

THE “FOUR-DAY WAR”: CHANGING PARADIGMS IN THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

The April 2016 clashes between the Azerbaijani and Armenian armies along the Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact caused the highest number of human losses since the 1994 ceasefire, and highlighted the fragility of the status quo and necessity for substantive, properly mediated talks. From Azerbaijan’s perspective, there were various reasons behind the April war, including the deadlock in negotiations and lack of prospects for substantive talk. The intensifying and increasing frequency of skirmishes on the Line of Contact made it necessary for Baku to seek better military-tactical positioning.

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The “four-day war” in April 2016 marked the most serious escalation in hostilities in terms of both military hardware and human loss. This particular outbreak of conflict brought Azerbaijan and Armenia the closest they have been to all-out war in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) since the 1994 truce. Violence along the Line of Contact has erupted periodically over the past two decades with increasing intensity. The April conflict came just after the return of the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents from the Nuclear Summit in Washington on 31 March 2016. For the Azerbaijani leadership, the Washington meeting marked a major development in bilateral relations with the US, which had been strained for many months following critical comments about Baku’s democratic credentials. The US leadership’s affirmation of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity was welcomed by Baku officials and the general public alike.¹ Because the four-day war took place in the aftermath of the Nuclear Summit, it has sometimes been linked to Azerbaijan’s disappointment in the summit. However, in reality it is hard to find a reason for the disappointment, given that even the assumed meeting with the Armenian President did not materialize. The role of US President Barack Obama’s administration in a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was not overestimated by Baku, and expectations were low given that the administration was by that point outgoing. The expectation for the summit, was that the air could be cleared following the allegation that Victoria Nuland, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, had played a role in blocking the resolution rejected by the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe on Karabakh in January 2016. The resolution had highlighted the territorial integrity issue.² Baku’s disappointment in that regard was eliminated by the State Department’s assurances that it had not been involved, and then, more clearly via statements in the meeting between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev with respect to Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity.

Many international observers linked the four-day war to domestic factors, primarily the economic decline. This would have made more sense if the skirmishes had taken place in January 2016, amidst the regional protests against price hikes following the devaluation of the local currency in December 2015. In that case, an official attempt to distract the public from domestic woes would have been a valid argument. On the contrary, the economic decline forced Baku to try to convey a sense of political stability, due to its urgent need to secure international investments, in particular for its gas mega-projects. Flare ups in Nagorno-Karabakh were – and are – potential risk factors in deterring potential investors. The negotiations on investing and sharing

¹ “State Department about meeting Kerry with Aliyev,” *Contact.az*, 31 March 2016, http://www.contact.az/docs/2016/Politics/033100151155en.htm#.WK_h-RJ969Z

² “Azerbaijan clarifying Nuland’s role in non-adoption of Karabakh resolution,” *Trend*, 10 February 2016, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/2492568.html>

the financial burden for the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP) was one of Baku’s priorities. Luckily, by early February 2016, Baku had secured a loan of one billion Euros from the European Investment Bank (EIB) to finance the construction of TANAP, while other requests were pending.³

From Skirmishes to Active Violence

The intensity of skirmishes along the Line of Contact since 2014 has signaled the possibility of sudden and more devastating violence. During this time, the military equipment used had become more advanced, and the local commanders on the Line of Contact had gained more authority to deploy this hardware. Previously, the local commander was responsible for deploying a

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limited number of armaments for preventive purposes and in emergency situations, while senior commanders oversaw usage of heavier weapons. However, since 2014 local commanders have been allowed to use heavier armaments more frequently, without first obtaining permission from the military leadership, albeit for defensive purposes. This was clearly witnessed in November 2014, when Armenia’s military exercises extended over the Line of Contact, where in response, Azerbaijani positions shot down one of its attack helicopters.⁴

Nevertheless, the real shift came with the Armenian Deputy Defense Minister David Tonoian’s announcement in early February 2016, when he said that Yerevan was moving from a “static defense” strategy to a more active deterrence mode. This was manifested in the offensive response to the April conflict. On the other hand, some Armenian experts said that this strategic change came with the 2014 August skirmishes. Manvel Sargsyan, director of a Yerevan based think tank said:

