

By Vahan Dilanyan

The Caucasus region has not yet recovered itself from the consequences of the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, and another breeding ground of an armed confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh is arising there. Today, the over 16 years' protracted conflict of Karabakh is the most significant obstacle to security in Caucasus.

The Obama administration saw the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, and the opening of their border, as a critical step in establishing trust in the region, which would much affect to the Armenian-Azeri relationships. However, as National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair stated, "Turkey-Armenia rapprochement has affected the delicate relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and increases the risk of a renewed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh".

The Ceasefire signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Armenia backed Nagorno-Karabakh in 1994, has been frequently breaking in recent.

The reconnaissance group from Azerbaijan trespassed the territory of Nagorno Karabagh during the night of June 18-19, 2010 in the northern part of the Line of Contact between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan. In the result of the fighting Azerbaijan left a casualty and ammunition, and the Armenian side suffered four casualties and four wounded.

This was the fourth serious incident in the contact line between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh taking the 2008 March and November, and 2010 March similar serious confrontations.

With the oil-money Azerbaijan has upgraded its armed forces and increased the military expenditures from \$ 300 million in 2005 to about \$ 2 billion in 2009. The nowadays military budget of Azerbaijan is more comparing with the Armenia's state overall budget. If the military balance is broken between conflicting sides, a "beneficial" environment of a possible war naturally forms.

The western nations, the pipelines passing through Caucasus critical for them, have never condemned the Azerbaijani military policy. It should be noted the Martakert region of Nagorno-Karabakh is over a 50 km far from the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, and in the case of a possible confrontation, this line could become vulnerable.

To exclude the military initiative in the case of the existing realities, such as oil and gas security vital for the Azerbaijan, Turkey and EU, as well as the fact that the aforementioned raise of military expenses is a "necessary, but not sufficient" factor to the renewal of hostilities, could be questioned, if taking into consideration the coefficient of unpredictability of the Azerbaijan.

After agreeing over the principle of renunciation of use of force (Meindorf declaration in November, 2008 and the Helsinki agreement in December, 2008), Azerbaijan continued the breaking the frontier line with Karabakh, one of which during the OSCE mission monitoring in the conflict zone in February, 2009.

The Azerbaijan's attack against Karabakh in June 18 was just some hours after the meeting on Karabakh peace talks between Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders in Sankt Petersburg.

Azeri bellicose statements against Karabakh have been activated in recent, thus ruling out the appropriate response of Azeri people to conflict solution.

In June 25, 2010 Defense Minister Safar Abiyev announced "the military option has never been ruled out" in the Karabakhi case. In one of his recent statements, Abiyev said, Azerbaijani "armed forces are capable of terminate targets throughout Armenia in the result of purchase and installation of new armament systems".

The war experience has showed that the war rhetoric could become out of hand if precautionary measures are not taken.

The Armenia is considered as the main threat facing the National Security of Azerbaijan in the approved of June 8, 2010 Military doctrine of Azerbaijan. The Milli Mejlis MP Zahid Oruj described the doctrine as "liberating the occupied Azerbaijani territories".

The situation is becoming more tensioned because of absence of a peace agreement.

Early in March of this year Armenian President "appealed to Azerbaijan to sign an agreement not to use force", which could "instill trust in the Armenian people of Karabakh and Armenia". Baku welcomed this call, but with a reservation, "the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the Azerbaijani occupied territories".

The mood of "not giving a door" for the conflict resolution is apt to the settlement process. Though the parties publicly agreed the peaceful solution of the conflict under the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs mediation, but none of them displayed the needed political will to settle the conflict.

The "Madrid principles" offered to the conflict sides by mediator-states (US, France, Russia) in November, 2007 as basic principles for the negotiations are not of the sides' interests; therefore they strain the relative instability between them. The document seems to be a "model of inconsistency" as it repeats the principal of Nations self-determination on one hand, while giving a nod to the Azerbaijani proposal for autonomy on the other.

The updated of last year "Madrid principles" do not affect the public opinion in Azerbaijan and in Armenia and Karabakh.

The joint statement issued by the Presidents of United States, France and Russia on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in June 26 during the G8 summit in Canada underlined the urgency

on completing the work on the offered Basic Principles.

However, with the absence of Public will to concessions, even the compromise via the political will would increase the possibility of an armed confrontation.

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