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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** *POSC 3300: International Security Studies*  
**FROM:** *Allexus Bain*  
**SUBJECT:** *Armenia and Azerbaijan*  
**DATE:** *November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Armenian-Azerbaijani war has the potential of growing into a larger scaled dispute. There have been shifts in the tide of war, increasing the chances of spillage into nearby countries. This war has a developing casualty count, on both sides, that is gradually rising. The Russian Federation had previously issued a ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, with the proceeding Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is unclear whether the Russian government will have the capability to control, or minimize, current tensions between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces. This gives great-power states, such as the United States, China, and potentially India, the opportunity to manipulate peacekeeping strategies to control the growing conflict. As it pertains to the longer term, the best means of resolution for the region is that the international community recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as neutral territory, or as the independent state it has been pursuing to become, the Republic of Artsakh.

## HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

### *The Southern Caucasus*

Nagorno-Karabakh is in the Southern Caucasus region. It's seated within the Azerbaijani border, but mostly populated by ethnic Armenian people. The area is mountainous and rugged.

The first documented observation of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute goes back to 1918, when both independent states developed tensions for the region. Armenia and Azerbaijan have continuously returned to a state of war, with small clashes that erupted in the area, after every few years. Tensions declined once Armenia and Azerbaijan joined the Soviet Union. But the issue arose once again after the USSR's collapse in 1991.

It is believed that in the former USSR, Stalin purposefully designed borders in a way that would cause disputes, in allied countries, if the Soviet Union was ever to fall, which it eventually did. This delineation would make recapturing Soviet assets, specifically Armenia and Azerbaijan, easy if they were to defect from Soviet rule. The ongoing uproar over Nagorno-Karabakh proves that if the Soviets needed to rely on this approach, the tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan would have weakened their might, and resolve, enough for the Soviet Union to reclaim both states. However, this strategy only displaced Nagorno-Karabakh's prerogative claims into a place of uncertainty. In other words, Azerbaijan controlled mostly ethnic Armenian territory.

Ethnic enclaves are the primary issue for the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Ethnic Armenians have lived in the region from before the USSR was formed, but Stalin's drawn borders gave the Azerbaijani rights to the area, which revived former feelings of hostility that dates back to 1918.<sup>1</sup>

The Republic of Artsakh was formed by inhabitants of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Artsakh is recognized by Armenia; likely to circumvent its border claims by Azerbaijan. However, the International Community, as well as Azerbaijan wanting to reclaim its territory, does not recognize the Republic of Artsakh. In 2020, the French Assembly provided support for the Republic of Artsakh with the senate passing a resolution for the government to offer its recognition. Still, the attempted resolution was unsuccessful.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Vox, dir, 2020.*

<sup>2</sup> *Asian News International. 2020.*

### *A Rising Imbalance of Power*

Armenia's location on the map places the country at a military disadvantage to Azerbaijan. Armenia is entrenched between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Turkey and Azerbaijan currently maintain a friendly relationship due to the Turkic background they share. Even though military engagement from Turkey is unexpected, it is still a likely scenario if Turkey finds probable cause to engage Armenia.

Azerbaijan is a growing exporter of oil. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Russia cutting off its gas supply to Western countries, Azerbaijan has been able to increase its profits through its oil industry. These profits continue to provide military funding, meanwhile the Armenians depend on Russia for aid. Nonetheless, Russian forces are stretched thin within the Russo-Ukrainian war, hindering whatever chances Armenia had at gaining vital Russian support. Azerbaijan, however, has been gaining support from Turkey, through weapon purchases and trade. Israel has also sold weapons to Azerbaijan. Through their shared friendship, Turkey and Azerbaijan recently developed a \$3.7 billion oil pipeline, known as *Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline*, which supports Azerbaijan military funding through the profits made.<sup>3</sup> The pipeline passes through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. It runs oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

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<sup>3</sup> *Hydrocarbons Technology*, n.d.

## ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

### *Operationalize the OSCE Minsk Group*

The U.S could act as a mediator in providing a solution to the conflict. The U.S could dispatch peacekeeping forces in the region to maintain a ceasefire. This can be done through the OSCE Minsk group, which was developed to mitigate the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992.

“The United States supports a comprehensive peace process and is committed to working bilaterally, with close partners like the European Union, and through international organizations such as the OSCE.”<sup>4</sup>

### *Deter Threats to Diplomacy*

It would be best to avoid selling weaponry, or other forms of advantages, to any involved party in the conflict. Private entities in the United States may find ways to profit from trade, selling advanced weaponry, and selling information to Armenia and Azerbaijan. As a consequence, this would only escalate the conflict, as well as place the United States in a seat to be blamed—decreasing its global credibility. Tightening internal security on the black market can give sellers a hell of a time. If this issue ever arises within the U.S. states, it must be addressed quickly to maintain the hopes of a diplomatic resolution in the Southern Caucasus.

