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On September 19, 2023, the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, the self-declared Republic of Artsakh, fell to Azerbaijan's Turkey-supported military forces. It was the "end" of a thirty-year war; little noticed by a world preoccupied with the wars between Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Hamas, writes Joseph E Fallon.

With the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Turkey established their geoeconomic, geopolitical, and geostrategic dominance over the South Caucasus.

The late Azerbaijan president, Heydar Aliyev, had repeatedly stressed that Turkey and Azerbaijan are "one nation, two states" stretching from the Aegean Sea to the Caspian Sea.

In 2021, Mustafa Sentop, Turkey's parliamentary speaker, declared "The famed phrase on Turkish-Azerbaijani ties 'One nation, two states' is not just a slogan but 'reality.'"

An evolving reality.

In his June 23, 2021 article, "Can Turkish Drones Bolster NATO's Eastern Flank Against Russia?" Can Kasapoglu noted "Through systematic joint drills and intensive interactions, the 'two states, one nation' have almost become 'two states, one military.'"

This was demonstrated in Nagorno-Karabakh. During the war, Turkish President Erdogan stated: "We support the steps taken by Azerbaijan – with whom we act together with the

motto of one nation, two states."

The relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey is political synergy. "The total effect is greater than the sum of the individual effects."

On September 27, 2023, SWP stated "Whereas Baku can count on Ankara to strengthen its military capacity, Ankara sees Baku as an indispensable entry point to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Thanks to Azerbaijan, Turkey's connections to the South Caucasus boast several strategically significant schemes of cooperation, among them being the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, and the Southern Gas Corridor that consists of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE), Trans-Anatolian (TANAP), and Trans-Adriatic (TAP) natural gas pipelines."

Pan Turkism

The South Caucasus energy corridors are to be extended eastward to connect with energy-rich Turkmenistan. "Turkey intends for its 'Middle Corridor,' the Trans-Caspian East-West corridor that spans from China to Europe, to be the artery that binds the Turkic world."

As Turkey's president Erdogan declared at the seventh summit of the Turkic Council in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2019: "We will be most powerful as six states, one nation."

Christian Mamo wrote in "Is pan-Turkism about to spark a new 'Great Game?'" Emerging Europe, August 19, 2021, "His words constituted more than a simple recognition of common linguistic and historical heritage: it embodied the ideology underpinning Turkey's forays into the post-Soviet world over the past three decades. Pan-Turkism can be defined as the idea that Turkic peoples throughout the world – such as Azeris, Tatars, Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz – constitute a single nation with a shared heritage, and together can create a powerful coalition that challenges the established regional order."

Realizing such long-term goals, however, depends on Azerbaijan and Turkey succeeding in the "Turkification" of conquered Armenian territories. But as Dr. Stefan Meister of the German

Council on Foreign Relations warned.

"Azerbaijan's takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh in no way ended or deescalated the conflict but instead is likely to usher in a new stage of humiliation and revenge."

For the "peace" imposed by Baku has resulted in a humanitarian crisis. According to the Center for Preventive Action on March 20, 2024: "Following Azerbaijan's lightning offensive and occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh on September 19, 2023, the ethnic Armenian enclave was officially dissolved on January 1, 2024. Faced with the prospect of rule by Azerbaijan, more than one hundred thousand people, almost all of Nagorno-Karabakh's population, fled to Armenia in one week. Baku plans to 'reintegrate' the region and its remaining population into Azerbaijan, promising economic development."

But "reintegration" means "de-Armenianization" of the territory: symbolically, politically, demographically, and culturally.

Symbolically

Faustine Vincent reported in Le Monde, October 4, 2023, "Two weeks after the surrender of Nagorno-Karabakh following a lightning-fast military offensive, on Tuesday, October 3, Azerbaijan re-issued a map of the capital of the former Armenian separatist enclave (Stepanakert in Armenian, Khankendi in Azerbaijani), with street names in Azerbaijani. One of these streets is named after Turkish military officer Enver Pasha, one of the main instigators of the Armenian genocide of 1915."Ã,Ã,Ã

Often described as "the first genocide of the twentieth century," the Armenian genocide "refers to the physical annihilation of Armenian Christian people living in the Ottoman Empire from spring 1915 through autumn 1916. There were approximately 1.5 million Armenians living in the multiethnic Ottoman Empire in 1915. At least 664,000 and possibly as many as 1.2 million died during the genocide, either in massacres and individual killings, or from systematic ill treatment, exposure, and starvation."

