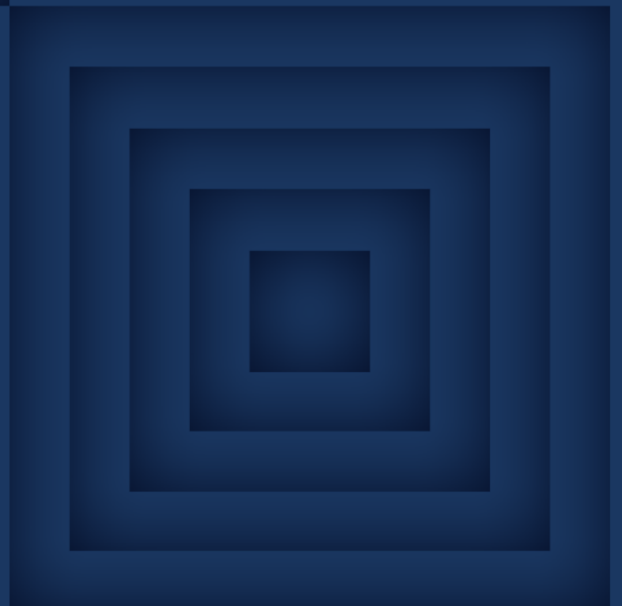
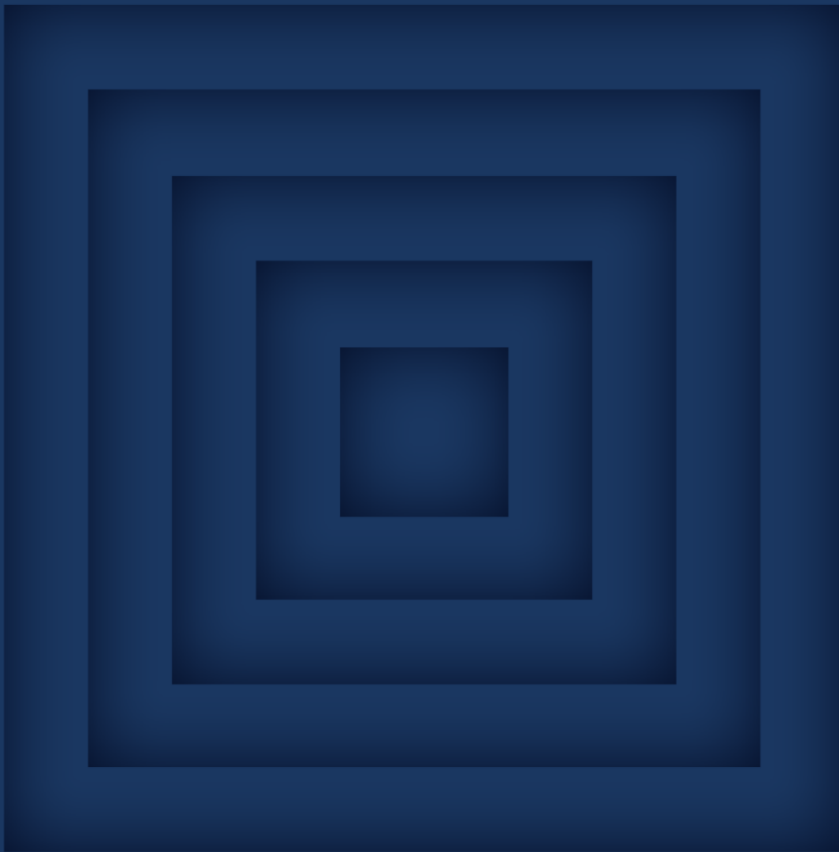




The Hague Centre
for Strategic Studies

Armenia and the future of the South Caucasus

October 2021



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Introduction

Nagorno-Karabakh is an area known for its history of decades-long territorial disputes and conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The recent eruption of violence has drawn attention to the urgent need to find a durable solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These developments necessitate a constructive dialogue based on knowledge of the positions of Armenia and Azerbaijan, regional powers, and relevant international players. The broader aim of this research is to shed light specifically on Armenia's position in the region and the world more broadly and advance an understanding of the various ways in which Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, the European Union and the United States and other actors could work towards peaceful resolution.

Why has the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan not been resolved after the extended period of hostilities in late-2020? Primarily, because the conflict is not characterized by a *Mutually Hurting Stalemate*, a necessary condition for intractable conflicts to be resolved. Azerbaijan was able to escalate to unilateral victory and as a result did not have to look for a negotiated *Way Out* and a durable resolution to the conflict as a result.

Two primary causes of Armenia's extreme vulnerability in the Caucasus can be distinguished: the limited power of Armenia vis-à-vis Azerbaijan, its neighbor with which it is engaged in an intractable conflict, and its status as a shadow state, meaning a state that "remains frozen in the shadow of a single power"¹, in the orbit of Russia, its lukewarm ally, which is only partially – and decreasingly – committed to Armenian security. Russia is "the only outside party with real leverage over both Baku and Yerevan"², as shown by its ability to make Azerbaijan accept the November 2020 ceasefire. However, Russia is not committed to brokering a definitive resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan has some characteristics of a pivot state, as it possesses "military, economic or ideational strategic assets that are coveted by great powers"³ and therefore is better able to influence the considerations and actions of the region's powers. A range of medium-term trends also influence the conflict. On average, these developments complicate the resolution of the conflict even more in the near future.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the conditions of *ripeness* remain absent as long as Russia is not willing to commit diplomatic efforts and resources to initiate a peace-process, make sure both Armenia and

Azerbaijan stick to it, and find a long-term durable resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The first meeting in late September 2021, approximately one year after the start of hostilities, of Armenian and Azerbaijan foreign ministers in New York is only a first early step in restarting the OSCE Minsk Group-led peace process.⁴ Yet, measures can still be taken to minimize the harm done to the security and prosperity of populations. In other words, action can be taken to manage the conflict which is aimed at "forestall[ing] the self-reinforcing effects of some conflict characteristics [e.g. polarized identities and profit-taking]"⁵ and therefore better enabling the conflict to be resolved at a time when conditions of ripeness are present.

Russian peacekeeping forces – enforcing the ceasefire – have provided a large degree of relative stability and security, preventing new large-scale atrocities from being committed. Under these circumstances, actions can be taken to manage the conflict, or in other words, to target the drivers causing the continuation of conflict, and in general to increase peace, prosperity, and security in the South Caucasus. These policy options are presented in the last chapter of the report.

This report takes five steps to accomplish the research aim (see Table 1). Chapter one lays out – in broad terms – the situation at hand in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and highlights peace efforts. In chapter two, to establish a theoretical framework on how conflicts were durably resolved in the past, a literature review is incorporated focusing on frozen conflicts, intractability, entrapment, the role of shadow and pivotal states in the international system and conflict resolution and conflict management. In the third chapter, the interests and actions of

Armenia and Azerbaijan and the relationships with – and biases of – regional and international players in which the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is embedded is assessed making use of the theoretical framework. The fourth chapter assesses the current and future position of the Republic of Armenia – focusing on its current security, diplomacy, energy relations, trade relations and political ideology – in both the South Caucasus region as well as in the world explaining

tentatively *why* the conflict has not been resolved. In addition, this section distills a set of mid-term trends that are likely to affect Armenia’s security position in the upcoming decade. Finally, this report presents policy options outlining specific initiatives regional and international actors could take to enhance peace, prosperity and security in Armenia and the South Caucasus more broadly.

Section	Main question(s)
1. Timeline	What are the main events shaping the current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh?
2. Conflict resolution, a Theoretical Framework	How have conflicts been durably resolved in the past? How does the transformation from a unipolar to a bi-(or multipolar) order affect conflict resolution? In the absence of means to resolve conflict, how can conflicts be managed?
3. Conflict map	What are the interests and actions of the regional and international players directly or indirectly involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
4. The position of Armenia	How is Armenia embedded in the regional and international order?
5. Managing the Nagorno Karabakh conflict: Policy options	What steps have been taken to durably resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? What steps could be taken to durably resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? What steps can relevant actors take to manage the conflict, contribute to peace, prosperity and security in the South Caucasus and work towards a situation in which the conflict might be durably resolved in the future?

Table 1: Reader’s guide: Sections and main questions

Methodology

The assessment in this report is based on a literature review, conflict analysis desk research, expert and stakeholder interviews, a limited data analysis and in-person dialogues. A review of theoretical literature on frozen conflicts, intractability, entrapment, ripeness theory – highlighting the role of *Mutually Hurting Stalemates (MHS)*, *Ways Out* and *Mutually Enticing Opportunities (MEOs)* – and the characteristics of shadow and pivot states in an increasingly multipolar world is also included.⁶ Finally,

the report relies on a wide range of open-source databases such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s (SIPRI) military expenditure and arms transfer databases,⁷ several issues of the International Institute for Security Studies (IISS)’s Military Balance,⁸ the International Monetary Fund (IMF)’s Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS),⁹ the United Nations’ UN Comtrade Database,¹⁰ the Freedom House Index¹¹ and the Corruption Perception Index (CPI).¹²

1. Timeline

In September 2020, the decades-long, territorial Nagorno-Karabakh conflict flared up, leading to the worst violence the area has seen since the early 1990s. This six-week war, reportedly killing approximately 7,000 soldiers and civilians in the disputed territory and along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border,¹³ ended in military victory for Azerbaijan. The large-scale use of drones imported from Turkey¹⁴ and Israel, described by analysts as a “game-changing weapon”,¹⁵ played a large role in the success of Azerbaijan’s offensive.¹⁶ A Russia-brokered truce, including the replacement of Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh by approximately 2,000 Russian peacekeepers, formalized the control taken by Azerbaijan over about one third of the contested region, including the city of Shushi/Shusha.¹⁷ Additionally, the war and the trilateral declaration on ceasefire forced Armenia to withdraw from seven districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh, belonging to Azerbaijan.¹⁸ A joint Russian-Turkish Centre for Monitoring the Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, supported by Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey but not by Armenia, has been charged with observing the ceasefire since January 2021.¹⁹

To accomplish the ceasefire declaration, Russia put heavy pressure on Azerbaijan to accept the terms, reportedly threatening military intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh if Baku did not comply.²⁰ As a result, the post-2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict governance regime and security situation in the approximately two thirds of the region not taken over by Azerbaijan is as follows:

Under the terms of the ceasefire agreement Armenian forces were obliged to leave Nagorno-Karabakh, and they were replaced by a Russian peacekeeping contingent. [...] In the absence of any internationally supported legal guarantees from Baku, the presence of Russian peacekeeping forces constitutes the sole guarantee Karabakh Armenians can rely on in preserving their *de facto* statehood and separation from Azerbaijan.²¹

Earlier truces brokered by France, Russia, and the United States, co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk

Group who spearhead efforts to achieve peace in Nagorno-Karabakh, failed. The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group nonetheless have urged both Armenia and Azerbaijan to work towards “the achievement of a final comprehensive and sustainable settlement on the basis of the elements and principles well-known to both sides” (as presented in section “International actors” and in Table 6).²² Similarly, the UN Secretary-General has called on Armenia and Azerbaijan to “resume negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE’s Minsk Group Co-Chairs to reach a lasting peaceful settlement.”²³

The ceasefire has not been followed up by negotiations to durably resolve the conflict. In the absence of a peace process, grievances remain unaddressed, and important issues unresolved, including the return of prisoners of war and, critically, the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁴ At the same time, the current situation produces new grievances. Fighting has continued along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border more broadly on occasion, including an attack by Azerbaijan on 28 July killing three Armenian

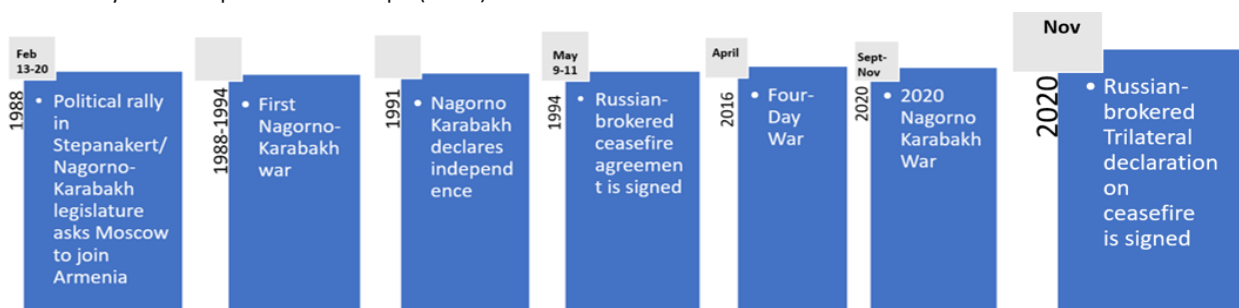


Figure 1: Over three decades of conflict: A timeline of major events in the Nagorno-Karabakh region

servicemen and injuring four more.²⁵ In response, Armenia has proposed the establishment of Russian army outposts along the border to prevent tensions from escalating further.²⁶

Nagorno-Karabakh has been the theater of an interstate territorial dispute for over three decades, which the Republic of Armenia sees as a fight for self-determination in favor of the Armenian-majority population of the region and Azerbaijan sees as a separatist conflict violating its sovereignty. Under the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh had been an autonomous region within Azerbaijan. As the Soviet grip started to loosen, ethnic-Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh organized a political rally in Stepanakert advocating the region join Armenia on 13 February 1988. Through the Nagorno-Karabakh legislature, the majority of the region then passed a

resolution to join Armenia on 20 February 1988, whilst the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia voted in favor of 'unification' with Nagorno-Karabakh. In other words, it advocated the annexation of the region.²⁷ Tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia escalated into a full-fledged war when Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence in 1991. When a Russia-brokered trilateral ceasefire agreement ended the conflict on 11 May 1994, Armenia controlled most of the disputed region as well as adjacent Azerbaijani territory (See Figure 1 for a timeline). Nagorno-Karabakh, which had been supported by Armenia politically and militarily, gained *de facto* independence. Since the 1988-1994 war, the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute – in addition to several other conflicts in the former Soviet-sphere – has been referred to as a *frozen conflict*.

