

BAKU DIALOGUES

POLICY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SILK ROAD REGION

Vol. 4 | No. 4 | Summer 2021

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Achieving Full Resolution to the Karabakh Conflict

Steven J. Klein

Azerbaijan's decisive defeat of Armenia in the Second Karabakh War is certainly cause for optimism that any remaining issues between the two countries can be resolved through diplomacy rather than military might. After all, Azerbaijan managed to recover all the territories outside the Karabakh enclave captured and occupied by Armenia since the 1990s—as well as parts of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast itself—in addition to forcing Armenia to withdraw all its troops from sovereign Azerbaijani territory. However, past indisputable successes in other conflicts indicate that Azerbaijan must be careful not to overestimate its capabilities to translate the recent military triumph into full resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

While it is tempting to declare the conflict over and to talk strictly of post-conflict construction and development, a handful of countries have painfully learned that such declarations can be premature. For instance, in August 1982 Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin predicted that the imminent defeat of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon portended 40 years of peace; and in May 2003 U.S. President George W. Bush declared “Mission Accomplished” after ousting Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Both of these declarations came back to haunt the respective countries that had believed they had put behind them the conflict at issue.

The crucial element that both of the aforementioned leaders had missed was that they did not control completely the fate of the conflict they chose to treat as being resolved.

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In Israel's case, the PLO relocated to Tunis, from where it was able to rebuild its power base and receive support from the Soviet Union, while Hezbollah—which didn't even exist at the time of the defeat of the PLO in 1982—arose with the support of Iran to become a much more formidable and menacing force in southern Lebanon than the PLO had been. In the case of America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the resulting power vacuum allowed numerous external forces to enter the picture and disrupt the plans of the United States. Moreover, corruption and disorganization within the governments established with American help contributed to the deterioration of stability in the region.

These failures provide a stern reminder to be cautious about prematurely declaring a conflict to be over. Leaders still need to evaluate the post-victory reality and all the geopolitical factors that could get in the way of translating their military accomplishments into permanent political gains. Then, based on the assessment of their means and alternatives, they can plot out a strategy based on the options that are realistically in their power to control.

A note on language before proceeding: language is symbolically powerful, particularly in social and political conflicts in which

words convey meanings and values. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, the territories captured by Israel in 1967 are known alternately as Judea and Samaria, the West Bank and Gaza, or the Occupied Territories. Sometimes the preference of one term over another for the same geographic area implies partisanship, but at other times it is seen as a sign of neutrality even at the risk of offending one side or another. In the case of the territory still under nominal ethnic-Armenian control in Azerbaijan, it will be referred to here as Nagorno-Karabakh, in line with the November 10th, 2020 statement by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia.

And a caveat: as with any regime, we in civil society who are not privy to the inner-workings and thinking of political leaders cannot know whether its leaders truly want peace or merely engage in rhetoric to cover up their true intentions to engage in military force to attain their goals. This paper takes at face value statements made by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev at an April 2021 conference in Baku, co-organized by ADA University and the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIRCenter) under the banner “New Vision for South Caucasus: Post-Conflict Development and Cooperation.”

Aliyev expressed there a commitment to resolve outstanding issues through negotiations and to reabsorb the Armenians of Karabakh in a spirit of peace and reconciliation, reserving the military option only in the eventuality that Armenia should signal preference for belligerency.

State of Play

Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, the interests of Azerbaijan are arguably simple and easily achievable: to reestablish full sovereignty over all of its internationally-recognized territory, presumably once the Russian peacekeepers withdraw from the parts of the enclave in which they are now present; to repopulate those lands; and to revitalize the regional economy. However, sovereignty is but one component. There is also the question of what will be the future of the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh. Aliyev has stated that he considers Karabakh Armenians as Azerbaijani citizens. This is an important statement signaling that Azerbaijan does not wish to drive out ethnic-Armenians from the

region—a gesture that will require action in order to assuage a people traumatized by the recent fighting and steeped in a narrative of grievance that dates back decades.