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported April 24, 2021, Turkey and Azerbaijan officially deny any genocide of Armenians occurred (their longstanding position).

"According to genocide scholar Roger W. Smith, 'In no other instance has a government gone to such extreme lengths to deny that a massive genocide took place.' Central to Turkey's ability to deny the genocide and counter its recognition is the country's strategic position in the Middle East, Cold War alliance with the West, and membership of NATO."

At the time of the Armenian genocide, the Ottoman Empire was ruled by the Three Pashas: "Mehmed Talaat Pasha, the Grand Vizier (prime minister) and Minister of the Interior; Ismail Enver Pasha, the Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief to the Sultan; and Ahmed Djemal Pasha, the Minister of the Navy and governor-general of Syria."

In a "'Terrible Vengeance': The History of Turkish Atrocities Against Armenians And Why Biden Has Called Them Genocide," April 24, 2021, Ivan Gutterman reported "A German envoy wrote that Talaat Pasha was unambiguous about the Ottoman government's intention to 'use the world war to make a clean sweep of its internal enemies - the indigenous Christians of all confessions - without being hindered in doing so by diplomatic intervention from other countries.' In the envoy's words, Talaat Pasha intended to 'annihilate the Armenians'...This was echoed in a report from Germany's ambassador to Constantinople, Baron Hans von Wangenheim. The expansion of the deportations to provinces far from the front line, he said, "and the manner in which the deportation is being carried out shows that, indeed, the government is pursuing the purpose of annihilating the Armenian race in the Turkish Empire."

At the end of World War I, "Talaat emphasized that regardless of losing the war, he had succeeded at 'transforming Turkey to a nation-state in Anatolia'

Azerbaijan follows the Turkish model. As the Turks expelled Armenians from the Ottoman Empire, so Baku expels Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.

On August 31, 2023, Newsweek reported "Over the past few weeks, two international legal experts, the first UN special advisor on the prevention of genocide and the founding chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, issued separate reports warning of the genocidal implications of the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh..."

The symbolic renaming of a street in the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh in honour of Enver Pasha, one of the architects of the Armenian genocide, is indication Azerbaijan's war against Armenians has not ended.

Politically

In the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh had been an autonomous oblast of Azerbaijan. "The oblast's borders were drawn to include Armenian villages and to exclude as much as possible Azerbaijani villages. The resulting district ensured an Armenian majority."

But on November 26, 1991, as the Soviet Union was collapsing, Azerbaijan abolished the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh and imposed direct rule from Baku. This provoked three wars between Armenians and Azerbaijan.

In the first, beginning as guerrilla skirmishes in 1988 then as war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, 1992-1994, the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh as the Republic of Artsakh was established. Armenians seized surrounding Azerbaijan territory to connect Karabakh with Armenia proper.

While the Republic of Artsakh exercised de facto independence, its independence was not recognized by the international community. Not even by Armenia.Ã,Ã,Ã

A quarter of a century later, after a military build-up and with supplies and support from Turkey and Israel, Azerbaijan launched two counter-offensives. In the second war, September 27, 2020 – November 10, 2020, Baku recovered much of the territory it lost in the 1990s. Then in the third war, a one-day blitzkrieg on September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan's forces defeated the Armenians and occupied Nagorno-Karabakh.

Its military victory enabled Baku to re-establish direct rule over the territory; permanently abolishing Nagorno-Karabakh's Soviet political and cultural autonomy.