2. Peaceful Resolution, a Theoretical Framework

It is easier to start a war than to end one.²⁸ As such, ending protracted, occasionally frozen, and intractable conflicts is particularly difficult. How can the frozen conflicts in pivot states around Europe be durably resolved? What if these conflicts are characterized by intractability? And if resolution is not possible, how can initial steps to establish the foundation for longer-term conflict resolution be laid and the negative effects of conflicts be mitigated?

There is a whole library of theories and historical analysis of frozen conflicts and conflict intractability. The literature review below explains why frozen conflict is no longer the main prism through which these conflicts are studied. It proposes Ira William Zartman's conception of conflict intractability as a better alternative to understand the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's internal dynamics and embeddedness in the region²⁹ – in combination with concepts of entrapment and conflict change. Subsequently, Ian Bremmer's distinction between the ability of shadow states and pivot states to influence the policies of larger states in a post-unipolar world is assessed.³⁰ Then, the framework returns to Zartman as it highlights the roles of Mutually Hurting Stalemates (MHS) and a Way Out and Mutually Enticing Opportunities (MEOs) that are necessary conditions for intractable conflicts to be resolved.³¹ Finally, the framework presents the steps that Louis Kriesberg proposes parties can take in order to manage the conflict if conditions to durably resolve conflict are not met.³²

2.1. Frozen conflict

Frozen conflicts have been described as wars that “have been settled not through peace deals but simply by freezing each side's position.”³³ The central point of a frozen conflict is that they are still ongoing but in a state of dormancy, as the positions of both parties on the battlefield, and perhaps also in negotiations, are frozen without formally concluding the conflict. In some

definitions of frozen conflict, the role of a “stalemate” to end the conflict's “violent stage” is highlighted.³⁴ The term has become in vogue in both current affairs publications and the field of international relations since 1991 and has primarily been applied to developments and conflicts in the territories of the former Soviet Union.³⁵ Six conflicts in South-Eastern Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and Transcaucasia specifically have been described as frozen conflicts, due to their shared characteristics (see Table 2).

Armed violence along ethnic, national, cultural, or linguistic community lines within multinational states characterize all six conflicts. Fragmentation of a multinational state, in Europe since the 1970s, has been more likely to occur under the following conditions: if “the minority population is relatively numerous, spatially concentrated, [and] culturally and religiously considerably different from the majority nation.”³⁷ The stand-off between Russia and Ukraine over Donbas is a seventh conflict that shares characteristics with the other six, even though the conflict is still ongoing today.

Location	Conflict	Main states involved
Ex-Soviet territory	Abkhazia	Russia and Georgia
Ex-Soviet territory	Nagorno-Karabakh	Armenia and Azerbaijan
Ex-Soviet territory	South Ossetia	Russia and Georgia
Ex-Soviet territory	Transdniestria	Russia and Moldova
Former Yugoslavia	Kosovo	Serbia, United States and the EU
East Mediterranean	Cyprus	Turkey and Greece
Ex-Soviet territory	Donbas (ongoing)	Russia and Ukraine

*Table 2 Europe's six frozen conflicts and one ongoing conflict*³⁶

The term frozen conflict has been criticized, especially when it pertains to the conflicts in the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia. In fact, the situations around these conflicts are far from frozen and are evolving continuously. For instance, the Nagorno-Karabakh region is constantly either close to or in a state of violence, even though the peace processes itself are often frozen.³⁸ Armed conflicts and mini-wars causing “considerable loss of human life” do take place, even at times when the conflict is considered to

be frozen. Another criticism focuses on the relatively short existence of these frozen conflicts, especially compared to other conflicts in Europe, such as the dispute over Gibraltar between the United Kingdom and Spain, or to those resulting from the acts of European colonial powers in the past, such as in Africa.³⁹ Most of these six conflicts, however, do share conditions that make them intractable,⁴⁰ regardless of whether frozen is the best term to describe them.

2.2. Intractable conflict

Intractable conflicts are near impossible to resolve, as the warring parties show “persistent resistance to a negotiated solution”.⁴¹ The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is perhaps the most well-known example of an intractable conflict.⁴² Even though a commonly accepted, straightforward definition of intractability does not exist, there are a set of characteristics widely acknowledged to play a role in intractable conflicts. Zartman distinguishes eight characteristics. The first five

are internal process-related, and self-reinforcing characteristics “that combine to identify intractable conflicts” and that are “generally shared by intractable conflicts”. Then, there are three external and structural characteristics that are not “as universal, [...] but [...] are still powerful influences”, on which the intractability of conflicts relies (see Table 3).⁴³ Zartman’s eight characteristics are explored in detail hereafter.

2.2.1. Internal, self-reinforcing characteristics

Even though it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when a conflict has gone on long enough to become intractable, the self-reinforcing nature of conflict increasingly obstructing a solution over time – every grievance administered pushing towards intractability – is self-evident.⁴⁴ As fathers are killed, sons avenge them while pressuring their siblings to not forget the harm that was done. This brings about a counterreaction, resulting in a dynamic that exacerbates grievances constantly. Seemingly, an action-reaction cycle instead of the initial incompatibility of the *solutions* proposed by both parties becomes the problem.⁴⁵ Vuković and Bernabei point out that sunk costs, for instance lives lost, in this process show a warring party’s “resolve” and perhaps even serve as an “addicting means” to continue “commitment to intended objectives.” *Protraction* in this way reinforces beliefs of the conflict as inevitable, existential, and in need of “unyielding commitment to achieve outright victory.”⁴⁶ Both sides are likely to “perceive themselves as being victims of the rival” in intractable conflicts [...], as a result of “real experiences and on the process of social construction” which is then “transmitted to the

members of new generations.”⁴⁷ In the end, *identities* become polarized to an extent that they “depend on denigration of the other”.⁴⁸ Finally, these acts become part of history, mythology and ideology behind group action, making it difficult to change their actions.⁴⁹ Populations will, as a result of these broadly shared zero-sum identities, offer little space for the elites to strike a peace deal that inevitably involves compromises on their behalf.

In the absence of one side’s victory or a moment of ripeness (see section “Ripeness”) in which the conflict can be resolved - intractable conflicts are characterized by a Stable, Soft, Self-Serving (4S) stalemate in which parties within warring factions profit from the ongoing conflict. Under conditions of a 4S stalemate, violence is ongoing but generally preferred over any negotiated solution as the parties are fully committed to their unilaterally formulated untenable solutions. In a situation of soft stalemate, at least one of two warring parties hence “avoids the worst [i.e., defeat at the hands of an inhuman enemy],

controls losses [...], and protects existence and identity".⁵⁰ The stalemate at the Western front during World War I is a well-known example in which for multiple years France, Germany and Britain did not opt to start negotiations, as no side suffered a defeat.⁵¹

Another reason why ripeness might be absent is the origin of the practice of profit-taking and "parasitic industries" as conflict proceeds.⁵² *Profitability* moves beyond the 4-S stalemate, as conflicts become "not just bearable, but actually gainful" to parties within the warring factions. These forms of profitability come in material and immaterial forms such as defense industry interests and elites who, in the conflict, find "a way to enhance their relevance and consolidate power".⁵³ In fact, escalation of the conflict can become "a vehicle for political face-saving and consolidation of public support".⁵⁴ Furthermore, less clear-cut forms of profitability – such as job security for (child) soldiers fighting in intractable conflicts who otherwise have very little professional skills and opportunities for training— can endanger peaceful resolution or the maintenance of peace.⁵⁵

At what point exactly are parties entrapped in escalatory cycles to such an extent that a conflict becomes intractable? Wars are characterized by four forms of change, namely conflict formation,

2.2.2. External, less-dynamic characteristics

Conflicts seldomly occur in a vacuum in which only the warring factions are of relevance. Instead, involvement of outside actors, such as patrons or clients, give the intractable conflict three external dynamics in addition to the five internal conditions mentioned. These external characteristics do not have a self-reinforcing nature and are less dynamic, which makes them in general less pernicious.

First, conflicts are characterized by their *embeddedness*, meaning that conflict takes place under the conditions of "a multi-layered set of relationships", as they involve parties beyond those directly engaged in the fighting.⁶¹ Take for example the events of the July Crisis of 1914 leading eventually to the start of World War I. The

conflict exacerbation (or escalation), conflict mitigation and conflict resolution.⁵⁶ *Entrapment*, meaning conflict exacerbation with no apparent chance of undoing that development,⁵⁷ takes place in the second stage of change, eventually resulting in intractability. Zartman approaches the issue loosely, arguing that "a conflict is not really intractable until it has [...] resisted attempts to render it tractable".⁵⁸ Kriesberg proposes more concrete parameters to determine when intractability has been reached, arguing that if "large-scale social conflicts" persist beyond "one social generation" they become "intractable" as parties "learned and internalized reasons" to persist in fighting.⁵⁹

The incentives for opposing leaderships usually favor escalation over de-escalation, as a result of the above conflict dynamics. Vuković and Bernabei stress that the use of escalation is a means for warring parties to justify material and immaterial sunk cost or sacrifices already made in the past. For entrapment to fully manifest, a consequence of far-going escalation, they point at the necessity of "increased investments over time".⁶⁰ Many societies honor those willing to sacrifice instead of those willing to compromise. The conflict investment in the form of these lives lost, in addition to spent resources and opportunities for peace, cannot be easily abandoned by the leaders who advocated in favor of continued conflict escalation.

retaliatory campaign of Austria-Hungary in July 1914 against Serbia, in response to the killing of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, eventually spilled over into a worldwide conflict. The spread of the conflict throughout Europe and then the world cannot be understood in isolation of the blank cheque Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany gave the dual-monarchy in support of the retribution it administered against Belgrade, nor without studying the Russian Empire's support of Serbia.⁶²

Larger, more powerful states (or patrons) can, hence, either aid or obstruct a durable solution to a conflict by pushing smaller states over which they hold a large degree of control (their clients) to either continue or end the conflict, depending on their interests and policies. An embedded

mediator, like patrons, bring their own policies and interests and hence *bias* to the negotiating table at which parties seek to end conflict between them. Finally, attempts of rival states to

eliminate *buffers* by taking over or dividing these areas often have “serious consequences” as this tends to “prolong conflict.”⁶³

	Element	Characteristics	Description	Example
Internal	1. Protraction	Processual, definitional; dynamic; self-reinforcing; obstructing resolution	“A conflict is not really intractable until it has gone on for a while and resisted attempts to render it tractable.” ⁶⁴	Israel-Palestine conflict; The Cold War (1947-1991); Saudi-Iranian rivalry (current); German-Franco rivalry (late-19 th /early-20 th century)
	2. Identity	Processual, definitional; dynamic; self-reinforcing; obstructing resolution	“Identities [...] are not only polarized but are actually dependent on the denigration of the Other.” ⁶⁵	Hutu extremist persecution of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda (1994); Unionists and Republicans in Northern Ireland (late-1960s-1998)
	3. Profitability	Processual, definitional; dynamic; self-reinforcing; obstructing resolution	“In any kind of conflict [...] profit-taking and parasitic industries are bound to arise.” ⁶⁶	Profits of arms suppliers; Careers of (child) soldiers; Political fortunes of leaders/Ayatollah Khomeini purged rivals from his revolutionary government during the early stages of war with Iraq (1979-1980).
	4. (Absence of) Ripeness	Processual, definitional; dynamic; self-reinforcing; obstructing resolution	“The predominance of a stable, soft, self-serving (4-S) stalemate instead of ripe moments in intractable conflicts means that there is no pressure on the parties to come to a resolution of the conflict [...] or to even listen to mediators.” ⁶⁷	Stalemated Western-front during WWI (1914-1918); The conflict in Eastern-Ukraine between Kiev and Moscow (post-2014)
	5. Solutions	Processual, definitional; dynamic; self-reinforcing; obstructing resolution	“Each side wants its solution in its entirety and can accept neither the Other’s nor even a combination of or a compromise between the two solutions.” ⁶⁸	During the Iran-Iraq War Ayatollah Khomeini demanded the ouster of Saddam Hussain who was unwilling to resign (1980-1988);
External⁶⁹	6. Embeddedness	Contextual; less dynamic; not self-reinforcing	“All characteristics are heightened [...] by parties engaging patrons or supporters further away from the conflict [...].” ⁷⁰	Imperial Germany’s support for Austria-Hungary’s campaign against Serbia (July 1914); The Soviet Union’s support for the Vietcong in its war against the United States (1955-1975)
	7. Bias	Contextual; less dynamic; not self-reinforcing	“Mediators with policies and interests that favor one of the conflicting parties tend to be hampered, both operationally and ideologically, in their efforts to bring the conflict to an end.” ⁷¹	The Trump Administration’s proposed peace plan to handle the Israel-Palestine peace process (2020)
	8. Buffering	Contextual; less dynamic; not self-reinforcing	“An effort to either divide the buffer, between major blocs, powers or civilizations, or take it over by one side or the other.” ⁷²	North-Korea’s purpose to China (Current); Korea’s purpose to the Republic of China and Imperial Japan (pre-World War II); Ukraine and Belarus’ function to Russia (Current)

Table 3 Conflict intractability and ripeness theory / Source: Zartman / Most examples were formulated by HCSS

2.2.3. Pivot and shadow states

What then determines a small state's ability to influence the positions and interests of these external larger players? The space allowed for a warring state to influence the position and interests of larger patron states indirectly involved in the conflict depends on whether it has more characteristics of a *pivot state*, considered winners in a post-unipolar world, or a *shadow state*, considered to be at a great disadvantage.⁷³ A pivot state, or "a country able to build profitable relationships with multiple other countries without becoming overly reliant on any of them,"⁷⁴ has some ability to influence its patron as it can (use the threat to) seek the support of another powerful state to achieve its objectives. The fact that pivot states "possess military, economic or ideational strategic assets that are coveted by great powers" is the reason why they can successfully prevent overreliance.⁷⁵ Importantly, ideational factors play a

role too, as, for instance, "countries with similar regime types are likely to enjoy more mutual trust."⁷⁶

One reason why pivot states have achieved more room to maneuver in today's new era of great power competition is that they are to a lesser extent bound by multilateral agreements than in the unipolar post-Cold War moment and can, as a result, "take advantage with opportunities to form one-on-one relations with multiple other governments, playing one off another to secure the most profitable terms of engagement."⁷⁷ Shadow states, unlike pivot states, "remain frozen in the shadow of a single power",⁷⁸ even though they would prefer to have more freedom and diversify the countries on which they depend for their prosperity and security – especially in this new, increasingly multipolar era. Pivot states have hence a greater ability than shadow states to influence the interests and actions of their environment.