Thus, the pursuit of Azerbaijan's interests requires managing its relationships with the Armenian residents of the rump Nagorno-Karabakh as well as Armenia and Russia. Comparatively speaking, the latter two relationships are easier, as demonstrated by President Aliyev's participation in three-way talks with President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in January and the establishment of a high-level trilateral working group. Nagorno-Karabakh is more challenging because Azerbaijan, rea-

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sonably, does not recognize the legitimacy of the self-declared Republic of Artsakh that claims to represent the residents of the enclave, and also because this same enclave, protected by Russian peacekeepers, has declined to engage with Azerbaijan in any regard, even basic trade. Yet, the onus remains on Azerbaijan to make a convincing case that the enclaves' present residents will be better off

remaining and being reintegrated into Azerbaijan rather than abandoning their homes and relocating to Armenia or elsewhere.

Armenia is less of a hindrance to Azerbaijan's overall goals in the wake of its military defeat. The country is in political disarray (and this will unlikely come to an end in the wake of the June parliamentary election). It has to digest the realization that it cannot compete militarily with Azerbaijan and has no prospects of regaining the territories it had seized in the 1990s. Moreover, it cannot compete economically with Azerbaijan. One hopes that Armenia would grasp that restoring diplomatic and economic relations best serves the long-term interests of its people, but it will take some time to recover from the trauma of losing the Second Karabakh War. In the meantime, Armenia is in no position to interfere with Azerbaijan's plans to redevelop the liberated areas or to reassert in practice its claims over the remainder of Nagorno-Karabakh. Nor can it be expected to be particularly helpful with repairing relations between Azerbaijan and the Karabakh Armenians, since its interest consists in arguing a case on the international stage that Nagorno-Karabakh must remain outside direct Azerbaijani sovereignty.

In contrast, Russia is, at the very least, key to Azerbaijan reasserting full authority over the enclave—if not engendering a thawing of relations between Azerbaijan and the Karabakh Armenians. It should also be recognized that Russia has the capability of occupying Nagorno-Karabakh beyond its five-year mandate. While the November 10th, 2020, peace deal makes extension of Russia's peacekeeping mission contingent on mutual agreement by both Azerbaijan and Armenia, Putin has a record of ignoring diplomatic agreements in favor of advancing Russia's own interests. In 2008, Russia de-recognized Georgia's territorial integrity in order to justify its intervention in South Ossetia, and in 2014 Moscow de-recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity in order to justify its annexation of Crimea and its intervention in Donbass. If Russia decides to stay past the expiration of its peacekeeping mission, there is virtually nothing Azerbaijan can do to force it to leave.

Russia is already positioning itself as the patron of Nagorno-Karabakh, which styles itself as the unrecognized Republic of Artsakh. In March 2021, Duma parliamentarian Konstantin Zatulin, a member of the ruling United Russia party, met with two

members of the unrecognized parliament in Nagorno-Karabakh in order to develop inter-parliamentary relations, a step that could not have been taken without Putin's consent. Then, in April 2021, Moscow reportedly summoned Arayik Harutyunyan, the self-declared president of Artsakh, for unofficial talks (Russia does not officially recognize the enclave) in order to scold him for being too subservient to Pashinyan because doing so does not serve the enclave's interests. And, in late April 2021, Russia donated 15,000 doses of its Sputnik V vaccine against COVID-19 to the enclave. All these moves clearly position Russia as the protector of Nagorno-Karabakh. Considering that Putin envisions Russia reasserting in some fashion the power it held when it formed the nucleus of the Soviet Union (and before that, imperial Russia), it stands to reason that just as Russia has reestablished a presence in the former Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine without showing any signs of withdrawing, it will be reluctant to give up its foothold in Azerbaijan, no matter the reason for its initial re-entry.

Azerbaijan must therefore tread carefully regarding Nagorno-Karabakh in order to advance its own interests there.

Preferences and Realities

President Aliyev has already expressed that his first preference is to settle remaining issues through negotiations. While it seems at first glance that Azerbaijan holds all the cards and could finish the job, as it were, through military means as it started the job last year, the presence of Russian peacekeepers severely restricts this alternative. Given the aforementioned moves Russia has made to position itself to make Nagorno-Karabakh its political protectorate, it is reasonable to conclude that Moscow will not tolerate another military campaign the way it did in late 2020. This scenario has important repercussions not only on Azerbaijan's military prospects to reassert sovereignty in practice over the remainder of Karabakh but also its maneuverability in negotiations.

