

# Caucasus Edition

---

Journal of Conflict Transformation

## POLITICAL TRANSITIONS AND CONFLICTS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Caucasus Edition Volume 3, Issue 2  
2018

# In This Issue

<b>From the Editorial Team</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PART 1</b>	<b>4</b>
Engagement with the South Caucasus de facto states: A viable strategy for conflict transformation? <i>Nina Caspersen</i>	5
Russia and the conflicts in the South Caucasus: main approaches, problems, and prospects <i>Sergey Markedonov</i>	24
Two Modalities of Foreign and Domestic Policies in Turkey: From Soft Power to War Rhetoric <i>Ömer Turan</i>	48
<b>PART 2</b>	<b>66</b>
Nationalism and Hegemony in Post-Communist Georgia <i>Bakar Berekashvili</i>	67
Russia and Georgia 2008-2018 – Escapism for the Sake of Peace? <i>Dmitry Dubrovskiy</i>	80
Recommendations <i>Dmitry Dubrovskiy</i>	92
The Poverty of Militarism: The ‘Velvet Revolution’ and the Defeat of Militarist Quasi-Ideology in Armenia <i>Mikayel Zolyan</i>	95
Discourses of War and Peace within the Context of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Case of Azerbaijan <i>Lala Jumayeva</i>	105
Recommendations <i>Lala Jumayeva, Mikayel Zolyan</i>	117
Perceptions in Azerbaijan of the Impact of Revolutionary Changes in Armenia on the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process <i>Zaur Shiriyev</i>	119
Karabakh Discourses in Armenia Following the Velvet Revolution <i>Anahit Shirinyan</i>	140
Recommendations <i>Anahit Shirinyan, Zaur Shiriyev</i>	155
<b>Authors</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Editors</b>	<b>161</b>

# Discourses of War and Peace within the Context of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Case of Azerbaijan

---

---

Lala Jumayeva

## Introduction

Armenia and Azerbaijan, as sides to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, have committed themselves to the process of negotiating a settlement. Despite the lack of progress at the negotiation table for the last 26 years, exacerbated frustrations and the situation on the ground became increasingly tense, but the sides still remain at the negotiation table. Hence, hypothetically, in order to find a mutually acceptable formula and settle the dispute along with the officially conducted peace talks at the top level, the sides should also adhere to the conflict transformation process through various peace-building activities on the grassroots level. Particularly, transformation of relationships as a crucial component of the whole settlement process lies at the heart of further diminution of tensions within the conflict context that could foster the peace process.

Lederach, well-known for his contributions to the fields of conflict transformation and peacebuilding, emphasizes the crucial meaning of conflict's relational aspects and states that absence of good relationships between groups may cause a conflict, and after the violence is ceased this factor remains an important barrier to peacebuilding efforts (Lederach 1997). If there is no possibility to influence the relationship between the conflict parties within a transformational framework, it will

be much harder to do that during the settlement process because peace is achieved not via peace agreements (that can, actually, be forced) but via peacefully transformed minds, beliefs, and attitudes that may last forever. Consequently, the official discourses in Armenia and Azerbaijan about the opposite side impacts the relationship between the two societies. Notably, the rhetoric adhered forms the misperceptions of the respective societies about each other. This fact causes the growth of mistrust between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis, whereas building trust is one of the most important components of the conflict settlement process since it determines the security concerns of the opposite side. In order to build peace, grassroots-level dialogue programs and reconsideration of relationships should be initiated not only between the two communities of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also between the societies of Armenia and Azerbaijan. This process should be carried out or supported by the two governments, which will make more effort on the propagation of pro-peace discourse within their countries rather than pro-war rhetoric the way it is done today.

This article sheds light on the existing discourses of war and peace in Azerbaijan within the framework of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. The research covers mainly the recent developments taken place in Azerbaijan from the period of July 2017 to July 2018. The concept of the “pro-war discourse” (“pro-war rhetoric,” “bellicose rhetoric”) is defined as the art of speaking in an attitude that hopes for actual war whereas the notion of the “pro-peace discourse” (“peace rhetoric”) is defined as the art of speaking in an attitude that hopes for actual peace. The paper analyses the existing pro-war and pro-peace discourses in the speeches of high-level Azerbaijani government officials. Furthermore, the article briefly discusses the ongoing militarization process in Azerbaijan, which in itself is part of the pro-war discourse and its actual and possible impacts on the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process.

