

By Emin ARIF (SHIKHALIYEV),  
*Doctor of History*

# GEO-POLITICAL RIVALRY IN SOUTH CAUCASUS AMID EMERGENCE OF NEW WORLD ORDER

*Armenia's last hope for retaining the occupied territories was the Collective Security Treaty Organization*



**F**rance's stance on the second Karabakh war and behind-the-scenes issues. France's position on Armenia-Azerbaijan relations and the second Karabakh war is particularly worth mentioning. As mentioned earlier, Armenia, which faced a predicament, followed its conventional mindset, issued false reports regarding an alleged presence of Syrian mercenaries and Jihadist groups in Azerbaijan. Having failed to scrutinize the fake news aimed at blackmail or unwilling to do so, France unconditionally supported the Armenian lies. It put forward an openly pro-Armenian stance by adding a religious slant to the issue, stressing its alleged gravity and urging pertinent discussions in the Council of Europe. This approach completely ran counter to France's commitment to impartiality as a mediator in the Karabakh conflict settlement. According to our subjective reasoning, one of the main causes of France's openly backing Armenia in the latter's conflict with Azerbaijan is the clash of its geo-political interests in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and Africa with those of Turkey. France voiced a similar stance on the Mediterranean and Libyan issues with regard to the Syrian movement in Turkey.

France's activity in the Mediterranean region has a long history. Currently, France continues striving to realize its goals concerning Libya and have a say in the ongoing struggle for power in the Mediterranean Sea.

In reality, the ability to act as a superpower hinges on control over sources of energy. In any case, the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves as well as oil and gas fields worth trillions of dollars in the eastern Mediterranean sparked differences among major powers. From this viewpoint, the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean regions may be considered a geo-political "stage for wolves" whereby all countries claiming hegemony and regional states are seeking to assert themselves. In other words, this is a scene for a power struggle among regional and global players. Thus, the French and Turkish geo-political interests have long been in contradiction on this stage. France, which lacks international support in the projects in the Mediterranean region and has also been gradually sidelined from the Middle East, sees Turkey as the biggest obstacle to its policies on Libya. It is not a mere coincidence that a recent clash between a French ship and a Turkish vessel increased tension between the two countries.

Gas exploration in the vicinity of Cyprus continues to heighten tension between France and Turkey, a NATO member state. Since Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) were not included in the activities on operating the reserves of natural gas discovered near the island, Turkey, in turn, launched drilling in East Mediterranean, in accordance with its maritime border delineation deal with Libya. The issue increased tensions





*In almost 30 years, the OSCE Minsk Group failed to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict*

between Athens and Ankara, while France threw its weight behind Greece.

Following the outset of the second Karabakh war, France immediately called for a ceasefire, expressing utmost concern over Turkey's alleged moves aimed at encouraging Azerbaijan to regain Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the statement was made under the influence of the Armenian community, its actual reason was France's rivalry and struggle with Turkey in Libya and East Mediterranean (24).

More profound comprehension and analysis of the Turkish-French tensions requires considering this crisis not in the context of the Libyan issue alone, but as part of an overall struggle and competition on the scale of the entire African continent. In fact, the stand-off over Libya is only the tip of the iceberg in the rivalry between Turkey and France. As for the unseen part of the iceberg, it entails a clash of Ankara's policy on Africa with France's strategic interests. As is known, this continent is of great political, economic, social and cultural importance for France. Just like the "**Great Game**" reflecting rivalry for control over Asia between Russia and Britain in the 19th century, such major powers as France, Britain and Germany sought to establish supremacy over Africa (6).