But Armenia, went on the counterattack since August 2014, applying a new strategy. Thus, Armenia passed from the defensive position to the offensive (...) As a result, the Azerbaijani army suffered heavy casualties and panicked and fled to the second line.⁵

³ “European Investment Bank to allocate 1B euro for TANAP,” *Trend*, 5 February 2016, <http://en.trend.az/business/energy/2490402.html>

⁴ “Azerbaijan Says Shot Down Armenian Military Helicopter,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 12 November 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-karabakh-helicopter-down/26687375.html>

⁵ “Analyst: Armenian army new doctrine caused Azerbaijan to panic,” *News.am*, 11 March 2016, <https://news.am/eng/news/316189.html>

“In the event of an Armenian offensive, Azerbaijan’s frontline military posts are very vulnerable.”

The Armenian military leadership’s announcement of the active deterrence policy was intended to push Azerbaijan’s military back from its frontline position; resulting in a suspension of skirmishes. But, according to Baku, the increased fire against the Azerbaijani side in March 2016 ultimately led to more Armenian casualties following

Azerbaijan’s response.⁶ The strategic change and its implications – and the lessons of the August 2014 skirmishes – very likely led to the Azerbaijani side’s disproportionate response in April.

Azerbaijan’s Military Rationale

Azerbaijan’s political and military leadership declared that the April violence was the result of Armenia’s provocation. Due to the widespread support for Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, including from the US, President Aliyev’s stance was that “it was an adequate response to provocation.” He refuted all claims that it had been a pre-planned offensive. Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov shed more light on the matter, stating that the main objective of the small, limited in scope operation had been “to prevent provocations and reduce the impact of gun emplacements on our communities.”⁷

Despite initial claims by the international media, Baku’s official military goals were limited: the intention was not the liberation of part of the occupied territories via the blitzkrieg strategy. According to officials, it would have been “easy to liberate Aghdam and Fuzuli – partly occupied territories of which Baku has control – but without a big military operation it is impossible to keep those territories without huge human loses.”⁸ The rationale for the limited operation was proven a day later by Azerbaijan’s unilateral truce. By that point, Baku had gained its expected results. However, in the days that followed it lost some of them in a counter-offensive by Armenia, aimed at strengthening its positions along the Line of Contact which were geographically vulnerable and posed danger from two distinct perspectives.

On the one hand, in the event of an Armenian offensive, Azerbaijan’s frontline military posts are very vulnerable. A successful attack could endanger everything

⁶ “Heavy shelling rocks fragile ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Reuters*, 11 March 2016, <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKCN0WD18E>

⁷ “Security Council under the President of Azerbaijan convened a meeting,” *Azertac*, 3 April 2016, <http://azertag.az/en/xeber/939722>

⁸ Interview with representative of Ministry of Defence, speaking on condition of anonymity, Baku, January 2017.

from the north of the Line of Contact – the Aghdam-Barda road as well as the route to the Tartar/Goranboy provinces from Armenia’s frontline positions in Aghdere (Mardakert) area. From the south, an Armenian offensive poses a threat to the Beylagan district. Before the 1994 truce, Azerbaijan’s partly-successful Horadiz Operation led to the de-occupation of the south side of the current

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Line of Contact – a few settlements in the Fizuli and Jabrail regions. However, this meant that some strategic heights around Aghdam and Aghdere (Mardakert) were lost.⁹ The skirmishes in March 2008 and August 2014 – the two main outbreaks of violence prior to April 2016 – demonstrated that Azerbaijan’s frontline posts have tactical disadvantages, resulting in more casualties. Thus, the April 2016 offensive aimed to strengthen Azerbaijan’s frontline positions in two directions. The small military operation went to the north and south of the Line of Contact, and aimed at gaining strategic heights in both. However, despite the temporary capture of posts in the north Seysulan/Talish direction – key for consolidating the position in the Aghdere (Mardakert) direction – the operation garnered minimal gains. In the end, Baku was only able to hold its position towards the south – the Lele Tepe heights. While this offers a tactical advantage via better positioning along the frontline, the lack of success in the northern direction reveals that the military victory was not as strategic as Azerbaijan claimed.

