



Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi (AVİD), II/1 (2013), 1-37

**WAR AND PEACE: RUSSIA, TURKEY, AND THE DOMESTIC
DIMENSION OF CONFLICT PERPETUATION, CESSATION, AND
RESOLUTION IN THE CAUCASUS**

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Abstract

The political landscape of the Caucasus region has changed dramatically since the initial eruption of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the late 1980s-early 1990s. Among other changes, Turkey and Russia have experienced a rapprochement in the 2000s that places them in a strong position to influence both the political leadership and the mass publics of Azerbaijan and Armenia to open negotiations with a new willingness to consider hitherto unacceptable solutions to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Because of the domestic political tension-ratcheting knot within both Armenia and Azerbaijan that make concessionary approaches to N-K politically suicidal, external influence is essential. It is precisely here that Turkey and Russia are now – unlike earlier -- uniquely and fortuitously positioned: Turkey is arguably in as effectual a position to influence Azerbaijan as Russia is to influence Armenia. Again, the Russian-Turkish rapprochement has changed the calculus of prospective resolution decisively, if not inevitably.

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Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, Turkey, conflict-resolution, Caucasus, Minsk Group, OSCE.

Savaş ve Barış: Rusya, Türkiye ve Kafkaslar Sorununun İç Siyaset Boyutu

Özet

Kafkasya bölgesinin siyasi ilişkileri Dağlık-Karabağ sorununun ortaya çıktığı 1980'lerin sonu ve 1990'ların başından günümüze büyük ölçüde değişmiştir. Bu değişimlerin arasında önemli bir yer ise 2000'li yılların başından giderek artan Türkiye ile Rusya arasındaki yakınlaşma politikasıdır. Türkiye ve Rusya'yı Dağlık-Karabağ sorununun çözümünde özellikli bir yere konumlandıran dinamikler ise bu iki ülkenin Azeri ve Ermeni siyasi liderliğini ve kamuoyunu Dağlık-Karabağ sorununun çözümü doğrultusunda etkileme güçleridir. Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan'ın iç siyasetinin içerisinde bulunduğu kör düğüm ve Dağlık-Karabağ sorunu etrafında gelişen hassasiyet nedeniyle soruna uzlaşmacı bir çözüm yolunu dış ülkelerin müdahalesine muhtaç hale getirmektedir. Tam da bu noktada Türkiye ve Rusya'nın ilişkilerinin gelişmesi ve Rusya'nın Ermenistan Türkiye'nin ise Azerbaycan üzerindeki etkin rolü bu iki ülkeyi geçmişin aksine çözüm sürecinde biricik bir konuma yerleştirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dağlık-Karabağ Sorunu, Rusya, Türkiye. Kafkasya, Minsk Grubu, AGIT.

1. Introduction

This essay explores the changing role of Russia and Turkey in the Caucasus region, particularly with respect to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and does so from the perspectives of: (1) the ongoing *rapprochement* between Turkey and Russia; (2) the underlying state-society political dynamics operating in all four countries of Russia, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan; (3) the closely-related issue of political identity within these countries, and (4) a general sense that, by late 2012, the OSCE-sponsored Minsk Group resolution-seeking process had reached a point of showing little promise of a satisfactory settlement. We conclude that *the complex array of domestic and international forces that have come into being during the past two decades more or less require an increasingly pronounced role for both Russia and Turkey in order for a workable resolution of regional conflicts — particularly Nagorno-Karabakh — to be found*. Below we explain why this is so, and begin by describing

in a general way the manner in which civil society has either increased or decreased in the four countries under investigation. We then consider the nature of their interaction with each other, particularly with regard to regional conflict resolution, and conclude by revisiting the role of the Minsk Group and its current disposition to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. We believe that by more closely examining the complex of domestic and international factors, clearer understanding will emerge regarding the likely success or failure of various prospective solutions. It is critical to understand the manner in which the regional political landscape has changed since the early 1990s.

In the 2000s Turkey and Russia have cultivated increasingly close relations, based initially on diminished threat-perception, but over time on increased mutual interests in a broadening array of domains. Moreover, each is attempting to find more available political ‘space’ to increase their overall relations, each having formally described the relation as a “strategic partnership.” Nevertheless, an important and unavoidable regional obstacle remains, and whose resolution is increasingly salient for the Russian-Turkish bilateral relation. *That issue is Nagorno-Karabakh, and it locates not only in the key point of bi-lateral relations between Turkey and Russia, but also in the quadrangle of Caucasus-region countries: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, and Russia.*¹ Further, this complex quadrangle of relations is complicated by the different character of state-society relations that has emerged in each of the four countries. In the recent, succinct but unfortunately true words of long-time Caucasus observer Tom DeWaal, “[t]his conflict has tied up the whole south Caucasus region since the late 1980s, early 1990s.”² EU *rapporteur* for the region, Evgeni Kirilov, likewise offered that “[t]he South Caucasus is not only a region in the immediate neighborhood of the European Union

1 The Republic of Georgia also plays a key role in the region, of course, but in many respects is more peripheral than central to the resolution of the N-K issue.

2 Tom DeWaal, “A Pause in Armenia-Turkey Reconciliation”, **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, Washington, D.C., transcript of audio of 10 May 2010, accessed 20 May 2010 at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=40771>.

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-- Romania and Bulgaria have a sea border with it, . . . but a region of great strategic importance for the union in the political, economic, and security aspects.”³ Other observers depict an even more ominous forecast – noted Russian security-affairs commentator Pavel Felgenhauer recently warned that renewal of large-scale conflict was more or less inevitable and imminent, echoing similar voices from within Azerbaijan since late autumn 2009. In late February 2010 Azeri Defense Minister Safan Abiyev offered that a “big war is inevitable”, adding that “we’re not going to wait another 15 years” for a peaceful resolution.⁴ Significantly, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev issued not a word of contradiction to the pronouncements, which in most political contexts would be regarded as highly inflammatory; domestic considerations surely played heavily in this matter, as they of course do so intensively in Armenia as well. Thus we turn to the question of the character of domestic politics, and particularly the manner of change in civil society in Turkey, Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan during the past two decades.

2. Civil Society in Turkey, Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan

During the 2000s, evidence pointed toward a deepening strength of civil society in Turkey and perhaps to a lesser degree in Armenia, and a more or less simultaneous diminution of civil society’s strength in Russia and Azerbaijan. This conjunction of trends is rather odd given the general but powerful tendency for Turkey and Azerbaijan to coalesce, and for Russia and Armenia to ally themselves – sometimes subtly, but in the domain of collective security, to do so in a formal, mutually binding manner (Turkey in NATO, and Russia and Armenia in the CSTO).

While much has been written about the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, we believe that insufficient attention has been devoted to how the domestic politics of

3 Ahto Lobjakas, “European Parliament Calls for Greater EU Role in South Caucasus,” **Eurasianet.org**, (20 May 2010), accessed June 21, 2010 at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61113>.

