

SUPPORT TO ARMENIA, INTIMIDATION AGAINST THE CAUCASUS, BLOCKADE TOWARDS RUSSIA

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Azerbaijan has recovered its territories occupied by Armenia, however, there have been significant setbacks in the transition from the cease-fire phase to the permanent peace phase. In particular, the undetermined status of the borders can lead to provocative attempts and new conflicts. Indeed, the conflict that started on 13 September 2022 and ended with a new ceasefire on 14 September 2022 killed 214 people in total according to the numbers reported by the parties. This time, apart from the casualties, there has been an attempt to hastily intervene in the dispute between the two countries and to increase the role of the West in peace negotiations.

The Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, who visited Taiwan despite the warnings and increased tensions in the region, visited Armenia this time and made statements that can disrupt the search for peace. Pelosi accused Azerbaijan of aggravating the clashes. It can be argued that Pelosi's goals in developing her domineering, harsh, and top-down discourse are the following:

1. Pointing out Azerbaijan as guilty and forcing it to retreat,
2. Preventing Russia from becoming the main actor in peace negotiations,
3. Making the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) operational/non-operational again,[1]
4. Keeping the Karabakh issue as a unresolved/frozen conflict,
5. Pulling Armenia away from Russia,[2]
6. Encouraging Armenia to betray Russia, just like it done multiple times to others in the past, and pledging support to Armenia that would correspond to the distance Armenia would be willing to put between itself and Russia,
7. Taking over Armenians' self-governance to increase American control in the region by managing Armenia through diaspora organizations,[3] especially through the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA - the most effective Armenian lobbying organization in the US),

8. Encouraging Armenia to leave the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO),[4] thus raising question marks about the credibility and functionality of CSTO,
9. Causing Russia, which is already fatigued due to its war against Ukraine, to lose its spheres of influence.

Although some of the points listed above are assumptions, Pelosis previous contacts and press statements have included the said points.

Azerbaijan saved its territories, which had been occupied by Armenia for 30 years, within 44 days with the "Iron Fist" operation it launched on 27 September 2020, and a ceasefire was subsequently achieved between the two countries.[5] The factors that made the operation mandatory were the following:

1. Armenian authorities also developing claims on Nakhchivan, which is a part of Azerbaijan,
2. Armenia disrupting the search for diplomacy by disregarding the United Nations Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 that define Karabakh as an integral territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Council calling on Armenia to end the invasion,
3. Armenia defining Karabakh as its own territory,
4. The OSCE Minsk Group, which was tasked with resolving the Karabakh issue within the framework of the UNSC resolutions, remaining silent towards Armenia's actions and thus rendering its existence meaningless.

After Azerbaijan regained control of 7 districts around Karabakh, specifically the city of Shusha, a Russian-brokered ceasefire was reached on 9 November 2020. The withdrawal dates of Armenia and ethnic separatist forces were determined, and progress was made despite some setbacks. Peace talks were initiated on 14 December 2021. To ensure lasting peace, it is necessary that borders are determined, diplomatic relations are established, the parties mutually recognize each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of the borders and independence, and lastly, transportation and communication lines are opened. Despite Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's rhetoric of supporting the search for peace, Armenia has behaved evasively, particularly during the border demarcation phase.

In truth, the 13 September clashes have created further support for Armenia. Being visited by such a high-ranking US official for the first time, ensuring that the clashes around Karabakh remain on the UN agenda,[6] and having countries like the US and France who are partial towards Armenia during peace negotiations can all be seen as achievements for Armenia. According to Azerbaijan, Armenia is violating the terms of the agreement reached after the war ended with Azerbaijans victory, and the 13 September clashes broke out during Azerbaijans intervention against Armenias military provocation.

As for Armenia, it rejects the allegation of provocation. However, it appears that Armenia is unable to handle the shock of the 44-day war in 2020 triggered by its attempts to acquire more territory, and more significantly, to enforce the scenario in which Karabakh is separated from Azerbaijan as well as its provocations conducted through border

clashes. Armenia likely wishes to go back to the day before 27 September 2020 and preserve the status quo that had existed at that time. Clearly, Armenia's unwillingness to initiate border demarcation procedures in particular stems from the fact that it does not want the current situation to turn into a new status quo. This is because establishing lasting peace, determining of the borders, and mutually recognizing sovereignty and territorial integrity will make it impossible for Armenia to once again occupy the territories of Azerbaijan (superior to Armenia in terms of military power, defense, and economy) in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the position of the actors who want to intervene in the regional affairs with the wars to be fought through Armenia will also be weakened. Considering the sudden, hasty, and biased statements of the US, the call made by the UN Representative of France on Azerbaijan to withdraw its armed forces to their initial position, and the attempt to create a new mission for clearly defunct OSCE Minsk Group, it is logical to assume that the conflict on 13 September was initiated by Armenia through provocations. Indeed, Armenia wants to receive the support of countries such as France and the US during the peace negotiations.[7] However, Azerbaijan has defined the Minsk Group as an entity that has failed to fulfill its duties and thus refuses to give space to it in the negotiations.