2.3. Durable resolution

How to break intractability's hold? There is no textbook, universally applicable way to drive a conflict towards its last two phases of change: conflict mitigation and then resolution.⁷⁹ There are, however, conditions that have to be met for conflicts to be resolved. Resolving intractable conflicts was only possible when warring parties, often supported by

mediators, build on rare moments of conflict *ripeness*, a necessary but not sufficient two-folded condition to resolve conflict. In combination with the presentation of a Mutually Enticing Opportunity (MEO), another necessary condition to end conflict, conflict mediators can use rare moments of *ripeness* to achieve peace (see Figure 2).

2.3.1. Ripeness

Conflicts are ripe for resolution if they consist of two elements. The fighting parties' perception of the presence of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) in conjunction with the belief in a Way Out is necessary for conflict parties to begin negotiations. Their joint working is best described as follows:

When the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to

victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them (although not necessarily to an equal degree or for the same reasons), they tend to seek a Way Out. A recent or impending catastrophe can provide a deadline or sharply increased pain.⁸⁰

Whether parties find themselves in an MHS also depends on the perception of both their inability to escalate to victory and the costs this brings to

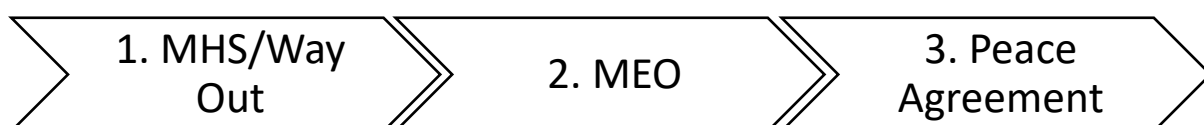


Figure 2: The road to peace: from Mutually Hurting Stalemate, Way Out and Mutually Enticing Opportunity to Peace Agreement

both parties, which can be highlighted by a mediator or another outside party, in addition to objective conditions such as large-scale loss of life or economic catastrophe.⁸¹ The idea that a Way Out is available is also a perceptive event, namely a belief of both parties that the possibility of a negotiated solution exists and that the other side

“shares that sense and the willingness to search”. Outside actors, such as mediators, can therefore help shape perceptions of “a painful present” (i.e., a MHS) and a “preferable alternative” (i.e., a Way Out) by adding information and using leverage to shape the perceptions of warring parties.⁸²

Conflict	Warring Parties	Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS)	Mediator	Agreement
Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)	Iran and Iraq	After seven years of stalemate Iraq in 1988 made gains again on the battlefield leading Iran to finally accept a proposed outcome of the war, which Iraq already supported since an early stage of the war.	United Nations	Security Council Resolution 598
The Bosnian War (1992-1995)	Bosnian factions, Croatia, Serbia and NATO	Operation Deliberate Force, a NATO bombing campaign against the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS), contributed to bringing Serbia to the Dayton Peace Negotiations and eventually – to end the Bosnian War.	United States	The Dayton Agreement

Table 4 Examples of Mutually Hurting Stalemates that have been used to end intractable conflict

2.3.2. Mutually Enticing Opportunity

The MEO makes a Way Out concrete, as it is “a resolving formula” or “an agreement to end conflict”, that the warring parties prefer over their current state of hostilities with one another.⁸³ The commitment and resources mediators are willing to provide often play a pivotal role to bring a MEO into being as they offer additional means – from a position of relative neutrality – that the warring parties cannot provide themselves.

One example is the large-scale NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the U.S.-brokered Dayton Peace Agreement initiated from 1995 onwards, providing an acceptable and relatively trusted security architecture to the warring parties in a way that they could not provide themselves (see Table 4).⁸⁴ In this case, the mediator adopted a strategy of “mediation with muscle”. This form of mediation consists essentially of “manipulative strategies”, traditionally taking the form of (threats of) coercion or (promises of) inducement, to “enlarge the spectrum of potential solutions that are mutually preferable to continued conflict” or, in other words, *the Zone of Possible Agreement* (ZOPA).⁸⁵

2.3.3. Conflict management

In the vast majority of intractable conflicts, the conditions of ripeness are however absent; and parties engaged in an intractable conflict will not look for a solution as a result. Yet, measures can still be taken to minimize the harm done to the security and prosperity of populations or, in other words, to manage the conflict. Conflict management is aimed at “forestall[ing] the self-reinforcing effects of some conflict characteristics [e.g., polarized identities and profit-taking]”.⁸⁶

The measures and circumstances that Louis Kriesberg proposes that counter intractability in the phases after the conflict has already become intractable are presented. Conflict management can hence better enable the conflict to be resolved at “a more propitious time”.⁸⁷ Additional measures can be taken to improve the security and prosperity of populations even more broadly than just minimizing new grievances administered during the conflict.

2.4. Conclusion

The literature review has shown that conflict resolution has moved on from notions of frozen conflict to intractability, ripeness, entrapment and the central role of concepts of Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), a Way Out and Mutually Enticing Opportunity

(MEO) in order to better understand conflict. The next chapter shows that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be considered intractable, highlighting where the five internal characteristics of intractable conflict and its external characteristics can be found.

Conflict management approach	Actors	Description
New leaders	Internal changes	Leadership changes have in the past often preceded the adoption of policies that transformed conflict.
Highlighting atrocities	External campaigning	Parties inside and outside of the conflict can highlight atrocities committed in a conflict to ensure it is not forgotten.
Infusion of investment	External inducement	External parties for instance in a mediation role can provide external rewards for conflict parties if they adopt policies working towards peace.
Provide information about the costs	External provision of information	External actors for instance in a mediation role can provide information about the lost opportunity costs of continued fighting.
Provide information and consultations about institutional arrangements	External provision of information	External actors for instance in a mediation role can present available solutions such as consultation mechanisms and institutional arrangements that could be implemented to resolve the conflict.
Establishing unofficial track two channels	Externally led programs incorporating both sides	Non-governmental, unofficial and informal contacts between citizens or groups of warring factions – or states with a relation to warring factions – might help to produce trust and generate ideas for resolution that conflict parties can act upon.
Confidence-building “early agreements” monitored by intermediaries	Externally led programs ensuring the commitment of conflicting parties to early agreements	Early agreements, such as ceasefires, the return of prisoners of war and the exchange of maps indicating where land mines were laid, can help build trust between conflict parties, especially when the application of these is monitored.

Table 5 Kriesberg's prescriptions to slow-down intractability once it has taken hold: what can be done? ⁸⁸

3. Conflict map

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh shows both internal and external characteristics of intractability. A broad range of actors have a stake in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, albeit at different levels of importance. The players involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be grouped into four categories. First, there are the parties that have fought multiple wars over Nagorno-Karabakh, namely Armenia and Azerbaijan. These states are involved in an intractable conflict, characterized by the five internal conflict dynamics Zartman distinguished. Second, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is embedded into, first and foremost, a regional but also an international context that includes outside parties with strong biases (or interests) in – and undertaking actions to influence – the conflict. The regional actors are Turkey, Russia, Iran, and Georgia. The third category includes international players such as the EU, with France playing a large role, and the US and, finally, the Armenian diaspora around the world. The involvement of these actors can be further categorized depending on the relevance of the conflict for their interests and on the actors' capabilities to influence the course of the conflict.

3.1. Involved parties

3.1.1. Armenia and Azerbaijan

Armenia and Azerbaijan have the strongest interests in the conflict as well as some capabilities to influence the course of the conflict. Both countries have formulated *insoluble* goals. Armenia advocates for Nagorno-Karabakh's independence on grounds of the right to self-determination,⁸⁹ as did the *de facto* leaders governing Nagorno-Karabakh before the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. This is viewed by observers as a step towards enhancing its independent bilateral relations with the possibility of an eventual unification with Armenia as well.⁹⁰ Armenia points at the Madrid Principles of the OSCE, which state that the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh should be decided by a "legally binding expression of will."⁹¹

Azerbaijan wants Nagorno-Karabakh to remain a part of Azerbaijan, insisting on its territorial integrity, considering independence an "anathema".⁹² Baku points at the international consensus referring to the region in four consecutive UN Security Council Resolutions in 1993 as part of the Azerbaijani Republic.⁹³ In 1996, when it was not in control of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan adopted the position that the region

would have a legal status "based on self-determination" and that the region would have "the highest degree of self-rule within Azerbaijan".⁹⁴ As of 2021, following Azerbaijan's victory in the war, President Aliyev stated that "the Karabakh conflict has been resolved for good" whilst its ministry of foreign affairs released a statement that "President Aliyev sent [the Nagorno-Karabakh issue] to the dustbin of history" rejecting calls by Armenia and the OSCE Minsk Group, including the EU, to negotiate Nagorno-Karabakh's status.⁹⁵

After 30 years of *protracted* conflict, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains a salient issue among the Armenian as well as the Azerbaijani public, both of which attribute much importance to an outcome of the conflict favoring their country.⁹⁶ Highly *polarized identities* and a fervent dislike of the other party provides the respective leaderships of both countries – Prime Minister Pashinyan on the one hand and President Aliyev on the other – a strong incentive not to give in to the demands of the other.⁹⁷

3.1.2. Regional actors

The regional actors, particularly Russia and Turkey, and to a much lesser extent Iran, have a stake in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well, taking different positions, whilst Georgia does not play a role. The high degree of involvement and assertiveness from Russia can be primarily attributed to its ambition to maintain and expand its influence within the South Caucasus.⁹⁸ Russia, the most active member of the OSCE Minsk Group,⁹⁹ has often put forward peace proposals unilaterally, which eventually resulted in the trilateral ceasefire agreements of 1994,¹⁰⁰ April 2016 and November 2020.¹⁰¹ The Trilateral declaration on ceasefire of November 2020 includes the presence of 2,000 Russian peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh for a minimum of five years, with the possibility to be renewed for another five years,¹⁰² making Russia the only actor within the OSCE Minsk Group to have brokered a ceasefire.

Russian influence in Nagorno-Karabakh today and in the future is likely even greater than on paper. Total Russian personnel on the ground – reportedly – far exceeds the maximum of 2,000 agreed to in the ceasefire. In addition, Russia's presence may very well persist beyond the initial five-year deployment (with the possibility of extension of an additional five years if neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia objects) agreed upon in the ceasefire. As the experiences in Moldova and Georgia show, once Russian troops are deployed, they tend not to leave.¹⁰³ Currently, Russia is Armenia's security guarantor (see Table 8). At the same time, Russia nudges Azerbaijan to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which Azerbaijan remains reluctant to do.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the conflict for Russia is a salient issue over which Moscow holds more influence than any other party.