4 For Abiyev’s remarks, see <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LDE61O244.htm>, accessed 14 June 2010.

these four countries frame the manner in which the issue is perceived by both political leaders and mass publics, and in each country. This is no small matter, given that the simmering dispute that is Nagorno-Karabakh is so indeterminate – it could explode into a broadening conflict, lend itself to a workable resolution, or continue in an uneasy, tension-laden condition that both eludes solution and gives rise to other problems that are perhaps quite unrelated to the immediate issue of territorial control (e.g., environmental problems, energy-resource marketing issues, etc.). Indeed, from a regional perspective, it has been suggested that the persistence of territorial disputes has seriously and significantly obstructed the emergence of what might otherwise develop into a significantly more productive Black Sea-area regional association. As noted by the *Black Sea Commission* (a multi-lateral, civil-society organization):

Around the Black Sea, there are two opposing conditions that affect the potential of regionalism. On the one hand, economic difficulties and the need for managing regional public goods such as the environment, trade and financial stability have generated demands for regional cooperation, integration and policy coordination. These need to be strengthened and efficiently channeled into regional policy-making. On the other hand, important security issues such as the unresolved secessionist conflicts undermine the drive for regionalism and obstruct collective action and institutions. These adverse security conditions need to be eliminated or their impacts reduced.⁵

It will be useful to consider several points, beginning with a synoptic view of the trajectory of civil and political rights in each of the four countries under consideration from the perspective of Freedom House, a NY-based research organization devoted to understanding the character of political change, in a periodic manner, in all of the countries of the world. The following tables show a trend toward greater political rights and civil liberties in Turkey, a decline in Russia and Armenia, and stagnation and authoritarianism in Azerbaijan.

5 The Commission on the Black Sea, **A Vision for the Black Sea**, Istanbul and Athens, 2010, p. 39

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Tables 1-4: Freedom House Rankings of Civil and Political Rights: 4 Countries, 2 Decades⁶

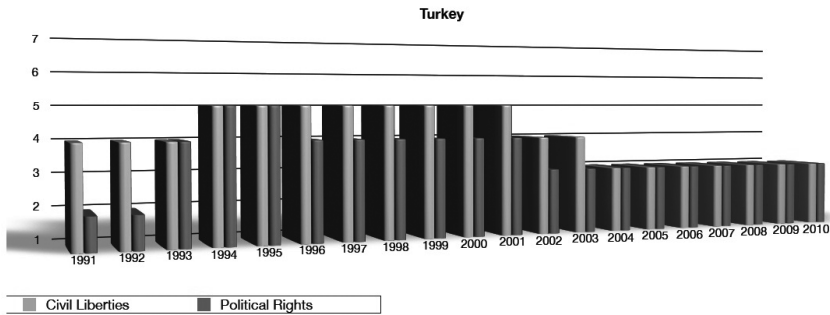


Table 1: Turkey: Political Rights and Civil Liberties -- Change Since 1991

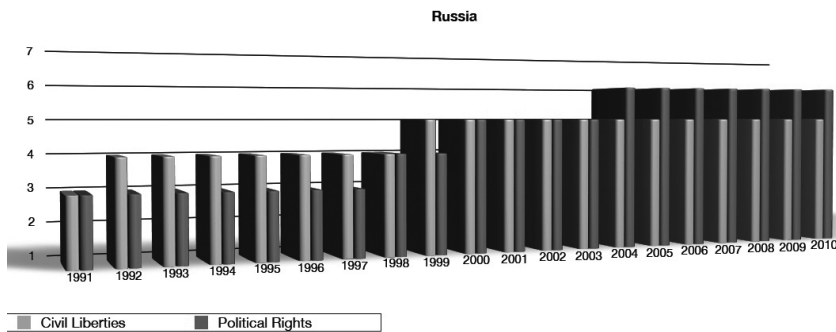


Table 2: Russia: Political Rights and Civil Liberties -- Change Since 1991.

⁶ The scale is from “1” to “7”. “1” refers to highest liberty and freedom, where “7” refers to lowest.

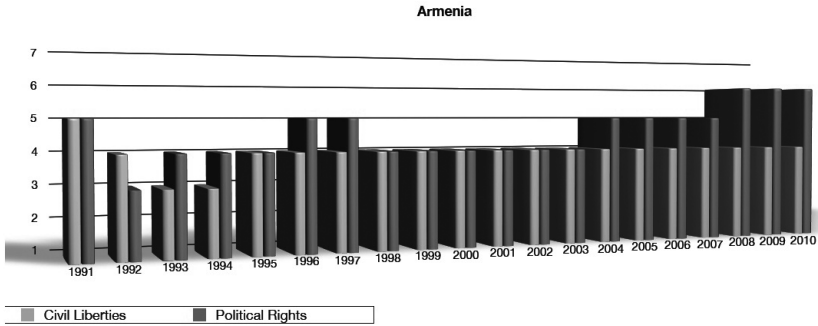


Table 3: Armenia: Political Rights and Civil Liberties - Change Since 1991

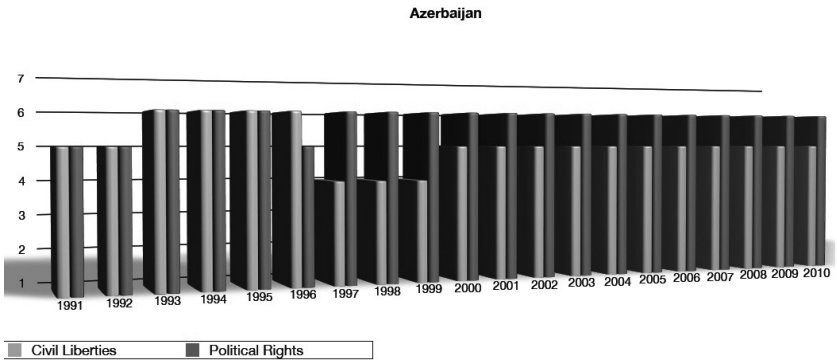


Table 4: Azerbaijan: Political Rights and Civil Liberties – Change Since 1991

2.a. Civil Society in Turkey and N-K

From the Turkish perspective (both popularly and official-governmentally), the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is centrally related to two critical, important issues in Turkey’s domestic politics: (1) relations with Armenia and particularly the Armenian genocide claims, and (2) bi-lateral relations with Azerbaijan, considered by both the Turkish regime and by consistent public opinion to be Turkey’s closest ally. Further, although Turkey remains very much a western-oriented country whose future is tightly related with US-NATO-EU relations,

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especially with Russia, various Middle Eastern countries, and also various African countries. Significantly, most of the recent initiatives of the AK Party government in foreign relations have enjoyed substantial degrees of domestic popular support, certainly including the maintenance of good relations with Azerbaijan.

Significantly, Turkish public opinion has shown signs of becoming increasingly effective and important in foreign policy; among other things, this means that with the local elections in 2013, the state does not have the same latitude for foreign policy maneuvering as is the case in Russia or Azerbaijan, wherein the state tends to strongly dominate the society. The linkage between Turkish foreign-policy and the domestic political landscape has developed into a more complex structure than previously, and dissimilar in kind to the foreign-policy making mechanisms in either Russia or Azerbaijan. In fact the architect of Turkey's post-2002 foreign policy -- current foreign minister Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu -- stated in December 2010 that Turkish foreign policy is popularly-based and derived. As such, it is both responsive to the society and informs society. During the past several years in particular this increasingly more tight, interwoven structure of domestic politics and foreign relations in Turkey has become influential in several dimensions of the foreign relations.⁷

As a case in point, one can observe how public opinion toward the manner in which the Turkish government handled the October 2009-initiated Armenian protocols (directly related to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue), necessarily affected the AKP government's other domestic issues, either directly or indirectly. On the other hand, Turkey's *rapprochement* with Russia appears to have broad and deep popular support for commercial as well as security reasons, and this may enable Turkey to work more effectively, with Russia, is loosening the knot of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Pertinent to such a role for Turkey, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu offered the following:

7 For related commentary, see: Ziya Öniş, "Multiple Faces of the "New" Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique," **Insight Turkey**. Vol. 13, No.1, Ankara (2011), pp. 47 – 65.

