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In the Hot Seat

By Afa Alizada

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Closed Borders, Disaster Risks, and Disaster Relief Coordination in the Caucasus

By Erik Grigoryan

It is a common belief within Armenian society and culture that the neighbor is the closest, hence the most effective when one is in immediate need. The same should work for neighbors on the geographical map, yet that is not necessarily the case in the South Caucasus... **Read more on Page 8**

ANALYSIS

Russian Hegemony and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution: A Quandary or an Impasse?

By Armen Grigoryan

The events of the last few months have shown that the U.S. and European Union (EU) policies in the South Caucasus have not reached the desired results. The hope for swift Armenian-Turkish reconciliation became negligible and, more recently, Russia's preference for keeping the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh rather than solving the conflict by means of negotiations is being demonstrated more openly. For now, it seems that the main outcomes are increased Russian influence in the region, the failure of democratic development in Armenia and, worst of all, the risk of large-scale fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Let us suppose that the so-called "soccer diplomacy" was not planned from the beginning to result in the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations. In that case, the current situation may be considered rather expected. So far, the soccer diplomacy contributed to international legitimization of the ruling regime in Armenia, as hopes for Armenian-Turkish reconciliation motivated the West to minimize the criticism towards the oppressive and corrupt Armenian government. But at the same time, the soccer diplomacy strengthened Russia's hegemony in Armenia. As Turkey's leaders declared that opening the border and establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia would depend on the return of territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control, Armenia's ability to maneuver and act more independently from Russia diminished. Statements made by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in January 2010, during the negotiations with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Moscow, and in June 2010, during a working meeting with Erdoğan in Istanbul, showed that any principal decision on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue would be made in Moscow, not in Yerevan. The signing of the Russo-Armenian agreement to extend Russia's military presence during President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Armenia in August became the logical conclusion.

It should be noted, however, that in spite of the official propaganda, that agreement has not been met with widespread optimism in Armenia. Quite the contrary, there has been an increasing awareness that de facto rejection of a compromise through negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and the prolongation of Russian military presence will seriously obstruct the political and economic development of Armenia. A few days before President Medvedev's visit, the Russian base in Armenia had been included in Russia's Yug (South) military district, together with Russian bases in the North Caucasus, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. That caused the concern about the possible deterioration of Armenia's relations with Georgia, as the latter is the main (if not the only) target of the Yug military district. Finally, there is now a common understanding in Armenia that in case of resumed large-scale fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh Russian troops will not provide any assistance, and that such fighting would be, to a large extent, a result of Russian policy for keeping the status quo. Russia's recent decision to sell S-300PMU-2 long-range surface-to-air missile systems to Azerbaijan is viewed by the Armenian public as an openly hostile move against Armenia, as Russia may benefit not only from keeping the status quo but from resumed fighting as well.

The Iranian factor should also be taken into account. If Russia may trade some of its influence on Armenia for certain concessions from Azerbaijan, Turkey, or the West, Iran does not have similar capability, although it also benefits from the present "no war, no peace" situation. If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is solved, NATO peacekeeping forces or, possibly, a U.S. military base can be deployed along Iran's northern border, and Iran views such a possibility as a threat to its national interests. Iran also views the possible growth of aspirations for autonomy among ethnic Azeris living in northern Iran as a threat, in case the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is solved and does not remain the principal issue of concern for Azerbaijan. Iran's influence on both Armenia and Azerbaijan and the capability to sustain the status quo are limited, but they must not be underestimated.

Iran's possible actions in case of resumed fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh are also rather predictable. Iran, as well as Russia, would significantly benefit from a sharp growth of hydrocarbons prices. Most probably, Iran would attempt to complement economic profit with political influence, particularly by "export" of the politicized variety of Islam. Such a possibility is viewed in Azerbaijan as a threat to the secular order and national security, so it may be one of the factors constraining the inclination to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh issue by force.

