

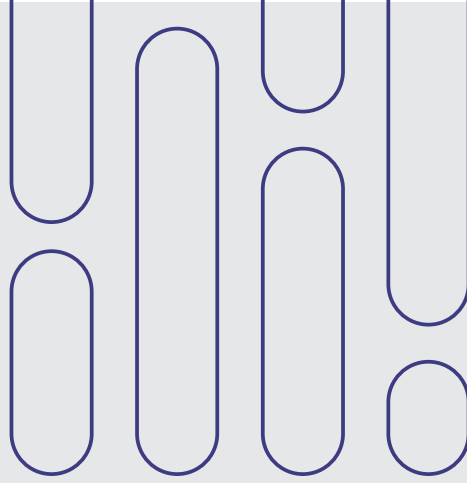
— Position Paper —

The Azerbaijani-Armenian Escalation and Its Ramifications for the Middle East

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Introduction

The Azerbaijani-Armenian crisis witnessed a new escalation. Since 1990, it has raged on to varying degrees. On the morning of Saturday, September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan and Armenia announced the resumption of fighting.

The two sides blamed one another for triggering the fresh round of fighting. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that Azerbaijan had launched a missile and ground attack on the Nagorno-Karabakh region, an Armenian-majority region which declared its independence from Azerbaijan in 1992. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani president asserted that Armenia had mounted an attack on Azerbaijani regions located along the line of contact between the two countries, which was demarcated after the end of the major war between the two countries in 1994 that left more than 30,000 people dead and led Armenia to occupy almost 20 percent of Azerbaijani territories.

This report intends to offer a realistic portrayal of the scope of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, evaluating the extent of its impact on the Middle East and the conflicts raging therein, and the potential opportunities it offers and challenges it poses to the region's countries. The report will also cover a host of issues, such as the conflict's background, the root causes of the latest eruption of fighting, the current situation on the ground, the regional and international positions towards the resumption of hostilities, the dangers and ramifications of the dispute at the regional and international levels and, finally, future scenarios.

I. The Roots of the Conflict

The roots of the Azerbaijani-Armenian crisis can be traced back to the Soviet era, when Nagorno-Karabakh, known as Artsakh in the Armenian language and as Yukari Garabagh in the Azeri language, was annexed to Armenia in 1923. The region, which is in the heart of Azerbaijan's territories, has an Armenian-majority population. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence in 1992, along with Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan rejected Nagorno-Karabakh's efforts to secede from it, declaring war on the regional government. Armenia then entered the war, opposing Azerbaijan.

The war ended in 1994, leading to disastrous consequences for Azerbaijan, which lost 20 percent of its territories after the Armenia-backed Karabakh separatists annexed six Azerbaijani regions. In addition, Nagorno-Karabakh announced its independence. The foremost reason behind Azerbaijan's defeat was its lack of the necessary weapons, in contrast to its adversary Armenia, which received huge support from Russia.

Due to Azerbaijani oil revenues, in addition to Turkish support for Azerbaijan and its cooperation with Israel, the balance of power began to tip in Azerbaijan's favor.

As a result, Azerbaijan introduced an expanded armament program that focused on missile capabilities and drones. It displayed interest in purchasing drones from Turkey, such as [the Bayraktar TB2, a medium-altitude long-range tactical aerial vehicle](#). [Azerbaijan has also bought 60 drones from Israel of various models and cate-](#)

[gories](#), including Harop 'suicide drones' and Orbiter aerial vehicles.

[Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paid a visit to the Azerbaijani capital Baku in 2016, during which he signed a security and military cooperation agreement worth \\$5 billion.](#) Following that visit, Azerbaijan was supplied with the Typhoon artillery system along with several other missile systems and helicopters.

Recent additions to the Azerbaijani military arsenal include Israeli 'SkyStriker' drones, ballistic missiles, surveillance drones, Belarusian tactical missile launchers, a Pakistani military training aircraft, Turkish armored vehicles/ anti-drone systems, South African sniper rifles and Russian BTR-82A armored personnel carriers.