Turkey's unique demographic realities also affect its foreign-policy vision. There are more Bosnians in Turkey than in Bosnia-Herzegovina, more Albanians than in Kosovo, more Chechens than in Chechnya, more Abkhazians than in the Abkhaz region in Georgia, and a significant number of Azeris and Georgians, in addition to considerable other ethnicities from neighboring regions. *Thus, these conflicts and the effect they have on their populations have a direct impact on domestic politics in Turkey.*

Because of this fact, *Turkey experiences regional tensions at home and faces public demands to pursue an active foreign-policy to secure the peace and security of those communities. In this sense, Turkish foreign policy is also shaped by its own democracy, reflecting the priorities and concerns of its citizens.* As a result of globalization, the Turkish public follows international developments closely. Turkey's democratization requires it to integrate societal demands into its foreign policy, just as all mature democracies do. (emphases added)⁸

A recent survey from Ankara University's European Research Center stated that Turkey's relations with Armenia are the third important subject in foreign relations in public opinion.⁹ According to this survey, Armenia ranked as "hostile to Turkey" by 10.9 percent, after the USA. Turkish public opinion demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of global affairs. According to the same survey, Turkey should approve the protocols with Armenia, but only with numerous conditions stipulated by the parliament.

Question: "*Should the Turkish Grand Assembly approve the Armenian Protocols?*"¹⁰

8 Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy", **Foreign Policy**, (20 May 2010), p.1

9 Ankara University European Research Center, **Kamuoyu ve Türk Dış Politikası Anketi**, Ankara, 2010, p. 35.

10 a.g.e., p.67

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	Frequency	Percent	Percent in total
Yes, if Armenia would withdraw from Azeri territories	361	35,0	35,0
Yes, if Armenia would give up from genocide claims	295	28,6	63,6
No, never should approve	284	27,5	91,1
Yes, should approve without any conditions	63	6,1	97,2
No Answer	29	2,8	100,0
Total	1032	100,0	

Turkish Foreign Policy makers were of course well aware of public opinion regarding the Armenian protocols, but traditional relations with Baku were also very high on Ankara's agenda. Because of this priority, protocols leading to formal, normalized relations with Armenia were out of the question unless Armenia first withdrew from territories claimed by Azerbaijan. The present government in Nagorno-Karabakh, fully backed by Armenia, has not only flatly and indignantly refused to do so, but has vowed to never do so. In this sense perhaps, the Armenian Constitutional Court decisions and Sarkasyan's decision to freeze the protocols in late April 2010 relieved the Turkish AK Party administration from an otherwise almost-certain nationalist reaction domestically. This also spared Ankara an angry reaction from Baku. Also, and rather predictably, the AKP administration's prerequisite of resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue for approving the Armenia-recognition protocols provoked sharp reaction from both Washington and Armenia. Armenian Minister of Foreign Relations Edvard Nalbandyan stated that Armenia did not see any reason to negotiate the Nagorno-Karabakh issue with Ankara. He even added that the issue has "no relevance" to the protocols.¹¹ Moreover, according to columnist Mehmet Ali Birand, Washington also sees Ankara as the deal

¹¹ "Türkiye ile Dağlık Karabağ'ı görüşmeyiz", **ntvmsnbc**, (14 April 2010), accessed on 20 December 2012 at <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25082008/>

broker (*oyunbozan*) because of Ankara's conditions.¹² It is noteworthy that the EU, as well as Washington DC, strongly urged the Turkish parliament to ratify the protocols, in order to proceed with Turkey's EU accession process.¹³ It should also be noted that Ankara's decision depended heavily on the domestic reaction to the protocols -- Azerbaijan is consistently perceived as the most important friend of Turkey.¹⁴

Significantly, Baku's attitude in the overall tangle of foreign relations among these four countries is influencing both Turkish public opinion and the official regime in Ankara. While Azerbaijan criticized the protocols and threatened Ankara regarding the energy issue, Baku was strangely silent concerning Turkey's efforts at defending itself in the international arena against the Armenian genocide claims. The Turkish intelligentsia and, in a gradual way, Turkish public opinion, showed evidence of changing their position on Azerbaijan, perceiving (accurately or otherwise) that Baku was not seeking Turkey's best interests.¹⁵ From Baku's perspective, Turkey has, if anything, not given sufficient attention to the N-K issue.

Another dynamic affecting Turkish decision-makers' calculations regarding a comprehensive approach to Nagorno-Karabakh is their legitimate concern about a likely nationalist reaction from some elements within Turkish society. This is particularly so in light of the local elections scheduled for later 2013. With Ankara already entangled with the Kurdish question and Syrian problem,

12 Mehmet Ali Birand, "Kimse ipleri koparmayı göze alamadı, top Obama'da kaldı," **Milliyet**, (14 April 2010), accessed on <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/kimse-ipleri-koparmayi-goze-alamadi-top-obama-da-kaldi/mehmet-ali-birand/guncel/yazardetay/14.04.2010/1224632/default.htm>

13 European Commission, **2010 Turkey Progress Report**, 9 November 2010, p. 95.

14 Ankara University European Research Center, **Kamuoyu ve Türk Dış Politikası Anketi**, Ankara, 2010, p. 47.

15 See Mehmet Ali Birand, "Türkiye çırpınıyor, Azeriler ise hiç orali değiller," **Milliyet**, (15 April 2010), accessed at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiye-cirpiniyor-azeriler-ise-hic-orali-degiller/mehmet-ali-birand/guncel/yazardetay/15.04.2010/1225105/default.htm>

pressing for resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh would be politically imprudent by igniting a nationalist reaction at home. Doing so at this time would also complicate the prospect of coming to some sort of agreement with Russia on resolution of the Syrian conflict, although we believe that in the longer run Turkish-Russian cooperation on Nagorno-Karabakh is indispensable to finding a resolution.

2. b. Civil Society within Russia on Foreign Relations, and regarding Nagorno-Karabakh

In several important respects Russia presents an interesting juxtaposition of opinion regarding the character of its civil society in general, the manner in which has changed since the end of the USSR, and how that civil society affects Russian foreign policy. The latter point is particularly important because the domestic *perceptions* and *expectations* placed upon the national leadership place it thereby in a powerful or weak position to act internationally, and especially in the exceptionally charged nature of conflict-resolution in areas close to Russia itself.

The general view prevailing in the Western world is that civil society in Russia has perhaps grown to some degree during and since the *perestroika* period, but that during the years of the Putin presidency until today, a general truncation of civil rights and liberties has prevailed, and along with it a general constriction of political rights as well (table, above, from *Freedom House*). Despite the undesirable trend in Russia regarding state-society relations (stronger state, generally weaker civil society), the fact is that such a Russian state is in a more favorable position to maneuver regarding regional issues than either Turkey, the USA, or Europe, and for several reasons; these include:

1. a preponderance of local / regional military power;
2. no sufficiently efficacious domestic constraints (such as diaspora lobbies, commercial groups, etc.);
3. no international obligations that would hobble it from such involvement;

4. intensive, direct, and sustained historical, logistical, military, and diplomatic intelligence experience in the region
5. forcible reassertion of Russian power and influence in the region since the onset of the Putin era, perhaps most clearly exemplified by the Russo-Georgian war of 2008.