Turkey also plays an important role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, being the principal supporter of Azerbaijan and stating that Armenia occupies Azerbaijani territory.¹⁰⁵ Turkish support for Azerbaijan is often explained by making reference to the ethnic and religious ties between

Turkey and Azerbaijan and the strained relations between Turkey and Armenia because of historical issues, such as the Armenian Genocide, which Turkey vehemently disputes happened. Besides the evident Turkish aspirations to enhance its regional influence, additional explanatory variables include Azerbaijan's contribution to Turkey's energy security and its large-scale investment in Turkey's economy.¹⁰⁶

Several actors accused Turkey of transferring foreign trained fighters to Nagorno-Karabakh, in order to support Azerbaijan's war effort. French President Macron has asserted that "Syrian fighters from jihadist groups have (transited) through Gaziantep (southeastern Turkey) to reach the Nagorno-Karabakh theatre of operations."¹⁰⁷ During the war, the Dutch government has also stated that it is aware of "the involvement of Turkey" in the "deployment of Syrian fighters on the Azeri side".¹⁰⁸ Turkey has also drawn criticism from Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani both stating that the presence of foreign fighters in Nagorno-Karabakh is or would be unacceptable.¹⁰⁹

After the war Turkey continued to pledge support for Azerbaijan. In June 2021, President Erdogan reaffirmed Turkey's support for Azerbaijan by pledging "to support each other in case of threat or attack by a third country on their independence or territorial integrity."¹¹⁰ The November 2020 ceasefire improved Turkey's position as it included a provision for the establishment of transport links from Nakhchivan over Armenian territory to Azerbaijan which likely will further expand economic ties and people-to-people exchanges between Turkey and Azerbaijan.¹¹¹ Iran takes a more or less neutral position, trying to balance out the needs of its Azeri minority (approximately 16% of its total population),¹¹² and the aspiration to counterbalance Turkish influence in the South Caucasus.¹¹³ Georgia, maintaining extensive economic ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, has repeatedly positioned itself as a neutral broker that is ready to facilitate prospects for peace.¹¹⁴

3.1.3. International actors

The OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia, and the US,¹¹⁵ provides the primary mediatory framework within which negotiations to durably resolve the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (instead of merely accomplishing a ceasefire) have taken place since its inception in 1992.¹¹⁶ In December 2020, April 2021 and July 2021, the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group urged the parties to the conflict to engage in negotiations to resolve outstanding issues.¹¹⁷ The conflict should be resolved through negotiations on the basis of the principles referred to as the provisions of the Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations Between CSCE/OSCE Participating States of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference (1975) and the Madrid Principles, according to the OSCE.

From 2007 to 2012 the OSCE Minsk Group developed a framework for subsequent negotiations and peace proposals, based on both the Helsinki Final Act and the Madrid Principles, consisting of six elements (see Table 6).¹¹⁸ The framework stresses the importance of adherence to the following general articles of the Helsinki Final Act: Article II related to refraining from the threat or use of force, Article IV related to the territorial integrity of States and Article VIII related to the equal rights and self-determination of peoples.¹¹⁹ The Madrid Principles nevertheless, left the status of Nagorno-Karabakh open for interpretation, as it stipulated that an “interim status that provides guarantees for security and self-governance” needs to be created, which Armenia and Azerbaijan interpret differently.¹²⁰

OSCE Helsinki Final Act	Article II	Refraining from the threat or use of force
	Article IV	Preserving states' territorial integrity
	Article VIII	Protecting the equal rights and self-determination of peoples
OSCE Minsk Group Madrid Principles	Principle 1	Return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control;
	Principle 2	An interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance;
	Principle 3	A corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh;
	Principle 4	Future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will;
	Principle 5	The right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and
	Principle 6	International security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.

Table 6 The OSCE Minsk Group's articles and principles for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict¹²¹

International actors such as the EU and the United States have fewer interests in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, have only limited capabilities to influence its trajectory and as a result have engaged at a minimum with the main players.¹²² The EU has decided to provide a €2.6bn investment package to Armenia, which has been a member of the Council of Europe since 2001.¹²³ Both Azerbaijan and Armenia work with the European Union through the Eastern Partnership (EaP).¹²⁴ A Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the EU and Armenia in which both parties acknowledge that “sustainable democratic reform processes in the Republic of Armenia will help build confidence and stability throughout the region” and commits to “enhanced trade and economic cooperation” has come into effect in March 2021, showing the EU's interest in Armenia's democratization and

economy.¹²⁵ The partnership agreement is not an official EU association agreement, even though CEPA does advocate the “legislative approximation to EU norms in many sectors”.¹²⁶

While the EU between 2003 and 2011 has made some attempts to increase its influence in the region,¹²⁷ recent engagements¹²⁸ aside from pledging investment, have mostly been limited to statements made by EU representatives. For instance, the EU High Representative Josep Borrell called for “an immediate cessation of hostilities, de-escalation, and for strict observance of the ceasefire”.¹²⁹ Additionally, Borrell has given voice to European grievances as he stated the following: “in conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh, Libya, and Syria, we are witnessing an exclusion of Europe from the settlement of conflicts in favor of Russia and Turkey”.¹³⁰ In a recent meeting between European

Council President Charles Michel and Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, Michel said that the EU intends to take a more active stance to stabilize the region.¹³¹ Moreover, individual EU member states have also taken steps to engage with the conflict, as the Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok has called for an investigation into war crimes committed in the conflict.¹³²

The US has been mostly uninvolved in the conflict under the Trump administration.¹³³ However, the Biden administration shows a rhetorical willingness to take a more proactive stance on the conflict, also driven by its aspiration to resume the US global leadership role. Until now, US actions in the South Caucasus have been limited. Issues of great power competition with both China and Russia put many demands on American foreign policy.

The Biden Administration's recognition of the Armenian Genocide in April 2021 is perceived to be an important diplomatic win for Armenia.¹³⁴ US Secretary of State Blinken additionally expressed support towards US funding for demining efforts in the region, as well as for contributions to Armenia's security and resistance aimed at strengthening democratic governance and the promotion of economic growth.¹³⁵ Blinken also announced that the US will review security assistance to Azerbaijan.¹³⁶

Armenia has received some support from the legislative branch, even though their initiatives have not yet passed the Senate. The US House of Representatives has passed several amendments proposed by the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), to the National Defense Authorization Act in September 2021 calling on Azerbaijan to "immediately and unconditionally return all Armenia prisoners of war and captured civilians", on the Biden Administration to make

clear to Azerbaijan to adhere to the terms of the trilateral declaration on ceasefire and on the Secretary of Defense to submit a report on the possible use of US-origin technologies in Turkish-delivered drones use by Azerbaijan, alleged Azerbaijani use of cluster bombs and the accusations of Azerbaijani and Turkish recruitment of foreign-trained fighters.¹³⁷

Together, the EU and US have demonstrated their ability to broker a specific, small-scale, constructive early agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia on prisoners of war and landmines. In June 2021, Azerbaijan released 15 prisoners of war. In exchange Armenia provided maps detailing the locations of nearly 100.000 landmines in the territories under Armenian control for around three decades.¹³⁸ This agreement has not solved the issue permanently, as Azerbaijan still holds POWs and Armenia additional mine maps.

Finally, the Armenian diaspora has played an important role in mobilizing support for Armenia's cause in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, showing that *polarized identities* extend beyond Azerbaijan and Armenia. There are more than 7 million Armenians living in more than 100 countries around the world, more than twice as many as in Armenia itself.¹³⁹ In particular, the Armenian diaspora in Russia (approx. 2.5-3 million), the US (approx. 1.6 million), France (approx. 600.000) and Georgia (approx. 200.000-400.000) are vast.¹⁴⁰ The Armenian diaspora in the US is considered to be particularly powerful, especially in its advocacy for the provision of annual US foreign aid to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh as well as in advancing the resolutions recognizing the Armenian Genocide (passed in 49 out of 50 states) and Nagorno-Karabakh's independence resolutions in several state and municipal councils.¹⁴¹

3.2. Conclusion

The previous section has shown that the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, fought between Armenia and Azerbaijan, shows both internal and external characteristics of intractability. Both countries propose *insoluble goals*, the animosity between them has gone on for a *protracted* time period, going beyond one social generation, and is further propelled by highly *polarized identities*. In addition, the conflict is *embedded* in a regional

context that includes third parties with strong interests in – and actions taken to strongly influence – the outcome of the conflict. The following chapter zooms in on the position of Armenia in the South Caucasus and the world more broadly to provide an explanation as to *why* the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not *ripe* for resolution and why it will most likely not be characterized by *ripeness* in the foreseeable future.

4. The Position of Armenia

4.1. Armenia in 2021

Why has the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict not been resolved after the extended period of hostilities in late-2020? Essentially, because the conflict is not characterized by a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), which is a necessary condition to resolve intractable conflicts. Azerbaijan was able to escalate to unilateral victory and, hence did not need to look for a negotiated Way Out. Armenia's position of relative weakness vis-à-vis Azerbaijan is best evidenced by the fact that it lost almost 3.300 soldiers, which would be the equivalent of "the United States losing over 350.000 troops" or the European Union losing over 440.000 soldiers in just over six weeks.¹⁴²

Two primary causes of Armenia's extreme vulnerability in the Caucasus can be distinguished: the limited power of Armenia vis-à-vis Azerbaijan, its neighbor with which it is engaged in an *intractable conflict*, and its status as a *shadow state*, meaning a state that "remains frozen in the shadow of a single power,"¹⁴³ in the orbit of Russia, its lukewarm ally, which is only partially – and decreasingly – committed to Armenian security. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan has some characteristics of a *pivot state*, as it possesses "military, economic or ideational strategic assets that are coveted by great powers" and therefore is better able to influence the actions of larger powers.

First, on all traditional indicators of power Armenia scores lower than Azerbaijan. Second, Armenia's overwhelming dependence on Russia for anything ranging from its security, to its arms imports, to its energy supply and finally for its trade and prosperity gives it no leverage to influence Russian policymaking on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Meanwhile, Armenia's successful democratic transition renders its regime different from all other states in the region, including Russia's, but except for Georgia. The following subsections discuss Armenian weakness, its *embeddedness* in the Caucasus, a region dominated by much larger and more powerful states, and its vulnerable democratization process in a region dominated by autocracies. Finally, medium-term trends towards 2030 are assessed showing that on average Armenia's position is likely to further weaken somewhat.

4.1.1. Security

Armenia scores lowest or second-lowest out of the countries in the South Caucasus regions on a broad range of traditional indicators of state power, including population size, GDP, and several defense indicators (see Table 7). Armenia is the smallest country in an area dominated by two regional powers and one great power, respectively Turkey, Iran, and Russia. The size of Turkey and Iran's population is more than 25 times that of Armenia. There are more than 40 times as many Russian nationals as there are Armenian nationals. Even Azerbaijan's population size is three times bigger than Armenia's. Similarly, both Iran's and Turkey's economies are about 50 times larger than Armenia's, and Russia's is more than 100 times

larger. In 2020, only Georgia had fewer active armed forces than Armenia, whilst Turkey's, Russia's and Iran's armed forces dwarf Armenia's.

Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, hence, are surrounded by far more powerful neighbors who have heavily invested in their military capabilities during the last 20 years (see Figure 3). During the last two decades, especially Russia, but also Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan have heavily increased their defense spending. Russia's, Turkey's, and Iran's defense budgets were respectively almost 100 times, 30 times, and 25 times higher than Armenia's in 2020. Azerbaijan outspent Armenia almost 4-1.

	Total population (M) in 2020	GDP (\$Bn) in 2020	GDP per capita (\$) in 2019	Active armed forces	Annual military expenditure in \$M in 2019
Armenia	3.021	12,8	4.622,7	45.000	634
Azerbaijan	10.205	41,7	4.793,1	67.000	2.238
Georgia	4.930	16,3	4.698,0	21.000	292
Turkey	82.017	649,0	9.126,6	355.000	17.725
Russia	141.7	1.460,0	11.585,0	900.000	61.713
Iran	84.923	611,0	5.550,1	610.000	15.825

Table 7 Power in the Caucasus in 2020 | Sources: IISS The Military Balance 2021; SIPRI; World Bank

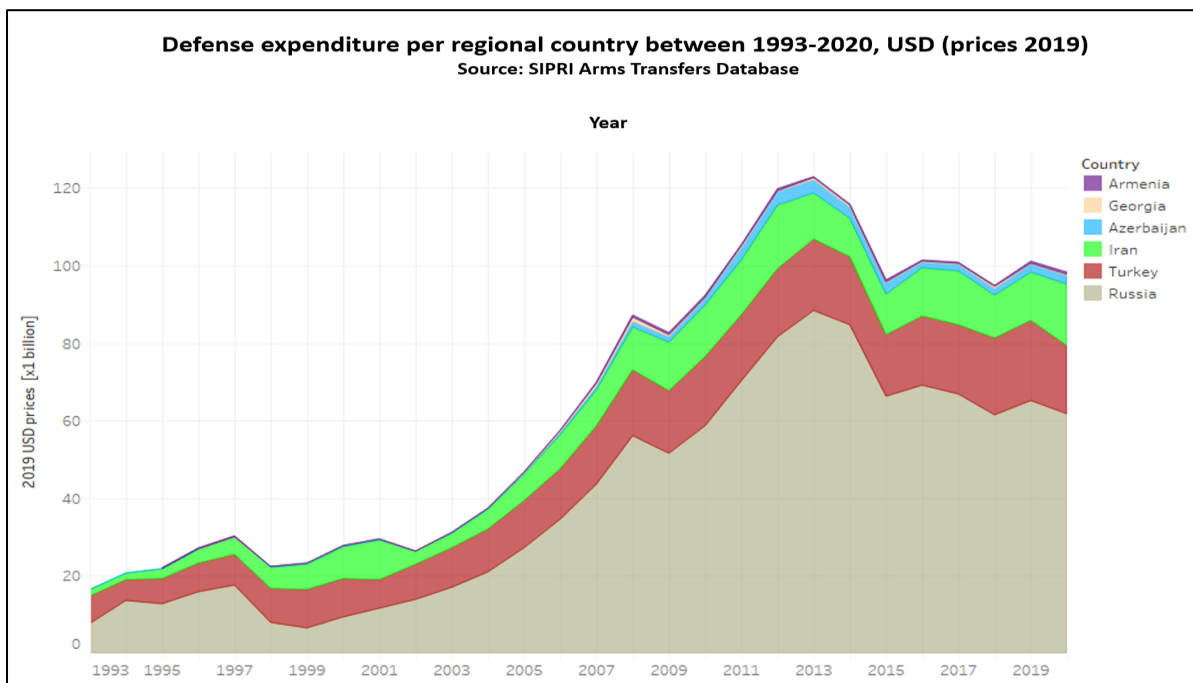


Figure 3 Stuck between two giants: Armenian defense spending in the Caucasus

Armenia heavily depends on Russia for its security, but Russia has become less committed to granting Armenia security throughout the last decades. Russia is formally committed to providing military assistance in case of aggression against Armenia through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. The CSTO is an intergovernmental military alliance established in 1992, of which currently Armenia, Belarus,