On the other side, Armenia obtained a \$200 million loan from Russia in 2015, after which Moscow provided another interest-free loan of \$100 million to Armenia in 2018. It was used to purchase Russian military equipment. Armenia bought [the Su-30SM fighter aircraft](#), which it deployed in the confrontations with Azerbaijan in April 2016 and July 2020. In addition, it purchased [the Iskander, Repellent, Infauna and Kornet-EM missile systems from Russia.](#) It should also be noted that, in addition to this support from Russia, Armenia gets significant annual US financial aid thanks to the powerful Armenian lobbies inside the United States, specifically the pro-Artsakh and Armenia lobby in the US Congress. [Armenia has also resorted to buying old weapons from other parties, such as a deal to buy 35 used OSA air defense systems from Jordan worth \\$27 million.](#)

II. Indicators and Reasons Behind the Latest Eruption of Fighting

A. Indicators

All indicators combined have signaled an imminent return to hostilities between the two countries since last July when Azerbaijan and Armenia both announced a troop buildup along the line of contact. These indicators were confirmed when the US State Department issued a warning for its citizens against traveling to both countries, calling on American citizens to quickly leave the Azerbaijani and Armenian territories.

One day before the eruption of fighting, Russia's Caucasus 2020 military exercises, held in the Russian Caucasus, concluded. The exercises included forces from Russia, Armenia, Iran, China, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Belarus, and Myanmar. These military drills have been viewed as a threat to US interests in the region as well as a clear indication of the Russian-Iranian-Chinese alliance, and heightened military cooperation between them. Also, joint naval drills were held by the three countries, which were conducted in the northern area of the Indian Ocean on December 27, 2019.

The recurrent nature of the eruption of fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia has drawn global attention to quell the simmering hostilities. This time, however, things seem to be different, with fighting breaking out across several fronts involving a massive number of troops and earlier indicators pointing to this latest flare up. It seems that a comprehensive plan has recently been developed,

as the recent fighting is different from the limited-scale attacks of the past, the last of which were waged last July, with the largest of these, in terms of impact, taking place in April 2016.

[This analysis is supported by Azerbaijan's announcement that it had liberated six villages in the two Azerbaijani regions of Fuzuli and Jabrayil which had been controlled by the Armenian forces](#), along with another announcement that fighting would continue until all the occupied Azerbaijani territories have been liberated. Other proof of the new situation being a departure from the usual hostilities came in the form of [Armenia's declaration of martial law and general mobilization](#), not to mention the massive losses sustained by both sides in the early hours of fighting.

[Armenia has already announced that it managed to destroy three Azerbaijani tanks, two helicopters and three drones. Azerbaijan has contested these claims, however, insisting that its losses include only one helicopter and that the Azerbaijani forces managed to destroy 12 Armenian air defense systems](#). Furthermore, Turkish intervention and support have been evident since the early hours of the eruption of the latest round of fighting.

B. The Reasons Behind the Eruption of Fighting in September 2020

Fighting has erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenia in consecutive waves since 1994 up to the present day. However, the eruption of the current crisis may be attributed to various reasons, some of which go beyond the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh contested region.

Others reasons are related to the conflict's ceaseless and historic nature. Several factors have intersected resulting in an eruption of fighting on a far larger scale at the current time. These can be detailed as:

1-Turkey's Deployment of Syrian Fighters to Azerbaijan

This time, the link between the fresh eruption of fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia and Middle Eastern challenges is clearly apparent. Azerbaijan, which believes in the necessity of liberating its territories from the three-decade-long Armenian occupation, has found in Turkey, which seeks to extend its own influence in the Middle East, a useful opportunity to gain external support. This explains its request for Turkish support when an Azerbaijani military delegation visited Ankara in July and signed agreements with the Turkish government whereby a Turkish military base is to be established in the Azerbaijani region of Nakhchivan neighboring Turkish territories and is separated from the rest of the Azerbaijani territories. [Under this deal, Turkey will set up a camp for training Syrian fighters in Al-Bab district in the northern countryside of Aleppo who will be deployed to fight in the ranks of the Azerbaijani forces from the Turkish military base. The first deployment of these fighters was scheduled to begin on September 25, 2020.](#)