Given the increasingly close relations between Turkey and Russia, how has their bi-lateral relation affected each country's relation with Azerbaijan, and with Armenia? *Significantly, Russia does not have – or at least is not willing to publicly disclose – an “official” position on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, but like the USA, appears to have preferred for the general status quo to be allowed to exist, generally favoring to uphold Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, with a permanent resolution to be found by the Minsk Group of the OSCE.* In a statement on May 24, 2010, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson indicated as much.¹⁶ When visiting Istanbul on 7 June 2010, then-Prime Minister Putin reiterated the general point, offering that the final responsibility for resolving the N-K problem rests with Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹⁷ While we agree, the domestic realities of Armenia and Azerbaijan effectively deadlock the matter, making an adventitious solution essential.

Further, notwithstanding Russia's closeness to Armenia – certainly including its collective-security commitment within the framework of the CSTO – Russia's pronouncements on Nagorno-Karabakh are invariably characterized by broad flexibility regarding proposed solutions, even being willing to include Iran in the mediation process, which the USA and the West in

16 “Moscow Reiterates Stand on Nagorno-Karabakh,” **The Voice of Russia**, (May 24, 2010); cited from <http://english.ruvr.ru/2010/05/24/8358889.html> on June 7, 2010.

17 “Russia can help settle Nagorno-Karabakh conflict but not to replace any party to it” – Putin”, **The Voice of Russia**,(June 8, 2010), cited from <http://english.ruvr.ru/2010/06/08/9323057.html> on June 7, 2010.

general would certainly not prefer.¹⁸ Overall, Russia's relations with Azerbaijan have been generally good, although seriously strained by Moscow's claims of Azerbaijan's unofficial support (or at least the appearance of acquiescence) of Chechen separatists.¹⁹ The triangle of Russia-Armenia-Azerbaijan saw Russia generally favoring Armenia, which was accentuated by the energy-dependence of Armenia on Russia, which was not the case with Azerbaijan.

As we shall see below, this concessionary disposition of Armenia was prudent, and domestically palatable, precisely because of the changed regional political landscape since the formal 'cease-fire' of 1994. This is significant because it (a) opens the door for both deeper security for Armenia, and (b) creates precedent for concessions elsewhere, namely flexibility on Nagorno-Karabakh, in exchange for the greater good of regional peace, and genuine national security. Likewise, Turkey's increasingly powerful civil society might arguably have a similar concession-inducing effect on Azerbaijan. But this can only happen if the major powers in the region – namely Turkey and Russia – continue to deepen their cooperative rapprochement. For this to be comprehensible, however, we need examine the dynamics of civil society, and the sense of political identity, in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

2. c. The N-K Issue and Civil Society within Armenia

What is the character of public opinion within Armenia, and what is the general disposition of the various political parties and groups, toward Nagorno-Karabakh? In 1998, the government of Lev Ter-Petrosian was brought down amid a number of issues, the core one of which was the political opposition's objection to his mode of resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh. The internal political divisions are not merely over specific policies (including N-K), but

18 "From Iran Media: Russia Lauds Iran Mediation in Karabakh", **ArmeniaNow.com** (March 5, 2010), accessed May 14, 2010 at: http://armenianow.com/karabakh/22858/iran_mediation_armenia_azerbaijan_karabakh_talks.

19 Fatma Asli Kelkitli, "Russian Foreign Policy in South Caucasus in Putin," **Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs**, vol. 13 (Winter 2008), pp. 78-80.

reflect deeply divergent conceptions of Armenia's identity itself, to which we return below.

In April 2010 Ter-Petrosian, as leader of the ANC (*Armenian National Congress*) opposition party again indicated willingness to cede 5 of the 7 occupied districts of Azerbaijan.²⁰ This was not universally supported with Armenia, nor N-K itself.

Thus while a reasonably vibrant vocal political opposition exists in Armenia despite the low scores it receives from Freedom House on "political rights," such opposition does not necessarily translate into an effective force for resolving the N-K problem, and in fact may ironically complicate it, given the fractured nature of political identity in Armenia, and the political usefulness of charging one's political opponents with weakness, foolishness, or even national disloyalty by being willing to negotiate territorial claims. Thus although some degree of civil society exists in Armenia (and perhaps even to a significant degree, depending on whom one asks), the notion of Nagorno-Karabakh being a politically negotiable item is not widely entertained.

Even though a degree of civil society has emerged in Armenia, the form in which it has taken and particularly the political opposition it has engendered appears incapable of wielding the sort of lever necessary to overcome the domestic political dynamic over Nagorno-Karabakh. The authoritarian tendencies beginning with the term of Ter-Petrosyan and still operating today effectively nullify such leverage. Notably, after current president Serzh Sargsyan was elected in 2008, his government introduced a state of emergency for twenty days during which the police violently suppressed protests led by Ter-Petrosyan. The harsh suppression caused 10 deaths and over 200 injuries,

20 Naira Hayrumyan, "Vision for Karabakh: Former and current leaders share their views on conflict settlement" **ArmeniaNow.com**, (7 April 2010), accessed May 14, 2010 at: http://armenianow.com/karabakh/22107/leaders_on_karabakh_settlement_vision.

indicating a compromised degree of political maneuver within the nascent civil society.²¹

2. d. Civil Society within Azerbaijan

There is scant evidence of a vibrant civil society having emerged since the collapse of the USSR. Although there is a political opposition in Azerbaijan, its power is limited to playing a role typical of post-Cold War authoritarian regimes wherein a nominal political opposition is tolerated and even encouraged by the regime, but whose capacity to challenge the ruling party with removal from office by free, fair, and genuinely competitive elections is effectively non-existent. Further, in Azerbaijan the salient political and social division does not show much evidence of dispute over national identity, and even less, perhaps, concerning territorial identity. Rather, in Azerbaijan the salient political question concerns *the nature of the relationship between the state and society*. The trajectory of political and civil rights in Azerbaijan, since the independence from the USSR, has not been positive, according to *Freedom House* and nearly all other Western observers, including the OSCE. Political divisions are hardly absent within Azeri society, but they pertain but little to Nagorno-Karabakh, and this makes the domestic-international dynamic different from that in Armenia, or even Russia.

Given that the nature of the state-society relation significantly differs in each of these four countries, it is curious that the natural “allies” among them tend to be differentiated among themselves; by this we mean that the Turkey-Azerbaijan coalescence has one of the partners (Turkey) with a civil society of growing strength in the past two decades, while Azerbaijan has, if anything, gone in the opposite direction. Similarly with Russia and Armenia, the former shows much evidence of having eroded the effectual strength of civil society, particularly in the past decade, while in Armenia the record is decidedly more mixed. Yet in this curious configuration a potential solution may be situated.

21 P. Kosto and H. Blakkisrud, “De facto states and democracy: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh”, **Communist and Post-Communist Studies** vol. 45 (2012), p.148.