The reason for Azerbaijan's bargaining position being weaker than it would seem to be at first glance can be found in crisis management theory. The premise of this theory is that one party to a conflict violates the status quo in order to advance its own interests. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the status quo of Azerbaijani sovereignty was violated. The aggrieved side then has a choice to respond diplomatically or militarily. The policy

dilemma is that seeking a purely diplomatic solution requires accepting damage to one's own interests because one is choosing not to force the other side to back down, unless one can bluff well enough to convince the other side that the use of military force is imminent. If Russia communicates to the Armenians that it will not abandon them in the eventuality of a diplomatic stalemate, then Azerbaijan will not be able to threaten credibly military intervention and will thus have to accept some damage to its interests, which can be defined as reintegrating Nagorno-Karabakh fully into the Azerbaijani political system without any special privileges for the enclave.

Azerbaijan is attempting to be the first country to peacefully regain sovereignty over rebel-held territory that has acted as an unrecognized country for an extended period of time.

It may also help to remember that despite the international principle of the right of sovereignty, Azerbaijan is attempting to enter into uncharted waters in the post-World War II era: to be the first country to peacefully regain sovereignty over rebel-held territory that has acted as an unrecognized country for an extended period of time. Aside from Nagorno-Karabakh, the list is

longer than some may be aware: Taiwan, Northern Cyprus, Western Sahara, Transnistria, Somaliland, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Kosovo. When the UN tried to broker talks between Serbia and the ethnic-Albanian authorities in Kosovo, the youngest of the nine entities mentioned above, the Finnish mediator Martti Ahtisaari told the Serbian negotiators in 2006 that after being free of Serbian administration for seven years, there was no going back. If the idea of restoring Serbian rule over Kosovo seemed so daunting after just seven years, one could imagine the resistance of Karabakh Armenians must feel after living without Azerbaijani rule for 30 years.

With these challenges in mind, let us consider constructive steps Azerbaijan can take on its own in order to bring the long-term conflict to a satisfactory conclusion. Recall that it should not count on reciprocity from Yerevan, which is the least likely to make concessions but is also ultimately the least relevant to reintegrating Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan. So, the focus will

be on steps in communicating Azerbaijan's intentions to the Karabakh Armenians and to Moscow. The less safe the enclave's ethnic-Armenian residents feel about living again under Azerbaijani rule (in whatever form), the less likely Russia will be willing to agree to withdraw its peacekeepers. On the other hand, if Russia will be convinced that the security of Karabakh Armenians is guaranteed—and that it has nothing more to gain by an extended occupation—then it will be more likely to withdraw and allow Azerbaijan to reassert full control of the enclave.

The first priority should be to continue signaling Azerbaijan's readiness to reengage with the Karabakh Armenians, which can be conducted unilaterally. However, Azerbaijan has to consider how such messages would be interpreted on the Armenian side. Given the low level of trust, the Armenians are likely to reactively devalue Azerbaijani gestures. East Jerusalem Palestinians and Golan Druze living in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 have refused Israel's offer to apply for citizenship as a diplomatic trap, because doing so would be conceding to Israel that it has the right of sovereignty over their respective areas. For Karabakh Armenians,

Aliyev's seemingly generous offer to receive Azerbaijani citizenship is likely to be interpreted as a similar trap. And, as many Palestinians refuse to do business with Israel as part of a greater anti-normalization campaign, so it seems that Karabakh Armenians are avoiding normalization with Azerbaijan.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, we are witnessing already negative attitudes toward Azerbaijanis hardened over 30 years of occupation, a consequence of which is that, notwithstanding the outcome of the Second Karabakh War, very few ethnic-Armenians consider friendship to be possible with Azerbaijanis or seem willing to do business with them. The departure of ethnic-Armenians from the areas retaken by Azerbaijan during the fighting or ceded back to Azerbaijan through the agreement to end the war indicates the lack of trust they have in the Azerbaijani regime. Karabakh Armenians clearly suffer from a security dilemma, fearful of and opposed to a future in Azerbaijan because they appear to be unable to conceive how such a future would work.