2-The High Military Budgets in Both Countries

The military budgets in Azerbaijan and Armenia have increased steadily over the past five years. In Azerbaijan, which has a population of approximately 10 million people and is wholly dependent on oil export revenues, the indi-

cators on military expenditure have shown a steady increase in recent years after a sharp decline in 2014 due to the decline in oil revenues. The country's military budget plummeted from \$3 billion in 2013 to \$1 billion in 2014; thereafter, however, it began to gradually rise again, until 2020 when it reached \$2.26 billion despite the continuing decline in oil prices globally. Meanwhile, the Armenian military budget did not exceed \$625 million in 2020, one quarter of the Azerbaijani military budget. The Armenian military expenditure has increased over recent years, however, proportionate to the size of the Armenian economy. This increase in military budgets reflects the two countries' readiness to revive the dispute.

3-The Growing Global Standing of Russia

The rise in Russia's standing in recent years and its emergence as a global superpower made Armenia feel more confident of Russian support. Russia, a traditional ally of Armenia, despite acting as a mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan, retains a military base in the Armenian capital Yerevan.

Due to the military and political gains that Russia made in Syria and the international status it carved out in the Middle East, coinciding with Washington's declining role, the Armenians have become more eager to end the dispute in their favor by depending on Russia's military and political capabilities.

III. The Current Situation on the Ground

As a result of the arms race between the two countries, which they have been involved in during the past sever-

al years, it has become normal for Azerbaijan to emerge victorious in its armed engagements with Armenia when measuring the balance of power.

This was seen in the last major round of hostilities between the two countries in April 2016. While Azerbaijan managed to liberate several occupied villages during that eruption of fighting, international pressure forced the country to end its offensive quickly.

While Azerbaijan has currently outnumbered Armenia in relation to weapons stockpile, the geographic nature of Nagorno-Karabakh gives the Armenian separatists a huge advantage over their foes, with the region's mountainous heights covered in dense forest overlooking the Azerbaijani plains. This makes the Azerbaijani forces' mission to storm the region's territories difficult without incurring huge human losses as a result. The villages liberated in 2016 were located within the lowlands in the regions of Fuzuli and Jabrayil which were occupied by the separatists.

As a result of these factors, the current military standoff is expected to continue in the long run given the two sides' inability to clinch swift decisive victories and the presence of international parties which are ready to support both sides to continue the war. On the second day of the latest eruption of fighting, it was clear that Azerbaijan had intensified its attacks on Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Agdam and Tartar, with these areas being located in the less mountainous regions of northern and southern Nagorno-Karabakh, which

could be easily invaded from the central area where the region's capital is situated. The Armenians call this capital Stepanakert, while the Azerbaijanis call it Khankandi.



IV. Regional and International Positions on the Renewed Dispute

The dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia intersects with several international and regional balances. The Caucasus region, which abounds with border disputes and separatist movements because of the former Soviet rule of the region, constitutes an arena for rivalry among several regional powers, including Turkey and Iran. Moreover, there have been interactions of world powers such as the United States, the European Union, and Russia. The following part will review the position of each of these on the renewed dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia in September 2020.

A. The Turkish Position

Turkey officially and immediately after the eruption of the fighting declared its support for Azerbaijan, holding Armenia responsible for instigating the fighting. Turkey asserted that Azerbaijan was simply responding to Armenian attacks on its territories. [This was announced by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who also stated that Turkey would stand by Azerbaijan with all its means.](#) Erdogan wrote on Twitter, [“The Turkish nation stands, as always, by all its means on the side of the Azerbaijani brothers and sisters.”](#)

The most striking aspect of the Turkish position is that it has clearly stated that the clashes will not be on a limited scale, with Turkey asserting that this will, rather, be an all-out war intending to liberate all the Azerbaijani territories and that Ankara wishes success to Azerbaijan in reclaiming its territories with the lowest number of casualties. The comments by the Turkish leader were made on Sunday, September 27, 2020, the same day Azerbaijan launched the offensive. This makes the Armenian narrative that there is coordination between Turkey and Azerbaijan in relation to the attack much more plausible.