On the other hand, the minimal success achieved to the south of the Line of Contact provided impetus for improving the security of the civilian population. Some local analysts, including Shair Ramaldanov, a retired Azerbaijani colonel, view the military logic of the four-day war as being more oriented towards civilian purposes: “(the aim) of the April war was to prevent constant shelling of civilian settlements. The goal was to (protect) civilian settlements from Armenia’s positions, especially in the Lele Tepe and Talish direction.”¹⁰

Retaking some territories helped to initiate the resettlement plan, for example in the village of Cocuq Mercanlı. The village has been under Azerbaijani control since 1994, but was not determined or rendered safe for return due to the Armenian forces’

⁹ “Azerbaijan: Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Human Rights Watch/Helsinki*, December 1994, p.84, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/AZER%20Conflict%20in%20N-K%20Dec94.pdf>

¹⁰ “Kəlbəcər istiqamətində gedən döyüşlər ona görə uğursuz alındı ki...,” [The military campaign on the flank of Kelbajar failed because...] *Moderator.az*, 6 January 2017, <http://www.moderator.az/news/164264.html>

control of the strategic hilltop of Lele Tepe about three kilometers away, in range of Armenian fire. However, this was a limited project and only a few places were made safer.¹¹ In other civilian settlements, the Azerbaijani population still lives within range of Armenian weapons. Possible skirmishes between Azerbaijan and Armenian forces can be devastating for those populations.

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The success of the April events resulted in a psychological boost for the Azerbaijani leadership, as well as for the public. The first attack by Azerbaijani forces rapidly penetrated the Armenian line of defense. This eliminated the notion that it was impossible to break through those defensive lines, providing a major morale boost for Azerbaijan’s army units. In addition, the military successes in April 2016 proved the need for the military reforms undertaken following the August 2014 skirmishes, which

demonstrated to the military high command that they needed to train and authorize local commanders to use technologically advanced weapons systems.

Domestic and Diplomatic Rationale

In terms of domestic political consequences, these small military successes strengthened support for and belief in the official rhetoric – i.e. that Azerbaijan “has a powerful army, successful military policy.”¹² In addition, the four-day war served as a justification for the continuation of military spending; with the country’s economic hardship, public spending had come under increasing scrutiny.

However, the small military offensive also led to disappointment with regards to the diplomatic deadlock on conflict resolution. Since 2014, the international community has turned a blind eye to conflict resolution. There has been little momentum to organize a meeting between the two presidents; in general both the West and Russia have taken a minimalist approach. Thomas de Waal, senior associate at Carnegie Europe, emphasized that the minimum goal was “to prevent the resumption of military actions, ensure that the presidents meet, and that Andrzej Kasprzyk’s mission

¹¹ Joshua Kucera, “Azerbaijan: Ruined Village Becomes Showcase for ‘Great Return,’” *EurasiaNet*, 21 February 2017, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/82511>

¹² Interview with Araz Aslanli, Director of the Caucasian Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies, February 2017.

continues.”¹³ The achievement of even such a minimalist goal was not easy, because all three of the missions are interlinked – the failure of one means the failure for the whole concept – which means a stalemate for negotiations.

The main disappointment for Baku in the negotiation period was that despite its concessions – since its acceptance of Turkey’s proposal back in 2013 – Armenia did not offer a constructive position. Under such a proposal, if Armenia pulled out from at least two of the seven regions it occupied in 1993, Turkey would reopen one border crossing.¹⁴ This concept was acknowledged

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by Baku – a clear shift in position since the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement period. Even after its failure in 2010, Baku refused to accept the proposed formula, which only provided for the liberation of two occupied territories, instead of seven. This line was acknowledged at the Munich Security Conference in February 2015, when Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated that “de-occupation of some of these districts, assuming negotiations continue, will immediately change the picture.”¹⁵

The gridlock in negotiations was a key factor in supporting military rhetoric with action, which had two aims:

Primarily, political pressure on Armenia aimed to show Yerevan that Azerbaijan has the capacity to end the occupation, a bargaining chip for diplomatic resolution. The development sought to match the rhetorical threats with practical military capability, a reminder that Azerbaijan is prepared to use force to regain control of occupied territory.