In an October 21, 2020 interview with Japan's Nikkei newspaper on the future status of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev said "With respect to self-determination, Armenian people have already self-determined themselves. They have an independent Armenian state."Ã,Ã,Ã

Demographically

To that end, on September 28, 2023, the BBC reported "the territory's separatist leader, Samvel Shahramanyan, also signed an order dissolving all state institutions from next year, effectively ending the territory's struggle for independence. Mr. Shahramanyan said the decision to dissolve the state was 'based on the priority of ensuring the physical security and vital interests of the people,' referencing Azerbaijan's agreement that 'free, voluntary and unhindered travel is ensured to residents.'" By this agreement, Nagorno-Karabakh was ethnically cleansed of Armenians.

Culturally

Once in control of Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, "Azerbaijani authorities dismantled monuments symbolizing Artsakh, including the Giant Cross and the Eagle Monument, and statues of prominent Armenians in the city, among them, Stepan Shahumyan (after whom Stepanakert is named), Charles Aznavour,, and Alexander Myasnikyan."

Armenian heritage throughout Nagorno-Karabakh may experience the same fate as Armenian heritage in neighbouring Nakhichevan. As Foreign Policy, reported on January 13, 2022, "Starting in 1997, three years after the first post-Soviet war over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan's successive father and son presidents decided that the entire Armenian cultural heritage of another region, Nakhichevan, was unfit for existence. By late 2006, Azerbaijan's government had destroyed all 28,000 medieval Armenian religious monuments of Nakhichevan. The final toll included an estimated 89 medieval churches, 5,840 cross-stones, and 22,000 tombstones...The Azerbaijani government has repeatedly refused international inspectors entry...and it has denied Armenians ever lived in Nakhichevan.

Nakhichevan is not unique. In a report accusing Azerbaijan of the "worst cultural genocide of the 21st Century", The Guardian noted on March 1, 2019, "the Azerbaijani government has, over the past 30 years, been engaging in a systematic erasure of the country's historic Armenian heritage."

By such actions of ethnic cleansing, both demographic and cultural, Baku has increased the likelihood of a future war.

Dr. Stefan Meister warned "Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev now wants to undermine the territorial integrity of the Armenian state. Both countries still have not agreed on the delimitation of their borders since the fall of the Soviet Union, and Azerbaijan last year took small but strategically important parts of Armenian border regions. Baku's next aim is to carve out an extraterritorial corridor to its exclave Nakhichevan via the Southern Syunik region of Armenia, and it threatens to do so by force if Armenia does not comply."

He added "Now, since they have Karabakh under control, they don't need any agreement with the Armenian government. They might just move forward and say: 'OK, we have some territory and we take some more. It's part of this maximalist approach: you're hungry and you never stop eating if no one puts a red line."

As of April 2024, Azerbaijan is pursuing a maximalist approach nibbling away at Armenia's borders with a focus on Armenia's Syunik province, which it claims as historic Azerbaijani land and calls Western Zangezur.

But a future war may be different from the previous wars. Iran has stated an invasion of Armenia by Azerbaijan would be crossing a red line.

If Baku seized Armenia's province of Syunik, it would sever Iran's link to Russia via the North-South Transport Corridor, which Tehran needs to circumvent sanctions and insure its economy is stable.

It would also establish an irredentist power all along Iran's northwest border. The chances of

war increase by Baku threatening Iran's territorial integrity with "Greater Azerbaijan."

Prior to Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev's historic speech on November 11, 2022 before the 9th Summit of the Organization of Turkic States in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, "the Azerbaijani special forces launched military drills near the Iranian border."

In that speech, President Aliyev linked "Greater Azerbaijan" with pan-Turkic solidarity and called for Turkey, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to support Azerbaijanis in Iran.

Following the speech, Shahin Jafarli of the Baku Research Center wrote "A New Direction in Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: Irredentism." He noted "The topic of South Azerbaijan and its historical lands, accusations against the Iranian regime are now aired on Azerbaijani state television at an unprecedented level and style...During his tenure as head of state, Aliyev has said several times that he is the president of all Azerbaijanis in the world, but this is the first time that he has spoken out on problems of Azerbaijanis (Turks) in Iran at an official level at a meeting of a Turkic regional organization, marking it as a problem for the entire Turkic world and calling on the Turkic states to make necessary steps in this direction. At an international conference held in Baku at ADA University on 25 November 2022, Aliyev returned to the topic and this time openly said, 'We will do our best to protect the Azerbaijanis living in Iran.'" -- "Whom he called 'part of our people.'

