

The Way Forward in the South Caucasus: What Role for Pragmatic Multilateralism¹?

GENERAL

- **Six months after the end of the 44day Karabakh war, there is the feeling that the South Caucasus is still at a crossroads. The outcome of this war has had many impacts. The ceasefire agreement has created a new geopolitical reality, especially thanks to the adroit coordination between Russia and Turkey.**
- **Meanwhile, the situation remained tense in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Russian peacekeepers have been deployed. Their indispensable role in ensuring the security of the local Armenian population has transformed the former internationally unrecognized NKR into another *de facto* Russian protectorate, at least for the time being. On the other hand, the establishment in the Aghdam region of Azerbaijan of the Turkish-Russian Joint Monitoring Centre to oversee peacekeeping operations in and around Nagorno-Karabakh has been hailed by some local and regional observers as a historical shift in geopolitical trends in the South Caucasus: a step forward in the regionalization of hard security.**
- **The trilaterally signed Statement of November 10th, 2020 is far away from a peace agreement. It left open key issues, such as:**
 - *the (interim and final) status of Nagorno-Karabakh*
 - *what happened to the status if the initial five-years mandate of the peacekeepers was not prolonged?*
 - *the future role of the OSCE Minsk Group and of other international organizations and actors (other than Russia and the UNHCR) in its implementation*
 - *the conditions for the return of the displaced persons to Karabakh*

¹ Multilateralism simply means the coordinated diplomatic interaction of three or more states (or other actors) in international politics. According to this definition, the term is not controversial; “multilateral” foreign and security policy stands in contrast to bilateral or unilateral action. Pragmatism is defined as an approach to things that focuses on the practical or logical response. Pragmatic multilateralism= use of multilateralism to forge practical frameworks, relations, and plans that would serve a chosen purpose.

- *how existing mistrust and animosities between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities would be overcome.*
- *the delimitation and demarcation and of the international borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan.*
- **Some of those open issues have become bones of contention to the signatories and have made for “A Precarious Peace for Karabakh”² and an uncertain future not only for the population of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, but also for the wider South Caucasus region.**
- **The perceived expansion of Russian area of influence in the South Caucasus has also been felt in the political struggle emerging from the contested outcome of last autumn’s legislative elections in Georgia.** Both European and U.S. emissaries attempted to persuade the Georgian government and opposition parties to overcome the existing political tensions and work together towards finding a reasonable political compromise. **The political crisis apparently ended in last April thanks to an #EU- #US brokered deal.** Still not every opposition party signed up to the deal, although some MP's did, in spite of party politics. **Given the terms of this deal, it looked more like a strained ceasefire up to the local elections rather than a full victory of either the government or the opposition.**

BIOGRAPHY KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Laurence Broers is the Caucasus programme director at London-based peacebuilding organization Conciliation Resources. He has more than 20 years’ experience as a researcher of conflicts in the South Caucasus and practitioner of peacebuilding initiatives in the region.

He is the co-founder and co-editor-in-chief of Caucasus Survey, the first dedicated scholarly journal for the Caucasus region, published since January 2015 by Taylor & Francis.

He is also the author of Armenia and Azerbaijan: Anatomy of a Rivalry (Edinburgh University Press, 2019) and co-editor of the Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus

² Thomas De Waal, “A Precarious Peace for Karabakh”, published on November 11, 2020 by Carnegie Moscow Centre, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83202>.

(Routledge 2020) and Armenia's Velvet Revolution: Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World (I.B. Tauris, 2020).

SECTION 1: What Role for Pragmatic Multilateralism in South Caucasus Conflict Resolution and Regional Cooperation?

The aim of this first section consists of evaluating the role of “pragmatic multilateralism” pursued by various regional organizations and initiatives (such as, the OSCE, the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union, the “Caucasus Cooperation Platform” initiative, the January 2021 “Trilateral Statement by Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan leaders on unblocking of economic and transport links”) in conflict resolution, and in building regional cooperation in the South Caucasus.

To this end the co-Chairs have proposed the following questions to spur thinking among invited speakers:

- **What are the main regional security risks and threats arising from a possible deadlock in completing the implementation of all the provisions of the Trilateral Statement on the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh of November 9, 2020?**
- **What potential role is there for pragmatic multilateralism pursued by regional organizations and initiatives in support of conflict management and resolution, and of enhancing regional cooperation in the South Caucasus?**
- **What would be the best institutional framework to materialize a possible reintegration of the South Caucasus region with the wider European security?**

Conclusion

- **Trilateral statement on a ceasefire of 2020 #Karabakh war unlocked enthusiasms for redrawing #Caucasus #transportation links. While apparently #Russia, #Turkey, #Iran, #Azerbaijan are leading on the debates, the #West is shining through meaningful silence.**