### **Army building becomes a key target for Azerbaijan**

One of the factors that influences the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiation process, and may in the future derail the peace talks, is the bellicose rhetoric utilized by the Armenian and Azerbaijani officials. Both governments constantly adhere to pro-war discourse and stress the readiness of their military forces to defeat the opposing side in the event

the war resumes. Such rhetoric contributes to the escalation of tensions among the societies, thus resulting in an increase of mutual mistrust and animosity. An aggrieved character of Azerbaijan's stance in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the level of economic development of Azerbaijan in the region, and a constant increase in the country's military budget make the Azerbaijani government feel more comfortable. And most importantly, the government finds it correct to adhere to the usage of antagonistic language towards Armenia.

The constant build-up of military power in Azerbaijan is a factor that both triggers the government's adherence to bellicose rhetoric and affects Armenia's security dilemma. Armenia, in turn, feels a necessity to respond to the ongoing militarization process. This bilateral military mobilization has become a vicious circle that is first and foremost used by third parties (such as Russia, the US, and Iran) for their own agenda, and it negatively impacts the ongoing peace talks by creating mistrust between the sides. From within the environment in which the conflict is embedded, Azerbaijan continued to build up its military strength in 2017–2018 and was in 53rd place out of 136 countries on the list of a global military power ranking—Global Firepower (Hasanov 2018). The military expenditure of Azerbaijan has increased 15 times since 2003 (Aliyev 2018b) and reached \$1.6 billion in 2018, which exceeds the military budget of Armenia (\$512 million) several times (Defense-aerospace.com 2017). Apart from a regular increase in Azerbaijan's military budget on an annual basis, the reason for the military expenditure's rise in 2018 was a national parade dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the establishment of both the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic and the Azerbaijani armed forces celebrated on May 28 and June 26, respectively. The military parade received particular attention from the government and society, and was more than just a celebration of a centenary of Azerbaijan's armed forces as advertised. It was more of a flashy demonstration of the strength of Azerbaijani military power, statehood, and nation. The parade hosted approximately 4,000 military and defence personnel from various Azerbaijani institutions and a special unit of the Armed forces of Turkey that carried out a military performance (Trend 2018a). Both parades in Baku received great interest and were highly cheered and broadcasted on social media. Even though such events usually aim at raising a spirit of patriotism within the

population, this year's parade was also a demonstration of the growth of Azerbaijan's military power, which can be used against the Armenian side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, particularly after the war in April 2016.

During the military parade the president in his speech noted that "army building" was the key target of the country, justifying this aim with the failure of international institutions to enforce peace in the region via the mechanisms of international law which, consequently, had made the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem by means of force the right policy to implement (Aliyev 2018b). Aliyev, further escalating the rhetoric, stressed that "The enemy must know that it does not have a single military or strategic facility the Azerbaijani army could not destroy. All military facilities, all of the enemy's strategically important sites can be destroyed by the Azerbaijani army" (Aliyev 2018b). These messages per se can be regarded as a military threat to Armenia. Additionally, such statements have a harsh character, particularly when taken into account the extent to which such messages claim to represent a popular opinion in Azerbaijan. Though, due to the lack of inter-societal dialogue to discuss the viewpoints in society about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, there is no data available to support this statement. Hence, the ongoing militarization process strengthens the military capability of Azerbaijan and, consequently, encourages high-level officials to make pro-war claims even though such language contradicts the government's official stance that it was committed to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through peace talks.

### **A constant build-up of military power in Armenia and Azerbaijan: a vicious circle ever to end?**

An antagonistic rhetoric makes the opposite side (both the Armenian and the de-facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities) more cautious in their analysis and estimation of the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. The threat coming from Azerbaijan on a continuous basis creates a situation of uncertainty and hesitation in its commitment to settle the conflict by diplomatic efforts. Consequently, such rhetoric prevents the development of trust and makes the goodwill gestures impossible. Particularly, after the April war in 2016 the Armenian side

acknowledged the seriousness of such a threat and racked up its own antagonistic rhetoric and militarization. Hence, this was one of the reasons for a widespread speculation about the upcoming attack planned by the Azerbaijani side during the “velvet revolution” in Armenia in the spring of 2018. Among the Armenian elite, mainly the representatives of Sargsyan’s former government, there was a fear that Azerbaijan could have used the momentum and resume military activities on the frontline.

