POST-SOVIET ARMENIA

The New National Elite and the New National Narrative

Irina Ghaplanyan

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Post-Soviet Armenia

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia has struggled to establish itself, with a faltering economy, emigration of the intelligentsia and the weakening of civil society. This book explores how a new national elite has emerged and how it has constructed a new national narrative to suit Armenia's new circumstances. The book examines the importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan, considers the impact of fraught relations with Turkey and the impact of relations with other neighbouring states including Russia, and discusses the poorly developed role of the very large Armenian Diaspora. Overall, the book provides a key overview to understanding the forces shaping all aspects of present-day Armenia.

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To my children David, Nané and Anthony,
in hopes of a better Armenia

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Nagorno-Karabakh

Introduction

'Political leaders attempt to make such statements [on Nagorno-Karabakh] that will bring them the most votes,' replied Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan to the question on the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict.[1] It is worth mentioning that according to the discourse analysis, President Sargsyan's administration produced a strong and at times even aggressive narrative on the conflict following the failed Turkish–Armenian Protocols and continuing internal, political and socioeconomic instability.

Through historical analysis, this chapter illustrates how the NK conflict became the driving national force behind Armenia's independence, and how war and the symbolism of 'liberating Karabakh' were at the core of articulating and constructing Armenia's new nationhood. This chapter also illustrates how the narrative around the conflict was a prominent source of power legitimation and consolidation. It is speculative to argue whether the NK conflict was and is an existential threat to the security of the Armenian people, but it certainly was discursively constructed as such in the narratives of successive political administrations. The goal is not to underestimate the reality of military escalation and political instability to which the NK conflict has led, but rather to underline how the threat of the conflict has been exploited for domestic political, military and economic control.

The notion of survival has been at the core of Armenian historiography for centuries, but the late nineteenth-century massacres (particularly the Hamidian) and especially the massacres of 1915 further entrenched and solidified that self-identification. Genocide constituted not just an historical fact, but more a living memory that recurred in both academic and daily narratives. It was not surprising, therefore, that following the pogroms in Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990), which resulted in hundreds of Armenian deaths, the Armenians relived the past and visualized it in the posters and banners carried in the incessant rallies on the streets of Yerevan in late 1989 and 1990.[2] Genocide became the prism through which the discourse on Nagorno-Karabakh was constructed – it was about survival. Forced cultural assimilation by Azerbaijanis was referred to as 'white genocide', the pogroms were seen as continuation of Genocide and Azerbaijanis were referred to as 'Turks'. This fear of national extinction, according to Peter Rutland, became

'a crucial motivating force generating a strong nationalist movement'.[3] This movement was embodied in and then headed by an eleven-member Karabakh Committee, whose key members later headed both the Armenian government (Ter-Petrosyan) and its opposition (Vazgen Manukyan).

As the struggle of a discriminated ethnic minority (the Armenians of NK) in the South Caucasus began to acquire a USSR-wide phenomenon inspired by Gorbachev's glasnost, coupled with other events and factors, such national-secessionist movements and empire-wide economic distress, the foundations of the Soviet Union began to crumble.[4] The members of the Karabakh Committee were now faced not only with the NK problem, but with the task of leading an independent republic. This initial stage of power legitimation through the NK conflict occurred essentially by default. The context or affiliation to the NK conflict consecutively played a defining role for the succeeding administrations to acquire and legitimize their power. Although Kocharyan was in Ter-Petrosyan's administration, and most likely was well aware of Ter-Petrosyan's stance on the conflict resolution process, he waited for a 'politically ripe' moment to go against the then President and, together with the military strongmen (e.g. Vazgen Sargsyan), was successful.[5] At the time, current President Serzh Sargsyan was also in Ter-Petrosyan's administration and headed the Ministry of Interior and National Security. He was seen as a de facto successor to Kocharyan after his two terms were up, whereas his 'affiliation' to NKR included his origins and his military career during the war years, which 'earned' him political appointments in Yerevan during and after the war.