As the chance for a breakthrough in the negotiation process, as well as for successful regional cooperation in the South Caucasus, has become even weaker than before, the U.S. and EU policies may need a critical revision. Western players, being nowadays unequivocally devoted to "soft power," have not been taking into account that negotiations serve as an effective problem-solving tool only for democratic entities; authoritarian regimes (no matter what ideology they employ — communist, Islamic, or "fortress-under-siege") may prefer to use negotiations as a means for delaying any meaningful solution. As the enthusiasm of "soccer diplomacy" prevailed, it was not taken into consideration that President Serzh Sargsyan, who like his predecessor Robert Kocharyan comes from Nagorno-Karabakh and has close ties with Russia, might also wish to maintain the status quo. Unlike the general population, Armenian state officials, the military establishment, and politically affiliated businessmen do not experience hardship as a result of the closed borders. Quite the contrary, economic preferences in exchange for political loyalty provide many opportunities for making money fast. The military establishment also benefits from corruption in the army — one of the largest armies in the world in proportion to the country's population. If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were solved and borders were opened, economic competition would make existing monopolies inefficient and lead to decreased military spending, which would reduce the profits and political influence of the loyal establishment.

Unless there is a profound change of mentality among the Armenian political elite, solving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through negotiations is practically impossible. That was underscored once more on September 2, when President Sargsyan in his address stated that a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would be possible only through international recognition of the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, while large-scale fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh would be a political, economic, and demographic disaster for Armenia, Azerbaijan would be unlikely to achieve its ultimate objective, in other words, to regain full control over Nagorno-Karabakh and its adjacent regions, while possibly suffering huge economic losses and risking internal stability. With resumed fighting, the sharp growth in hydrocarbons prices, most probably, would result in another economic crisis in the US and EU. The West, apparently, needs to review the policies of the last few years and act more assertively in order to protect its own political and economic interests, to maintain international security, and to bring stable peace and security to the South Caucasus.

Artificial Stereotypes and Agitated Misperceptions About the 'Enemy'

By *U. Ismailov*

The conflict of ideas and words, then a brutal war over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, did not only “produce” tens of thousands of deaths on each side, but also bad memory and hurt feelings and emotions about each other. The slogans and talks, along with thousands of articles and books written and narrated about the friendship of peoples, brotherhood, and a “United Family” promoted in Soviet media and literature, suddenly disappeared, almost over night.

The early years of the conflict are long behind. A ceasefire lasting over 15 years has not smoothed the “impressions” and “views” about the “other.” Actually, they have only deteriorated in recent years and turned into “firm beliefs.” With the advance of new social media tools such as Facebook, such “views” are more visible among ordinary Azerbaijanis on this side of the trench. Any personal contact or friendship with Armenian fellows, even online ones, is disapproved. The verdicts are strict. The “guilty” are taken into public blaming and discrediting exchanges. Common slogans out there include, “Armenians are thieves and liars,” “They have stolen our lands, have exterminated us,” “They continue stealing our music and our cuisine,” and “There cannot be a good Armenian and there cannot be any exception.”

The sarcastic and belittling comments of Armenian users on the patriotic or nationalist (depending on which end you are standing on) posts and videos of Azerbaijanis only worsens the situation, ending up with mutual cursing and argument sessions on the pages of YouTube or third-country websites.

As an observer from this side it can be noticed that the age, education, and social background of Azerbaijanis expressing such positions do not play a major role. It can be a Western educated woman, currently working abroad somewhere in Europe or the Americas, or a young, wealthy man working in an international environment in Baku. For example, the new video called “Armenian Plagiarism” is very popular on Facebook these days, and according to unconfirmed sources, it is produced by the famous TV host and filmmaker, Orkhan Fikret-oglu.^[1] It portrays an Armenian priest who is visited by an Armenian woman. She confesses her sin in stealing... yes, an Azerbaijani song. The priest after listening to her confessions says that he used to like those Azeri songs, too and ends up forgiving her “sin,” then telling her how many more Azerbaijani songs are out there to steal. The entire conversation, which is in Armenian, is supposedly filmed at the St. Gregory the Illuminator’s Armenian Church in Baku and dubbed into Azerbaijani.

But the situation regarding what to think about the adversary has not always been so gloomy in this region. There is a long history of a “giving hand” relationship with the help Azeris and Armenians rendered to each other — to their closest neighbors regardless of what was happening in the streets. Banine (1945), a granddaughter of two prominent Azeri oil barons from the early 20th century Baku who moved to France after the Bolshevik empire was established in these territories, described in her memoir how her family saved Armenian neighbors from the ethnic clashes in Baku in 1918. It is an irony because Banine’s own mother died when she delivered her in a remote village of Baku. Pregnant with Banine, she had to escape from Baku in those winter days of 1905 — during the first ethnic clashes between Armenians and Azeris (Tatars then), and the doctors did not make it due to a snowstorm.