Though for the period of July 2017 to July 2018, the continuous violation of the ceasefire on the frontline by both conflict parties continued to create tensions between the two countries not only on a political but also at grassroots levels. Notably, such grassroots-level confrontations occur when the conflict stops being only a military one and, thereby, impacts the daily lives of ordinary people. The fact that Azerbaijan has been in a state of an ongoing military conflict for the last 28 years (since 1990) has not affected the daily routine outside of the immediate conflict zone and those displaced since the cease-fire was established much until an *unexpected* incident happens. The killing of two-year-old Zehra and her grandmother in the village of Alakhanli, in the Fizuli district, by Armenian military forces in July 2017 became one such experience. While the news was widely covered by the international media such as *BBC News* (BBC News 2017) and *The Washington Times* (Murinson 2017) it triggered a strong reaction from the Azerbaijani population in the social media, which, once again, mirrored the wave of animosity and hatred at the level of national identity. The Azerbaijani government assessed this act as an Armenian provocation and heavily condemned the attack of combatants on the frontline, while the president described this event as “a military crime which demonstrates Armenian fascism” (Trend 2017).

### **The change of power in Armenia to foster or hinder the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process?**

Yet, one of the most provocative remarks ever made by President Aliyev became his statement at the inauguration ceremony in April 2018 when he claimed that not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also the territory of the contemporary Armenian Republic was historical land of Azerbaijan and

advised referring to archival documents for validation (Aliyev 2018a). According to the mainstream media discourse in Azerbaijan, the first Armenian Republic of 1918 was established on historical Azerbaijani lands (FrontNews International 2018; Trend 2018b). Certainly, by making such a statement, which was mainly for an internal audience, the Azerbaijani government did not intend to threaten the sovereignty of the Armenian Republic; however, in Armenia it was understood as a threat to its sovereignty. Later in the same month, the Azerbaijani government hoped for a constructive change in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process as a result of the political processes happening in Armenia after the presidential elections.

An unexpected change of political power in Armenia through the “velvet revolution” took the Azerbaijani government by surprise. There have been a number of statements by local and international (mainly Russian) experts, such as Markov (AzerNews 2018a), Sobhani (AzerNews 2018b), and Tropinin (Shirinov 2018b) on the opportunities this power change could have provided for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, hoping that Pashinyan’s stance on the ways of the dispute’s settlement would be different from Sargsyan’s.

Another interesting point was the fact that the Azerbaijani government restrained from any adverse or bellicose rhetoric towards Armenia within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during and right after the revolution. Yet, as was mentioned above, there were concerns in Armenia that Azerbaijan could use the momentum and resume war in Karabakh. However, after the new government in Armenia revealed its stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, demanding that the de-facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities be included in the negotiation process, Baku doubted that there would be much of a substantial change in terms of the peace process.

In May 2018, the Azerbaijani government initiated military actions on the Armenian-Nakhichevani<sup>19</sup> border. Yet, this case to a certain extent keeps its vagueness since neither side provided convincing information on the activities carried out on the border. On May 20, the Azerbaijani

---

<sup>19</sup> In Azerbaijan, the Autonomous Republic is known as Nakhchivan. In Armenian, it is known as Nakhichevan (CE Editorial Team).

Defense Ministry reported the death of an Azerbaijani soldier at the Armenian-Nakhichevani border calling it yet another provocation from the Armenian side. The Armenian Defense Ministry laid the responsibility on the Azerbaijani side, claiming that the reason for the casualty was due to "... active engineering works at certain sections of the border with Armenia" (TASS 2018). By the end of May, the local media circulated information that the Azerbaijani army conducted a counter-offensive operation ("Gunnut operation") and liberated "the village of Gunnut in Sharur region and strategic heights of Khunut (2,065 meters), Gizilgaya (1,683 meters), and Mehridag (1,869 meters), located around the village" (Shirinov 2018c).