In accordance with the General Act of the 1885 Berlin Conference, which sought to discuss the partitioning of Africa, France emerged as a major colonial power on the continent (2, p. 420). The decolonization policies that started after World War II certainly affected this continent. However, France sought to retain its political, economic and cultural dominance in the

territories that were under its control, though most of the colonial areas had gained independence, and even managed to increase its influence further. From 1961, France exercised control over the national reserves of 14 African countries. These included **Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon** (22). African countries had to place their national currency reserves in France's central bank. Since France's treasury was receiving revenues to the tune of \$500 billion a year from Africa, the country was reluctant to give up the benefits of the colonial currency system. A number of African leaders opposing the system were either assassinated or removed from office through a coup, while the compliant ones received French awards on many occasions. France, which was receiving significant revenues from Africa, was doing its utmost to sideline all countries opposing its endeavors. The remarks of Jacques Chirac, a former French president, regarding the French colonies in Africa, are definitely food for thought. "Without Africa, France will slide down into the rank of a third [world] power," he said. Remarkably, his predecessor, Francois Mitterrand, admitted the truth by saying in 1957 that "France will have no history in the 21st century without Africa" (20).

Currently, African countries still have to pay colonial debt to France. Though this unfair system has been repeatedly condemned by the European Union, it is evident that France would not be able to stay afloat without this colonial system, which provides it with around \$500 billion annually. Therefore, France deems the strengthening of such a geo-political player as Turkey in the regions it exerts influence upon historically, politically, economically and culturally as a serious threat to its interests.

Evidently, the policy pursued by Turkey on Africa and the Middle East contradicts France's strategic and economic interests. Therefore, France did not refrain from openly supporting Armenia in its conflict with Azerbaijan, which is backed by Turkey and is one of the states representing the Turkic civilization. It even made an effort to achieve recognition for the self-proclaimed "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic".

**Ceasefires, interference and geo-political attacks.** In addition to the above-mentioned conclusions, another important point is worth mentioning. It

*Although the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group replaced each other on a regular basis, the position of the organization remained unchanged*



concerns truce in the second Karabakh war. Azerbaijan's advances and regaining of its territories that had been occupied by Armenia occurred amid relevant political conditions that emerged following a 26-year-long ceasefire. Meanwhile, questions arose for many regarding changes with regard to the position of Russia, which held "a key to the lock" in the region. It is not a coincidence that when the dominance of either side in any clash or short-term military conflict did not trample upon the overall Russian policy in the past, Moscow remained silent in this regard for some time or opted to assert its presence instead. This was the case during the 2016 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or the Four-Day War in April 2016.

Nearly two weeks after intense clashes broke out on September 27, Russia sought to interfere with the matter again, inviting the Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers to Moscow. The parties agreed at the meeting held with Russia's mediation to observe a humanitarian ceasefire from October 10, 2020 in order to exchange prisoners of war, other detainees and the dead bodies (3). Reaching truce was extremely important for Russia, which considered the South Caucasus as its "backyard". Exerting its influence and demonstrating to the rest of the world once again that it held the key to the conflict settlement was crucial for Moscow. However, it was crystal clear that the ceasefire was temporary and hostilities would be resumed. 24 hours bare-

ly passed before Ganja, Mingachevir, Barda, Goranboy, Terter and other Azerbaijani cities, districts and villages were subjected to missile attacks from Armenia's territory. In particular, strikes dealt upon Ganja, Azerbaijan's second largest city, targeted civilians, causing numerous casualties and injuring others. This was another manifestation of Armenian terror. The attacks showed that Armenia was in such a deplorable condition that it resorted to staging acts of terrorism against civilian population. Yerevan's only hope was to pave the way for immediate involvement of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in the conflict if Baku launched a counter-attack on the Armenian territory. Nevertheless, this move, in fact, dealt a major blow upon Moscow's influence and charisma.

The mentioned ceasefire violation also displayed Armenia's pro-American stance. However, although Armenia, Russia's ally, is governed by a person backed by Moscow's rivals, such as the West and Soros, namely, Nikol Pashinyan, Russia's loosening its grip on this country appeared unrealistic. It was merely necessary to "punish" the Armenian prime minister. Moreover, Azerbaijan currently possesses powerful army and weapons, which was not the case in the 1990s. At the same time, the Karabakh war could not have been resolved at the level of foreign ministers and it was an issue of a larger scale. In fact, Azerbaijan sat down at the negotiating table while it was expecting Armenian ceasefire violations.