On the other hand, Pelosi's visit cannot be interpreted as merely an attempt to win the support of the Armenian lobby circles in the US during the midterm congressional elections to be held on 8 November 2022. There are certain countries that the US wants to encircle, weaken, and control, and thus the current situation in Karabakh cannot be left to its usual course. The part about gaining the support of Armenian lobbies during the midterm elections can be explained especially by the expressed aim of winning Armenian votes and the creation of a political maneuvering space at the US Congress for the budget required by various Armenian American programs that are planned to be implemented.

However, there is more than that. The former Deputy Ambassador of Armenia to the US, Armen Kharazyan, explains this as follows:[8] Ensuring that Armenia has an integrated policy with the US and withdrawing Armenia from CSTO membership, which is an obstacle to normal military-technical cooperation with the West. According to this statement, CSTO does not to solve Armenias problems. Yet, the reason why CSTO rejected Armenia's request for military support during the 13 September clashes and instead sent a monitoring committee was due to the fact that the clashes were taking place in the disputed territory. As such, the real problem was that the borders were indetermined. While Armenia has found the support it has been looking for, this support will come with the following consequences:

1. Abandoning the realpolitik approach that preserves the Western-Russian balance, betraying Russia this time, and aiding in the creation of a second front against Russia,
2. Once again increasing the influence of the Armenian diaspora (particularly the US-based one) in the administration of Armenia, and causing people living in Armenia to pay the price for that again,
3. Strengthening Azerbaijans resolve to never let go of its territories (recognized by the UN Security Council resolutions as well) it has liberated from 30 years of occupation.

The new status quo is the current situation. In the new status quo, Armenia will eventually understand that moving towards regional cooperation is the necessary and at the same time most reasonable approach.

Photograph: Azatutyun

[1] Pelosi has repeatedly emphasized that the US, as one of the members of the OSCE Minsk Group that plays an important role in the resolution of the conflict in the region, will make the diplomatic effort to achieve a lasting resolution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the Karabakh issue.

[2] Նաիրա Նալբանդյան, Այստեղ ենք՝ հասկանալու, թե Երևանն ինչ ակնկալիքներ ունի Վաշինգտոնից. Նենսի Փելոսի, *Azatutyun*, September 18, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32039787.html ; Փելոսիի այցը Հայաստան ունի կրիտիկական նշանակություն □□□□□□□ ՀՀ նախկին փոխդեսպան, *Azatutyun*, September 19, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32040491.html

[3] Փելոսին արձանագրել է, որ Հայաստանը դիմակայում է Ադրբեջանի անօրինական և մահաբեր հարձակմանը, *Azatutyun*, September 18, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32039505.html

[4] Նաիրա Նալբանդյան, Հայաստանից դժգոհություններ են հնչում՝ ուղղված ՀԱՊԿ-ին, *Azatutyun*, September 17, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32038828.html ; Naira Nalbandyan, Նաիրա Նալբանդյան, Այստեղ ենք՝ հասկանալու, թե Երևանն ինչ ակնկալիքներ ունի Վաշինգտոնից. Նենսի Փելոսի, *Azatutyun*, September 18, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32039787.html. Indeed, a protesting group of 10-20 people held up signs welcoming Pelosi as well calling for leaving CSTO.

[5] For a detailed reading, please see: Tutku Dilaver, Karabağın Özgürleştirilmesinin Üstünden Geçen 1 Yıl, *AVİM*, 9 Kasım 2021, https://avim.org.tr/tr/Analiz/KARABAG-IN-OZGURLESTIRILMESININ-USTUNDEN-GECEN-1-YIL ; Tutku Dilaver, Azerbaycan Karabağa Giden Yeni Yolu Açıyor, *AVİM*, 26 Ağustos 2022, https://avim.org.tr/tr/Analiz/AZERBAYCAN-KARABAG-A-GIDEN-YENI-YOLU-ACIYOR

[6] Փելոսին ու Փաշինյանն անդրադարձել են ՀՀ տարածքից ադրբեջանական ստորաբաժանումների դուրսբերմանը վերաբերող հարցերի, *Azatutyun*, September 18, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32039820.html

[7] Armenia Responds To Azerbaijani Proposal, *Azatutyun*, September 14, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31752169.html

[8] Փելոսիի այցը Հայաստան ունի կրիտիկական նշանակություն □□□□□□□ ՀՀ նախկին փոխդեսպան, *Azatutyun*, September 19, 2022, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32040491.html

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