The next month, "Azerbaijan held another large drill along the Iranian border, this time with Turkey, codenamed 'Brother's Fist', which was yet another irritant for Tehran."

Israel's involvement

According to the Emirates Policy Center, December 26, 2023, "The region is expected to see a multi-dimensional escalation against Iran in the South Caucasus after the crisis in Gaza ends. Realities in Azerbaijan show that Baku is ready for escalation. Media outlets in the country continue their attack on Iran despite the temporary pause. This indicates that tension between the two countries may rise further compared to the past six months. This is evident in the anti-Russian moves in Armenia and the introduction of other foreign actors against Iran's regional interests...The talk about severe threats for Tehran is wider than border changes.

These threats are multi-layered: Efforts by regional competitors to carry out a joint geopolitical and geo-economic project, expanding Israeli presence in the northwestern borders of Iran, and moves by Azeri nationalists with secessionist objectives."

In October 2022, Azerbaijan signed several military and security agreements with Israel. On that occasion, then Israeli Defence Minister Benny "Gantz took advantage of his presence in a country neighbouring Iran and told Israel Hayom's military correspondent, Yoav Limor, that Tel Aviv could respond to any development in Iran."

While eliminating Israel is a goal of Iran, its fundamental objective remains regime survival to which all other issues, including Israel, are secondary.

Iran is an existential threat to Israel. But Israel is only a strategic threat to Iran with its military presence in Azerbaijan. It is 1,187 miles from Tel Aviv to Tehran but only 486 miles from Baku to Tehran.

Israel is not an existential threat to Iran. Azerbaijan is. If Israel had no military presence in Azerbaijan, Baku would still be an existential threat to Iran because of its support for "Greater Azerbaijan" and its military patronage by Turkey, which also borders Iran.

A new war brewing in the South Caucasus?

Ankara and Baku may ignite a new war in the South Caucasus in which Tehran would be an armed ally of Armenia.

Such a war and such an alliance would throw into disarray the policies of the U.S., NATO, the European Union, and Israel.

And such a war is becoming increasingly likely. As David J. Scheffer wrote in "Ethnic Cleansing Is Happening in Nagorno-Karabakh. How Can the World Respond?", Council on Foreign

Relations, October 4, 2023: "The renewed conflict demonstrates the failure of years of diplomatic efforts to prevent the persecution of ethnic Armenians, and remaining options to address the situation with the tools of international law are limited.²

The only possible ally for Armenia is Iran. Russia is pre-occupied with the Ukrainian war. The U.S., NATO, and the European Union have done nothing to stop Azerbaijan. Despite the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh and ongoing military attacks on Armenia, Washington and Brussels have refused to impose sanctions on Baku.

The reason is geopolitics. Azerbaijan has abundant oil and gas resources and a strategic location along the Caspian Sea and the Russian border. Armenia has neither.

Washington and Brussels view Azerbaijan as a vital economic and military component in the "containment" of Russia.

Economically, energy corridors were established to redirect Europe's oil and gas imports away from Russia and to Azerbaijan and Central Asia via "the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, and the Southern Gas Corridor that consists of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE), Trans-Anatolian (TANAP), and Trans-Adriatic (TAP) natural gas pipelines."

The official explanation is diversification of energy imports to lessen Europe's dependency on Russian oil and gas. But as Politico noted on August 17, 2022, "the EU-Azerbaijan gas deal is...an agreement with yet another autocratic regime, it stands in defiance of the bloc's climate goals and human rights standards." The reason for the deal is to destabilize Russia, economically and politically, by denying it markets.

Militarily, the U.S. and NATO have most likely followed Israel's lead and have established "electronic intelligence gathering stations along the Azerbaijani border" with Russia.

Azerbaijan has a long association with NATO. Twenty years ago, Baku "joined NATO Operational Capabilities Concept...[and] the Individual Partnership Action Plan." In December 2021, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg described Azerbaijan as "a valued partner"

pointing to "Azerbaijan's strong military cooperation with Turkey, [and] its gas supplies to several NATO member states."