*During the 44-day war, Armenia disrupted the negotiations aimed at ending the hostilities by committing war crimes and firing rockets at peaceful cities in Azerbaijan. Moscow, 10 October 2020*



According to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, it was a chance given to Armenia by Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, Armenia violated the ceasefire, attacking civilians, making it clear that it had no intention to pull out of the occupied Azerbaijani territory as a result of a negotiated solution of the conflict. After the OSCE Minsk Group mediators, in particular, France, stepped in, another truce was declared on October 18, 2020. However, it was breached by Armenian armed forces just minutes thereafter (4).

In an effort to defuse tension, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo invited the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia to his country. Pompeo's separate meetings with the ministers took place on October 23, 2020 (25). Certainly, the United States' attempt to rein in the situation was actually being expected. Following those discussions, a third ceasefire was further declared on October 26. However, Armenia violated the truce again minutes thereafter (9).

Armenia, which was unable to resist Azerbaijani armed forces in the battlefield, targeted civilians again. On October 28, 2020, Armenian forces launched a strike on Barda using Smerch multiple rocket launchers, killing 21 people and severely wounding over 70 others.

Despite repeated ceasefire violations, attacks on civilians, including children, with the use of ballistic missiles, and mass killings, Armenia's crimes were not condemned by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, major world powers and influential international organizations. Instead, conventional international calls were made to put an end to the war, lay down the weapons and immediately start talks. If international organizations and world countries were indeed deeply concerned over the ongoing military action and human casualties and were seeking justice, they should have ensured an immediate pullout of the invading Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories, in line with relevant UN resolutions. If necessary, they could have put pressure on Armenia in this regard. However, they failed to do so.

The Armenians' fate was determined in the early 20th century and a state called Armenia is in existence. Establishing a second Armenian state in Azerbaijan's territory is impossible. If ethnic Armenians try to promote the self-determination issue in every region they reside in, numerous Armenian states would emerge around the world. Based on this logic, if the three Minsk Group co-chairing countries, namely, France, Russia and the United States, indeed support materializing the "self-

*US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Armenian Foreign Minister Zorab Mnasakanyan.  
Washington, 23 October 2020*



determination” principle for the Armenians, granting autonomy status to their large population would be more acceptable in Krasnodar, Russia, California, USA and Marseille, France. Failure of the mediators to fairly differentiate between an invading state and a country affected by occupation of its territory and their moves supporting the invader had resulted in further exacerbation of Armenia’s aggressive policy. Regardless of the political convictions of any government that came to power in Armenia, including anti-Russian and anti-Western ones, Russia, France and the United States would never leave Armenia out of their policies. Although the interests of these powers may clash in other regions, the Armenian issue and enmity toward Turks is a key factor that unites them. All the three mediating countries expressed their actual views regarding the Karabakh conflict at a closed-door meeting of the UN Security Council held on October 19, 2020. Following the meeting, MG co-chairs Russia and France drew up a draft statement. However, the circulated document, which was to be further agreed upon by the member states, had no reference to the four well-known UN resolutions. Thus,

the statement absolutely disregarded territorial integrity, which is one of the most significant principles of international law, as well as UNSC decisions. The objective of this move was to leave behind and make everyone forget Resolutions No.822, 853, 874 and 884, pass new pro-Armenian decisions and derail efforts aimed at ending the occupation of Azerbaijani territory. However, seven Non-Aligned Movement members represented in the UNSC, namely, **Indonesia, Niger, Vietnam, Tunisia, South Africa, the Dominican Republic and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, suggested that a reference to the UN resolutions be included in the statement draft. Though the co-chairing countries deemed the proposal as unacceptable, the statement was eventually withdrawn due to an insistent and principled stance of the Non-Aligned Movement member states (8).

Apparently, the fact that the permanent UNSC members remain unchanged shows that this organization merely serves political interests and violates international law instead of enforcing it. As before, the co-chairing states set aside the impartiality

principle and continued to take sides in conflicts, openly supporting Armenia. To the contrary, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member states displayed commitment to the organization's principles and values to the whole wide world, honoring international law. At the same time, this is a graphic example of NAM's being a major player in the system of international relations.

