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## **Ceasefire Agreement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

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### 1. Introduction:

On 1<sup>st</sup> of November of 2020, with the mediation of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, and the Azerbaijani President, Ilham Aliyev, signed a declaration regarding “a complete ceasefire and end to all hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone”. President Vladimir Putin confirmed the signing of the aforementioned declaration.

The declaration came after 6 weeks of military confrontation, virtually confirming Azerbaijan’s military victory, the signing of which forced the Armenian party to make significant territorial concessions. Furthermore, as per the agreement, Russia took upon itself the responsibilities of a peacekeeper, deploying 2 000, appropriately equipped, military personnel to Nagorno-Karabakh to act as a peacekeeping force.

All of this led to outrage in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. In protest to the signing of the aforementioned agreement, a sizable group of furious demonstrators rushed the building of parliament of Armenia in Yerevan, along with buildings of government administration. As a result of the assault infrastructure of said institutions was damaged, with the speaker of Armenia’s parliament, Ararat Mirzoyan, receiving grievous bodily harm. 17 opposition parties

demanded the resignation of the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, and his government, however, the Prime Minister's party retains the majority of seats in parliament.

The statement made by the Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan reads thusly: "I took a difficult, a rather difficult, decision both personally for me as well as for all of us. The text of the declaration, that was published, is painful for me and for our people. I took this decision due to a deep analysis of the military situation, based on the judgement of those individuals, who have a good insight into the military situation on the ground. The decision is also based on the belief that this would have been the best possible outcome under the arisen circumstances. This is not a victory, but neither is it a defeat, not as long as you don't recognise yourself as being defeated. We will never see ourselves as defeated and this is precisely what should be at the foundation of our national unification and renaissance".

The President of Nagorno-Karabakh, Arayik Harutyunyan, stated regarding this issue: "I do not know how history will judge yesterday's decision, however, we had to do it". Furthermore, according to his comments, had Armenia not signed the declaration, 20 000 Armenian military personnel would have been encircled by the Azerbaijani forces. In turn, the Armenian President, Armen Sargsyan, stated, that he was not involved in the taking of the aforementioned decision, hearing about it from the press.

The Azerbaijani President, Ilham Aliyev, congratulated the Azerbaijani people on the cessation of hostilities on terms favourable to Azerbaijan, calling it a historic fact, stating: "We forced them to sign the document. I had previously said that we would force them from our lands and we did it. The signing of the ceasefire agreement on behalf of Armenia is "akin to capitulation", as Azerbaijan forced Armenia to sign this declaration. Today I sign this agreement with pride. I congratulate the people of Azerbaijan".

President Ilham Aliyev also stated that "he would retake land rightfully belonging to them without further bloodshed".

The declaration was preceded by ceasefire agreements of 10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of October. Both were immediately broken, however, at that point in time Russia only went so far as to issue calls regarding cessation of hostilities.

It is a curious development, that despite Azerbaijan's military victory, Russia managed to gain further validation and another foothold in the South Caucasus region, with both Armenia and Azerbaijan becoming more dependent on Russia as an arms provider, as well as in terms of its role as a peacekeeper further regulating the conflict. Under such circumstances Turkey's role will be relatively constrained and, thus, it is likely that Turkey will cooperate with Russia via the Russian-Turkish joint monitoring centre, which is to be set up within the framework of the reached agreement. Under these circumstances Georgia remains the only regional actor retaining the prospects of European and Euro-Atlantic integration within a cautious and pragmatic foreign and internal policy framework.

## 2. Reasons behind Azerbaijan's Military and Political Success

Azerbaijan's Military and Political success can be explained by multiple factors, including the open and unconditional military and political support and assistance received by Baku from Turkey, a NATO member, along with the relative restraint demonstrated on behalf of Russia during the early stages of the conflict.

The aforementioned, open and unconditional support demonstrated by Turkey towards Azerbaijan has deeply rooted historical dimensions, as the former considers the latter its 'brotherly', blood-bound relative. Turkey was rather irritated by Russia's support of the Bashar Al-Assad regime in Syria, forcing Ankara to back down in that conflict. Turkey also finds Armenia's efforts in terms of gathering international recognition of the death of half a million Armenians during WWI on Ottoman territory as a genocide rather irritating, especially as the initiative has found success on high legislative levels in such influential international actors as the US and France. The US refused to repatriate Fethullah Gülen, a religious figure, back to

Turkey, so, the already strained US-Turkish relations, only worsened due to the issue of the “Armenian Genocide”. None of this is in Turkey’s interests.

Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas reserves, sharing mutually beneficial relations with Turkey, closely cooperating in the energy sphere, which is confirmed by the successful functioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipe-lines, supplying both Turkey and Europe with Azerbaijani natural resources. Therefore, compared to Armenia, Azerbaijan has considerably more resources at its disposal to develop its defence capabilities, along with the economy. According to the available data between 2008 and 2020 Azerbaijan spend no less than \$24 billion on military equipment and training, with the bulk of the aforementioned funds going to Turkey as additional income.

Armenia, on the other hand, only managed to spend around \$4 billion on equipment and training of its military. Despite the fact that in recent years military expenditure amounted to approximately a fifth of Armenia’s annual budget, Yerevan, most likely, still received less and low-quality equipment from Russia than Baku. Armenia also probably mobilised less resources that would be directed towards training and military drills. Therefore, a well-equipped and trained Azerbaijani military, backed by Turkey and supplied by Russia, was, by all means, better prepared for the conflict to break out.

Georgia does not even spend as much as Armenia on its defence capabilities. *Ergo*, under such circumstances Georgia can only ensure its security by receiving help from its strong strategic partners, NATO, the US and the EU.

Some argue that the current Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, who rose to power after a peaceful (‘velvet’) revolution in 2018, does not enjoy levels of support from the Kremlin appropriate for Russia’s ally and member of CSTO. Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, steered Armenia closer to European integration step by step, while, simultaneously, deepening economic ties with Russia. Additionally, he began implementing democratic reforms, refusing to fulfil several demands made by Russia. This included the cessation of legal action against

members of Armenia's previous administration. This in all likelihood irritated President Vladimir Putin, thus, Armenia did not receive Moscow's 'traditional' support.

Before the reigniting of the conflict Russia supplied both Armenia as well as Azerbaijan with arms. Moreover, Azerbaijan usually paid in hard currencies generated from natural resource revenue, according to the available data, the relatively less wealthy Armenia mostly received said arms through direct aid or credit programmes. In recent years it was speculated that Russia supplied the two Caucasian states with arms on condition that they would not put the aforementioned equipment to use against one another, only "preventing external risks to the region". However, in the most recent period such sentiment was no longer a part of public discourse.

Additionally, the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, is fully surrounded by Azerbaijan and bears little strategic significance for Moscow. Thus, the Kremlin had little incentive to spend any sizable military, or political capital until the military confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan reached a critical point for Yerevan. Namely, after seizing the town of Shusha, Azerbaijan received strategic dominance, placing under threat not only the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert, but also the entirety of Armenia's strategic interest in the region. The town of Shusha is located 15 km from Stepanakert, on the highway connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. Thus, its capture proved to be a pivotal development in the conflict.

The town of Shusha was captured by Armenian forces in 1992 with the support of Russia, creating a de-facto independent republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. The republic never received international recognition, along with the 7 regions of Azerbaijan captured by Armenian forces around Nagorno-Karabakh. The 1994 ceasefire agreement put an end to hostilities, however, tensions remained high throughout the decades.

The Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, addressed the celebrating people in Kocaeli, stating that “the liberation of Shusha means quick liberation of the rest of territories...”, once again, reconfirming, Turkey’s active involvement in the conflict.

Under such circumstances, Russia only involved itself in this conflict as Armenia represents a long-standing ally of the Kremlin in the region. Thus, a complete defeat of Armenia would place Russia’s strategic interest under jeopardy in the entire South Caucasus. The ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia went into force on 01:00, November 13<sup>th</sup> of 2020. According to said agreement, Azerbaijan retains control over the territory liberated during the military confrontation, while Armenian forces are to leave another several regions by the 20<sup>th</sup> of November.

Turkey played a significant role in the developments surrounding the conflict, using the special relationship that it shares with Russia. Azerbaijan could have, probably, achieved victory on its own, however, the multifaceted and unconditional support and assistance that it received from Turkey accelerated this process. Therefore, this victory can also be considered a Turkish victory.

Additionally, Azerbaijan correctly determined that under conditions of open and unconditional Turkish support Europe, including France, would have no real opportunity to influence developments in South Caucasus.

As a final result, Azerbaijan gained several important regions and a new paradigm.

Based on the aforementioned agreement Russia will station its peacekeeping forces in the region for the duration of 5 years. Additionally, new monitoring and peacekeeping mechanisms are to be implemented in the region. All of this could have an impact on Georgia’s security.