In addition, the military escalation destroyed any expectations Armenia might have harbored for support from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) members. The response was fragmented, with Belarus, for example, openly supporting Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. Kazakhstan requested that the Prime Ministers’ meeting of EEU members, scheduled to take place in Yerevan on 8 April 2016, be moved to Moscow. Since

¹³ Thomas De Waal, “Armenia and Azerbaijan May Play the Karabakh Card,” *Carnegie Europe*, 26 October 2015, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2015/10/26/armenia-and-azerbaijan-may-play-karabakh-card-pub-61923>

¹⁴ Fehim Tastekin, “Turkey extends hand, but no apology, to Armenia,” *Al-Monitor*, 12 December 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fr/originals/2013/12/turkey-tentative-gesture-armenia.html#ixzz4ZaZ2nFmg>

¹⁵ “Ilham Aliyev attended “Beyond Ukraine: Unresolved Conflicts in Europe” session of the Munich Security Conference,” *President.az*, 7 February 2015, <http://en.president.az/mobile/articles/14275>

Armenia's accelerated progress towards membership of the Moscow-led EEU, Baku has strengthened its relations with member states, especially Belarus and Kazakhstan. In this way, Baku secured allies within what is formally Yerevan's own alliance, showing the practicality of diplomatic investment after the four-day war.

Return to and Breakdown of Russian Brinkmanship

The initial expectation after the April clashes – following the ceasefire brokered by Moscow – was that increased international awareness would see the West and Moscow cooperating to bring both sides to the negotiating table. Armenia, a security ally of Moscow, questioned Moscow's role in the escalation of the conflict, from skirmishes to a “mini war.” The Russian leadership's soft rhetoric also raised questions as to why Moscow tolerated the conflict. The rationale in that respect was that non-interference would ultimately lead to more arms purchases by Azerbaijan, a long-time client of Moscow.

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A month before the four-day war, several high-level Russian bureaucrats dealing with military-security issues visited Baku, after Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister had declared Baku's dissatisfaction with the relationship: “We pay for everything in accordance with contracts. There are problems with their implementation; weapons supplied to Azerbaijan should conform to technical parameters set in the contracts.”¹⁶ Most likely, the Azerbaijani leadership wanted to guarantee Moscow's neutral-

ity – especially in terms of preventing a quick diplomatic intervention by Russia or harsh rhetoric from the Kremlin if Azerbaijan launched a counter-military offensive. Azerbaijan has been able to establish relations with a military-industrial group, which sought to gain leverage to balance the other ideologically driven components of the foreign policy establishment, and bureaucrats whose policies have not always been sympathetic to Azerbaijan. Some analysts believe that one of the main reasons that Azerbaijan lost the Nagorno-Karabakh war of the 1990s was its failure to build “mutually beneficial” relations with military-industrial groups.¹⁷ Russia's

¹⁶ “У нас нет проблем с финансовой поддержкой оружейных контрактов с Россией,” [We have no problems with the financing in terms of fulfilling arms contracts with Russia] *Kommersant.ru*, 18 March 2016, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2939725>

¹⁷ Interview with Fuad Chiragov, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic Studies, Baku, February 2017.

slow response during the April skirmishes and the neutrality of the Russian military establishment can be credited to the development of these relationships, which have deepened since 2010 with major arms purchases from Russia.