Azerbaijan continued a struggle for its just cause in the war and diplomacy till the end and sought to avail of the emerging opportunities. Strides were taken in this direction. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev demanded setting a timetable for an Armenian pullout from the occupied land. Until November 10, 2020, Armenia resisted its withdrawal and repeatedly sustained significant loss. On November 8, the city of Shusha, which is of great and symbolic importance for the Azerbaijani people, was liberated after 28 years of occupation. On November 9, President Ilham Aliyev informed the people that the victorious Azerbaijani army had liberated 71 more villages, a settlement and eight strategic hills from the Armenian occupation. The liberation of Shusha completely disarmed Armenia and deprived it of all capacities for maneuvering and misleading the world community with regard to the Karabakh war. Surrendering was the only way out for Armenia. On November 10, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia and Armenia's Prime Minister signed a trilateral statement on cessation of hostilities in the conflict zone. Armenia assumed a commitment to withdraw its troops from Azerbaijan's occupied Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachin districts stage by stage by December 1, 2020 (14). According to the statement, a limited contingent of Russian peacekeepers was to be stationed in the region. Immediately after the statement was signed, a Russian peacekeeping force was sent to Karabakh. However, there has been deep concern in Azerbaijan over its pro-Armenian actions, which are beyond the legitimate peacekeeping mission.

About two months after the ceasefire was reached, on January 11, 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who met in Moscow to discuss the Karabakh problem and other important issues, signed a statement. The document, signed behind closed doors, was of crucial importance for specifying the November 10, 2020 trilateral statement. However, there are some uncertain points in this regard. A decision was passed at the meeting to draw up specific outlines on the development of transport infrastructure

and the regional economy and establish a trilateral task-force comprised of deputy prime ministers and working groups consisting of experts for the purpose. The goal of these exchanges was to restore the deadlocked economic and transport relations. Moreover, Azerbaijan will be connected to its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic through the transport links crossing Armenian territory, while Armenia, in turn, will have a railway link to Russia and Iran via Azerbaijani territory. In addition, Azerbaijan will gain access to the Turkish market through Nakhchivan, while the Turkish and Russian railway hubs will be connected.

Another detail regarding the statement is that it has no reference to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Overall, there were not many points that would allow the Azerbaijani side to rest assured completely, but there was not a significant number of points of concern either. One of the most important outcomes of the January 11 meeting was that the mediating OSCE Minsk Group's activity in the peace process was essentially rendered useless (1, 18). Nevertheless, the way further developments will unfold will be clear over the course of time.

**Outcome: the parties that benefitted or sustained loss in the second Karabakh war.** Overall, the following point may be made once the real situation in world politics has been studied: if a certain measure or move is in favor or harms superpowers, the issue of its compliance with international law is placed on the back burner and those powers act in accordance with their interests. In other words, superpowers consider themselves "exceptional". This is the **"World Order"** of major powers and it is determined by a correlation of power capacities of major geo-political players, not international law and institutions. Challenges facing the South Caucasus region, in particular, the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, should be considered in the same context. The second Karabakh war, which ended in Azerbaijan's victory and Armenia's crushing defeat, could be considered as an integral part of the conflicting or compliant issues related to the superpowers' geo-political interests in the region. Therefore, the most significant matter in this regard that comes to the forefront concerns those who either benefitted or sustained loss as a result of the conflict.

**Russia.** An analysis of the developments that have occurred leads to a conclusion that a complete solution of the Karabakh issue is not in line with Russia's current interests in the first place, given that Moscow's main ob-



*President Ilham Aliyev lights a  
Novruz bonfire in Shusha*



jective is to capitalize on the problem and keep international activities and regional policies of both countries involved under its influence. Russia's disapproval of Nikol Pashinyan, who pursues a pro-Western policy, could be deemed absolutely normal. However, Russia defines its policy in the Caucasus in line with its geo-strategic interests, not on the basis of certain governments.