However, a month later it was revealed that this, actually, was a military operation planned ahead. On July 7, the Turkish channel TRT World aired a program dedicated to the Gunnut operation during which it was clearly stated that "Azerbaijani military officials say they have long been preparing a special operation to retake the land held by Armenian forces and so launched the operation in Nakhchivan. Over 200 Azerbaijani special forces stormed Armenian military positions in this area and recaptured over 110 square kilometers of territory that was once occupied by Armenians" (AzerNews 2018c).

Interestingly, this military operation remained a secret for about a month. On June 20, the Minister of Defense of Azerbaijan, in his press conference with the local mass media representatives, stated that the information about the military operations at the Armenian-Nakhichevani border were not disclosed due to the political situation in Armenia because Sargsyan would have apparently used this information in order to distract the attention of the Armenian population from the political chaos within the country (REAL TV 2018). Hence, the military activities launched at the Armenian-Nakhichevani border were made public on May 15 only upon the completion of the Armenian "velvet revolution" on May 8. While this event was presented as a glory in Azerbaijan, its brightness was soon darkened by claims of certain local experts that the so-called "liberated" territories had been in the neutral zone which was neither under Armenian nor Azerbaijani control (AzadliqRadiosu 2018). Apparently, while the Azerbaijani military forces launched the operation, they were acting within the neutral

territory and were not liberating lands from Armenia, which is why Sargsyan could not use this, and overall there was no reaction from Armenia. Hence, little information disseminated in Azerbaijani media reflected the truth.

## **An effective peace process—yet another challenge to be addressed**

Regardless of the detrimental developments that occurred within the context of the existing discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, there has also been constructive progress. One of the main indicators of the process of a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the ongoing negotiations between the dispute sides. Since the April war in 2016, the relations between the two governments remained very tense and the presidents did not meet between June 2016 and October 2017. Hence, as a result of number of meetings between the respective ministers of foreign affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan the presidents, finally, met on October 16, 2017 in Geneva, where they agreed to intensify the peace process and decrease the tensions on the frontline. These renewed talks were assessed by the OSCE as a demonstration of a sign of goodwill from both sides.

Yet another encouraging development of the passing year was the Azerbaijani government's readiness to continue support for the peacebuilding activities between the two communities of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This fact was highlighted at the meeting of the Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov with the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Klaar, where the minister noted the significance of the dialogue between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of Nagorno-Karabakh and stressed Azerbaijan's support (AzerNews 2017). Furthermore, this message was also announced at the winter session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg on January 26 by Azerbaijani MP Rovshan Rzayev, who stressed the importance of the restoration of "lost trust" between the two communities by correctly adding that this process per se could positively influence and foster the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process (Zeynalova 2018). Another statement was made by Jeyhun Mammadov, the senior consultant of the

presidential administration, about the security of Armenians currently residing in Azerbaijan who emphasized the lack of a "...conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians residing in the country" (Shirinov 2018a; Shirinov 2018b). Consequently, even though the Azerbaijani government adhered to bellicose rhetoric more often, it leaves some room for the expression of the goodwill within the context of the peacebuilding activities as part of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process. Such pro-peace rhetoric should be practiced more often by government officials and the media should pay more attention to the circulation of such news to restore that constructive approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process.

## Conclusion

Both the existing pro-war discourse as well as the ongoing militarization process in both countries negatively affect the already complicated Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peace talks. The dangerous rhetoric of the past few years, particularly, reduces the chances for the soonest resolution of the dispute as it diminishes trust and confidence in the possibility of a peaceful approach and urges both sides to prepare for combat operations in case the war resumes. Both governments, taking into account the current situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, particularly after the power change in Armenia, should put more effort into continuing the peace talks and demonstrate a more constructive approach in settling the dispute.