Baku’s expectations with regards to conflict resolution after the April war were initially met when the Vienna meeting was arranged in May 2016; the West and Russia cooperated and brought the two sides to the negotiating table. However, since then, the Western countries have essentially disappeared, leaving Russia to fill this particular power vacuum. The narrative of Russia’s strong regional role was revived back in September 2013, when Armenia’s decision to join the EEU led the West to reduce its efforts to draw Armenia closer, and thereby gain bargaining power in the peace negotiations. This also strengthened the view that Azerbaijan would be ready to bargain with Russia for Nagorno-Karabakh-related advantages. Since mid-2015, Russia has undertaken the role of principal negotiator, represented by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. However, Moscow has sought to avoid being perceived as a parallel to the Minsk Group, which between April and July 2016 was the principal negotiating body. While it appeared to be a new plan by Moscow, sometimes dubbed the “Lavrov plan” – it included elements of the updated Madrid Principles as well as the failed Kazan Document from 2011. For comparison, the failed 1997 Ter-Petrosian-Aliyev peace plan required Armenia to return six territories, including some parts of Lachin, while Moscow’s latest proposal provided for a stricter timeline for returning Lachin and Kalbajar, and an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh. Only five occupied regions would have been returned during the first stage.

There are two key factors behind Azerbaijan’s expectations for a strong Russian role in the negotiating process after the April conflict.

First, in parallel with Baku’s deteriorating relations with Western powers, Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia have slightly improved. Azerbaijan wants Russia’s assistance in reaching a peaceful resolution. The Azerbaijani authorities, while recognizing Russia’s capabilities, do not fully apprehend the realities of the situation. Seeing Moscow as the only power capable of breaking the deadlock in negotiations, Azerbaijan is reliant on the notion that Moscow can impose any agreement on Armenia and ensure compliance. Moscow would be satisfied if the two conflict parties could reach a settlement based on their own compromise under Moscow’s aegis, with Russia as a guarantor of the peace agreement. This would mean that Russia would continue to wield Karabakh as a tool of influence in the post-conflict period. The “cost” of a settlement for Azerbaijan would be that it would allow Russia to push Baku to join its Eurasian Union project. Baku has repeatedly stated that Azerbaijan would only ever be able to join after a resolution,

believing that this could play a key role in pushing Russia to settle the conflict in a more pro-Azerbaijani direction.

The second factor, which emerged after April, is that Azerbaijan wanted to instrumentalize the war's gains. With Russia's help, this was especially so with regard to its morale boost at the diplomatic table. Baku hoped to see the quick return of two territories back within the framework of negotiations, and in line with the 2013 Turkish proposal, a narrative which had some support from Moscow. The meeting that followed the Vienna conference in May was initiated by Russia in June. According to several insiders, Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested moving incrementally forward, with Armenia returning just two territories in exchange for Azerbaijan resuming normal transit and economic connections to Armenia; all other aspects of the Madrid Principles, including the remaining five occupied territories, would be subject to further negotiations.¹⁸ However, while the life span of Moscow's plan satisfied Baku, it was overshadowed by subsequent developments in Armenia. It soon became clear that the Armenian public had become even more radicalized and insistent on a maximalist solution. This was revealed in the "Sasna Tsrer" revolt – a hostage crisis in July 2016 – regarding the fallout of the four-day war and the possibility of concessions to Baku. This revolt and the public's support for the activists indicated that the Armenian public is not ready for concessions that might lead to a resolution of the conflict. If Russia pushes the Armenian government too far, it risks "losing" Armenia.

Azerbaijan perceived the developments in Armenia as public manipulation by official Yerevan to justify the rejection of Moscow's plan. President Sargsyan was worried about losing his political capital in the context of the upcoming parliamentary election. Acceptance of the Lavrov Plan would have signaled the end of his government. This immediately changed the dynamic, and Putin stated in August – after meeting with the Armenian president in Moscow – that "Azerbaijan and Armenia will be able to reach a compromise settlement of the existing conflict – without winners or losers." The statement displeased Azerbaijan greatly and destroyed Baku's hope that the four-day war would lead to a peace plan or partial resolution of the conflict, including the return of some territories.