However, Armenian intransigence need not deter Azerbaijan. As the official sovereign authority, breaking down that resistance is

practically its duty if it wants the best chance of Karabakh Armenians to submit to Azerbaijani authority. Moreover, messaging is a necessary if not a sufficient condition for reconciliation.

Consistency is also crucial. The Palestinians have long undercut their own credibility by making pro-peace pronouncements abroad in English but belligerent and antisemitic remarks in Arabic at home in public speeches, on local media, and in the school system. When preparing one's people for potential war, as Azerbaijan did in recent years, such mixed messaging is more understandable because the outcome of the conflict is uncertain. However, in a post-conflict environment mixed messaging undercuts peace and reconciliation efforts whilst signaling that violence is still a preference despite protestations to the contrary.

Azerbaijan is a case in point. In years past, even as Azerbaijan pursued the diplomatic route to resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the country's leadership, including President Aliyev, also engaged in anti-Armenian or belligerent messaging. Such examples include pardoning Ramil Safarov, who was convicted of axing to death an Armenian

soldier with whom he was training as part of a NATO exercise and welcoming him back as a national hero in 2012; referring to or likening Armenians to fascists, dogs, barbarians, or vandals; and calling for an active struggle with Armenia. The ubiquitous billboard campaign that Karabakh is Azerbaijan—albeit in response to Pashinyan's statement that Karabakh is Armenia—was also a rallying cry for Azerbaijanis to back the campaign to regain territory that they otherwise may not have felt due to its geographic isolation. All these gestures and slogans served a purpose in unifying Azerbaijanis behind last year's war, but they were also not lost on the Karabakh Armenians, who fear what the implications are for their long-term well-being should they be reintegrated into Azerbaijan.

The starkness of the mixed messaging may have grown even greater in wake of the war. Azerbaijan seems to be doubling down on its messaging, in particular with the War Trophies Museum. While the intent may be to glorify last year's victory and reinforce support for the war itself in the Azerbaijani psyche, some outside observers have been shocked and disappointed by what they perceive as a dehumanization of Armenians. For Armenians, the public display provides

further confirmation for their biases against Azerbaijan as a regime that cannot be trusted to resume rule over Nagorno-Karabakh. Meanwhile, the continued “Karabakh is Azerbaijan” campaign also reinforces the perception among Karabakh Armenians that they have no future in Azerbaijan.

What Can Baku Do?

What can be done to ease the anxiety of Karabakh Armenians and increase the confidence of Russia without compromising on Azerbaijani interests? Doing so requires a multi-step process that involves more than trying to convince Karabakh Armenians that they have nothing to fear but rather letting them know that they and their concerns are being heard and addressed. Messaging should focus on the notion that Karabakh Armenians will be able to maintain some measure of control over their lives, that they will be able to enjoy economic prosperity, and that they will enjoy political and civil rights.

It would be helpful for Azerbaijan to set up a team on reestablishing communication with

Karabakh Armenians as part of a greater truth and reconciliation commission. It should be clear on the message that there will be no retribution for the events of the 1990s—if Azerbaijan is willing to make that concession—but also that it wants to hear from the Karabakh Armenians their grievances and experiences to understand what fears prevent them from being willing to live under Azerbaijani rule.

While it is reasonable to expect Azerbaijan to continue to be critical of the Armenian government, distinction should be made between the regime and the people. Eliminating Armenophobic comments is a simple solution, especially for leaders so sensitive to the Turkophobia that prevails in Armenia. Going a step further would involve messaging that emphasizes Azerbaijan’s multiculturalism and its commitment to finding a place for Karabakh Armenians in Azerbaijani society.

Such positive rhetoric needs practical reinforcement to be perceived as credible. This goal can be achieved by investing in Nagorno-Karabakh’s microeconomy with Russia’s help. While

Azerbaijan’s primary concern in the region must be and naturally is focused on the repopulation of its liberated lands, this process will take years. In the meantime, Azerbaijan can exploit its renewed access to Nagorno-Karabakh by offering trade opportunities to its residents, even though it is expected to be rebuffed in the near future.