It is important to note that following the 1994 NKR ceasefire agreement, although the sides to the conflict continued to negotiate a peaceful resolution, Azerbaijan's threat to resume military hostilities has been at the forefront of official Baku's military and political propaganda aimed more for the domestic consumption but also at official Yerevan as well. On the domestic front in Yerevan, all the three political administrations employed this narrative as a deterring factor aimed at preventing any major oppositional uprising and consolidating power at the expense of militarization of the political discourse – in a way, the NKR narrative or largely the security narrative in Armenia was constructed on the dichotomy of 'ballot vs. border'.

The analysis of the political discourse generated by media sources over the past twenty-plus years, and particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, shows, at least quantitatively, that an overwhelming portion of the political narrative is focused on issues of security in general and the NKR conflict in particular. As the situation around the conflict solidified its status quo, it became further 'removed' not only physically but also discursively from official Yerevan, and in the 2000s, political narrative is more dominant with issues pertaining to reforms, socioeconomic situation, corruption and other pressing political issues.[6] What is important to note, however, is that the security narrative in general and the military-focused narrative on the NK conflict in particular served as a façade or the 'go-to' reason for justifying the continued and mounting socioeconomic problems and political problems, which the country was facing.

In this chapter, the analysis of the NK-related discourse and subsequent policies offer insight into the processes of power legitimation and consolidation through this conflict. A brief historical outline precedes this analysis in order to outline the significance of the conflict in Armenia's path towards independence and to show how the conflict was exacerbated by its historiography, and also how it shaped and militarized Armenia's post-independence nation-building processes and politics at large.[7]

In identifying the Karabakh Movement as one of the most defining factors leading up to Armenia's independence, this chapter argues that Nagorno-Karabakh was at the root of the political power creation of newly independent Armenia. In describing the outbreak of military hostilities, the war, the ceasefire and the status quo, the analysis focuses on how these developments were interpreted in Yerevan and how political control was acquired and consolidated because of the NK conflict. In analysing the strategies vis-à-vis Nagorno-Karabakh employed by the three presidential administrations, the analysis stresses how the security narrative pertaining to the NK conflict was subsequently utilized by the respective political forces to further consolidate power.

From *Arran* to the Black Garden

The intricate history of Nagorno-Karabakh is reflected in its etymology – *Nagorno* in Russian (*Нагорно*) means 'mountainous', '*Kara'* in Turkic means 'black' and '*Bakh'* in Persian means garden. Armenians call it *Artsakh*.[8] While the history of Nagorno-Karabakh stretches back into antiquity, the conflict is relatively recent. However, the contesting Armenian versus Azerbaijani historiography of the region has been employed to claim that the conflict existed for centuries. As both Armenia and Azerbaijan embarked on their path to independence, while simultaneously fighting the war over Nagorno-Karabakh, the 4,800 square kilometres of this mountainous Black Garden played a very powerful symbolic role for both peoples. For Armenians and Azerbaijanis alike, when it comes to Nagorno-Karabakh, the 'dynamics of identity and boundary formation are intrinsically intertwined'.[9]

Although some historians argue that this ethnic conflict dates back a few centuries, almost no evidence supports this view.[10] The ethnic identities began to come into conflict at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries when Azerbaijanis began to actively define their identity, while Armenians were salvaging what was left after the Genocide.[11] Hence, for the leadership and the people of Armenia, including Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia proper, became crucially significant for reinforcing and strengthening national identity and pride, particularly following the loss of Western Armenia to the new Turkish Republic. It was then that the conflict was largely shaped, although it was well into the twentieth century when it eventually burst into the open as a result of the larger global context of increased national self-awareness and domestic reforms (i.e. glasnost).

Armenian historiography in general, and particularly that of post-1988 Karabakh, embodied Armenian nationalism as it was home not only to the 'proud, self-sufficient, suspicious of outsiders and intractably headstrong' people, but also because 'nowhere else have Armenians clung to their native soil with such ferocity, and with such success'.[12] Bournoutian, an Armenian-American historian, states that the region falling south-west of the River Kur, east of Hazar and north of the River Arax (i.e. Karabakh) had been part of an Armenian state from the second century BC. Neither the partition between the Byzantine empire and Sassanian Iran in the fourth century nor the Arab invasion in the seventh century and domination until the eleventh century had broken up the stronghold of the Armenian feudal lords or the majority of the Armenian population. It was the Turkish and Mongol invasions (eleventh–thirteenth centuries) that, for the first time, had altered the balance of the Armenian population. Due to widespread destruction and forced conversions, Armenians began to flee the lowlands of Arran and sought refuge in the mountains of the region (today's mountainous Karabakh).[13] Following the fall of the Bagratid and Cilician Armenian kingdoms in the west, the highlands of Arran between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries witnessed the creation of active political, military and intellectual centres under the leadership of Armenian *meliks*.[14] The invasions of Timur and the Turkmen tribes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and constant wars between the Ottomans and Persians from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries all resulted in the further reduction of Armenians in the lowlands and renaming of places with Turko–Persian names. The mountains of Arran (Karabakh) and Syunik (Zangezur) remained one of the areas where they continued to be a sizeable population.