The question becomes how the state-society relation has worked itself out differentially, in each of the four countries, in a manner that has either created better conditions for resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh? To begin answering this question, we note that the N-K issue is used by political elites, especially in Azerbaijan but also Armenia, for purposes of (attempted) regime legitimation, and this not only complicates the prospect of resolution, but directly re-frames the type of role that Turkey and Russia might play in working toward a resolution. In Laurence Boers interpretation, various “myths” have emerged regarding N-K, one of which deals directly with the relationship between state and society; his comments bear citing at length:

The elite-society relationship is one of the most dysfunctional relationships in the political arena in the South Caucasus, as regular violent incidents of large-scale protest and crackdown in recent years witness. Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents have not enjoyed solid mandates or broad bases of legitimacy that would give them room for maneuver on Karabakh. *They have consequently steadfastly refused to engage their societies in an open, honest debate over different options in the peace process.* This is entirely logical. In the 1990s the Karabakh conflict repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to determine elite turnover, and today’s elites correctly assess the unresolved conflict as a major threat, probably the greatest, to their power. *Elites in Armenia and especially Azerbaijan as the losing side have therefore done everything they can to channel and control the issue: the ‘Karabakh factor’ has arguably been used to boost legitimacy otherwise lacking among presidents from Karabakh in Armenia, while in Azerbaijan the continual invocation of external threat has been successfully deployed against internal opposition. The elite-society nexus is therefore a key structural jam in the process.* ²² (emphasis added)

22 Laurence Boers, “10 Myths about the Karabakh conflict and peace process”, pp. 7-8. Also, cf. Laurence Broers, “Introduction”, in **The limits of leadership: Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process** (London: Conciliation Resources, 2005).

We completely agree, and argue below that the political reality described by Boers, above, only underscores the need for the enhanced role of the two major regional actors, namely Turkey and Russia, neither of which alone could play such a role, although for different reasons (i.e., Turkey widely perceived as biased toward Azerbaijan and Russia as neo-imperialistically biased). But Boers' characterization of the problem also reflects deeper issues about the nature of the political identity of the actors themselves; once that is examined, it will become even clearer how Russia and Turkey, in tandem, may well be able to create the political climate necessary to begin unravelling the N-K knot.

3. The domestic politics of identity regarding Nagorno-Karabakh: 4 countries, 2 decades

It is perhaps best to begin this matter with discussion of political identity within Armenia, about which Gahramanova offers:

Armenians suffered many defeats during their national history and, inclined towards glorification of their history, developed the chaste image of the victim. Because Armenian political mythology is based on the permanent defense of its ethnicity against the external world, all paradigms evolved around new cultural centers of the Armenian people – Yerevan in the 1940s and Nagorno-Karabakh at the end of the 1980s. The nation is the major reference point for Armenians. Public opinion is much more politicized and conceptualized than in neighboring countries due to the fact that geopolitics play a prominent role in the Armenian vision. . . . After one and a half centuries, Armenians had formed a firm identification with the Russian Empire, which was perceived as having common interests with Armenians (“the external world is as hostile to Russians as it is to Armenians”), and as a favorable context for self-realization.”²³

23 Aytan Gahramanova, “Paradigms of Political Mythologies and Perspectives of Reconciliation in the Case of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”, **International Negotiation** 15 (2010), p. 137.

Further Dr. Arus Harutyunyan explains the ramifications of the various *types* of national identity (i.e., liberal-nationalist v. ethno-nationalist, v. ‘mixed’-type) operating within Armenia:

My findings also suggest that if the type of shared national identity is ethno-nationalist, governments with a democratic deficiency will be criticized less and will receive higher rates of evaluation and satisfaction with the state of democracy. This is a very important finding since it demonstrates that even though in 2006 Armenian political elites enjoyed the public’s trust and received higher rates of satisfaction with democracy because of a shared predominantly ethno-nationalist identity type, this was trust and approval for a government which was nevertheless marked by anti-democratic tendencies²⁴

Thus, the regime in Armenia became less democratic but this did not undermine popular support for it, at least in part (and perhaps in large part) because of its stance on the critical issue of the nation’s identity – including of course an unyielding posture regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. It should not be surprising that the question of Armenia’s political and territorial boundaries engender intense political dispute not only within Armenia, but also within the Armenian diaspora, although probably to a lesser extent. As also noted by Dr. Harutyunyan:

many high-ranking officials in Armenia, Karabagh, and Armenia’s opposition parties accused the president of betraying national ideals and posing a danger to national security. Irreconcilable disagreements escalated into Ter-Petrosyan’s resignation on February 3, 1998. This was accompanied by the Republic Bloc’s disintegration in the parliament and the loss of ANM’s political power. In the following sections, I illustrate that *within Armenian politics disagreements*

24 Arus Harutyunyan, “Imagining National Identity through Territorial Politics: War in Nagorny Karabagh, Elites, and Citizens,” paper presented at the **15th Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities Annual Meeting** (NY: Columbia University, April 15-17, 2010), p. 27.

around package and step-by-step approaches were not simply about methodological details for achieving peace settlement in Karabagh. Disagreement also revealed contesting ways of imagining political boundaries of the Armenian state. Therefore, the Karabagh crisis exposed fundamental national identity cleavages existing among Armenian political elites and the extent to which territorial politics nourished the needs of the Armenian identity as imagined by liberal nationalists and ethno-nationalists.²⁵ (emphasis added)

A ‘victim mentality’ has thus become deeply embedded on both sides, among Armenians and Azeris, and not without good reason given the tortured history of the region.²⁶ This not only makes for highly charged political rhetoric on both sides, but also provides highly useful political material for those in public authority, or those aspiring to it. In this we concur with Boers, above, who described the “elite-society nexus” as the “main structural jam” in the N-K knot. It also creates a situation, within both Azerbaijan and especially Armenia, wherein concessionary proposals offered for settling N-K are fraught with political danger for public officials. It is for this reason, perhaps most fundamentally, that a solution is most likely to emerge from outside the two countries, and to come through the two major actors in the region best suited to compel Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a workable solution – namely, Russia and Turkey. Yet even here, serious (but not insurmountable) obstacles present themselves.

Within Turkey, the AK Party simply cannot manoeuvre on Nagorno-Karabakh without very close attention to public opinion, and to an increasingly powerful Turkish civil society. Yet it is that very civil society that has become increasingly convinced that the status quo in the region – including a perpetually closed border with Armenia and a tension-charged

25 **Ibid.**

26 For a recent examination of this matter, albeit one more sympathetic to Azeri interpretation than to an Armenian one, see Scott Taylor, **Unreconciled Differences: Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan**, Ottawa, Canada, 2010.

Armenian-Azerbaijani boundary – is not in their short, medium, or long-term interests. The Russian state, on the other hand, experiences few if any such domestic constraints due to its weak civil society brought increasingly under the ‘power vertical’ of president Putin. Arguably, however, this places the Russian state – in conjunction with a Turkish state powerfully animated by an increasingly commercially-concerned civil society -- in a particularly powerful and potentially effective position to broker resolutions to regional conflicts. Precisely in this respect the Turkish-Russian rapprochement may be critical, and a brief look at the recent evolution in their respective identities will help show why.