Trade is one area in which Nagorno-Karabakh may follow Armenia’s lead if Azerbaijan can make progress on that front with its neighbor. The further along plans to develop east-west trade extending beyond the Lachin corridor and north-south trade based on the old Soviet-era trade routes, the more tempted Karabakh Armenians will be to access these opportunities, especially if Armenia is exploiting them.

Still, it must be recognized that trade on Azerbaijan’s terms can also be viewed by wary Karabakh Armenians as recognizing the legitimacy of Baku’s sovereignty. Thus, they may see their interests in continued resistance and making the case to their

Russian protectors that trade is a peace trap that fails to address their security dilemmas once they are at the mercy of Azerbaijani authorities.

The most effective strategy for Azerbaijan to make the case that Karabakh Armenians can feel safe and secure under its rule is to offer a form of local self-governance. However, Azerbaijan is hardly inclined to make such an offer. After all, Armenia rejected previous offers of autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh in the failed negotiations of the 2000s

and 2010s. Azerbaijan is in a strong enough position to deny Nagorno-Karabakh self-governance and no longer needs to make such a concession to Armenia, which is powerless to stop it from imposing its own rule. Aliyev himself has ruled out such an arrangement in the wake of victory. The most he seems inclined to offer is cultural autonomy, which was mentioned during the war in October 2020. Besides, autonomy is often perceived as an invitation to secessionism, the last thing Azerbaijan would want to encourage.

The paradox of self-rule is that the greater the competencies granted, the more levels are created for peaceful bargaining, the less likely a region is going to be secessionist.

However, fears of self-governance, which can run the gamut from granting limited local authority over schools and health services to full autonomy, are misguided. In fact, the paradox of self-rule is that the greater the competencies granted, the more levels are created for peaceful bargaining, the less likely a region is going to be secessionist. Increased autonomy weakened the secessionist movement in Canada's Quebec and the UK's Scotland, while efforts to restrict autonomy in Spain's Catalonia and Yugoslavia's Serbian province of Kosovo raised secessionist fervor in those countries. States like Sri Lanka that denied minority calls for federalism or local autonomy faced greater civil unrest or even civil war.

Azerbaijanis might look at their Soviet past as an example of a federation that broke up, but federal arrangements like the ones in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had been established without the consent of the leadership (and residents) of the individual federal and autonomous units. That is why these sham federations spurred grievances and separatism in places like Nagorno-Karabakh.

While Nagorno-Karabakh is too small and too weak to demand self-governance, the issue remains on the table because its withholding will lead to one of two scenarios: either the Russians will refuse to withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh or, if Baku can still prevail upon Moscow to pull out, the Armenians will empty out Nagorno-Karabakh. If Azerbaijan is fine with the prospect of a depopulated Nagorno-Karabakh, that is its

What would be the ideal form of self-governance, one that serves both the interests of the central government in Baku and the future residents of Nagorno-Karabakh?

prerogative. This paper proceeds upon the presumption, based on President Aliyev's recent statements, that he would prefer that they remain there, as Azerbaijani citizens, in which case he will need to offer some form of self-governance.

What would be the ideal form of self-governance, one that serves both the interests of the central government in Baku and the future residents of Nagorno-Karabakh? The most successful arrangements involve full autonomy in exchange for a binding agreement that rules out the option of secession. The model agreement is South Tyrol in Italy. One of the keys to South Tyrol's autonomy

agreement is that disputes within the region are submitted to the International Court of Justice in the Hague. The arrangement has allowed it to become a prosperous area that is a bridge to trade between Italy and Austria and contributes significant tax revenue to Rome—truly a win-win situation.

This option, while in many ways ideal, is in all likelihood not an arrangement the current leadership in Azerbaijan would entertain for a number of reasons. Besides the fact that such arrangements have been agreed between friendlier countries that enjoyed relative parity in power, Baku would be understandably loathe to give favorable status to an ethnic-Armenian enclave that had rebelled against its authority.