Just like in some other former Soviet states, an immediate solution to all outstanding differences and conflicts in the South Caucasus republics and restoring sustainable peace in the region contradicts the long-term goals of Russia's regional security policy. In other words, Russia possesses significant leverage of influence upon both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, Russia bolstered its presence and gained geo-political dominance in the region in the course of its rivalry with the West over the South Caucasus. At the same time, Russia demonstrated to Armenia the bitter consequences of a pro-Western political slant. On the other hand, Moscow's using its weight in ending the war paved the way for sidelining France and the United States, the other two MG co-chairs, from the game.

**OSCE Minsk Group.** The Minsk Group's mediating efforts were essentially rendered null and void; France

and the U.S. were left outside the peace process at this stage.

**Turkey.** Turkey is one of the benefitting parties. First of all, this pertains to the training provided to the Azerbaijani armed forces by Turkey in the Karabakh war, along with military tactics and weaponry. Turkey also attained further recognition of its defense industry in world markets. At the same time, Turkey asserted its presence in the South Caucasus before the international community for decades to come. This should be considered a great benefit and success both for Azerbaijan and Turkey. The presence of the Turkish army in Azerbaijan to offset Russian presence is a significant factor for ensuring stability. Russia has to admit Turkey's presence in Azerbaijan but it actually opposes this country's playing a major role in the region. Azerbaijan, for its part, has always stressed the importance of Ankara's presence at the negotiating table.

**Azerbaijan.** Azerbaijan, which is the main winner in the mentioned war, used every opportunity at hand and will continue to do so. In addition, Azerbaijan proved to be the most powerful state in the South Caucasus militarily, politically and economically. Undoubtedly, becoming a key transit state in the region will provide



*President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva at the Alley of Martyrs. The victory was won at the expense of the lives and blood of Azerbaijani martyrs*



a considerable advantage to Azerbaijan in the future. The significant benefits include suitability of the land liberated from the Armenian occupation for agriculture, as well as gold mines and regained control over hydro-power capacities. Moreover, regional rehabilitation efforts and sub-structure projects will give an impetus to economic development. On the other hand, launching a transport corridor between Nakhchivan and other western Azerbaijani regions following Armenia's formal surrender will provide for uninterrupted transportation capacities between Turkey and Azerbaijan. The success achieved by Turkey and Azerbaijan will give the Turkic world a psychological edge with the opening of the Nakhchivan corridor. Nevertheless, Russia's entry to the region, which occurred in the form of a peacekeeping mission, certainly poses a significant risk from Azerbaijan's viewpoint. Although the war ended in Azerbaijan's historic victory in the battlefield, it continues currently in the political, diplomatic and information realm. From now onward, Azerbaijan should outline a new strategy to repel any potential attack. Turkey's stance on the issue will be crucial at this stage. Therefore, further strengthening of Azerbaijani-Turkish military cooperation, along with bilateral ties in other fields, will be pivotal in this period of history.

**Armenia.** Armenia is the main defeated party in the war. Armenia, which actually believed it was taking a prudent measure with regard to the conflict, sought Russian and Western pressure against Azerbaijan. However, Armenia, itself, ultimately turned into a toy in the hands of these powers and lost most of its support at a critical time. No matter how persistently Armenia attempted to pursue a Western-leaning policy under the Pashinyan administration, it fell under the Kremlin's influence again following a bitter defeat and Russia's interference with the conflict. At the same time, Yerevan had to admit Azerbaijan's victory and the fact that it has very limited capabilities. Russia, for its part, showed Armenia that the West's promises and guarantees had no merit and could not turn the tide in the war whatsoever.

Azerbaijan carried out a 44-day operation that was called the "Iron Fist". It was not just a war fought between the two countries and lost by Armenia. The second Karabakh war served as a deciding factor for a new situation that has emerged in the South Caucasus. This new geo-political reality in the region has been acknowledged by regional and global forces. 🌟

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