The Ottoman-Persian wars in the region were succeeded by Russo-Persian and Russo-Ottoman power struggles from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. After two Russo-Persian wars, Karabakh became part of the Russian Empire. However, despite its significant Armenian population, it was included into the Muslim province.[15] Under Russian rule, administrative-territorial changes were implemented every two to three years from the mid-nineteenth century all the way to the First World War, as due to the mosaic of the different ethnic populations of Transcaucasia, it was virtually impossible to find a win–win formula for all the local officials. Especially with the rise of national and ethnic consciousness among Armenians, Georgians and Turkic populations of Transcaucasia, the tsarist administration felt the urgency to adopt a number of ways of resolving the demands of these populations: minor reforms or promises of reforms, use of force and creating divisions among the ethnic and religious groups living there. As a result, the Karabakh conflict emerged between the Armenians and the Turkic population, which had begun to refer to themselves as Azerbaijanis by some accounts in the late nineteenth century, beginning of the twentieth century, by others at the inception of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918. This was the first time that Armenians and now Azerbaijanis were divided along cultural, ethnic, linguistic, regional and religious lines.[16]

The Armenian Genocide, the loss of Western Armenia and the mass exodus of the survivors, including into Eastern Armenia, all served as chilling evidence to

Armenians in Yerevan and Tbilisi that unless they resisted, Karabakh would be lost as well. So, when both Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence in 1918, both claimed Karabakh. However, as Armenia, fatally weakened by the Kemalist assault of late 1920, was preparing to enter the Bolshevik fold, Nariman Narimanov, unilaterally and unexpectedly declared that 'Azerbaijan was giving up all its claims to the territories, which it disputed with Armenia and that now Karabakh and other regions would be part of Soviet Armenia'.[17] The other regions were Nakhichevan and Zangezur.[18] The decision was reaffirmed in July 1921, when the Caucasian Politburo voted 'five to two that Karabagh should become part of Armenia'.[19] It is not surprising that on the very day of Armenia's Sovietization, this telegram, relinquishing all Azeri claims to Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur, was received by the Armenian government. In reality, it was a 'propaganda ploy aimed at encouraging the Armenians to view the Red Army as a saviour as it entered Yerevan'.[20] Once Armenia was Sovietized, Narimanov repudiated the Azeri concession and threatened 'fomenting anti-Soviet activity in Azerbaijan'.[21] Although on 12 June the Caucasian Bureau of the Communist Party reaffirmed its decision about Karabakh, it met again on 4 July and voted again in favour of Armenia in the presence of Narimanov and Stalin, who did not participate in the debate but apparently made his opinion on the matter known to the Bureau members only after the meeting had adjourned. The next day, without deliberation or a formal vote and apparently at Stalin's behest, the Bureau reversed itself abruptly and made Nagorno-Karabakh part of the Azerbaijan SSR.[22] The 'Soviet fraternity' hailed as the impetus behind the decision on giving Karabakh back to the Armenians was obviously disregarded when the decision was reversed and Nagorno-Karabakh was given to the Azerbaijan SSR within only three months. Soviet foreign policy interests, otherwise called 'proletariat fraternity', outweighed 'Soviet fraternity'.[23]

According to Christopher Walker, the repudiated decision of placing Karabakh, with its 94 per cent Armenian population, under the power of Baku was formalized in 1923, and in 1936 Stalin's constitution affirmed the borders of the South Caucasian republics.[24] From the very beginning, Stalin put a taboo on discussing the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. When Aghasy Khanjyan, Armenia's first secretary and himself Stalin's protégé, raised the question of Karabakh prior to the adoption of the 1936 constitution, he was later shot dead (allegedly by agents of the chief of Soviet Security and Secret Police, Lavrentii Beria; some even claim by Beria himself) in Tbilisi.[25] Stalin silenced Armenians until after the end of the Second World War, when the question of returning both Western Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh was raised. The petitions were again sent in the late 1940s and throughout the 1960s. Despite the Kremlin's silence and disregard, Armenians continued to petition for Karabakh, and this struggle was continuously fuelled by the sense of injustice over the fate of Karabakhi Armenians.