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan are members. The treaty contains a clause (Article 4) that stipulates that an act of aggression against one Member State will be considered as an aggression against all Member States of the Treaty (see Table 8).¹⁴⁴ The bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance was signed in 1997 between Armenia and Russia, and also includes a clause for military assistance similar to Article 4 of the CSTO.¹⁴⁵

Member States	Year of entry	Former Member States	Year of entry	Year of withdrawal
Armenia	1994	Azerbaijan	1994	1999
Belarus	1994	Georgia	1994	1999
Kazakhstan	1994	Uzbekistan	1994 & 2006	1999 & 2012
Kyrgyzstan	1994			
Russia	1994	Observer States		
Tajikistan	1994	Afghanistan	2013	
		Serbia	2013	

Table 8 Members of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)

During the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan inquired Russia's President Putin about the extent to which Russia could assist Armenia in ensuring its security, particularly referring to this bilateral treaty.¹⁴⁶ However, Russia remained on the sidelines and did not assist Armenia. Multiple reasons have been identified for this passivity. Officially, the lack of involvement has been justified by the argument that the conflict took place in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is internationally recognized as Azerbaijan's territory.¹⁴⁷ This argument was also put forward by the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandr Pankin,¹⁴⁸ even though during the 2020 conflict Armenia's territory was affected by Azerbaijani missile attacks¹⁴⁹ and civilian and military casualties occurred near the front lines that extend along the entire Armenian-Azerbaijani border.¹⁵⁰

4.1.2. Diplomacy

Arms imports

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have been and remain highly dependent on Russia for the import of their arms, albeit Israel has replaced Russia as Azerbaijan's most important source of arms over the last years (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).¹⁵¹ More specifically, from 2011 to 2020, Russia accounted for 93.7% of all arms imports of Armenia and 60.1% of all arms imports of Azerbaijan.¹⁵²

Israel started to increase its arms export volume to Azerbaijan significantly from 2016 onward, providing more than half of Azerbaijan's weapon supplies in 2016-2020 and 26.6% in 2011-2020.¹⁵³ Two other relatively important weapon suppliers in 2011-2020 for Azerbaijan were Belarus (7.1%) and Turkey (2.9%). Meanwhile, Jordan (5.3%) has been the only weapon supplier to Armenia apart from Russia since 2012.¹⁵⁴

Despite the historical importance of Russia as an arms supplier to Azerbaijan, the advanced weaponry delivered by Turkey and Israel in recent years is considered to have been particularly pivotal in giving Azerbaijan the edge in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of 2020. Turkey's arms export to Azerbaijan increased significantly in the months leading up to the conflict, as showcased by a six-fold increase in Turkey's military exports in 2020 compared to 2019.¹⁵⁵ More specifically, Turkey and Israel delivered modern drones used by Azerbaijan were key in ensuring Azerbaijan's military predominance in the recent conflict as they provided significant long-range strike capabilities that disabled a significant number of Armenian tanks, fighting vehicles, artillery units, and air defense systems.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, Armenia's Russian air defense systems are quite outdated, thereby further allowing Azerbaijan to dominate with its aerial capabilities.¹⁵⁷

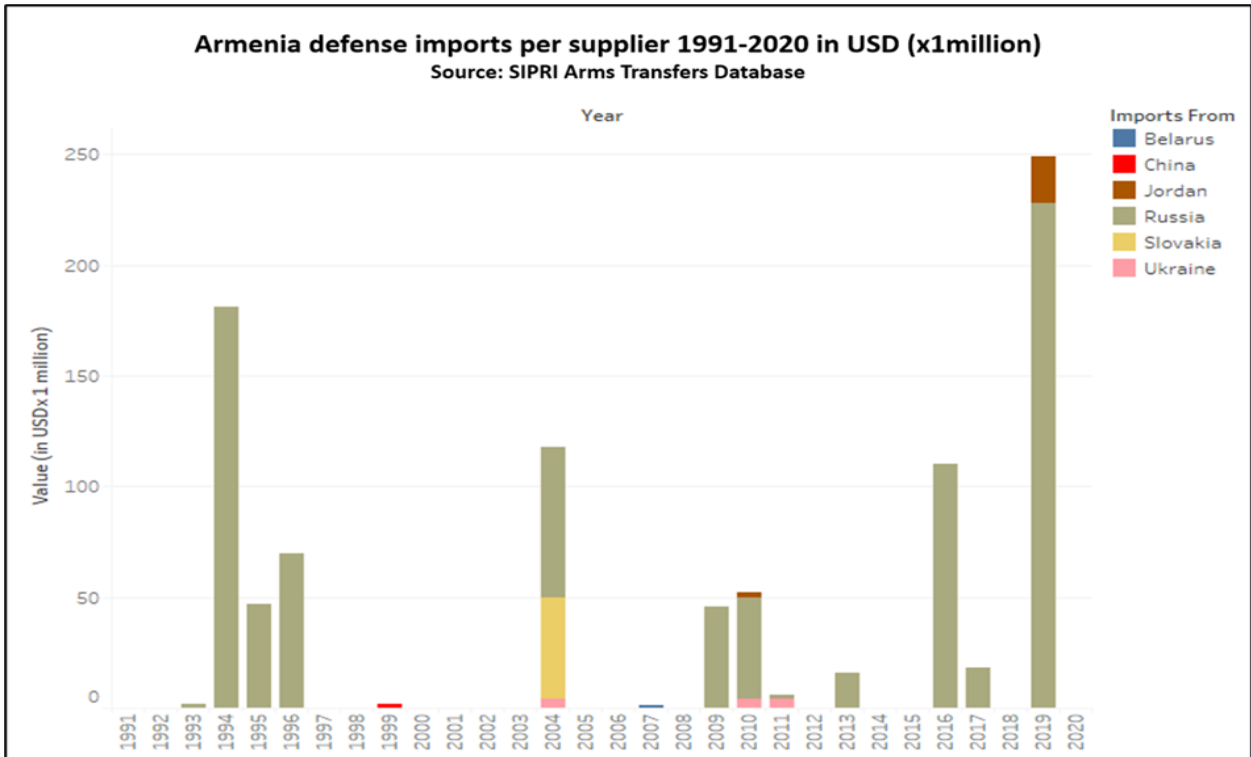


Figure 4: Three decades of limited Armenian arms imports almost exclusively from Russia

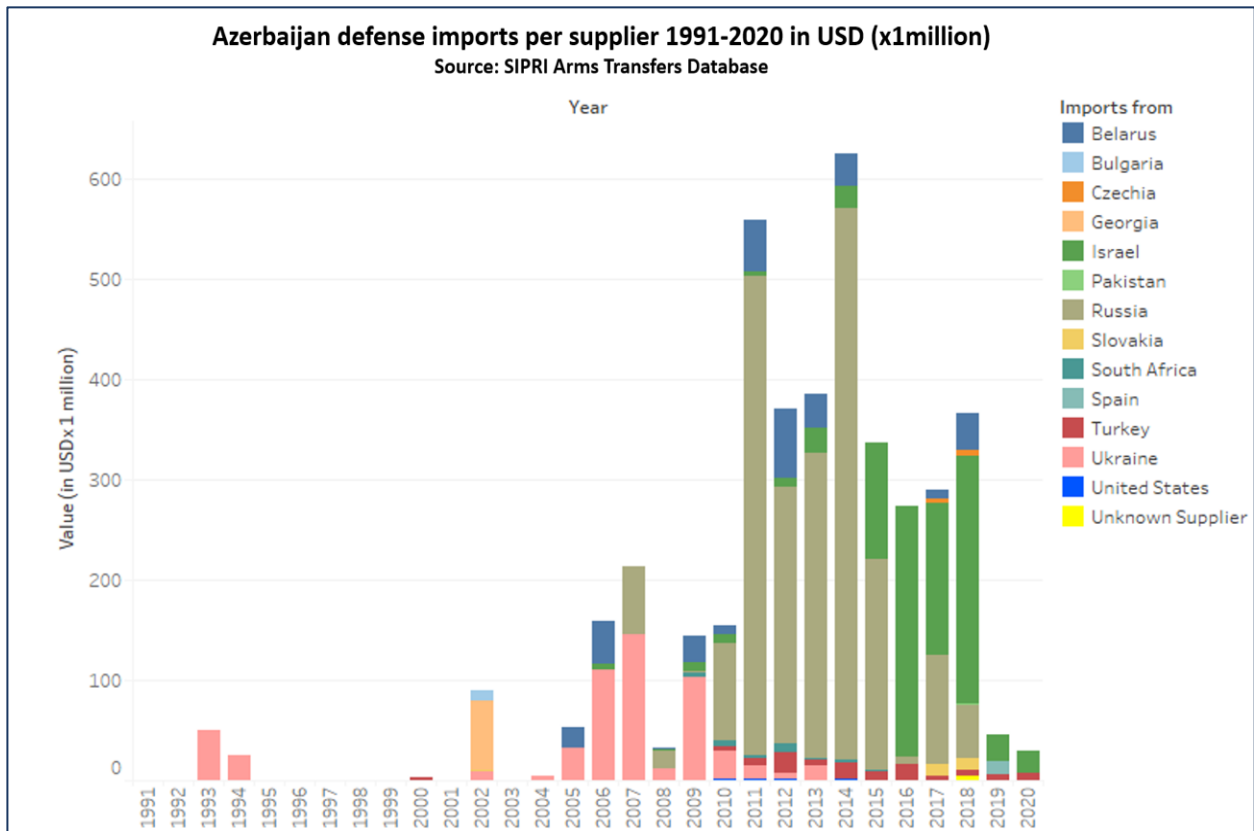


Figure 5: Azerbaijan's defense import diversification

The Armenian Genocide

In non-military fields, Armenia has throughout the past two decades booked considerable diplomatic successes on the key ideational issue of Armenian Genocide recognition. At least one analyst has suggested that the “unresolved problem of 1915 [should be seen] as an obstacle to positive developments today”.¹⁵⁸ In spite of strong opposition by Turkey, countries around the world

have recognized the Armenian Genocide over the last two decades (See Table 9). Perhaps its biggest accomplishment came in early 2021 with the Biden Administration’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide,¹⁵⁹ suggesting that the Armenian diasporas are able to influence decision-making in their states of domicile.

Recognized by (State)	Recognized by & since		
Argentina	Government, 2007	Lebanon ¹⁶⁰	Parliament, 2000
Austria	Parliament, 2015	Lithuania ¹⁶¹	Parliament, 2005
Belgium ¹⁶²	Government, 2015	Luxembourg ¹⁶³	Parliament, 2015
Bolivia ¹⁶⁴	Parliament, 2014	Netherlands ¹⁶⁵	Parliament, 2018
Brazil ¹⁶⁶	Parliament, 2015	Paraguay ¹⁶⁷	Senate, 2015
Canada ¹⁶⁸	Government, 2015	Poland ¹⁶⁹	Parliament, 2005
Chile ¹⁷⁰	Senate, 2007	Portugal ¹⁷¹	Parliament, 2019
Cyprus ¹⁷²	Government, 1975	Russia ¹⁷³	Parliament, 1995
Czech Republic ¹⁷⁴	Parliament, 2017	Slovakia ¹⁷⁵	Parliament, 2004
Denmark ¹⁷⁶	Parliament, 2017	Sweden ¹⁷⁷	Parliament, 2010
France ¹⁷⁸	Parliament, 2001	Switzerland ¹⁷⁹	Parliament, 2003
Germany ¹⁸⁰	Parliament, 2016	Syria ¹⁸¹	Parliament, 2020
Greece ¹⁸²	Parliament, 1996	Vatican City ¹⁸³	Pope, 2015
Italy ¹⁸⁴	Parliament, 2019	Venezuela ¹⁸⁵	Parliament, 2005
Latvia ¹⁸⁶	Parliament, 2021	United States ¹⁸⁷	Government, 2021
		Uruguay ¹⁸⁸	Parliament, 1965

Table 9 Countries that recognize the Armenian Genocide

4.1.3. Energy relations

The energy sector is an important factor determining a country’s vulnerability and its ability to influence the regional or global balance of power. Fossil fuel-rich countries are not only self-sufficient in fulfilling their domestic energy demand but can also strengthen their position internationally by exporting oil and/or natural gas to fossil fuel-poor countries, making the latter dependent on them. Energy security is another field in which the balance of power is against Armenia and in favor of Azerbaijan. Armenia’s energy sector is highly dependent on natural gas imported from Russia, further cementing its status as a shadow state in Russia’s orbit.

Contrarily, Azerbaijan’s vast oil and natural gas reserves enable the country to be energy self-sufficient, capture high revenues and, most

importantly, give it some leverage over the countries that depend on the import of Azerbaijan’s fossil fuels. Azerbaijan’s energy sector hence provides it with some characteristics of a pivot state.

Dependence of Armenia's energy sector on Russia

Armenia’s energy sector is in a very vulnerable position vis-à-vis Russia. There are two major reasons for this vulnerability. Firstly, Armenia is completely dependent on the import of Russian gas for the well-functioning of its electricity, industrial, residential, services and transport sectors.¹⁸⁹ Secondly, most of the electricity in Armenia is produced by natural gas and a nuclear power plant, both of which are under total

influence of Russia for their operations as well as for the supplied fuel.