- **The outcome envisaged with the January 2021 #Armenia-#Azerbaijan-#Russia statement: building a backbone to future regional economic integration inclusive for #Turkey, #Iran. Whether such plans could stand nationalist, geopolitical headwinds it remains to be seen.**
- **Across #Armenia- #Azerbaijan borders, ethnic, cultural, historical legacies are fighting an undeclared war. Renewed dialogue on creating incentives to restore trade, set up joint business, infrastructure projects could help build trust, alleviate divides.**
- **New border crisis emerged from #Azerbaijan rushing to cement its post-war gains, while #Armenia was temporizing for new government. With the mutual consent of #Baku, #Yerevan, #Russia has largely supplanted #OSCE role in conflict management and resolution.**
- **However, #Russia hasn't reneged its support to the #OSCE Minsk Group, maintained as fallback in case its current peacekeeping mission in #NagornoKarabakh would, in time, face headwinds from #Azerbaijan, #Turkey, while ensuring a modicum of international legitimacy.**
- **Having played a "game changer" role in #NagornoKarabakh war, it's high time for #Turkey to step up its contribution to lasting #Armenia, #Azerbaijan peace. Investing in #SouthCaucasus stability would underpin Ankara's regional strategy to expand its influence in Turkic Central Asia.**
- **Current geopolitical regional dynamics is sucking #Georgia, #Armenia, #Azerbaijan farther away from #Europe, #US, and deeper into a wider #MiddleEastern geopolitical cauldron, where the #Russia-#Turkey-#Iran triangle is gaining steam. However, Turkey remains the joker in the game.**
- **From a geopolitical angle, #Iran foreign minister's recent tour to the #SouthCaucasus, #Russia, #Turkey aimed to display an expanding regional role at times of relative isolation from the #MiddleEast.**

SECTION 3: Russian-Turkish Peacekeeping in the South Caucasus and the End-state in Nagorno-Karabakh

The aim of this section consists of:

- **evaluating the performance of the peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the operation of the Turkish-Russian Joint Monitoring Centre and the prospects for their impact on conflict resolution in the South Caucasus region**

To this end the co-Chairs have proposed the following questions to spur thinking among invited speakers:

- **What lessons were learned by the Russian and Turkish peacekeepers while fulfilling their mandate in and around Nagorno-Karabakh?**
- **What end-state in Nagorno-Karabakh would warrant the withdrawal of the peacekeepers?**
- **How does the growing confrontation between Russia and the West impact on the future Turkish-Russian collaboration on peacekeeping?**

Conclusions

Four principles for how the conflicting parties, the peace-enablers, and other local, regional and external actors **move past the current “*precarious peace*” towards a stable, and long-lasting peace:**

- a) The main responsibility for drawing the peace process forward and for resuming Track 1 and Track 2 diplomacy will rest with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. Turkey might also step up its contribution to setting in a stable, long lasting peace, and undertake the role of an honest broker in the conflict.**
- b) A deal that Armenians viewed as a capitulation would hardly be a reliable foundation for stable and long-lasting peace. On the contrary, it might fuel more inter-ethnic mistrust, tensions, and eventually lead to another war.**
- c) The stakeholders of the current peace process might sooner rather than later turn towards the international community (UN and/or OSCE) to ensure the international legality, and legitimacy of any future peace deal, which should be negotiated to cement and clarify the provisions of the trilateral Statement. They**

might also need to **ask for international humanitarian help, as well as for assistance on reconstruction, demining, facilitating the resettlement of displaced persons, protection of cultural heritage. Sectorial/governmental, business, youth and other forms of economic, social, and cultural inter-community dialogue and interaction might also help overcome existing mistrust and animosities.**

d) The OSCE, the EU, the US, the relevant UN agencies, as well as other international actors could, upon request, help the key stakeholders to build up an effective mechanism for conflict resolution and a strong, comprehensive foundation for ensuring a lasting peace.

- **Much like NATO in Afghanistan, who has initially won the war against the Taliban, but for 20 years failed to “win the peace” and prevent them to return to power in the aftermath of NATO’s withdrawal, Azerbaijan has won the war in Karabakh, but it risks failing in “winning the peace” with Armenia. Whether Azerbaijan’s coercive bargaining strategy is going to deliver the key elements of peace is unclear. Instead, this strategy has clearly strengthened the hand of Armenian nationalists and has pushed Yerevan closer to Russia, which might have not necessarily been in the best interest of Baku.**
- **Both Armenia and Azerbaijan keenly need wider multilateral engagement from neighboring, regional and external actors to support their efforts at “winning the peace”, normalize bilateral relations, build mutual trust, and advance towards a comprehensive Armenian-Azerbaijani reconciliation within Karabakh and more widely within the South Caucasus region and beyond. Regional stability and the secure and prosperous future of the whole region is also hanging by it.**