The Soviet empire quickly healed the wounds of nations who fought with each other viciously. However, another common “enemy” quickly filled in the scene. In September-October of 1941, the Soviet Union was at war with Germany and the German army already made it deep inside the USSR. The death toll of the Soviet Army reached the hundreds of thousands, which included thousands of Azerbaijanis. The entire ethnic German population of the USSR living along the Volga River, as well as in the Caucasus, particularly in Georgia and Azerbaijan, were subject to exile to Kazakhstan, Siberia, and other non-frontline territories in a matter of a few days according to the USSR Supreme Soviet Decree. Vine specialist N. Ibrahimov (1997), who was a child in those days, remembered how Azeris of Ganja and Shamkir, where Germans lived for more than a century, were shattered by this act. He recalls that Azeris with tears in their eyes and food in their hands rushed to the railway stations to say goodbye to their neighbors, friends, and

co-workers who shared the same ethnicity with the Nazis that a few hundred kilometers away were killing their brothers and sisters — Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Armenians, Russians, and Ukrainians. Despite the official propaganda and discrimination of Germans for their ethnicity, people realized that the Nazi war and policy had nothing to do with their neighbors and friends.

The official Soviet policy on the “German issue” during World War II was not one-sided, either. On one hand, there was a deportation of ethnic Germans within the USSR, with militia and security officers labeling them “Frisian,” “Fascist,” or “Enemy.” On the other hand, the policy carefully chose the words in official documentation and agitation, especially in newspapers and literature. The Soviet news machine aimed not to discriminate the Germans as a nation. Aliaga Vahid (1982), a truly popular Azeri poet in those days who versed several satiric pieces on this issue and like many of his colleagues traveled to the frontline to cheer up the Azerbaijani soldiers, made sure that not the German nation, but “Hitler,” “Nazis,” and “Fascists” were the targets of his edgy poetry. He repeated over and over how German people too suffered from Hitler’s bad policy.

The top hierarchy, too, had not lost their minds entirely. In 1943, in the midst of the horrors of World War II, the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR’s Academy of Sciences published a three-volume history of philosophy that was almost entirely dedicated to the so-called Classical German philosophy of the 18th to 19th centuries. The entire academic team, composed of four scholars, was awarded the Stalin Superior Honor Award by none other than Joseph Stalin himself^[2]. Even though, according to the same academy’s internal discussions, the award was later retracted in May of 1944 “for mistakes in misinterpretation of the German philosophers’ views,” the fact itself shows how cautious the highest leadership of the Soviet Union was in differentiating the German army in the trenches and the German philosophical thoughts of pre-World War II.^[3]

Questions remain on what could be the cause of ethnically biased rhetoric among the people of modern days who were so much against ethnic segregation, bias, and prejudice some 40-50 years ago. As we saw in previous examples, neither the totalitarian empires that controlled peoples, nor the brief independence and self-governance of 1918, could force Azerbaijanis to put aside humanism and common sense. Even 20 years ago the situation was far better. In the early years of the recent conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, a collection of essays called “Bejentsi” (Refugees) were published in Baku in 1992, portraying the difficulties and tortures ethnic Azerbaijanis endured in the Armenian SSR during the uprooting between 1988 and 1989. The book that hosted many popular names of those days (and even today) — poets, writers, and historians, some of whom were born in Armenia — went back to collective memory, personal stories, and history to portray the clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in 1918-1920 and Soviet-era deportation of people during 1948-1952. In these essays, along with tragic stories, there are also small remembrances of ordinary Armenians who, risking their lives, went to the neighboring Azeri village in 1918 to warn them about the rampage that was expecting them the next morning by Dashnak gangs. Another story tells how an old Armenian fellow would shut up a younger one, when he called an ethnic Azerbaijani a “Turk” and an enemy in the 1970s, when everything seemed to be so calm and joyful.

However, things are different today. Many experts try to explain the current situation of negative rhetoric on ethnicity by citing the need for “divide and rule.” The everyday remembrance of the “guilty” for the failure in strong nation-building, along with human and territorial losses in history and today, distract the masses on both sides from daily social problems unassociated with the “enemy.” Others try to justify the aggressiveness of Azerbaijani rhetoric due to territorial gains of Armenia and conspirations that the latter wants to build peace based on the current status-quo, which in turn explains why Armenia takes more peace-oriented approach in its rhetorics.