This discrimination, or rather the process of 'chipping away Armenians' from the region, was evident. There were no institutes of higher education in Karabakh and Armenians had to go to Baku, as the option of pursuing higher education in Yerevan was very difficult due to institutional regulations (and once in Yerevan,

the return to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was also complicated). Armenian language broadcasts were not allowed to be relayed to Karabakh, and local stations as of the 1960s were forced to broadcast only in Russian or Azeri. The administrative centres, which the populace had to deal with, all lay in Azerbaijan proper. Armenian historical monuments decayed, either through neglect or deliberate vandalism. Even water resources were being tapped for the benefit of Azerbaijan and not the villages of Karabakh.[26] In addition to that, Karabakh was entirely dependent on Baku for the allocation of funds for economic development. Baku was 'extremely reluctant to allocate funds and resources necessary for economic development in the region'.[27] Finally, in addition to all the above, the Soviet-era *propiska* system was employed in Karabakh as well – meaning the obligatory residence permits which precluded the possibility of freely moving around the republics.[28]

All this, under the 'thaw' of Khrushchev, led to two strongly expressed petitions filed in 1964 by the local population directly to the First Secretary. However, they received no response. According to Suny and Stork, 'Several times during the Brezhnev period [e.g. a large rally in 1974 demanding the return of Karabakh], especially in 1977 during the discussions of the new constitution, the issue was raised through letters, articles and petitions. Again, there was no response from Moscow.'[29] But the pleas did not recede – every time there was a political change in Moscow, the Armenians of Karabakh would renew their request for unification with Yerevan. Why was the struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh so intense and fervent, especially during the Soviet years?

Azerbaijan did not exist as a nation state until 1918–1920, and when, as a result of Soviet nationality policies, Azerbaijanis began to be educated in their own language, learned of their own culture, created operas and broadcast programmes on radio stations in Azeri, they began to develop into a coherent, conscious and consolidated national community. The Soviet era, despite the Western views of forced assimilation and Russification, became a period of nation building and indeed creating a nation in Azerbaijan where one had not existed historically.[30] In the midst of Jews, Talysh, Kurds, Dagestani, Lezgin, Russians and other minorities in Azerbaijan, the Armenian community became the primary target of discrimination. They faced the closure of Armenian schools, theatre, cultural centres, pedagogical centres and television programming, discrimination in workplaces, and so forth.[31] The task of the authorities in Baku was to slowly 'chip away' the Armenian presence in both Azerbaijan and particularly Nagorno-Karabakh in order to consolidate Azeri nationhood, both in terms of its homogeneity and historiographical discourse. Thus, it is not surprising that Azerbaijani historians both today and in Soviet times attempt to define Azerbaijani national identity based on pre-modern sociocultural ethnicity to lay claim to a long history of nationhood, and both historically and politically legitimate their present claims to Karabakh.[32]

Although Soviet nationality policies were strategically aimed at cultivating ethnocultural identities, in reality they also nurtured the territorial and political identities of Soviet ethnic groups. This cultivation produced a raw form of nationalism,

emotionally rooted in the blood (the kin) and belonging (the territory). This kin and territory-bound nationalism was fuelled further by the persistent discrimination and denials of the return of land (Nagorno-Karabakh). This raw, ethno-centric nationalism, disconnected from the political structure, was directed not against Soviet structures or ideologies, but against Turkey and Azerbaijan. Geukjian asserts that 'unlike the Georgian, Ukrainian and Estonian nationalisms, Armenian nationalism was "tolerated" within limits by the communist authorities, except in certain militant forms when it posed a potential threat to the unity of the USSR'.[33] As a result, the leadership of the NKAO had addressed the central authorities with a request to reconsider the return of the NKAO to Armenian SSR through a number of petitions and official requests in 1945, 1965, 1967, 1977 and 1988, but had been rejected every time.