Turkey supports Azerbaijan’s emergence as the most powerful republic in the Caucasus considering the racial and linguistic ties between the two nations, bringing Turkey together with the Azeris. This support advances Turkey’s position in the region and bolsters its expansionist project, whether in the Middle East or in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Azerbaijan is the only country which has

what Turkey requires to achieve this position in the Caucasus. Azerbaijan is the only oil-producing country in the region, posting oil revenues of \$190 billion over the past two decades, a large part of which has been invested in establishing infrastructure for oil production, refining and transportation. The country has already begun to derive returns from these investments and is expected to post [revenues from selling oil and gas of more than \\$260 billion over the next 10 years](#). On the other side, economic crises are gripping the other Caucasian republics of Armenia and Georgia.

Due to all these reasons, Turkey threw its weight behind Azerbaijan in the arena of the Azerbaijani-Armenian dispute, with Ankara calculating that Azerbaijan is now so powerful that it is capable of reclaiming its territories from Armenia, thus creating a new reality in the Caucasus, in which a newly powerful Azerbaijan becomes Turkey's ally. By this, Turkey can secure its objectives of establishing a military toehold in the Caucasus region via its military base in Azerbaijan, and strengthening its energy security by increasing its dependence on Azerbaijani oil and gas instead of oil and gas from the Gulf states or even from Russia. This is in addition to responding to Armenian pressure on Turkey in relation to its demands to condemn the Ottoman Empire for carrying out massacres against Armenians, an issue which has significantly contributed to impeding Turkey's accession to the European Union and defaming the reputation of the Turkish state.

However, the Turkish position involves a great deal of

risk, as it sets the country on a collision course with Russia and threatens the understandings reached between the two countries on Syria. There is no doubt that Russia will feel uneasy about Turkey's straightforward and overt support for Azerbaijan and the transfer of Syrian fighters from Idlib to the Caucasus, which is a Russian sphere of influence, especially since one of Russia's proclaimed primary motives in intervening in the Syrian crisis is to eliminate Islamic fundamentalists coming from Central Asia and the Caucasus to Syria to support the opposition against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Russia fears terrorism returning once again to its territories. Turkey, after Russia's success in significantly resolving the Syrian conflict in its favor, has been transferring Syrian fighters to Russia's backyard, which Russia will not accept at any price. Therefore, the Turkish position could spark tensions in Syria and wreak havoc on the Russian-Turkish understandings there.

B. The Iranian Position

Iran has always acted as mediator in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, with this conciliatory role reflected in the official Iranian position on the recent conflict. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on Twitter, "[We call for an immediate end to hostilities and urge dialogue to resolve differences. Our neighbors are our priority and we are ready to provide good offices to enable talks. Our region needs peace now.](#)"

The Iranian foreign minister also held telephone conversations with his counterparts in Armenia and Azerbaijan,

with the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Saeed Khatibzafeh, calling on all parties to exercise self-restraint and urging an immediate end to the dispute and the initiation of talks between the two countries.

However, behind this neutral role and overt mediation in this conflict, Iran has concerns which its leaders do not reveal about the emergence of a powerful Azerbaijan. There are several reasons behind these worries, including: the unambiguous rapprochement between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Iran's traditional rival in the Caucasus; the presence of a significant Azeri minority inside Iran's territories who make up 20 percent of the Iranian population and who deem Azerbaijan to be preferable compared to Iran which is mired in economic crises; the intensive Azerbaijani cooperation with both the United States and Israel, with Azerbaijan viewed by the leadership in Tehran as a forward base for Israeli espionage and military activities against Iran, as well as the economic competition between Azerbaijan and Iran as both countries produce oil and target the same export markets.

In the meantime, Iran looks more benevolently at Armenia as its northern gateway to cooperation with Russia and a market for selling its products, especially its petroleum products, as well as a tool to both curb Turkish influence in the Caucasus and to keep Azerbaijan under constant pressure, deflecting its attention away from Iran and the situation of the Azeri minority there.

The Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict gives Iran multiple opportunities, especially in case it drags on for a long time,

including a possible improvement in its regional standing by acting as a mediator between the two parties to the conflict, instigating differences between Russia and Turkey over the Syrian crisis file, which would enable Iran to regain its position after it diminished significantly due to the Russian-Turkish rapprochement there, along with declining Turkish economic growth, which gives Iran an edge in its economic competition with Turkey. Another potential advantage for Iran is the possibility of suspending Azerbaijan's oil supplies to Turkey during the fighting, which would increase Turkey's need for Iranian oil and gas.