Russia and Turkey: Political Identity

Turkish foreign policy recently entered a new phase where interrelation between communities in Turkish society and Turkey’s relations with its neighbors have become more tightly intertwined, as noted above by Foreign Minister Davutoglu. This phenomenon has certainly extended itself into Turkey’s disposition toward the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Turkish society generally ranks its relations with the neighboring countries according to identity politics. According to a recent survey from Ankara University, Turkish population ranked “Turkey’s friends” as Azerbaijan, the Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.²⁷ Therefore, regarding the N-K issue identity politics in Turkey are expected to work in two ways: (1) the Turkish population’s friendly feelings towards Azerbaijan, and (2) their historically negative feelings towards Armenia, which have only sharpened in the face of relentless claims of genocide both from within Armenia itself and particularly from the Armenian diaspora. Nevertheless, in recent Turkish foreign policy regarding N-K, *realpolitik* has arguably weighed over identity politics precisely because of the deepening Turkish-Russian relation. With Russian President Medvedev’s May 2010 visit to Turkey, the concept of *strategic partnership* was articulated between Russia and Turkey with both

27 Ankara University European Research Center, **Kamuoyu ve Türk Dış Politikası Anketi**, Ankara, 2010, p. 47.

sides agreeing, among other things, to lift visa requirements. Nevertheless, the partially shared vision between Russia and Turkey concerning harmony for the Caucasus region broke down, for the time being at least, after Russia extended its military pact with Armenia in 2010. Soon after, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed a strategic cooperation agreement which obliges both countries to aid each other militarily when a third party attacks either of the two countries (ratified in 10 March 2011). This collective defense pact, along with a handful of other military agreements between Turkey and Azerbaijan, displays Turkey's leverage on Azerbaijan and shows how Turkish and Russian goals differ regarding the conflict. Furthermore, due to the Arab Spring-inspired civil war in Syria, Turkey and Russia seem to have lost further trust in each others' regional security strategies. The recent agreement for the establishment of NATO patriot missile systems on Turkish soil, and Turkish support for Syrian opposition groups to overthrow the Assad regime further sour the prospects of a shared Turkish-Russian strategy for settling the conflicts plaguing the South Caucasus. Russian President Putin's visit to Istanbul to confer with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan on 10 December 2012 gave hope for closer cooperation on Syria, but thus far none has materialized despite their signing of 11 bi-lateral agreements on other issues. However, it is our belief that Turkey would not likely completely risk her relations with Russia by demonstrating an unconditional support for Azerbaijan regarding Nagorno-Karabakh.

The recent turmoil in Syria also demonstrates that although Turkey and Russia do not necessarily share a common vision for the solution of each particular regional problem, they need to cooperate and compromise to solve general regional security issues in order to avoid suffering political and economic fallout from further regional instability.²⁸ As noted by Iseri and Dilek in early 2011, Turkey even retreated from its previously unequivocally pro-Azeri orientation:

28 "Putin's visit to Turkey to keep bilateral relations strong", **Today's Zaman**, (9 December 2012), at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-300580-putins-visit-to-turkey-to-keep-bilateral-relations-strong.html> (accessed on 28 December 2012).

[f]ully confident that there will be no repercussions, Ankara is prepared to step back from its former pro-Azerbaijani stance into a quieter state of neutrality. Be that as it may, Baku has already demonstrated its grievance with Ankara's new foreign policy shift by labeling it a wedge driven between the two Turkish states. In retaliation, and to the shock of many in Ankara, Baku recently decided to accept Moscow's purchase offer for its 500 million cm gas per annum to be sold to Dagestan; reserves which Turkey had counted on in justifying the existence of the Nabucco pipeline project.²⁹

For its part, Russian cooperation with Turkey over N-K would only further reflect a concrete manifestation of the ideals and principles laid out in the 2000 and 2008 *Russian Foreign Policy Concept* documents, each of which placed a primacy on active Russian engagement in regional conflict prevention and resolution; indeed, this is arguably a matter of core national identity for Russia.

The June 2000 *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* of President Putin called for Russia to take an increasingly assertive role in regional and indeed global affairs. This included regional conflict resolution, and that was re-emphasized in the 2008 version of the *Foreign Policy Concept*. The post-Soviet marginalization of Russia was over: Russia was now ready and willing to assume a much larger regional if not global role based on the macro-economic vibrancy already much in evidence. The Russian population appears to have strongly supported President Putin in this, considering it an integral component of Russia's national identity just as it had so frequently done in the nation's long history. Further, the brief but very revealing Russo-Georgian War of 2008 is perhaps the most concrete manifestation of Russia's determination to project its power regionally.

29 E. Isleri and O. Dilek, "The Limitations of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Activism in the Caucasian Regional Security Complexity," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (March 2011), 49.

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Within Azerbaijan, on the matter of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the more fundamental matter of the identity of the nation itself (territorially and otherwise), the political opposition shows little divergence from the ruling party's views.³⁰ The N-K issue is closely tied with Azeri national-political identity, but in a different manner than with national identity in Turkey, for whom N-K is significant but not central. Moreover, if the average Turkish person were asked whether Gaza or N-K is more important for Turks, most would almost certainly answer by choosing Gaza. Nevertheless, Turkish identity is closely tied with all Turkic-speaking groups (especially Azeris), thus revealing a complex picture regarding identity. For its part, the Azeri political community's sense of identity is also sensitive regarding their "kin" connection to Turkey as a big brother-type figure. *Thus this complex loyalty of identities between Turkey and Azerbaijan places Turkey in a unique position to help loosen the knot that is Nagorno-Karabakh.*³¹

Precisely because the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh is so predominant within Azerbaijan, and because of a very broad social consensus on Azerbaijan's proper territorial boundaries, a political opposition based upon challenging the regime's disposition to N-K would be doubly suicidal, politically: first, it would run afoul of a regime not noted for tolerating significant political opposition, and secondly, it would run sharply against the grain of public opinion. Thus further democratization of Azerbaijan (from a Western perspective at least), including an increasingly powerful civil society, would not necessarily in and of itself create more hospitable political conditions for the resolution of N-K. Azerbaijani political identity itself arguably augments and compounds this sense of territorial unity as a higher value than democratic governance (as per Western norms, at least). Dr. Gahramanova's comments help reveal why this is so:

30 "Müxalifət liderlərinin yeni formatda görüşü baş tutdu", **Milli. Az** (19 May 2010) at <http://www.milli.az/news/politics/11636.html> (accessed on 27 December 2012).

31 "Azerbaijan, Turkey Reaffirm Solidarity", **Today's Zaman**, (26 December 2009) at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-196668-azerbaijan-turkey-reaffirm-solidarity.html>. (accessed June 23, 2010).

Azerbaijani nation-building occurred through a process of conflict. In the mid-XIXth. century, confrontation between Azerbaijanis (Muslims at that time) and Armenians, fueled by the Russian Tsar's massive settlement of Christian Armenians in territories inhabited by Muslims, contributed considerably to the consolidation of Azerbaijani "we-they" identity.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict accelerated the process of national consolidation in Azerbaijan in the 1980s, prompted by resistance to the Armenian national idea of collecting territories with Armenian populations (Hai-Dat – restoration of Great Armenia's borders of the first century AD). Widespread interest in Azerbaijan's own ancient history was stimulated to a certain extent by the need to challenge Armenians' appeal to the antiquity of their nation to justify territorial claims."³²

Thus within Azerbaijan – at both the official governmental level and within the broad social consensus – Nagorno-Karabakh is perceived as being strictly and irremovably tied to national identity. Since Azeri identity was built up against the image of a hostile 'other,' both symbolized and reified in Armenians, it has borne a certain character curiously similar to one common in Armenia, i.e., a nation in perpetual danger of threat, even to the point of annihilation, from hostile adventitious forces. *While this commonality is vexing, it may paradoxically present an opportunity for mutual understanding and thus movement toward resolution, given appropriate external leverage.* Since Turkey and Russia are potentially pivotal in this process, it will be useful to consider these countries' relations with Azerbaijan regarding questions of identity, historical disposition, and state-society relations.