Hence, the causes of the conflict emerged almost entirely at the beginning of the Soviet period and then evolved further. First, the conflict erupted as a result of the anomaly of placing a predominantly Armenian-populated region within another Soviet republic. Second, in the context of the Soviet nationality policies, where national consciousness was linked to ethnicity, culture and territory, the anomaly of Karabakh's situation became even more pronounced. Armenians incessantly attempted to redress the miscarriage of history, whereas Azerbaijanis tried to chip away Armenianness not only from Azerbaijan proper but from Karabakh as well.

So, when Gorbachev launched glasnost, and with it a seemingly greater openness to redress injustices, the Armenians of Karabakh launched an active campaign aimed at unification. The Armenian plea, coupled with Gorbachev's failure to address it, was arguably among the instrumental causes leading up to the collapse of the USSR. With his denial of restoring Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, Gorbachev not only disillusioned many emerging Russian democrats and tipped them into a struggle for the dismemberment of the USSR, but he also encouraged Baltic and Ukraine nationalists to fight more aggressively for their national causes.[34] The paradox here is that Armenians initially did not set out to leave the Union, because the Karabakh movement initially started only with the call for the unification to Armenia proper. In fact, Yerevan was hoping to use Moscow's leverage to pressure Baku into giving up Karabakh. Had Gorbachev addressed the nationalist causes with more caution and employed diplomatic and political tools, as opposed to military suppression, the outcome of not only the Armenian but of other national dissensions, which emerged all across the Soviet Union at the time, could have had a different outcome. On the other hand, given the poor economic growth and regress of the Soviet industrial infrastructure, the downfall of the Soviet Union became almost imminent with the union-wide shake-up, which occurred as a result of the national strife occurring in various corners across the USSR. The rise of nationalist movements across the Soviet Union played a significant role or served as a prominent impetus towards the de facto independence of the multiple republics, which comprised the vast former communist empire. However, in the case of Armenia as nationalism became the driving force behind the Karabakh movement, followed by war and independence, it later

became a highly manipulated political tool, which was used to front the nation-building processes, while the processes of building democratic institutions remained stagnant, if not thwarted.

War and independence

Over the course of the past few centuries, Armenian historiography is marked by struggles for survival and a collective strife for endurance and perseverance. However, the twentieth century proved to be the most precarious of all: it was marked by the single most traumatic event in Armenian history – the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The depth of humanitarian, cultural, historic, political and, in general, material and non-material loss and trauma is yet to be discovered, as Genocide recognition continues to be at the top of the political, legal and cultural agenda of surviving generations. Hence, in many aspects, the Genocide continues to be a living memory for many Armenians around the world, including those living in Armenia. It was, therefore, not surprising that this living memory was fuelled by the ethnic cleansings in Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990). That is why both in the Diaspora and in Soviet Armenia nationalists, non-nationalists and local communist elites mobilized to defend Karabakh, a symbol of perseverance. The symbolism and significance of the Genocide to the Karabakh movement is multifaceted. As Marutyan documents, this symbolism was reflected in the number of posters that referenced the Genocide during the rallies for unification with Karabakh in 1988–9.[35] Discursively, the Karabakh movement was also very significant as it mobilized people on the open squares and streets, constructing a new and bold national narrative. It is important to note that initially these speeches constructed an image of an enemy sitting not in Moscow, but in Baku and Ankara. They referred to Pan-Turkism and connected the loss of Western Armenia to the loss of Nakhichevan and the looming loss of Karabakh to Azerbaijanis.[36] That, however, changed following the Sumgait pogroms in February 1988 when local Armenian residents were massacred by Azerbaijanis.[37] By May, the leaders of the Karabakh movement blamed not only Baku for orchestrating the massacres, but also Moscow for failing to protect Armenians and essentially for being the cause of the conflict.[38] The focus of the speeches now expanded to include narrative on democracy, value systems, corruption and the non-national character of the Soviet state. The opportunities to voice national grievances, and to openly discuss national issues and injustices that were not so welcome in the pre-glasnost days were all crucially significant in shaping the new psyche of the common Armenian citizen.