For Iran, the risks posed by the eruption of the conflict lie in the possible decisive victory of Azerbaijan over Armenia, which would strengthen the standing of Azerbaijan and give a great boost to Turkish and Azerbaijani interests as explained above. Also, the continuation of the conflict poses a threat to the security of the Iranian border areas neighboring the two warring countries, with Iranian villages already being hit with artillery and missile projectiles in the past two days. Another major drawback for Tehran of a prolonged Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict would be the suspension of energy and trade transport projects within the North-South Corridor, a joint project between Iran and Russia.

C. The Russian Position

Immediately after the latest round of fighting broke out, Russia announced that Russian President Vladimir Putin had held a telephone call with the prime minister of Armenia, during which they discussed the current situation

regarding the ongoing fighting with Azerbaijan. The Kremlin also expressed its grave concern about the resumption of large-scale clashes. In a move that further reflects the extent of Turkish and Russian interference in the conflict, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov [held consultations](#) with his Turkish counterpart on the ongoing fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia, calling for a return to negotiations between the two sides.

Despite Russia's claims to be neutral, Moscow's role in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict can be described literally as biased. Although Russia sells weapons to both parties and has, for a long time, played the role of an equalizing force between the military forces of the two countries through determining the quality and quantity of the weapons sold to both, Moscow has a clear bias towards Armenia. In addition to the religious links bringing the two countries together, there is a publicly acknowledged military and political alliance between Armenia and Russia. This is strengthened by the permanent deployment of Russian troops in Armenia's territories and by Russia maintaining a military base in the northwestern Armenian region of Gyumri, established in accordance with an agreement signed between the two countries in 2010. This agreement stipulated that Russia would maintain a presence at the base until 2044. At the base, Russia deploys 5,000 troops, S-300 missiles, several MiG-29 fighters, and an assortment of tanks and armored vehicles. Russia also conducts regular naval drills with Armenian forces, which often coincide with Azerbaijani-Turkish drills.

The renewed conflict in the Caucasus provides a chance for Russia to deploy more troops on Armenian soil and to tighten its grip on the southern part of the Caucasus. However, the renewed conflict involves more risks than opportunities for Russia, endangering Moscow's economic projects in the region, posing a threat to its understandings with Turkey, and providing more room for the United States and the European Union to intervene. In addition, the conflict also threatens the security and stability of the Caspian Sea region and the Caucasus, following the tremendous efforts by Russian diplomats to ensure calm there which resulted in the signing of an agreement to divide the Caspian Sea in 2018. Although one of the provisions of this agreement stipulated that there should be no troops from outside the region, there is no doubt that this conflict will threaten the security of the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus regions and will open the door to interference from outside the region. Such foreign interference would not be accepted by Russia in any way, considering its aspirations to restore control over the region, as was the case during the Soviet era.

D. The European Union's Position

Charles Michel, President of the European Council, has called for an end to the fighting and an immediate return to negotiations. Michel wrote on Twitter, "Military action must stop, as a matter of urgency, to prevent a further escalation," calling for an immediate return to negotiations without preconditions. This call from the European Union reflects its desire to revitalize the Minsk Group emanat-

ing from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to mediate between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The group, headed by three co-chairs – Russia, France, and the United States – was formed in 1991 to discuss the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict.

It seems that the longtime suspension of the group's work and its failure to discuss a lasting and comprehensive solution to the crisis is one of the main reasons behind the recurrent eruption of fighting between the two sides. While the European Union pins a lot of hope, from an economic viewpoint, on extending the umbrella of cooperation with the countries of the Caucasus, it has not made sufficient efforts to solve the chronic problems in this region, which will undoubtedly adversely affect the security and stability of the European Union.

E. The US Position

The United States has joined the rest of the world in calling on Armenia and Azerbaijan to end the bloody clashes over Nagorno-Karabakh. The US State Department announced that it had contacted both countries “to urge both sides to cease hostilities immediately and to use the existing direct communication links between them to avoid further escalation.”