These processes are also likely to increase Turkey’s influence in the region, which would be mirrored by the decline of the role of the US and France, as members and co-chairs of the

Minsk Group dating back to 1990s. Under such circumstances Georgia would be wise to pursue a more active policy of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

### 3. The Russian Factor in South Caucasus

Both Armenia and Russia are among the 6 post-Soviet member states of the collective security, military block, of which Azerbaijan is not a member. Thus, Russia has the obligation to protect Armenia in case of war. However, despite this, Moscow did not get involved in the military confrontation up until the point when the aforementioned declaration of peace was signed, as the conflict took place outside Armenia-proper.

Additionally, by exercising “strategic patience” during the early stages of the conflict, Russia managed to acquire another foothold for its military in the South Caucasus region, without having to exert any significant diplomatic or military efforts. Thus, Russia, once again, reconfirmed that, despite Turkey’s increased activity in South Caucasus, Moscow will not watch the unravelling processes from side-lines.

It is common knowledge that around President Vladimir Putin nothing takes place without his consent. However, even in terms of “local issues” he makes decisions based on long term geopolitical stances. Russia possesses military bases in Gyumri and Yerevan. Now the Kremlin has also received legitimacy to station its troops in Nagorno-Karabakh. This confirms that Russia’s intention is to fully control processes unravelling in South Caucasus. This deserved particular attention from Georgia.

The Kremlin has been waging a rather active foreign policy campaign in recent years, engaging in Ukraine, Syria and Libya. Moscow also supports its long-standing ally, President Aleksandr Lukashenko, in terms of resolving the crisis in Belarus. All of this begs the question, whether Russia has enough resources to resolve the aforementioned crises in its favour.

The Kremlin supports its puppet separatist regimes in Abkhazia, Samachablo/South Ossetia, Donbas, Transdnistria. Russia’s “forced friendship” policy will continue across all regions,

which the Kremlin views as its sphere of interest. This was clearly evident in 2008 when Russia conducted the so called “Peace Enforcement” operation in Georgia, while, in reality, simply occupying 20% of Georgia’s territory.

Nevertheless, President Vladimir Putin faces political challenges from within. After his involvement in the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, his ratings, decreasing due to the pandemic and political dissatisfaction, began to increase again. Successes of the Russian military help boost President Vladimir Putin’s ratings, however, the Russian economy, akin to the global economy, faces serious problems.

Historically Armenia has always provided Russia with beneficial geopolitical tools in terms of balance of power in the South Caucasus region, which, in turn, bears strategic significance for both the European, as well as the Middle Eastern theatres. However, Russia’s historical attempt to acquire warm water ports, exerting control over the Turkish straights, leading to the Mediterranean and curbing Turkish (Ottoman) dominance in the Balkans and the Middle East, has long ceased to be realistic.

Assuming that modern Russia continues to, among other strategic goals, pursue one of its old, Imperial strategies of protecting Armenia, which in its direct neighbourhood, from influences of Turkey and Turkic Azerbaijan, it must be taken into consideration that currently the context of operations is significantly different, as Turkey is a member of NATO, with a US military base at İncirlik, and Georgia is unwavering in terms of its decision regarding European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Additionally, currently Turkey and Russia cooperate in many spheres, including defence and armaments, energy resources and tourism, as well as other economic dimensions. This decreases the influence of the collective ‘West’ in the region. Furthermore, even as Turkey and Russia are at odds with each other over Syria and Libya, and Moscow supports Armenia, the Kremlin maintains cordial relations with Azerbaijan.



One thing stands out as being beyond doubt; as the conflict unravelled Russia called upon both parties to exercise restraint and cease hostilities, launching a costly peacekeeping operation after the conflict received appropriate assessments from the 'West', gaining firmer control over the region in return.

Russia managed to reap benefits of decreased US presence in the region, as US was busy with its presidential elections and other internal issues. The US State Secretary, Mike Pompeo stated that the US was against international intervention in the conflict, calling upon both sides of the confrontation to cease hostilities. Nevertheless, within the framework of his trip to 7 countries, he will be visiting Georgia on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, reconfirming the interest of the US in the region, as well as Georgia and its issues.

At this stage the fate of the conflict was sealed by both the superior equipment and training of Azerbaijani and Turkish militaries, as well as a favourable international environment. Under such circumstances it would be problematic for Tbilisi to attempt to ensure its own security using only the resources available to Georgia, or, even more so, to attempt to influence the conflict resolution process between Armenia and Azerbaijan in terms of peacekeeping. Therefore, Georgia must continue strengthening its economic development and defence capabilities, in order to attract powerful allies and supporters, via the means of further European and Euro-Atlantic integration and general development.