The failure of Russian brinkmanship, together with the hostage crisis in Yerevan, increased antipathy towards Moscow in Armenia. To assuage Yerevan's concerns, Moscow used certain tools to ease tensions, most prominently the supply of Iskander missiles. In that regard, Russia went far beyond expectations. Baku

¹⁸ Matthew Bryza, "Two Surprising Proposals for Peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Atlantic Council*, 18 August 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/two-surprising-proposals-for-peace-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

knew that Moscow was providing a 200 million dollar state export loan to Armenia for Russian weapons, in order to modernize its armed forces, which was based on an agreement signed back in 2015.¹⁹ However, Baku had not anticipated that this agreement might lead to Yerevan’s acquisition of such powerful weapons – namely the Iskander ballistic missile system. These ballistic missiles have the capability to reach any location in Azerbaijan – a posture that Baku considers not as deterrence, but escalation. As such, Armenia’s possession of Iskanders serves to intensify the arms race with Azerbaijan, which will seek counter-measures.

One more factor that limits Azerbaijan’s options is that since the Vienna meeting, Western co-chairs – France and the US – have pushed to increase the number of monitoring missions by the current OSCE Chairman-in-Office, and to establish a monitoring mechanism to investigate incidents along the Line of Contact. Baku opposes this because it will serve to crystallize the current Line of Contact as a border. The fact that Russia asked for the same mechanism after the August 2016 skirmishes suggests that relying on Moscow does not yield results. This decreases the probability of successful negotiations, but increases the chance of a new devastating clashes.

Conclusion

From an Azerbaijani perspective, the four-day war was a milestone, both in regard to the disappointment with the stalemate in negotiations and the display of military might. The Azerbaijani government has resisted attempts to describe the four-day war as an offensive action by Baku – regarding it instead as a counter-offensive or a reactionary act. However, both this overreaction as well as the substantive military goals of the action indicate differently.

Broadly, the four-day war resulted in improving Azerbaijan’s tactical positions along the Line of Contact. In terms of gaining a psychological advantage, the success erased the myth that the Armenian defensive line is highly capable of launching any attack. Baku also sought to go beyond rhetorical threats – demonstrating that it has the capability to use force to liberate the occupied territories if necessary. This was borne out of the four-day war’s small territorial gains.

However, Azerbaijan’s hope that its gains would soon lead to a diplomatic solution – even returning some territories in exchange for offering some trade and communication benefits to Armenia while a final solution is worked out – have proven futile. In particular, after April, Russia’s return to brinkmanship – having worked undercover since mid-2015 to manage separate negotiations – raised hope that Moscow

¹⁹ Hasmik Mkrtchyan, “Russia grants \$200 million loan to Armenia to help modernise army,” *Reuters*, 2 July 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-armenia-russia-loan-idUKKCN0PC1PY20150702>

will push Armenia to reach a solution. But in the end, the domestic political developments in Armenia – the hostage crisis and public challenge to the alliance with Moscow – followed by the supply of Russian missiles, diminished those prospects.

Hopes that Azerbaijan's closer relations with Moscow will hasten a solution have collapsed. As of August 2016, the conflict's sides have returned to the pre-April status quo in terms of the diplomatic deadlock in negotiations. The principal problem is that the Azerbaijani authorities exaggerate the extent of Russia's constructive mediating role in order to put greater pressure on Armenia. However, at the same time, Armenia – as a military ally of Moscow – expects an entirely opposite position, setting Moscow's initiative at a deadlock. Russia's previous mediation efforts, which lasted for four years under Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012), ultimately failed and for similar reasons, today's peace negotiations are struggling to move forward. There is little to show that today's realities offer any real change for the better.

However, aside from Russia, the other Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group – the Western flank of the OSCE mediation body – do not seem to have any desire to revitalize negotiations. The current US administration is not interested in activity in the South Caucasus, and early indications of Russia First policy in the post-Soviet space (except for Ukraine and Georgia) offers little hope for engagement in a Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. Preferences seem to be oriented towards maintaining the fragile military-political status quo, leaving any conflict resolution initiatives to Moscow. At the same time, domestic concerns like the rise of anti-establishment political forces in France prior to the presidential election suggest that the Co-Chair countries will have other priorities.