Despite this public stance, however, suspicions surround the United States on this issue, with many suggesting that Washington may have pushed Turkey and Azerbaijan to trigger the ongoing conflict for several reasons, with the foremost of these being an effort to abort Russian schemes in the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, especial-

ly the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization which was formed by Russia and includes a number of former Soviet Union member states. Another potential advantage for the United States in this scenario would be that the renewal of hostilities opens the door to a US presence in the region via exploiting the Turkish and Israeli roles and throwing Russia into the vortex of regional, and even internal, disputes as was the case with the war in Chechnya.

It is likely that, if the Azerbaijanis managed to achieve victory over the Armenians, Muslim minorities in the Russian parts of the Caucasus would be encouraged to resume their rebellion against Moscow's rule, especially the Republic of Chechnya and the Ingush minority. This analysis is supported by the presence of foreign fighters coming from Idlib, who undoubtedly include in their ranks several Russian fundamentalists of Caucasian origin.

In the past, the United States came up with a proposal to resolve the crisis between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Despite being rejected by both countries, the proposal seems to be realistic to a large extent. According to the proposal, Azerbaijan would recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh in exchange for taking back its six occupied regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh. The proposal also states that Azerbaijan would concede the Lachin Corridor, which allows a geographic link between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Meanwhile, Armenia would concede a corridor which allows a geographic connection between the Nakhchivan region and the Azerbaijani territories.



V. The Dangers and the Ramifications of the Conflict at the Regional and International Levels

A. Threatening Energy Security

The Caucasus in general constitutes an epicenter of crises in the region. The complex intersection of racial and religious factors means events in the region have a significant impact on neighboring countries, whose own interests also intersect with the territories of the region. For instance, the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict threatens energy transport projects passing through the Caucasus, especially the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline which starts from the Azerbaijani capital Baku on the Caspian Sea and passes through the Georgian capital Tbilisi running to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean coast, reaching outwards from there to Israel and Europe.

Azerbaijan has also become the fourth most important

oil exporter to Israel, [making up 30 percent of Israeli oil imports](#), as well as contributing significantly to Turkey's oil imports. Iran also pins huge hopes on the implementation of the North-South Corridor to transfer cargo from the Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman to Russia, and then to Europe. This is planned through the establishment of railways that pass through the Caucasus countries, with Azerbaijan and Armenia both being landmark hubs for the project.

B. Threatening Global Environmental and Nuclear Security

The danger posed by the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is not only confined to threatening energy supplies to Europe and Israel or Iranian-Russian energy transport projects. It extends far further than this, threatening global environmental and nuclear security. Azerbaijan has threatened to target the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, located only 35 kilometers west of the Armenian capital Yerevan, which was established by the Soviets in the 1970s. While work there was suspended in 1988 after an earthquake shook the region, [one of its reactors, which was re-opened in 1995, now provides Armenia with 40 percent of its energy needs](#). Hence, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict involves economic and nuclear dangers which threaten the security and stability of the world, especially considering the weapons arsenal which the two countries have developed over the past two decades, which allows them to wage a long-term, high-risk war.

C. Rising Global Oil Prices

Since Azerbaijan is an oil-exporting nation whose exports head to Turkey, Israel and Europe, which are markets with limited options for importing oil in light of the suspension of Libyan oil exports, a surge in oil prices is expected over the next few days, especially if the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline is bombed by Armenia.

D. The Outbreak of Displacement Waves in the Caucasus

In case the fighting continues between the two sides, it is expected that massive waves of displacement could occur from the areas of conflict, heading deep into the territories of Azerbaijan and Armenia. This could be followed by displacements from the territories of the two countries if the bombing and targeting of the innermost parts continue. Iran is the most likely destination to receive those displaced from both nations, followed by Turkey and then Russia.