Armenia's dependence on the import of Russian gas is particularly strong. This dependence arises from two elements, the first being the high share of natural gas in Armenia's total primary energy supply (TPES) and in its electricity generation sector. More specifically, natural gas accounts for about 60% of Armenia's TPES,¹⁹⁰ compared to an average of 24.4% of EU Member States.¹⁹¹ Of this total natural gas consumption of Armenia, about 45% is consumed for electricity generation, with the other 55% being distributed over the transport, residential, industry and services sector.¹⁹² The second element that makes Armenia specifically dependent on Russian gas is the monopoly that Gazprom Armenia has over Armenia's gas transmission and distribution system. This makes it legally impossible for Armenia to diversify its gas import sources without the consent of Gazprom and by extension of the Russian government.¹⁹³

Armenia's electricity sector is also in a highly vulnerable position vis-à-vis Russia as it is strongly dependent on natural gas and nuclear energy and its diversification options away from those sources of electricity are limited. More precisely, 44% of electricity is produced through natural gas and 27% through nuclear energy, for both of which Armenia is totally dependent on Russian operations of power plants as well as supply of fuel.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, while it is the goal of the Armenian government to increase the share of solar power generation to at least 15% by 2030,¹⁹⁵ only one large-scale solar PV farm (400 MW) is currently being constructed and set to be commissioned in 2025.¹⁹⁶ However, solar PV has a relatively low-capacity factor,¹⁹⁷ which means that a significantly higher capacity of solar PV needs to be installed to produce the same amount of electricity as, for example, a nuclear power plant. This vulnerability further runs risk of being exacerbated by the obsolescence of Armenia's hydropower fleet, which provides the remaining 30% of Armenia's electricity but half of which has already passed its average life expectancy in 2010.¹⁹⁸

The role of Azerbaijan's energy sector in the region

Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan, as a large oil and gas producer, is self-sufficient in fulfilling its energy demand. Indeed, Azerbaijan is a net exporter of natural gas and of crude oil. As a result, regional and international actors, like Turkey and the European Union, have a limited dependence on Azerbaijan as a result of its fossil fuel exports. While Azerbaijan exports significant amounts of natural gas as well as crude oil to Turkey and Italy, these volumes make up a relatively small part of the fossil fuel demand of those countries. Azerbaijan furthermore has a wide range of oil export to the EU, but in total accounts for a very marginal part of the EU's total oil demand.¹⁹⁹ Israel and Georgia have a larger dependence on Azerbaijan, as the first depends on Azerbaijan for meeting almost half of its oil demand²⁰⁰ and the latter depends entirely on Azerbaijan for fulfilling its natural gas demand.²⁰¹

Turkey is the most important export destination of Azerbaijan's fossil fuels but has a limited dependence on Azerbaijan's fossil fuel. More precisely, in 2019 Azerbaijan exported a total of 11 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas and 31 Metric ton (Mt) of oil, of which about 10 bcm of natural gas and an unspecified yet relatively small part of oil went to Turkey.²⁰² While Azerbaijan is the second-largest supplier of natural gas to Turkey after Russia, accounting for about 21% of Turkey's total natural gas import, Azerbaijan does not figure in the top five most important suppliers of oil for Turkey.²⁰³ Turkey is furthermore searching to substitute its gas-fired power generation by coal and renewable energy and to diversify its suppliers of natural gas, therefore likely decreasing the already limited leverage that Azerbaijan holds over Turkey over the upcoming decade.²⁰⁴

Azerbaijan also plays a limited role as a supplier to the European market, providing merely 5% of the EU's total oil as well as gas import.²⁰⁵ This figure for gas import includes Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), inaugurated at the end of 2020, which has the capacity to deliver 10 bcm per year to Europe, of which 8 bcm is destined for Italy.²⁰⁶ While the SGC has repeatedly been speculated to be just the first steppingstone to more expansive gas supplies from

either Central Asia, the South Caucasus or the Middle East to Europe, a wide array of economic and political difficulties make substantial expansion an unlikely prospect.²⁰⁷ In other words, it is unlikely that Azerbaijan's gas export to Europe will increase significantly and that this will function as a point of leverage, particularly as its gas export remains concentrated toward Italy. By contrast, Azerbaijan exports about 80% of its total crude oil export to European countries, of which Italy (39%), Germany (11%) and the Czech Republic (8%) are the largest recipients.²⁰⁸

However, as Azerbaijan's oil production has been declining since 2009, partially due to declining production of its Azeri-Chirag-Gunashi oil field and partially due to voluntary output cuts upon request from OPEC, it seems unlikely that Azerbaijan will continue to increase in importance as an oil supplier to Europe.²⁰⁹

4.1.4. Trade relations

Armenia's trade relations further showcase the precariousness of Armenia's position. Armenia does not have control over its connections to the maritime commons over which most trade is done, as it is a landlocked country depending mostly on Georgian ports to trade with the world. Furthermore, both in terms of exports and imports, Armenia has a substantial dependence on Russia, even though less severe than in the category of arms trade and energy.

Access to International Trade Routes

Leaders and foreign policymakers of the post-Soviet landlocked states were deeply aware of their landlocked status. This was reflected in their foreign policies as they integrated transportation infrastructure of strategic importance, namely transit routes and trade via access to ports, into their policies.²¹⁰ As a landlocked country, Armenia is geographically disadvantaged and faces powerful constraints on its foreign policy options. It needs to transport its goods via coastal neighbors to access ports to participate in international trade, of which Azerbaijan and Turkey are hostile and deny its access.²¹¹ Armenia, mainly depending on the use of Georgian ports to participate in international

trade, has therefore remained strongly dependent on its neighbors; economically and strategically.²¹² Given the limited transit routes for exporting its goods, Armenia has had to maintain close relations with Georgia. 70% of Armenia's foreign trade commodity circulation achieved through the Georgian train system and through the ports of Batumi and Poti.²¹³ Concerns about this dependence on Lines of Communication (LOCs) in other countries particularly increased after the war between Russia and Georgia over the breakaway Georgian province of South Ossetia in August 2008.²¹⁴ Armenia, which maintained its neutrality, suffered huge economic losses because of the war. In the absence of alternative gateways to international trade than Georgian ports, the hostilities paralyzed trade for days resulting in shortages of fuel in Armenia. Authorities later declared losses of nearly \$680m.²¹⁵ Armenia shares a small yet very important border with neighboring Iran, along the Araks River, through which it also conducts trade in spite of American sanctions.²¹⁶

Imports and exports

Despite a sharp increase in the total value of goods exported between 1993 and 2021, one of the main challenges remains for Armenia to diversify its trade relations and minimize the risk of overreliance on Russia. Armenia remains heavily dependent on imports from and export of relatively unsophisticated goods to especially Russia (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). China, Germany, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Georgia, and Iran additionally are important trade partners. Key European countries such as Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy's share has been declining in favor of Russia over the past two decades.²¹⁷

While Russia remains Armenia's dominant trade partner, trade with the EU accounted for around 18% of Armenia's total trade in 2020. The EU is Armenia's third biggest export market with a 17% share in total Armenian exports as of 2020 and the second biggest source of Armenian imports with a 18.6% share in total Armenian imports.²¹⁸ In spite of American sanctions on Iran for its nuclear program, Armenia has maintained trade with Iran, which shows Yerevan has been allowed to access an important export market in the face of American sanctions.

Armenian export to top 20 countries from 1993-2020, in USD million
 Source: International Monetary Fund, 2021

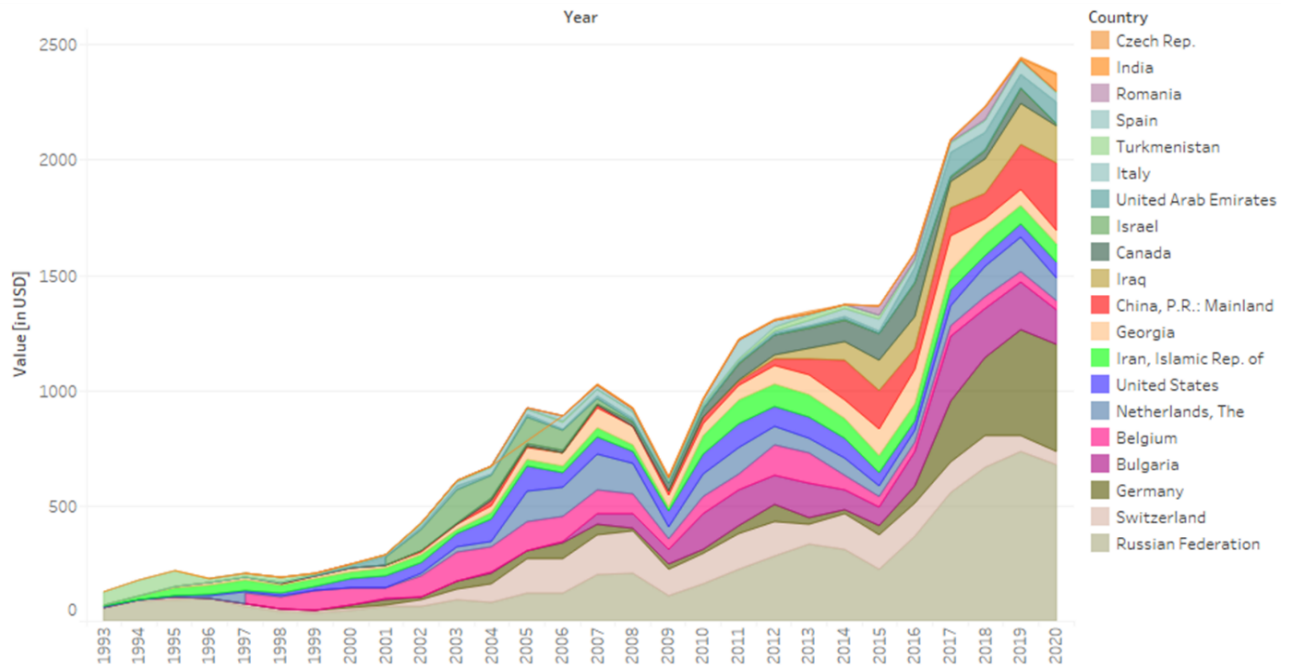


Figure 6: Three decades of Armenian export growth and diversification

Armenian imports from top 20 countries from 1993-2020, in USD millions
 Source: International Monetary Fund, 2021

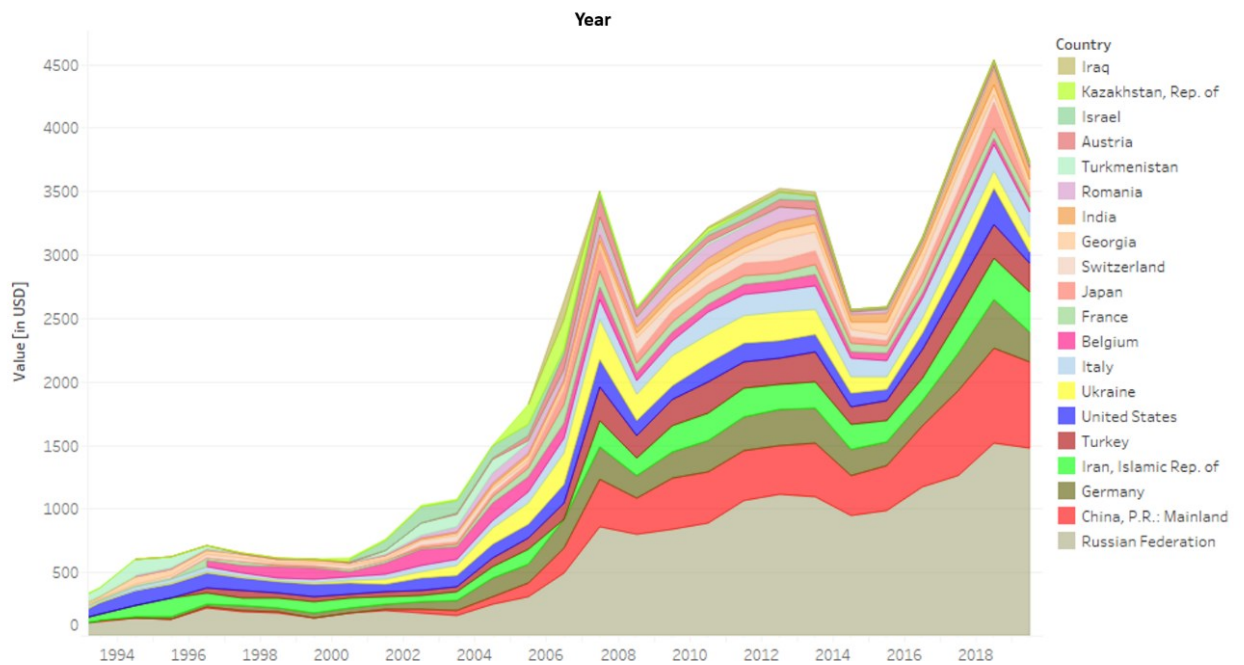


Figure 7: Three decades of Armenian imports

4.1.5. Political Ideology

Finally, is Armenia similarly governed as the other states of the South Caucasus? The countries of the South Caucasus have largely followed the global trend of 14-years of democratic decline around the world, with Armenia being the exception (see Figure 8, Figure 9 and Table 10).²¹⁹ Armenia is categorized as a partly-free democracy, improving substantially in guaranteeing its population civil liberties and political rights and reducing corruption over the past three years, surrounded by unfree and relatively corrupt autocracies, except for Georgia. This adds an additional layer of difficulty to its regional position, as countries with similar regime types tend to share greater trust.²²⁰ Armenia will have to balance its democratic transition and security considerations for which it depends on Russia, its authoritarian patron. Moscow particularly dislikes so-called “color revolutions”, or what it sees as foreign-inspired

efforts to overthrow regimes at its borders under the guise of democratic transition.²²¹

