Uncertain Future

By Sasun Khachatryan

The pain and anguish of a parent having lost a son in the army can hardly be relieved, especially when there is no officially declared war, but rather a situation under a fragile cease-fire accord sporadically breached in different parts along the line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan on the one hand, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the other.

The line of contact between Karabakh and Azerbaijan has since mid summer seen several cease-fire violations that have claimed human lives from both sides. The Armenian mass media shifts the blame on the Azerbaijanis for the acts of sabotage, while the Azerbaijani media claims it is the Armenian side to blame.

No one can predict when the Nagorno-Karabakh issue will be resolved given the complexity of this protracted conflict and the highly-sensitive and complicated geopolitical situation in the Caucasus region in general and the South Caucasus in particular. Unfortunately, the longer it remains unsettled, the more havoc it will wreak. More innocent soldiers will be exposed to the danger of being shot dead while doing their temporary military service in the army. The cease-fire violations on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and on the line of contact between Karabakh and Azerbaijan have become more frequent recently, and they are very often brought to the attention and judgment of the international community.

On October 7, 2010, the Armenian delegation to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) prepared a document that was signed by 25 delegates. The document referred to the controversial death of Manvel Saribekyan, an Armenian captive who, according to the official version reported by the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry and Military Prosecutor's Office, committed suicide in his cell in Baku on October 5.

The Azerbaijani side claims that Manvel Saribekyan had been trained and crossed the border into Azerbaijan to conduct acts of terror in that country, while the Armenian side claims otherwise. It says he was a shepherd and was abducted by the Azerbaijani forces as he was searching for his lost cattle at a remote area near the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and was killed.

On the same day, the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE prepared a similar document that was signed by 22 PACE delegates. That document called for the return of the body of Mubariz Ibrahimov, an Azerbaijani officer, who according to Karabakh's Defense Ministry, was one of the members of a group of Azerbaijani Armed Forces attacking one of the Karabakhi outposts.

Later, there were some political and public figures in Armenia saying that Manvel Saribekyan was definitely killed as "Azerbaijan needed a body" so that they would have something to exchange for the body of Mubariz Ibrahimov.

Naturally, this begs the question: what will these documents do? They may do a lot in terms of shaping an atmosphere or calling for restraint. But whatever they do, in reality they won't do one thing for sure: they won't bring back the lives that prompted their adoption.

Sadly, two Armenian soldiers were shot dead by Azerbaijani armed forces only in October. Vitaly Ashot Igityan, 22, was killed on October 24 and Harut Ashot Grigoryan, 20, was shot dead on October 26.

Who knows how many will be killed before this post is published ... I hope nobody else.

Fortunately, the last week of October had some solace in store. A meeting by Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev brokered by their Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev on October 27 in Astrakhan, Russia, brought some hope as they agreed to "strengthen the

cease-fire regime and mutual trust in the military sphere to solve the conflict peacefully” and “repatriate the corpses.”

Importantly, it is the private citizens and the civil societies on both sides that must first of all realize how much damage this situation can cause to them, as it is they who bear the heaviest loads of this no-war-no-peace situation by becoming literally moving targets, while working on their farms near the line of contact, and by sending their sons to the army, unlike high-ranking officials, ministers and presidents whose sons carry quite a luxurious life and rarely serve in the army, if ever.

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.

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Featured next on December 01:

Analytical issue:

Reflections on the dynamics of inter-societal relations in the NK conflict

By Anastasia Voronkova

Review of Thomas de Walla's *The Caucasus: an Introduction*

By Phil Gamaghelyan

Bi-weekly News Digest of Azerbaijan and Armenian media on Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations

By Arzu Geybullayeva and Sasun Khachatryan

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