As noted above, at both the popular and governmental levels Azerbaijan is considered not only a friendly country but a "kin" country to Turkey.

32 Aytan Gahramanova, "Paradigms of Political Mythologies and Perspectives of Reconciliation in the Case of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict", **International Negotiation** 15 (2010) p. 138

Significantly, the historical and psychological roots of this disposition are deep:

From the beginning of the XIXth century, Muslims in the Caucasus considered Turkey as their patron and the rescuer against Christian oppression. Turkey, with its solid imperial background, revival from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, national consolidation, and achievements in building significant economic and military power, had developed strong authority and respect in the eyes of Azerbaijanis. For many, Turkey embodies what Azerbaijan wishes to achieve one day, although Azerbaijanis do not demonstrate much loyalty to Turks in everyday life.³³

Russia, for its part, has been tied with Azerbaijan since the latter XVIIIth century, and of course it was Stalin who in the 1920s demarcated the ethno-territorial boundaries within the USSR that have framed the dispute over N-K. Further, Russian language is widely spoken or at least understood in Azerbaijan, especially in the larger cities, and commercial and energy-resource ties ensure that Azeri identity, practically speaking, must function within an orbit of strong Russian influence.

These aspects of political identity among the four countries raise intriguing and potentially key clues, however, to the underlying political forces at work in the region – both domestically and in the manner in which they work themselves out in international relations. Much of the matter revolves around the question of the *nature of the leadership* of a given country, how it relates to its respective population, and how it presents the nation in international affairs. Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, Lawrence Boers offers the following:

It is, to be sure, no easy task to persuade elites in the region to admit challenges to the basis of their own power, and surely they will only allow this when they themselves are convinced that a peace process is inevitable and the risks of *not* taking controversial steps to enable the peace process are greater than the risks of doing so. In 2010, it

33 **Ibid**, pp. 141-142

seems that *managing the diverging expectations predominating among a number of key audiences will be a key task. International expectations of a breakthrough seem more than ever out of sync with expectations among domestic audiences that maximalist positions can be maintained.* If these divergent expectations continue on their current vectors, we risk the shattering of the current paradigm for the Karabakh peace process, with unpredictable consequences for the Minsk Group and for Armenian and Azerbaijani elites. *What is needed is substantive transformation in the nature of the discursive frameworks used to define a solution, enhancement of elites' brokerage powers with their own societies and, to extrapolate, the creation of a 'bottom-up' legitimization formula for a peace agreement.*³⁴ (emphasis added).

It is worth noting that Armenian President Sargsyan began his political career in Nagorno-Karabakh, (as have numerous other Armenian political and military elites), thus N-K plays a crucial role in his political thinking, and the priorities of his leadership as well. While we concur with Boers on this point, and indeed consider it fundamental, it raises the question of how and why the hitherto processes of resolution, largely by the Minsk Group, have stalled; it also raises more important question of how to best proceed from here, given the dramatically altered political landscape *within*, as well as *among*, the four countries during the past two decades. To these questions we now turn.

4. Commentary on the Minsk Group

The Minsk Group was established in 1992 by the then-CSCE (and now OSCE), and is co-chaired by representatives of Russia, the USA, and France, but with “permanent members” also from Belarus, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, and Turkey, and of course Armenia and Azerbaijan. Its formally

34 Laurence Broers (Conciliation Resources), “Managing great expectations: the Karabakh peace process in 2010,” **the European Policy Centre** in “Eastern Promises” Roundtable, ‘Security and Stability in the South Caucasus. The Turkey-Armenia-Azerbaijan Triangle’, Brussels, 22 February 2010.

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stated tasks are twofold: (a) “[p]roviding an appropriate framework for conflict resolution in the way of assuring the negotiation process supported by the Minsk Group;” and (b) [o]btaining conclusion by the Parties of an agreement on the cessation of the armed conflict in order to permit the convening of the Minsk Conference; Promoting the peace process by deploying OSCE multinational peacekeeping forces.”³⁵ During a speech in Istanbul in 2010, President Aliyev expressed support for, and faith in, the Madrid Principles (described below), while blaming Armenia for obstruction. In doing so, he also expressed deepening scepticism about the Minsk Group process:

If Armenia continues to temporize or officially reject these principles altogether, then Azerbaijan must seriously ponder over the prospects of its participation in the process. We are thinking about this and considering different options and will try to restore our territorial integrity in any way possible. I personally, do not doubt that the country’s territorial integrity will be restored... But if Armenia continues to pursue its policy of occupation and simulate negotiations, Azerbaijan will seriously change its position.³⁶

He did not specify the content of the “changed position”, of course, but neither did he rule out military action. This would of course present an extraordinary hazard for escalation, precisely because of Armenia’s membership in the Russian-dominated CSTO, and Turkey’s NATO membership. Yet

NATO has hitherto played no serious role in the possible resolution of this conflict. But precisely because of Turkey’s membership in NATO, and Azerbaijan’s increased activities with it, perhaps NATO should take more steps

35 “Minsk Process: Basic Documents”, from <http://www.osce.org/item/21979.html>, (accessed June 21, 2010).

36 “Ilham Aliyev: if Armenia continues to pursue its policy of occupation, Azerbaijan will seriously change its position”, **Today.Az**, (10 June 2010), accessed 14 June 2010 at <http://www.today.az/news/politics/69459.html>.

as a stakeholder to the situation. NATO has hitherto only rhetorically supported the Minks Group process³⁷

Resolving the frozen conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh was one of the top stated priorities of the OSCE meeting in Astana in early December 2010. Nevertheless, it once again became clear that the Minsk Group in OSCE was not capable of, or not effectively using its capabilities, to resolve the conflict. This was true even despite the threat of a new war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as noted earlier in this essay. During the summer of 2010 Azerbaijan and Armenia each signed new military agreements – but hardly with each other: Azerbaijan’s is with Turkey (signed August 16) and Armenia’s is with Russia (signed August 20).³⁸ The configuration of actors in the region unfortunately points toward continuing preparation for a new conflict; indicators include the military agreement between Armenia and Russia in August 2010, as well as a similar agreement between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

While then-Russian president Medvedev made clear that the responsibility for arriving at a workable resolution rests with the disputants – as it ultimately must, of course -- the experience of the past 15 plus years gives little grounds for hope that in and of themselves, the disputants will be able to do so: the main reason for this is to be found in the calculus of domestic politics, which are further compounded by international buttressing factors. The present political and economic landscape of the region resembles 1994 --the year of the formal ‘cease-fire’ -- but little. But as the western Eurasian political landscape has shifted largely in favour of Russia and Turkey in the 2000s, new opportunities present themselves as well as increased dangers in case of failure to find a

37 Robert Simmons: “NATO sees main solution to Nagorno Karabakh conflict within the OSCE framework”, **APA**, <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=120939>; see also “NATO supports peaceful solution to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict “, **News. Az**, (09 April 2010) accessed on 23 Decemeber 2012 at <http://www.news.az/articles/12942>.