A second option would be to award Nagorno-Karabakh autonomy on the same level as the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, as per Chapter VIII, Articles 134-141 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This would, of course, require a constitutional amendment, but President Aliyev could sell this arrangement to the Azerbaijani public as a grand gesture to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, the vast majority of whom did not have a say in the decision of the Armenian government or the Karabakh

Armenian rebel leaders to invade the enclave. Moreover, it would not enjoy any favorite status above that of Nakhchivan, so there is a precedent for such an arrangement. However, given the statements made by Azerbaijan's president, this option is less likely to be considered despite the advantages it offers.

A third option then is to focus on local self-governance. The basis would be Chapter IX of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, adhering strictly to Chapter IX seems unlikely to allay the fears of Karabakh Armenians. It may require communicating with Karabakh Armenian representatives through the Russians and selling a package deal that Moscow find acceptable, which the Kremlin in turn could convey to the Karabakh Armenians as a take-it-or-leave-it offer before the inevitable handover of power.

A more favorable arrangement would expand the powers of the local government beyond those elicited in Chapter VIII, Article 144 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Enhanced powers could include judiciary powers for strictly local affairs, providing administrative services, health services, education, and policing. Returning ethnic-Azerbaijanis would receive proportional

representation. The unrecognized Artsakh regime already handles all these competencies, so it could transition to doing so under supervision of and in conjunction with the central authorities in Baku, after adjustments for Azerbaijani licensing and regulatory standards, curricula, and laws. To fulfill Aliyev's idea of cultural autonomy, a permanent joint antiquities authority should be established to preserve ethnic-Armenian heritage as well as the heritage of other ethnic communities in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The biggest steps short of autonomy, however, would be to close the circle on the divisions of the First Karabakh War, which include the abolishing of the original Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and the redistribution of its territory among the neighboring administrative raions. Such adjustments and commitments could also go a long way in keeping Karabakh Armenians in place, once they realize that absorption into Azerbaijan is inevitable. The administrative boundaries could be redrawn to keep the Armenian towns together. Legislation could be passed to guarantee that the district head appointed by the president will be a local resident, i.e., a Karabakh Armenian. Finally, a consociational

type arrangement could be made whereby the Armenian-dominated raions would have veto power over any laws that adversely affect ethnic-Armenian heritage or language rights in their districts—of course, in exchange for ethnic-Azerbaijanis returning to those raions having equal veto rights over the local government regarding any local bylaw adversely affecting their own heritage or language.

Speaking of which, language would be an issue, so provisions would have to be made to allow initially for the use of Armenian in the legal sphere, even though Azerbaijan is the state's sole official language. Article 45 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan does state that "everyone has the right to use his/her native language" and that "nobody may be deprived of right to use his/her mother tongue." Thus, it would not be a stretch to make a special provision for Armenian to be used in an official capacity within Nagorno-Karabakh. Help should be offered with translation services—at least during a transition period—in order to help comply with requirements to use the official language in official documents, state enterprises, and organizations, or to understand official statutes and rulings, as noted in Articles 8-14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Modus Vivendi

Would any these arrangements be acceptable to either Azerbaijan or the Karabakh Armenians? I expect resistance on both sides due to Azerbaijan's current perception of its bargaining power and the lack of trust on the Armenian side. However, somewhere in between them lies the only modus vivendi. If there is no viable bargaining zone, either Russia will choose to retain its peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, to Baku's chagrin, or the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh will choose to depart with the Russians, which would be a human tragedy.

The period between now and November 2025 is crucial. As long as the accepted wisdom is that the peacekeepers will leave at that point (in line with the terms of the peace deal), Azerbaijan has the upper

hand in the negotiations. However, should they stay in defiance of Baku's wishes, the Karabakh Armenians would then be able to up their demands. Thus, if the Azerbaijani state truly wants the Karabakh Armenians to remain within a reunited Azerbaijan, it is ultimately in Azerbaijan's interest to find that modus vivendi sooner rather than later. It will take much hard work to regain the resident Armenians' confidence, and if not theirs, then at least that of the Russians so that they would be willing convincingly to sell the idea to the Karabakh Armenians.

Ultimately, Azerbaijan holds the fate of the Karabakh Armenians in its hands, and one can only hope that it will choose to turn the page on the recent bloody history of the two peoples and usher in a new era of peace, prosperity, and fruitful co-existence. **BD**

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