Armenia has witnessed a process of democratization since 2018, with a series of anti-government and democratic reform protests in April and May 2018 led by Nikol Pashinyan, head of the Civil Contract Party and currently Armenia’s Prime Minister, resulting in the 2018 Velvet Revolution. Since then, Armenia has ranked second highest on the Freedom Index out of all states in the Caucasus, just behind Georgia. Armenia’s successful 20 June 2021 snap elections show that Armenia’s democratization is likely to persist as international observers acknowledged that the contest, overwhelmingly won by Prime Minister Pashinyan’s party, had been “competitive” and “generally well-managed” in spite of the short time frame. The elections had also been highly polarized, they noted.²²² A recent physical altercation in parliament highlights the tension within Armenia’s nascent democracy.²²³

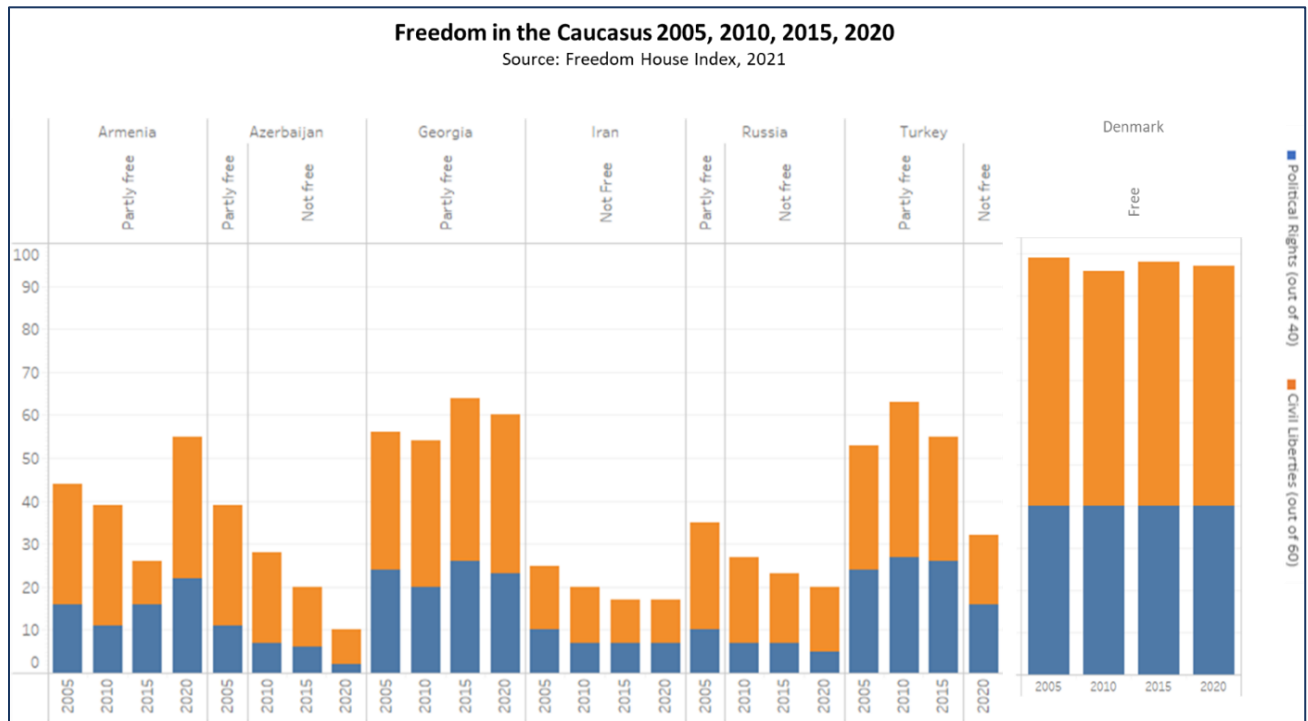


Figure 8: Freedom in the South Caucasus and in Denmark as a reference

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Iran	Russia	Turkey	Denmark
Freedom Ranking²²⁴	2	6	1	5	4	3	N/A
Change since 2005	+25%	-77%	+18%	-47%	-43%	-40%	N/A
Status	Partly Free	Not Free	Partly Free	Not Free	Not Free	Not Free	Free
Freedom	55	10	60	17	20	32	97
Political Rights	22	2	23	7	5	16	40
Civil liberties	33	8	37	10	15	16	57

Table 10 Political rights and civil liberties scores in the Caucasus in 2020 and percentage change since 2005 / Source: Freedom House

During the past 15 years, Turkey and Russia have experienced democratic decline under the leadership of President Erdogan and President Putin. Turkey’s decline is characterized by events such as the 15 July 2016 coup d’état attempt against state institutions, including President Erdogan and the government, carried out by a faction within the Turkish Armed Forces that organized themselves to seize control of several places in Ankara, Istanbul, Marmaris and elsewhere.²²⁵ The failed coup attempt led Erdogan’s government to curtail the freedom of journalists, academics, and the opposition.²²⁶ Putin’s return as Russia’s president, despite being originally constitutionally barred from serving a third consecutive term, has gone hand-in-hand with continued curtailment of rights and liberties

of the media, submission of the judiciary, as well as suppression of the opposition.²²⁷

Azerbaijan has shown the sharpest decline in freedom. In 2020 it ranked below not just Turkey and Russia, but even below Iran, with its clerical regime. Its status has, as a result, changed from partly free in 2005 to not free in 2010, 2015 and 2020. Freedom House in its 2021 yearly report describes Azerbaijan as suffering from “rampant corruption” and concentrating power with President Aliyev, who has been in power since 2003, and his extended family, making Azerbaijan an authoritarian state. The report also accuses Azerbaijani authorities of “extensive crackdowns on civil liberties” and weakening the formal political opposition by “years of prosecution.”²²⁸

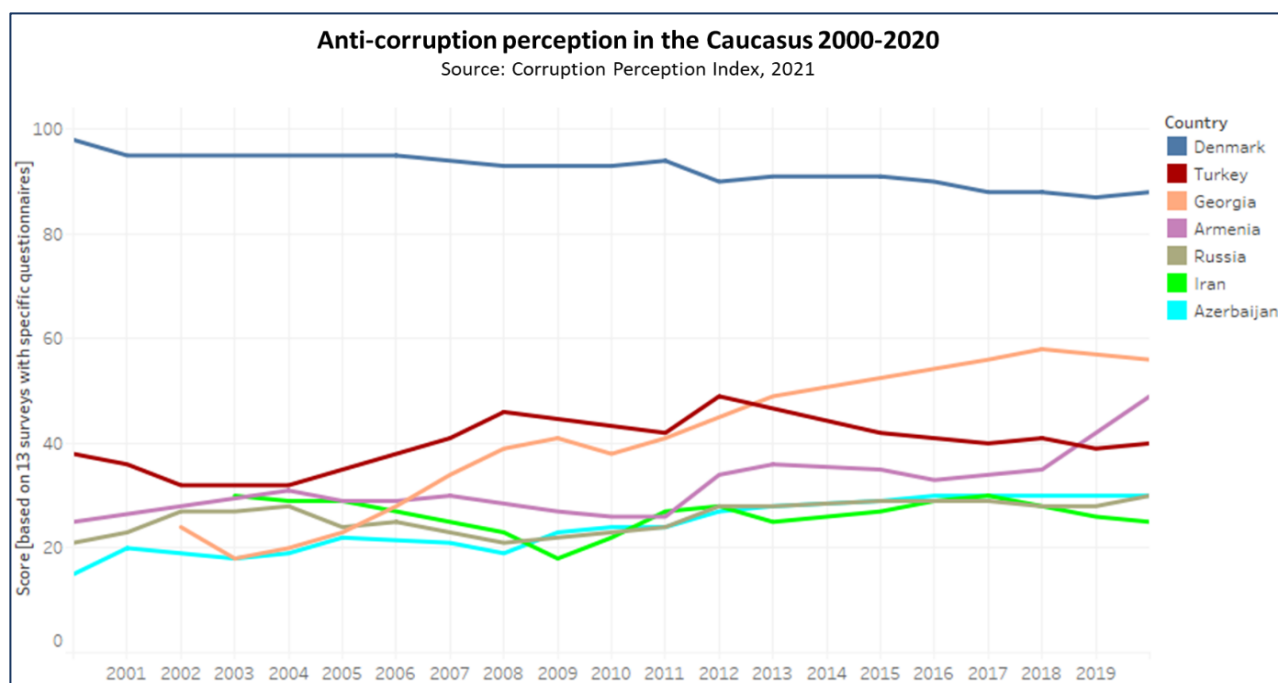


Figure 9: Corruption in the South Caucasus with Denmark as a reference

4.2. Regional and international trends towards 2030

How will the external situation in which the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is embedded develop? A survey of key regional and international trends shows that a substantial improvement in Armenia's position, either based on its own national power or a greater commitment of regional and international power brokers to strengthen Armenia's position, is unlikely. Instead, this section finds that major regional and international trends on average will somewhat weaken Armenia's position (see Table 11). The following trends are likely to strongly weaken, somewhat weaken or somewhat strengthen Armenia's position vis-à-vis Azerbaijan throughout the 2020s.

4.2.1. Trends strongly weakening Armenia's position

The return of an assertive Turkey, reminiscent of the Ottoman Empire, shows that one of Armenia's primary opponents is both committed to influencing events and conflicts through military means in its neighborhood and is likely to continue to do so.²²⁹ Before Erdogan held office Turkey took little interest in security developments in its direct neighborhood, particularly in the Middle East. Since then, the country's foreign policy more resembles that of the late-Ottoman Empire (1789-1918), establishing zones of influence in the regions around Turkey.²³⁰ At the moment, the Turkish military plays an active part in the conflicts in Syria, Libya and in Nagorno-Karabakh through its support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, including a recently reiterated security guarantee (see section on Regional actors).

The advent of *adversarial collaboration* between Turkey and Russia, or "experiment[ation] with a collaborative relationship at the expense of other actors" in spite of diametrically opposed interests, in the Middle East, North Africa and the South Caucasus, is another reason why Armenian interests have suffered.²³¹ The downing of a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 plane above Turkish territory in 2015 and the killing of the Russian ambassador led to fears of the advent of World War III very

recently.²³² Turkey and Russia today have active channels of communication on all the conflicts in which they support opposing sides. Both Russia and Turkey came out of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war as winners (as outlined in "Regional Actors").

4.2.2. Trends somewhat weakening Armenia's position

The fracturing of relations between the world's major powers, the Security Council's Permanent Members, in particular from 2014 onwards, and divergent views on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and Western-led military intervention makes a cooperative, potent and international mediation and conflict resolution effort in the South Caucasus less likely to occur.²³³

More broadly, the interest of the international community in conflict resolution seems to have declined, as some have warned of "international fatigue" in resolving any of the four conflicts in the former Soviet Union, namely those over Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Transdniestria.²³⁴ The War on Terror in the 2000s and the return of great power competition throughout the 2010s demanded attention and resources, effectively limiting the focus on conflict early warning and conflict resolution that characterized the 1990s, a time period when many of the gains in solving conflict were achieved. The power brokers of the world will likely remain less willing to spend political capital on finding a resolution to the intractable Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as a result.

4.2.3. Trends somewhat strengthening Armenia's position

Since the 2008 Russian-Georgian war and then the 2014 intervention of the Russian military in Syria and Ukraine, a resurgent Russia has taken up a larger role in South Caucasian and Middle Eastern security since any time following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia's willingness to commit

2,000 peacekeepers (and, likely even a greater number) to the security of Nagorno-Karabakh for at least five years and likely longer, its maintained military presence in separatist areas of Georgia and Moldova and Azerbaijan's inability to forcefully evict Russian troops from Nagorno-Karabakh suggests that Russian troops will continue to play, or even expand, their role in the near future of the region.²³⁵

An increased role of Russia, however, does not directly translate to greater influence of its "ally" Armenia, as Armenia is a shadow state firmly positioned in Russia's orbit. What Russia does provide is a neutral third party that enlarges the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) between Armenia and Azerbaijan on contentious issues for instance through the commitment of peace-keeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh and perhaps in the future along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. In addition, Russia's initiative to broker the Trilateral Declaration on ceasefire in November 2020 – including reportedly a threat of force against Azerbaijan if it continued its offensive – shows that if the balance of power tips over too far in Azerbaijan's favor Russia is willing to apply *mediation with muscle* to keep Baku in check.