38 James Warhola and Egemen Bezci, “The Wolf, the Bear, and the Eagle: Peace in the Valley?”, **E-IR**, (10 March 2011); accessible at: <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/03/10/the-wolf-the-bear-and-the-eagle-peace-in-the-valley/>.

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workable resolution. Significantly, Foreign Minister Davutoglu mentioned the role of Russia as *critical* in the resolution process.³⁹ Yet a heightened role for Russia will serve as both cause and effect of regional power alignments. As recently noted by Ildar Majidli,

. . . [as] the actions of Russian President Medvedev have shown, the role of individual countries may expand at the expense of the Minsk Group. That may complicate matters, especially since the Minsk Group was drawn from the membership of the only international organization in which all the countries of the South Caucasus region or abutting it are included except Iran. Clearly, Iran like Turkey is going to want to have a larger role than it has had in the past, and that too will put pressure on all the parties for a new venue. ”⁴⁰

As of early 2010, the Minsk Group had arguably reached a point of stalled usefulness; at the very least, it had failed to provide a comprehensive, lasting resolution, even though the valiant ongoing efforts of the Group doubtless helped keep the situation from seriously escalating into major conflict. Given the very different political landscape within and among the four countries considered in this essay, about the only constant is the demonstrated inability of the hitherto existing framework to produce a solution that is anywhere near satisfactory to any of the parties, let alone all of them. In any case, the region appeared no closer to accepting “OSCE multinational peacekeeping forces” than at any time since the formal cease-fire in May of 1994. As of this writing, the most general consensus to have emerged concerns the *Madrid Principles*, put forth in 2007, and even these are hardly accepted with enthusiasm by Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Madrid Principles include, “inter alia,”¹

39 Abdullah Bozkurt, “Davutoğlu in Baku for talks on Armenia ties”, **Today’s Zaman**, (20 April 2010), accessed on 23 June 2010 at <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-207919-davutoglu-in-baku-for-talks-on-armenia-ties.html>. For comments by Prime Minister Erdogan, see “Azerbaijan, Turkey reaffirm solidarity”, **Today’s Zaman**, (26 December 2009)

40 Ildar Majidli, “Nagorno-Karabakh Problem After Astana Summit”, **Eurasia Critic**, (January 2011).

returning the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; 2) an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; 3) a corridor linking Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh; 4) a future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding public expression of will through a referendum; 4) the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and 5) international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.⁴¹ Despite apparently broad international agreement on the usefulness of these principles (in theory, at least), a June 2012 joint statement by the Minsk Group co-chairs partially admitted to their ineffectiveness, stating that: “We regret that the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia did not take decisive steps that our countries called for”⁴² It is unfortunately clear by its own admission that the OSCE Minsk Group has not provided an agreeable solution for the main parties to the conflict.

Turkey is a permanent member of the Minsk Group but still does not have full diplomatic nor economic relations with Armenia; this effectively prevents Turkey from playing an unbiased role, which situation is only reinforced by its kin-type ties with Azerbaijan. This situation weakens the position of the Minsk group. The activeness of the Minsk group heavily depends on Turkey’s approach to the conflict. Turkey is not independent from her own conflicts with Armenia, and Turkish domestic public reaction therefore makes its role in possible conflict-resolution more complex. Further, the Russo-Georgia War in 2008 became inspirational for Azerbaijan in demonstrating that a diplomatic approach is not the only solution, and perhaps military intervention is necessary and desirable. In this respect, however, the roles of

41 Haroutiun Khachatryan, “Armenian-Azerbaijani Disagreement on Madrid Principles Stalls Karabakh Settlement Process”, **Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst**, (14 October 2009).

42 White House, “Joint Statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”, **Office of the Press Secretary**, (18 June 2012), accessed on 21 December 2012 at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/18/joint-statement-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

Turkey and Russia – given their effective, recent *rapprochement* with each other – are particularly well suited to influence both the political leadership *and* the mass publics of Azerbaijan and Armenia to open negotiations with a new willingness to consider hitherto unacceptable solutions. We have in mind specifically land-swaps, independent, multi-lateral historical investigations, willingness to concede past wrongdoing – on both sides – and marshalling of any cultural resources available to effect reconciliation in whatever form might be necessary or prudent. *Precisely because of the domestic political tension-ratcheting knot within both Armenia and Azerbaijan that make concessionary approaches to N-K politically suicidal, external influence is essential. And it is precisely here that Turkey and Russia are uniquely and fortuitously positioned: Turkey is arguably in as effectual a position to influence Azerbaijan as Russia is to influence Armenia.* Again, the Russian-Turkish *rapprochement* appears to us to change the calculus of prospective resolution decisively, if not inevitably.

Conclusions

The hitherto stalemate of Nagorno-Karabakh has arguably rested on a very precarious balance of forces in the region, but this balance is less and less tenable given: (1) Azerbaijan's growing economic and military capability, (2) Russia's enhanced role in the region in the 2000s and especially since the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, (3) the increasingly activist foreign policy of Turkey and (4), the effective impossibility of a domestically-generated resolution from within Armenia or Azerbaijan due to the nature of their political processes and particularly their politics of identity. All of these are occurring within a regional context of a substantially varied landscape of domestic and foreign policies among Turkey, Russia, and the two disputants over Nagorno-Karabakh. Within both Azerbaijan and Armenia, the nature of domestic politics has become authoritarian in a manner that in some very significant respects restricts effectual dialogue on issues pertaining to national identity that – were matters otherwise – might create more fertile soil for the generation of meaningful alternative solutions to the Nagorno-Karabakh knot. Fortunately, the Russo-Turkish *rapprochement* that has come to be the pronounced feature

of the region's great-power players may serve not only to loosen this knot, perhaps eventually untying it altogether, by prodding both disputants toward a lasting resolution. Neither Turkey nor Russia could serve this function *alone*, although for different reasons: Turkey is perceived as implacably tied with Azerbaijan and sceptical (at best) to Armenian claims, whereas Russia is often perceived, warily, as engaging in neo-imperial regional machinations that are more self-seeking than benign. But in tandem, Turkey and Russia can perhaps achieve what has eluded the Minsk Group. We concur in the main with E. Wayne Merry concerning the need for "great power collusion," but dissent from his interpretation of the specific actors; he offered:

What is needed is old-fashioned great power collusion by Washington and Moscow. Mediation is not enough. Armenian and Azeri political leaders will need outsiders to blame for giving up the "national dream" and accepting reality. Even if the two great powers cannot entirely impose a peace, they can certainly move the parties away from the status quo decisively in favour of compromise and settlement.⁴³

In our view, the necessary "great power collusion" will surely involve the USA in some capacity, but in all likelihood will more centrally and directly involve Turkey and Russia. This is due not only to their *rapprochement* beginning in the early 2000s, but also to their growing roles in the region, their particular ties to each of the disputants (Turkey of course to Azerbaijan and Russia to Armenia), and also of critical significance, the configuration of domestic-foreign policy conjunctures in each of the four countries – although the configuration of domestic-and-foreign politics in each country is substantially varied. The common denominator, though, is agreement that the present knot of tension and irresolution is unacceptable.

43 E. Wayne Merry, "Karabakh: Is War Inevitable?", **American Foreign Policy Council**, 22 May 2009.

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