### *Prevent Multiple Actors from Becoming Entangled in the Fray*

The U.S. must provide an exit strategy for Israel and Iran. The Israeli-Iranian proxy war could return once more if Azerbaijani-Israeli relations grow closer. Intel states that there is an alleged Israeli air force base in Azerbaijan<sup>5</sup> which could threaten the Iranians since this provides quick-strike capability on Iran.<sup>6</sup> Not Preventing this build-up can spark a greater conflict. Iran may seek alternatives to even the playing field, which can develop a larger issue across the Southern Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East, ultimately creating a greater issue for the International Community to settle.

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Mission to the OSCE, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Middle East Eye, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> RealLifeLore, 2022.

## ANALYSIS

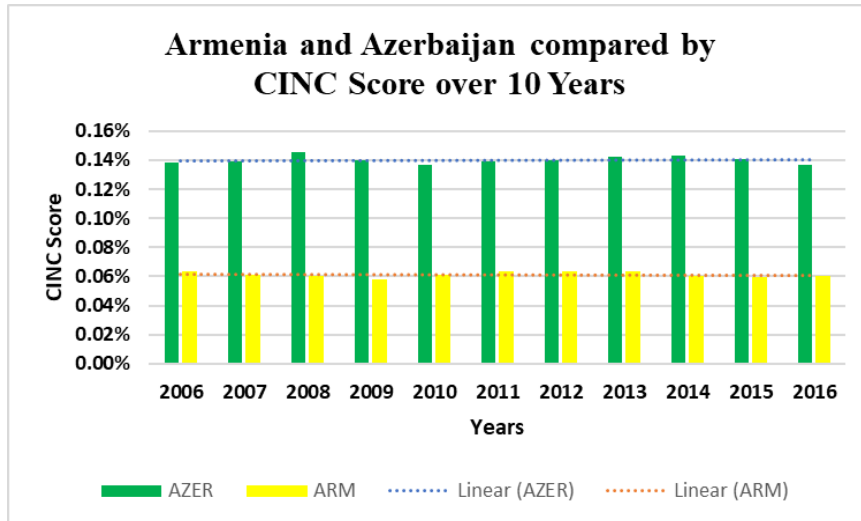
The use of “missiles, drones, and rocket artillery”<sup>7</sup> on the battlefield between two small countries escalates the costs of losses, whether that be casualties, or funding. Albeit, Azerbaijan has had an incredulous financial increase within the past decade which Armenia has struggled to size up to. The United States can only do so much to negate the imbalance in power Azerbaijan has over Armenia due to mutual partnerships, such as the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP).

<b>Key Assumption Check: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict</b>	
Key Assumptions	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Turkey will engage Armenia in support of Azerbaijan.</li></ul>	Unlikely due to Russian, CSTO and OSCE Minsk involvement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another ceasefire agreement can bring about a peaceful resolution.</li></ul>	Very Unlikely that Armenia and Azerbaijan will acknowledge and prolong another ceasefire.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Armenia will gain aid to level the battlefield.</li></ul>	Likely that Armenia will gain aid, but it may not even-the-odds compared to Azerbaijan’s progressive oil economy supporting its military expenditures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Azerbaijan will capture Nagorno-Karabakh.</li></ul>	Likely since the effectiveness of Russian peacekeeping forces have waned.

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<sup>7</sup> CSIS, 2020.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nagorno-Karabakh will be internationally-recognized as the Republic of Artsakh.</li> </ul>	<p>Unlikely due to Azerbaijan having rightful control over the region.</p>
<p>Key Assumption Check:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Turkish government would not condone an attack on Armenia knowing that it has support from great-power states. But Turkey will likely continue to support Azerbaijan with high military-grade tech and weaponry.</li> <li>2. A ceasefire agreement would be cast aside, yet again, within two decades of its implementation. War has broken out twice already during what were thought to be peaceful times. Nagorno-Karabakh has exceptional value to Armenia and Azerbaijan.</li> <li>3. Armenia may find a seller to purchase weapons and ordnance to support its struggle. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan would still have a greater advantage since the Azeri have been building its military might through the prosperity of its oil reserves in the Caspian Sea.</li> <li>4. Azerbaijan has a decent chance at capturing Nagorno-Karabakh since Russian peacekeepers are not directly engaged in the debacle. Russia also has its hands tied with the war on Ukraine, sending Russian support AWOL.</li> <li>5. For Nagorno-Karabakh to be internationally viewed as the Republic of Artsakh, Azerbaijan must find this proposition to be acceptable. The Republic of Artsakh is mainly an ideal driven by the Armenians and most residents of Nagorno-Karabakh.</li> </ol>	