The Biden Administration's new foreign policy narrative about showing that "democracy can still deliver" and his attempts to reinvigorate "a global alliance of democracies" may provide a window for Armenia, which continues its process of democratization, to expand its influence with the United States and the European Union.²³⁶ The amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act, proposed by the Armenian National Committee of America and adopted by the US House of Representatives, show that sympathy for Armenia extends to the legislature (see subsection "International actors").²³⁷ By contrast, Armenia's neighbors, Turkey and Russia, are in the process of de-democratization and Azerbaijan and Iran have long been autocracies. American and European support for Armenia's democratic transition, however, may be limited to words and few actions as President Biden seeks to reduce the United States' military footprint in the region. Considering that the Armenian diaspora in France is the largest of its kind in Western-Europe,

regions that are of less interest to the United States than in the early-2000s, such as the Middle East, in order to deploy additional assets to the Asia-Pacific where it is engaged in great power competition with China.²³⁸ In fact, some have argued that already under the first Obama Administration the United States began a "diplomatic retrenchment" from the South Caucasus.²³⁹

Iran's reintegration into the world economy – if the Biden Administration can reinvigorate the JCPOA (or the Iran Nuclear Deal) – might make Armenia relatively less dependent on Russia, as Iran is a resource rich country with a large export market directly bordering Armenia. Meanwhile Iranian-Azerbaijani relations are deteriorating rapidly.²⁴⁰ Expanding trade and economic relations could decrease Armenia's dependence on Russia for most of its security, resource and economic needs. In spite of American sanctions on Iran for its nuclear program, Armenia has maintained trade with Iran, showing it has been allowed to access an important export market in the face of American sanctions (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). At the same time, tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran are on the rise as Iran takes offense to Baku's military relations with and its procurement of arms from Israel and its close alignment with Tehran's regional rival Turkey. In early October 2021 Tehran held war games, a military training exercise, close to the Azerbaijani border.²⁴¹

The 2022 French Presidency of the European Union might provide an additional opportunity for Armenia to improve its position since France has been one of the most outspoken pro-Armenian states within the EU. France, a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group and an advocate of a more united EU foreign policy,²⁴² is less likely to accept that the conflicts around its borders such as in Libya, Syria, and the South Caucasus are decided by Russia and Turkey solving their differences bilaterally. France has a history of engaging both Russia and the conflicts it is involved in. During the 2008 Russian war against Georgia, President Sarkozy engaged in active diplomacy with President Medvedev.

Macron's 2022 re-election campaign coinciding with the French Presidency of the European Union

provides another driving force for Macron to take an active position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2022.²⁴³

Effect on Armenia	Strength of effect	Trend
Weakening	Strong	Return of an assertive Turkey
Weakening	Strong	Adversarial collaborationism between Turkey and Russia
Weakening	Somewhat	Fracturing of relations between the great powers
Weakening	Somewhat	Declining interest in peace-making
Strengthening	Somewhat	The resurgence of Russia in the Middle East and South Caucasus
Strengthening	Somewhat	The Biden Administration's 'global alliance of democracies' and US congressional support for Armenia
Strengthening	Somewhat	Iranian reintegration in the world economy and decline in of Azerbaijan-Iran relations
Strengthening	Somewhat	The 2022 French Presidency of the European Union

Table 11 Regional and international trends and their effects on Armenia's position in the South Caucasus

5. Peacefully Resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Why has the intractable Nagorno-Karabakh conflict not been resolved after the extended period of hostilities in late-2020? The primary reason is that the conflict is not characterized by a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), as Azerbaijan was able to escalate to unilateral victory and, hence, did not need to look for a negotiated Way Out. Russia is “the only outside party with real leverage over both Baku and Yerevan”²⁴⁴, as shown by its ability to make Azerbaijan accept the November 2020 ceasefire. However, Russia is not committed to brokering a definitive resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

5.1. (Un)fulfilled conditions for the durable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict the conditions of *ripeness* are absent if Russia is not willing to commit to finding a long-term durable resolution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Yet, measures can still be taken to minimize the harm done to the security and prosperity of populations. This means that actors must attempt to manage the conflict or in other words “forestall[ing] the self-reinforcing effects of some conflict characteristics [e.g., polarized identities and profit-taking]” (see Table 5). Conflict management, as a result, better enables conflict resolution at a time when conditions of *ripeness* are present.²⁴⁵

Russian peacekeeping forces have provided a high degree of security and relative stability preventing new large-scale atrocities to be committed. Under these circumstances, actions can be taken to manage the conflict, or to target the drivers causing the continuation of conflict, or in general to increase peace, prosperity, and security in the South Caucasus. Throughout the upcoming decade, Russia and the outside world are likely to have the following division of labor: Russia will provide the hard, military security in Nagorno-Karabakh whereas other regional actors and the international actors, including the OSCE, can help develop the region economically and continue to

provide suggestions for early agreements and confidence building measures, providing information on the benefits of peace.

Finally, if a moment of ripeness presents itself and less complex questions between Azerbaijan and Armenia are dealt with to increase trust, international actors can help work on the eventual resolution of the conflict including the determination of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship still pledges support for resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework they helped establish, namely a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue based on the Helsinki Final Act and the Madrid Principles (outlined in Table 6).

Table 12 lists the constructive actions taken by the belligerents and external parties so far and outlines what additional steps could be taken to move towards a durable resolution. The actions are ordered by the degree of difficulty for these steps to be taken successfully, recommending that the hardest questions (e.g., the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh) should be postponed to further in the future.

Action	Has this condition been met?
Cessation of major hostilities	Yes, since November 2020 a Russian peacekeeping force has ended large-scale hostilities (even though small-scale violations of the ceasefire continue to happen).
Confidence-building “early agreements” monitored by intermediaries	Yes, since November 2020 a Russian-brokered ceasefire has come into effect and is now monitored by a Russian-Turkish initiative, which Armenia does not support. At the same time, Azerbaijan has exchanged Armenian prisoners of war for maps detailing the locations of landmines in Nagorno-Karabakh’s surrounding areas.
Forces in place to assure the ceasing of hostilities	Partially, since November 2020 Russian peacekeepers are active in Nagorno-Karabakh but not along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border more broadly on which small-scale hostilities still occur.
Provide information about the costs of hostilities	Partially, a 2019 study funded by the European Commission did make clear the enormous costs of continued hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan comes at great cost to the entire region. ²⁴⁶ International actors can fund additional studies on the costs of war and benefits of peace.
Provide information and consultations about institutional arrangements	Partially, the OSCE has presented several outlines for peace falling back on the Helsinki Final Act and the Madrid Principles.
Return of Prisoners of War (to Armenia) in exchange for landmine maps (to Azerbaijan)	Partially, but Azerbaijan still holds of Armenian POWs and Armenia still holds maps detailing the locations of landmines even though the EU brokered a first deal swapping maps indicating the locations of land mines (from Armenia to Azerbaijan) and the release of Azerbaijan held prisoners of war.
Establishing unofficial track two diplomacy channels	No, currently there is no track two diplomacy between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
Cease all hostilities: Ending of smaller-scale hostilities in order to allow trust to further develop	No, Armenia has however requested Moscow to establish outposts along the entire border to halt hostilities around the Armenia-Azerbaijan border more broadly.
Definitive settlement to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh	No, the Russian-brokered ceasefire put a lid on this issue but has not solved it. All regional and international actors, such as UN, OSCE, EU, Russia, US, France underline that the determination of definitive status of Nagorno-Karabakh as an outstanding issue.

Table 12 Conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh: What steps have been taken and what remains to be done? Source: Partly Kriesberg’s prescriptions to slow down intractability (see Theoretical Framework) and partly NK-specific circumstances listed by HCSS

5.2. Policy options

Who could do what to accomplish the above steps? What are the policy options for Armenia and Azerbaijan, regional actors and international actors more broadly to support the stability, security and prosperity of Armenia and its region? What actions can the Netherlands take within the EU, NATO, and the UN to support or help peace progress?

Security:

- Any party mediating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can first advocate strategic patience. In other words, let Azerbaijan and Armenia take time to first let issues rest, ease tensions and focus on development of their own countries.²⁴⁷ The Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement has taken effect only eleven months ago, and recent hostilities are still fresh in the minds of both populations. The Russian peacekeeping force ended large-scale hostilities and may very well control the region for ten or fifteen years or even longer to come, effectively again freezing the conflict. At the same time, Russia has an interest in “unblocking” transport and trade routes in the South Caucasus, which may very well produce mutually beneficial economic advantages for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The contact between the peoples of the respective countries may reduce threat perceptions.²⁴⁸
- The EU and US could broker an additional deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan to exchange remaining Azerbaijani held prisoners of war in exchange for Armenian maps detailing the locations of land mines.²⁴⁹
- In due course, the OSCE, the United States and France could request Russia and Turkey to expand their joint ceasefire monitoring initiative. The Russian-Turkish Centre for Monitoring the Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh has so far been supported by Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia, but not by Armenia.

Internationalizing these monitoring efforts by including all co-chairs of the OSCE or making it a UNSC-mandated mission may make Yerevan more inclined to support, and believe in the impartiality, of the monitoring mission.

- Leaving the administration of the region directly to the United Nations, like in the case of Kosovo, or as a territory under the UN Trusteeship Council, may be an alternative interim solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It would definitely be more in line with international peace-keeping norms. The current Russian peacekeeping mission has “authorization only from the three signatory parties of the 9 November ceasefire declaration”, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia and hence lacks both a UN and OSCE mandate.²⁵⁰ It is also implemented by Russia, instead of the OSCE Minsk Group, the party formally responsible for the settlement of the conflict.

For a UN peacekeeping mission to be successfully implemented two fundamental obstacles, a lack of political will and credible deterrence, have to be overcome. UN administration of Nagorno-Karabakh should have UNSC support. The EU and US could try to increase their involvement working with Russia to support an international peacekeeping mission to give international legitimacy to its presence on the ground. However, Moscow sees other permanent members of the UNSC as rivals, and will be unwilling to allow them into its backyard. A myriad of issues in EU-Russian and American-Russian relations, as outlined in the previous chapter, complicate taking such an initiative from the EU and US side as well. Furthermore, UN administration will be unacceptable to Azerbaijan, which claims to have solved the conflict by winning the last war. Russia has stated it is open to allowing a “UN presence” in the region as well as a French and American, and other international contribution, but focusing on humanitarian purposes.²⁵¹ This may serve as an additional confidence building area for Russia, the EU and the US before further internationalization of peace-keeping efforts is achieved at a later point.

Then there is the problem of deterrence. There is a question what happens if peacekeeping forces from states without immediate interests in the region, without substantial defense capabilities and a limited mandate come under attack. They might leave. They are unlikely to further commit by increasing troop presence. The current Russian operation is different, as Russia is a regional power broker with an immediate interest in the region and sufficient defense capabilities to deter aggression from all sides. UN administration of Nagorno-Karabakh is, therefore, currently far away and would have to go hand in hand with additional efforts that guarantee credible deterrence against aggression from all sides.

Political:

- A track two dialogue that includes Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia (and bilateral combinations of these countries) could be established in order to produce small-scale progress in working towards building greater trust and generate ideas for the resolution of the conflict. The controlled re-opening of borders between Turkey and Armenia and, at a later stage, Armenia and Azerbaijan can contribute to reduce *polarized identities* and contribute to the re-humanization of the Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Armenian populations.²⁵²
- Meetings of groups of Armenian and Azerbaijan nationals, such as students in third countries like Georgia, can be facilitated to combat the “life-and-death issues of identity and security” that momentarily define the relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.²⁵³
- The US and the EU could connect further aid efforts to support prosperity in the South Caucasus to conditions of good governance, respect for human rights and democratization. For the EU, this can be done via provisions in the CEPA agreement. The EU has already pledged to provide €2.6bn investments to Armenia. Additionally, the EU can continue to provide technical expertise to enhance political reform in areas of law, administration, and regulation.
- If the Russian-brokered ceasefire holds for an extended period and trust between Armenia and Azerbaijan improves, the international community, through the United Nations Security Council, could request Russia, the only party with real leverage in the conflict, to champion a formal peace process together with the rest of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship. The first meeting in late September 2021, approximately one year after the start of hostilities, of Armenian and Azerbaijan Foreign Ministers in New York is a first early step in restarting the OSCE Minsk Group peace process. After the meeting Armenia’s Prime Minister Pashinyan and now also Azerbaijan’s President Aliyev publicly indicated their willingness to meet and to restart peace talks.²⁵⁴

Economic:

- International actors should continue to advertise the (economic) advantages of peace. In fact, a 2019 study by Berlin Economics, commissioned by the European Commission, showed that the continued expenditure on defense is hindering the development of the whole region.²⁵⁵
- Armenia could advertise its location and suitability as an export base into the wider region for international companies and the Armenian diaspora living around the world in order to increase prosperity in the South Caucasus. Armenia is a democratizing country drawing closer to the European Union via its CEPA agreement (that came into effect in 2021). At the same time, it has free access to large markets such as Russia's (approx. 140 million people) via its participation in the Eurasian Economic Union and has still been able to conduct trade with Iran, a market of approx. 80 million people, despite US sanctions on Iran. If the United States and Iran can agree to a new Nuclear Deal, investment opportunities via Armenia can further increase as political risk remains a factor in investing in Iran directly.
- The EU can use mechanisms within CEPA tying continued democratization to European aid, as has already happened with the €2.6 billion pledged.

Resources:

- The EU and the US could aid Armenia in its transition away from fossil fuels and by extension its large-scale natural gas dependence on Russia, making Armenia more self-sufficient and freer to act. The EU Green Deal aims to make the European Union the front-runner in the energy transition whilst also seeking to help third parties with their transition.²⁵⁶

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- ⁶⁵ Zartman, 50.
- ⁶⁶ Zartman, 51.
- ⁶⁷ Zartman, 52.
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Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will; (v) Upholding the right of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and (vi) Granting the parties international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation. The Helsinki Final Act includes provisions such as “refraining from the threat or use of force, preserving states’ territorial integrity, and protecting the equal rights and self-determination of peoples.” See International Crisis Group, “Digging out of Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh,” 2.

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