
ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT MAKES IT TO PRIME TIME

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by Joshua Kucera

An elite team of American special forces airdrops into Azerbaijan to defend a strategic power plant against enemy Armenian militia who have taken it over in an attempt to force concessions over Nagorno-Karabakh.

That's the plot of a new product from the U.S. military-entertainment complex, an episode from the TV drama *Seal Team* that aired October 16. The show's geopolitics caused an immediate controversy among Armenians and speculation that Azerbaijan may have somehow had a hand in developing the scenario.

Seal Team — a middle-of-the-rankings show that averages about five million viewers per episode — follows a band of Navy SEALs around the globe as they defuse one conflict after another. Given the number of hot spots the team churns through it is probably inevitable that they would hit the Caucasus, but their take on the conflict took a noticeably pro-Azerbaijani framing.

Twelve hours ago, Armenian forces violated their ceasefire with Azerbaijan in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, the team's intel officer says as she briefs the sailors.

That's a dangerous game of chicken, one SEAL observes. Why the hell do we care about turf wars between countries that I can't even spell? asks another in a good-ol-boy accent.

The no-nonsense intel officer educates him: Azerbaijan is our only ally in the Caspian Sea. * With Russia and Iran stirring the pot, we really don't want to lose any traction.

Someone has taken advantage of the ceasefire violation somehow to plan an attack on a critical power plant in Azerbaijan, and the SEALs are flying across the ocean to prevent the attack. Who are the potential suspects? Armenian loyalists, Shiite militia, foreign powers looking to reduce American influence in the region, the intel officer suggests. (It is perhaps noteworthy that the fact that Azerbaijan is itself majority Shiite is never mentioned.)

Eventually the team settles on the explanation that the attackers are an Armenian militia, seeking to hold the plant and use it to force concessions over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nearly all of this geopolitical exposition was laid out in a brief scene, a clip of which was tweeted by Azerbaijan's consul to Los Angeles, Nasimi Aghayev, just before the show aired.

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