For decades, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh had been an obstacle to Azerbaijan's membership in NATO. Now with the issue militarily resolved in Azerbaijan's favor thanks to help from NATO member, Turkey and NATO partner, Israel, Baku may soon join the military alliance; enabling NATO to establish a military presence along Russia's borders in the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea.

Political chess

But geopolitics is a game of political chess. One move may be checked by another. By acquiescing in Azerbaijan's political, cultural, and demographic "de-Armenianization" of Nagorno-Karabakh, Washington and Brussels have insured Abkhazia and South Ossetia will join Russia so as to avoid a similar fate at the hands of Western backed Georgia. Such a formal union would exacerbate the existing strategic vulnerability of Georgia and check NATO's position on the western front of the Southern Caucasus.

Israel, like the U.S., NATO, and the European Union, has not placed sanctions on Baku for ethnically cleansing Nagorno-Karabakh of Armenians or attacking Armenia. On the contrary, in an attempt to undermine Iran's military position in the region, Israel has been a major arms supplier of Azerbaijan. According to Giles Fraser, "Experts tracking arms sales have estimated that 70 per cent of the weapons employed by the Azerbaijani army had been sold to them by Israel. In the past, Armenia has even accused Israel of not just providing these weapons, but of operating them too."Ã,Â

But by doing so Israel may experience unwanted consequences. As Michael Rubin wrote in "Azerbaijan's Shift to Hamas Shows Its Cynicism," American Enterprise Institute, October 23, 2023:

"Israel has invested in Baku's military for decades. Israeli officials and many American Jews trumpet the strategic wisdom of partnering with Azerbaijan, arguing that Baku holds firm to secularism and remains a bulwark against Iranian interests in the region. As with Turkey two decades ago, perhaps they were too optimistic. Rather than endorse Israel's right to uproot the

terrorists responsible for the single-greatest murder of Jews since the Holocaust, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov appears at best to embrace moral equivalence, and at worst to side with Hamas. Speaking at an emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, he declared, 'Azerbaijan is committed to Islamic solidarity.' Azerbaijan's tilt toward Hamas in the current crisis comes after Hamas congratulated Azerbaijan on its victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, an action that led to the mass exodus of the region's millennia-old indigenous Christian community. 'We congratulate Azerbaijan for its victory in the battles and regaining the occupied territory,' Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri said. Abu Zuhri continued to 'hail' the Turkish support both Azerbaijan and Hamas received in their respective fights against Armenians and Jews. Herein lies the warning that those embracing Azerbaijan-Israel ties, or even Azerbaijani ties with the West, should heed...As Azerbaijan shifts closer to Hamas, the major questions Israel should ask is whether the weaponry they provided Baku for use against Armenians may end up being turned against Israel itself, perhaps via Palestinian groups, in the service of the Azerbaijani regime's new emphasis on Islamic solidarity."

Baku is following Turkey's lead. On October 25, 2023, shortly after the Hamas attack on Israel and the start of the Gaza war, Reuters reported Turkey's President Erdoğan, speaking to lawmakers from his political party, said "the Palestinian militant group Hamas was not a terrorist organisation but a liberation group fighting to protect Palestinian lands...[they are] 'mujahideen' waging a battle to protect its lands and people,' using an Arabic word denoting those who fight for their faith."

The U.S., NATO, and the European Union have not taken any substantive measures against Turkey or Azerbaijan for justifying attacks on Israelis and Armenians.

What if?

If Azerbaijan invades Armenia, will the U.S., NATO, and the European Union militarily defend Armenia?

Or will the West do what it did during the 1915-1916 Armenian genocide – nothing.

If Iran military intervenes on behalf of the Armenians, will the West attack Iran? Will Israel?

Are Armenians and Armenia the price the West is willing to pay to contain Russia and overthrow the mullahs?

***Explanatory maps and a full list of sources quoted are available on academia.edu

https://www.academia.edu/117229032/Nagorno_Karabakh_The_War_the_World_Forgot