However, none of the above justifies negative coverage in the media and prejudice about the entire nation – in this case Armenians, which in official rhetoric is applied to the future or current citizens of Azerbaijan. There is a need for intellectuals, just like in the past, to step up, break all stereotypes, and have the courage to speak in public and to the media and criticize the approach of aggressive language about another ethnicity – to prevent us all from falling back into the times of the Nazis. These intellectuals are writers, both Soviet-era and post-modernists, some of whom still enjoy great trust among people in Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, they can also include filmmakers and actors, journalists, and bloggers who can

make things more visual — like a new video on YouTube about how people on both sides suffer and share the same good values. Instead of trying to keep the neutrality and blaming the extremists from both nations, they need to show the true and right path, which does not ask “an eye for an eye.” Only after these efforts on both sides — in Armenia and Azerbaijan not linked to “popular diplomacy and mutual visits” dictated by officials — can we talk about a long-standing and stable peace that is around the corner.

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In the Hot Seat

By *Afa Alizada*

How entrenched are the stereotypes of the “enemy” in Azerbaijani and Armenian societies? Exactly how deep is the mistrust between the two peoples? Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists Kristina Vardanyan and Farman Nabiyeu recently embarked upon a very interesting project to explore these questions. In a short film project titled “[Passenger](#),” funded by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and British Embassies in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the producers filmed responses and reactions of unsuspecting taxi passengers both in Baku and Yerevan.

In the film, the project members doubling as “taxi drivers” in their respective cities initiate an uncomfortable conversation about the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict by playing the music of the “enemy.” The initial reaction of most passengers is confusion, surprise, and true discomfort. Even before the conversation begins, one can observe the tension and unease in their body language: rolling of the eyes, rising of the eyebrows, looking around anxiously, and laughing/smiling nervously.

Confusion ensues from hearing music and language that both Armenian and Azerbaijani ears are currently not accustomed to hearing. Once they become aware of its origins, the passengers’ faces display surprise, if not shock as they seem to ask themselves, “How does this taxi driver dare to play the ‘enemy’s’ music in broad daylight with his windows rolled down?” Then discomfort takes over. It is the discomfort of being in the presence of something associated with the “enemy,” something you’re supposed to hate, not to enjoy on your cab ride somewhere. Yet, it’s only music and it’s harmless, and you might even like it if you allow yourself to.

The experiment continues with the “taxi drivers” asking the passengers several questions on the subject matter ranging from, “Do you think we can ever live in peace with Armenians [Azerbaijanis]?” to “What would you do if you saw an Armenian [Azerbaijani] on the street?” Answers, although varying in their moderation and depth of comprehension of the complexities of the conflict, nevertheless reflect the sad reality on the ground. Misperceptions and stereotypes of the other side, taught in school and reinforced by media and lack of communication with the other side, exhibit themselves in full force.

The passengers from both sides portray themselves as the victims, transferring the blame and responsibility on the other side. Peace is possible, but “If only *Azerbaijanis* are willing...” or “If only *Azerbaijanis* are more compromising...” and conversely, “If *Armenians* return our lands...” or “If *Armenians* don’t cause us problems.” With the exception of a couple of passengers from each side, most passengers fail to reflect upon their own prejudices and readily offers an analysis of prejudices of the other side (with whom they have virtually no contact): “Since childhood, they are taught to hate Armenians” or similarly “They brainwash their children to hate Azerbaijanis and Turks...”

Despite exhibiting the most common stereotypes and misconceptions among Azerbaijanis and Armenians about each other, this short movie, nevertheless, leaves one with more hope for the future than desperation. This hope stems from the fact that with communication and contact, these stereotypes can be shattered, which in return can open some room for understanding and compromise.

Whether this 8-minute video is representative of the views of Armenians and Azerbaijani societies at large (which surprisingly were not as radical or hateful) or whether the moviemakers’ selective editing skills disguised or eliminated the most rigid and uncompromising responses is open for debate. However, the fact that none of the passengers in the movie excluded the possibility of peace (while recognizing the difficulty of getting there) in itself can be a cause for celebration.

Closed Borders, Disaster Risks, and Disaster Relief Coordination in the Caucasus

By *Erik Grigoryan*

“A good neighbor is better than a good relative.” — *A popular proverb in Armenia*

It is a common belief within Armenian society and culture that the neighbor is the closest, hence the most effective when one is in immediate need. The same should work for neighbors on the geographical map, yet that is not necessarily the case in the South Caucasus, a region with a high risk of earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters, and a region with conflicts and messy politics.