## Bibliography

- Aliyev, Ilham. 2018a. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Inauguration Ceremony." *Prezident.az*. April 18, 2018. Accessed August 13, 2018. <https://en.president.az/articles/28071>
- .2018b. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Official Military Parade on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Armed Forces." *Prezident.az*. June 26, 2018. Accessed August 13, 2018. <https://en.president.az/articles/29538>
- AzadliqRadiosu. 2018. "Torpaqlar İşğaldan Azad Olunub, Yoxsa Bu, "Hakimiyyətin Xəbərləri"Dir?" [Have the Territories Been Liberated, or Is This the News of the Government?]. Video,

published June 21, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-UaUtVOnL8>

- AzerNews. 2017. "Baku Supports Dialogue of Azerbaijani, Armenian Communities of Nagorno-Karabakh Region." December 7, 2017. Accessed September 4, 2018. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/123641.html>
- . 2018a. "Expert: Karabakh Clan's Leaving Power in Armenia Gives Azerbaijan Serious Chance in Karabakh Conflict Resolution." April 24, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/130947.html>
- . 2018b. "Sobhani: Sargsyan's Resignation to Have Positive Impact on Karabakh Conflict's Resolution." April 24, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/130972.html>
- . 2018c. "TRT World Airs Program Dedicated to Azerbaijan's Gunnut Village Liberated from Armenian Occupation." July 7, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/134449.html>
- BBC News. 2017. "Toddler Killed in Shelling in Azerbaijan." July 5, 2017. Accessed August 14, 2018. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-40504373>
- Defense-aerospace.com. 2017. "Azerbaijan, Armenia Plan Defense Budget Increases for 2018." October 20, 2017. Accessed September 3, 2018. <http://www.defense-aerospace.com/articles-view/release/3/187787/azerbaijan%2C-armenia-plan-defense-budget-increases-for-2018.html>
- FrontNews International. 2018. "Azerbaijani Ambassador: Yerevan Has Been Azerbaijan's Territory Through History, President Acknowledged the Fact." February 16, 2018. Accessed October 15, 2018. <https://frontnews.eu/news/en/23830/Azerbaijani-Ambassador-Yerevan-has-been-Azerbaijans-territory-through-history-President-acknowledged-the-fact>
- Hasanov, Bakhtiyar. 2018. "Turkish-Azerbaijani Joint Military Large-scale Drills." *CBC.AZ*. June 5, 2018. Accessed August 30, 2018.

<http://cbc.az/en/en/news/turkish-azerbaijani-joint-military-large-scale-drills1528181178>

- Lederach, John Paul. 1998. *Building Peace*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Murinson, Alexandre. 2017. "Armenia's Attack on Azerbaijani Civilians." *The Washington Times*. July 6, 2017. Accessed August 30, 2018. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jul/6/azerbaijani-civilians-attacked-by-armenia/>
- REAL TV. 2018. "Müdafiə Naziri Zakir Həsənov Jurnalistlərin Suallarını Cavablandırır." [The Minister of Defense Zakir Garalov Responded to Journalist's Questions.]. Video, published June 20, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWCXXAz4IVc>
- Shirinov, Rashad. 2018a. "Presidential Administration: No Conflict Between Azerbaijanis, Armenians Living in Azerbaijan." *AzerNews*. March 29, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/129423.html>
- .2018b. "Sargsyan's Resignation May Positively Affect Karabakh Conflict Settlement." *AzerNews*. April 26, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/131094.html>
- .2018c. "Civilians' Return to Liberated Lands in Nakhchivan Is Irrefutable Fact." *AzerNews*. June 27, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/134009.html>
- TASS. 2018. "Armenia Explains Border Incident by Azerbaijan's Provocative Actions." May 20, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/1005284>
- Trend. 2017. "President Aliyev: Murder of Little Zahra, Her Grandmother Demonstrates Armenian Fascism." July 12, 2017. Accessed August 10, 2018. <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/2776629.html>
- .2018a. "Baku Hosts Military Parade on Occasion Of Centenary Of Azerbaijan's Armed Forces." June 26, 2018. Accessed September 4, 2018. <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2921420.html>

—.2018b. "Azerbaijani MP in PACE Raises Issue of Expelling Azerbaijanis from Armenia." October 12, 2018. Accessed October 15, 2018 <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2964655.html>

Zeynalova, Leman. 2018. "MP: Necessary to Find Ways for Restoring Trust Between Azerbaijani, Armenian Communities of Nagorno-Karabakh." *Trend*. January 26, 2018. Accessed September 3, 2018. <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/2852873.html>.