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MISREADING THE ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN PEACE PROCESS THROUGH THE DIASPORA LENS

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The American *Newsweek* magazine seemingly has a quota for regularly publishing opinion articles written to promote the Armenian perspective, which would be fine by itself were it not for the fact that the said articles tend to veer towards propaganda targeting Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Interestingly, Armenia and any other actor supporting Armenias current government now seem to be in the crosshairs as well. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyans reformist agenda (that sometimes leads to heated controversies[1]), and his efforts to make peace with Azerbaijan and normalize relations with Türkiye have caused resentment not only some circles in Armenia, but also in the Armenian Diaspora.

A recent opinion piece focusing on the planned Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), a rebranded Zangezur Corridor[2] connecting Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan using Armenias Syunik province, reflects the resentment felt by some diasporan Armenians. To be operated by an American company, TRIPP is marketed as bringing Armenia and Azerbaijan together under a peaceful framework with the backing of the United States. The *Newsweek* article, however, rejects this and expresses criticism against all the countries involved. Azerbaijan is accused of multiple misdeeds: ethnically cleansing Karabakh of its Armenian population, erasing the Armenian cultural presence in Karabakh, holding Armenian captives on spurious political grounds, and meddling in Armenias internal affairs by insisting on constitutional amendment. The US is accused of putting aside its democratic principles for the sake gaining a foothold in the South Caucasus, appeasing Azerbaijan despite its multiple claimed transgressions, and thus jeopardizing US global leadership. Finally, Armenia is accused of essentially submitting to American influence without getting anything tangible in return and paving the way for becoming a dependent state.

The problem with these criticisms is twofold; they are factually wrong (or dubious) and they misinterpret the parameters of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process.

Azerbaijan did not ethnically cleanse Karabakh of Armenians. Almost all the Armenians living in Karabakh left the region at the urging of Armenian officials or their own volition because they did not want to live under Azerbaijani rule. This has been corroborated by the statements of Armenian officials themselves, the Armenians who fled the region, and

the officials at the UN and the International Red Cross.[3]

Armenians and Azerbaijanis have accused each other of erasing the other sides cultural presence in Karabakh for a long time. The issue entails many points that go as deep as differentiating between the remnants of the Caucasian Albanians (who were Christians) from the cultural monuments of the Karabakh Armenians[4]. An entire academic article can be written on debating these points.

The Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan are the former officials of the secessionist Armenian entity that occupied Karabakh for around thirty years with the strong backing of Armenia. They are not innocent civilians, unlike what the *Newsweek* article implies, and are responsible for running a political system that displaced hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis, illegally exploiting the natural resources Karabakh, and inflicting extensive ecological damage in the region out of negligence during their illegal economic activities in the region.

Azerbaijans insistence on Armenia changing its constitution is not driven out of a desire to meddle in Armenian politics, but out of a desire to prevent another Karabakh conflict from ever happening again. The references and implications being made in the Armenian Constitution towards Azerbaijans Karabakh territory[5] was one the factors that legitimized -in the eyes of many Armenians- the occupation of Karabakh by Armenia and the Armenian separatists for nearly 30 years. In other words, Azerbaijans insistence on constitutional change in Armenia is a defense mechanism to safeguard Azerbaijan from a possible future irredentist aggression.

It has been known for decades now by both the students of the Political Science and International Relations disciplines and the Global South that ideals such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law espoused by the US have been applied selectively when it comes to foreign policy objectives. This has been demonstrated repeatedly in recent history: from the 2003 invasion of Iraq on completely false pretexts, to the unconditional support provided to Israel despite war crimes being committed in Gaza since October 2023, and finally to the January 2026 attack against Venezuela and the kidnapping of its president. In other words, the foreign policies pursued by the US (or the West in general for that matter) sometimes have little (or no) connection to its espoused ideals.[6]

Furthermore, the TRIPP project is not an appeasement for Azerbaijan. Quite the contrary, it is to the benefit of the US in terms of power projection and of Armenia in terms of coming closer to the US and the West in general. TRIPP was not Azerbaijans preferred solution for the Zangezur Corridor issue, since Azerbaijan wished for the issue to be resolved between itself and Armenia only and did not want any external actors, be it Russia, Iran, or the US. TRIPP seems, however, to have been the only feasible way to gain Armenias consent because American involvement brought a sense of protection for Armenia now that Armenias traditional backer, Russia, has partially retreated from the South Caucasus due to the ongoing war of attrition in Ukraine.

It is thus difficult to read TRIPP as a failure of Armenias foreign policy. TRIPP is part of Armenias efforts to slowly but methodically push Russia away (which it accuses of failing

to live up to its promises of CSTO protection) and anchor the US in the region, which promises to bring American investment and military support to Armenia with it. This has already born its fruits, from the 9 billion USD deal to bring high tech modular nuclear reactor technology to Armenia and the acquisition of American reconnaissance drones,[7] to Armenia securing a 4.5 billion USD deal that will help establish a large scale AI factory and data center[8] that will allow Armenia go gain a competitive edge in the global AI arms race. All of these must be taken into consideration along with the growing institutional ties between the European Union and Armenia, the revamping of Armenias military doctrines and training to better respond to recent developments in warfare, and Armenias program of diversifying its military arsenal by acquiring various hardware from the likes of France and India. These developments do not paint an Armenia submitting to a status of dependence, but rather a country trying to find its footing in the changing circumstances of the international system and balance out the conflicting interests in the South Caucasus and beyond.

As such, the *Newsweek* article mentioned at the beginning fails to properly assess what is developing in the protracted peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It also reflects a rigid diasporan mindset disconnected from the realities of the South Caucasus that cannot view Azerbaijan (and its ally Türkiye) as anything other than a mortal enemy, which considers reaching compromises with Azerbaijan in the name of peace as the selling out of the Armenian Cause, and which claims Karabakh is an exclusively Armenian territory no matter what international law and historical findings indicate.

**Picture: Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev, and American President Donald Trump jointly shake hands during their trilateral meeting. - Source: DHA*

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