The whole year of 2010 has been devastating for Georgia for example, hit by a number of heavy rains, floods, and violent winds. Neighboring Armenia required two decades to recover from its devastating earthquake of 1988 (measuring 6.8 in magnitude, killing nearly 25,000, injuring 15,000, and leaving at least 400,000 homeless with three cities in rubble). Turkey suffered from a major quake on August 17, 1999, in the northwest. A 7.6 magnitude quake with its epicenter near Izmit killed over 17,000 and injured about 44,000. The damage was estimated at \$8.5 billion. Another severe 7.2 temblor killed more than 700 in Duzce and nearby towns in November. On December 26, 2003, a 6.6 magnitude earthquake hit Iran, devastating the ancient historic city of Bam in southeast Iran, killing 26,200 people — 30,000 were injured and 75,000 left homeless, as mud-brick buildings collapsed.

Due to Armenia's exposure to high seismic risk and the post-1988 earthquake capacity-building and international support, this small post-soviet country is pioneering in earthquake research and disaster relief expertise in the region. It has a full-fledged Ministry of Emergency Situations, a dedicated agency for rescue services, and the National Seismic Protection Service Agency. Armenian rescue teams have been part of major international disaster and earthquake rescue missions. Armenia most recently sent teams of heavily equipped firefighters to Russia to help the country cope with its worst wildfires in nearly four decades that killed at least 48 people. Armenia has one of the highest physician-to-population ratios in the world, an asset that can be effectively utilized for local, regional, or international emergency needs, should a system of management and training and relevant capacity be introduced. Emergency response structures and agencies are also functioning in other countries in the region. With the minor exception of some bilateral cooperation mechanisms and experience, these agencies largely work alone and independently from each other when mobilized.

Unfortunately, disaster response from outside is often being questioned, restricted, or banned due to political speculations. Back in 1999, for example, Armenia offered a rescue team to Turkey, but it rejected Armenian and Greek support due to historic animosity. With due NATO pressure Turkey did join this year's NATO annual disaster response exercise held in Armenia from September 11 to 17. Organized by the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), the exercise included 30 NATO and partner countries (including neighboring Georgia and Russia). While the exercise was meant to cope with the outcomes of an imaginary severe earthquake with a high number of casualties and widespread damage to critical infrastructure, it was ironic that due to closed borders, the Turkish delegation had to travel to Armenia via Georgia.

The disaster and earthquake threat is always in the air in the region. The last two quakes were as recent as January and August. A 3 magnitude-strong quake hit on January 26 at the Georgian-Azerbaijani border, 20 km west of the region of Gakh, and 3.56 strong one hit the Armenian-Turkish border on the night of August 6. With cross-border or border-proximate hits, response from the neighbors may be speedy and efficient, and the potential has to be used fully and efficiently for the sake of helping and saving lives. Earthquakes and disasters know no nationality, ethnicity, language, or geography, and neither should relief professionals and rescue teams.

The humanitarian and logistical support of neighboring countries cannot be overestimated. Neighboring countries most often are capable of rapid emergency response, provision of human and material resources, logistical support, food and sanitation aid, and vital access through ports, roads, and airports. These services channeled through neighbors, either by them directly or from international actors,

make disaster response more effective, efficient, timely, quick, and cost-effective. Benefits to the neighboring relief providers are also notable and weighty. By providing emergency support the providing country may expect reciprocity, when in need. Providing support, saving lives, and contributing to stability and recovery in the neighboring country or the region significantly contributes to one's own state security. Such relief and response may also significantly contribute to confidence-building and regional cooperation and integration.

Given the frequent occurrences of quakes, vulnerability of local populations, and relative advantages of some countries in response expertise, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, and Russia should work together in shaping partnership and cooperation in disaster response and relief coordination.

For comprehensive natural disaster data see [Earthquakes and Volcanic Eruptions at Infoplease.com: http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0001439.html#ixzz0wndn4GvA](http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0001439.html#ixzz0wndn4GvA)

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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October 15:***

Analytical issue:

Right Ideas, Right
People, Right Time

By **Gegam Bagdasaryan**

Inconclusive
Negotiations- Is There A
Light At The End Of The
Tunnel

By **Gulshan Pashayeva**

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