VI. Future Scenarios

The future scenarios include an all-out war and the continuation of fighting for over one month. The forces of each country could also invade and attack the respective territories of the two countries, while the fighting may not be confined to the boundaries of Nagorno-Karabakh and other Azerbaijani regions occupied by regional forces backed by Armenia. In case of an all-out war breaking out, we will be confronted with one of the following scenarios:

A. Victory by Azerbaijani Forces and the Recapturing of Nagorno-Karabakh and Other Occupied Regions

In this case, it seems that Russian intervention will be al-

most certain to ensure the integrity of the Armenian territories and to back the Russian forces stationed there. Despite possible Russian intervention, it is expected that Turkey will not risk a direct confrontation between its personnel deployed there and Russian forces or even between the Azerbaijani forces and Russia. Instead, Turkey would directly intervene to prevent direct Russian intervention, after which Azerbaijan would start retreating to the internationally-recognized borders, while maintaining the status quo and engaging in negotiations following the announcement of a ceasefire.

This scenario would secure the interests and objectives of Turkey as detailed above, enabling Azerbaijan to emerge as a powerful country and significantly changing the equilibrium in the Caucasus. This would subsequently impact the Middle East, leading to increasing Turkish influence in the region and encouraging it to move ahead with further interventions in Libya or Syria as well as to a relative rise in the influence of political Islam in general in the region. At the same time, however, Russian-Turkish relations would be significantly strained by this outcome, which could mark the beginning of the collapse of the Idlib agreement, and the resumption of Russian and Iranian attacks on opposition enclaves in Syria.

B. The Failure of the Azerbaijani Offensive and Stopping It

The possibility of an Azerbaijani attack failing depends on the level of fatalities sustained by the country when it pushes into the rugged mountainous areas in Nagorno-Kara-

bakh. These losses can be avoided to some extent by attacking the outskirts of the occupied areas from the north and the south, which are areas of a less rugged nature and avoiding an attack on the center of the region. However, for Azerbaijan, real victory can only be accomplished by pushing into the mountainous areas, including Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh. This could lead to Azerbaijan's casualties increasing. In this case, the Azerbaijani and Turkish ambitions would be subject to a moratorium for some time. Calculating the gains and losses, for both Turkey and Azerbaijan, depends on the outcome of the subsequent negotiations to stop the fighting. Even with the possibility of Azerbaijan's offensive failing, however, there is no doubt that Azerbaijan would make gains, however limited, on the ground as the balance of power is significantly in its favor. Neither the forces of Nagorno-Karabakh nor the Armenian forces could endure the fighting without Russian support, which could be frozen for some time due to Turkey hinting at direct intervention.

C. Ceasing the Offensive due to International Pressure and Engaging in Negotiations

Armenia has already appealed to the international community to call on Azerbaijan to cease its offensive. Armenian lobbies in Europe and the United States have worked actively to push the governments of these countries to submit a request to the UN Security Council to issue a ceasefire resolution.

Belgium's delegate to the Security Council already submitted a request to hold an emergency session on Tues-

day, September 29, 2020, to discuss the situation between Azerbaijan and Armenia and its developments. Germany and France joined this request, with Britain later joining them. In case the UNSC issues a ceasefire resolution and calls for negotiations to resume in order to resolve the crisis, which have been frozen since 2010, it is likely that Azerbaijan will accept the decision and stop the fighting based on the statement of the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. He confirmed on Monday, September 28, 2020, [during talks with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, the need to settle the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions](#). Aliyev based his statement on previous Security Council resolutions obligating Armenia to withdraw from all the Azerbaijani territories it occupied.

The most likely scenario is that the offensive will be stopped because of international pressure and negotiations will begin. However, this scenario will involve Azerbaijan wanting to seek the greatest possible gains in the shortest possible time and with the lowest possible casualties. This will lead to changing the realities on the ground in a way that is commensurate with the realities of the balance of power between Azerbaijan and Armenia, though only to a relative degree.

In such case, the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict would turn into a pressure and negotiation card between multiple regional and international powers, as well as being thrust into the global limelight, probably for some time to come. This means that Turkey will make gains, depending

on the level of the expected Azerbaijani victories, which will positively affect Turkey's stature in both the Caucasus and the Middle East. This is conditional on the assumption that Russia will not proceed to offer pre-emptive combat support to Armenia and the separatists of Nagorno-Karabakh to ensure their superiority over Azerbaijan from the outset, rather than waiting until Armenian territories come under attack from Azerbaijan.



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