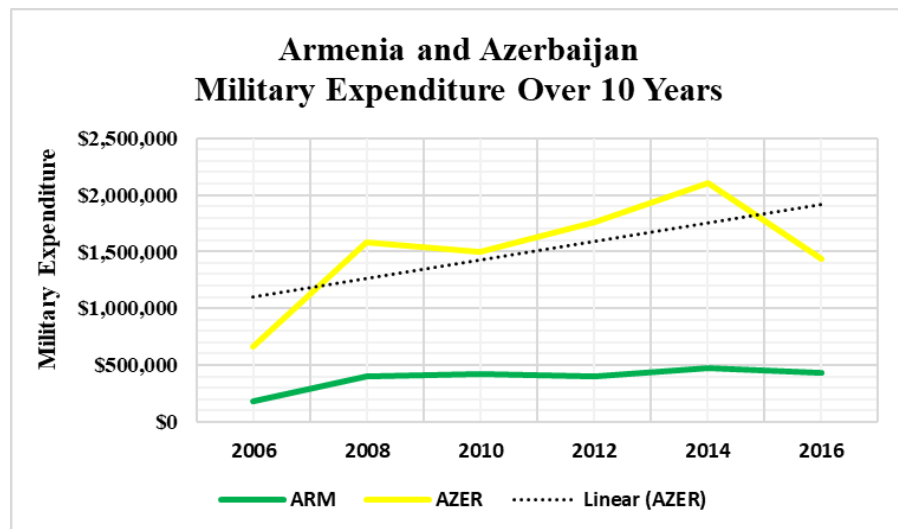


*It can be seen that Azerbaijan has a higher Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) Score in comparison to Armenia.*

*Both States have had a stable CINC score for a decade (2006-2016).*

*Notice that Azerbaijan has had rising military expenditure between 2006-2014. There is a visible decline after 2014.*

*Armenia's military spending has been somewhat constant throughout the dataset.*



<sup>8</sup> Correlates of War, 2016.

## **POLICY PRESCRIPTION**

### *Enforce Neutrality in Nagorno-Karabakh*

Armenia and Azerbaijan could find compromise by observing Nagorno-Karabakh as a neutral region between both states. This could open investment opportunities such as tourism, and trade, between both countries and surrounding nations. A mediator would be needed to push such interests, especially since the Kremlin is occupied with a variety of foreign disputes. The United States should use this as an opportunity to secure cooperation between both actors. Armenia is likely to listen to U.S interests since there is history between both countries. However, it is unclear whether Azerbaijan may agree with an idea as such, especially since Nagorno-Karabakh is rightfully owned by the Azeri people, based on former USSR border definitions. Coercion may be needed to induce a beneficial compromise.

### *Reiterate the Ceasefire Agreement*

Another ceasefire agreement can be made for both states to adhere to. But this may be difficult for Russia to carry out. The U.S can act on this by dispatching peacekeeping forces to maintain tranquility within the Nagorno-Karabakh area. This would allow the United States to monitor the region for security threats to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and U.S interests, as well as having an opportunity to establish a military facility in the Southern Caucasus. Nonetheless, this outcome is somewhat unlikely since nearby great-power states: China, Russia, India, Turkey, and Iran, may fear the U.S imposing on their security. If the Russian federation is unable to continue peacekeeping, there is a high likelihood that China may be next in line to enforce its own form of security; that is once Armenia and Azerbaijan agree to another ceasefire proposal.

### *Acknowledge the Republic of Artsakh*

Nagorno-Karabakh can officially become its own state. It is unrecognized by the international community, but the region is also known as the Republic of Artsakh by the local population, and a few surrounding nations. For this region to become independent of itself, the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments would need to observe ‘*the Republic of Artsakh*’ as an admissible compromise to their century long war. This outcome is somewhat likely, except the Azerbaijani people can find this agreement to be more distasteful since Azerbaijan rightfully owns



Nagorno-Karabakh. The global community would also need to be persuaded into offering recognition for the Republic of Artsakh. The French government would be an excellent starting point for negotiations since the Senate is in favor of providing recognition toward the Artsakh Republic. Though, more research is recommended to understand exactly what the Republic of Artsakh is, or was, and why it's unrecognized.

### *Conclusion*

The rising tensions in the Southern Caucasus, Nagorno-Karabakh, has a high likelihood of becoming a lethal interstate war. Turkey has shown support for Azerbaijani forces, giving Azerbaijan the upper hand in its probability of success to secure the region. It can be assumed that Armenia will eventually gain support from its allies to level the playing field, since Turkey supporting the fight poses a dilemmatic security issue to Armenia's military capability. If the need arises, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is one of those allies who may potentially extend support to the Armenians. U.S support in this conflict would be complicated due to both Armenia and Azerbaijan being a part of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. If possible, a peacekeeping force would be most strategic, and somewhat beneficial for U.S interests, and securitization. A longer-term objective would be convincing Azerbaijan, and the global community, into recognizing the Republic of Artsakh as its own country. This would increase stability within the region.

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