It is important to recall that what caused the demonstrations in the first place was the unprecedented permissiveness on the part of Moscow, which led to people pouring out on to the streets of Yerevan and demanding the overturn of the Kremlin's decision. According to Saideman and Ares, in January 1988,

> Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev received a petition with 75,000 Karabakh Armenian signatures – roughly 60 per cent of the Armenian popu-

> lation in the region. When this petition was summarily rejected, protest rallies broke out. In response to popular pressure, on 20 February the Soviet of People's Deputies for the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast formally requested transfer to the Armenian SSR.[39]

This subsequently led to violence, refugees on both sides and demonstrations. The Sumgait and Baku pogroms and subsequently 'Operation Ring', which resulted in many deaths and the exodus of virtually all Armenians from Azerbaijan, were a breaking point in the initially peaceful initiative of Armenians aimed at the unification of Karabakh with Armenia.[40] Events unravelled very fast, from NKAO legislatives voting for unification with Armenia to the incessant demonstrations from Yerevan to Stepanakert.

Moscow was increasingly seen by Yerevan as antagonistic not only because it continually denied the legitimacy of Karabakhi Armenians, instead opting to use force, but also because it failed to launch and undertake a substantial investigation into the pogroms, as well as what was seen as the main perpetrator and mastermind of Operation Ring. Moreover, Gorbachev's strategy of delaying the resolution of the problem, personnel changes and the promise of economic aid that never materialized proved to be futile after the bloody events of January 1990. Yeltsin's ascent to power gave a slim hope to Yerevan that, unlike Gorbachev, he would adhere to the principles of the new 'democratizing' USSR, but when Moscow slid into the 1991 chaos, Yeltsin's main concern in the region was getting the Russian military out of what already had turned into a full-scale military confrontation.[41]

But even when, still Soviet, Armenia organized its first parliamentary elections in May 1990 when the Communist Party scored the highest vote, followed by Ter-Petrosyan's APNM's members who ran as independents, the latter did not take an aggressive stance on independence, simply calling for 'an autonomy within the USSR'.[42] This suggests that the emergent political leadership was cautious about the timing of proclaiming sovereignty, and also perhaps realized that it was not ready for fully fledged independence yet; all the while, Karabakh continued to be the driving force of the political agenda. It was only a few months later, in August 1990, however, that Ter-Petrosyan officially declared Armenia's independence, renaming the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic as the Republic of Armenia (RA).[43] Initially, Ter-Petrosyan coined the new state as 'United Armenia', referring to the unification of Armenian proper with Nagorno Karabakh. However, following the outbreak of fully fledged military hostilities in early 1991 and realizing that calls for unification could be interpreted as 'acts of Armenian aggression' as opposed to the strife of the ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination, Yerevan renounced its claims to Karabakh at a Russian-mediated conference in September 1991.[44] From that point on, Armenia kept the official diplomatic position of support for self-determination for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, while continuing to help provide military and other support to Stepanakert.

The open warfare that broke out in early 1991 was preceded by a number of 'states of emergencies' issued in Stepanakert, many small-scale clashes on the

Armenian–Azerbaijani border, the formation of paramilitaries on both sides, the Azerbaijani blockade of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and so forth. Essentially, Nagorno-Karabakh served as both the cause and effect on Armenia's path towards independence, and the new Armenian 'nationhood' was initially constructed and 'strengthened by the struggle to "recover" Karabakh'.[45]

Full-scale military hostilities lasted for four years, ending in a ceasefire in 1994 and resulting in Armenian forces taking not only most of Karabakh proper, but also parts of seven adjacent territories which were situated outside the former NKAO.[46] The question is why and how the Armenian side was victorious in the war, given the asymmetry of the warring sides, the quantitative advantage of Azerbaijani military manpower and equipment, the successive offensives in the early 1990s, and so forth. It was this very sense of 'new nationhood', of a shared identity that went beyond the confines of the post-Soviet Armenians – many prominent military commanders in the NK war were Armenians from Lebanon, the United States, France, Italy, Canada, Iran and Syria.[47] This sense of 'new nationhood', or of a common or shared identity, was triggered by the fear of the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and the sense of duty to preserve it by the selfless heroism of many Armenian and Diaspora Armenian commanders who risked their lives on the frontlines or died in war, and by the perception of a singular enemy threatening the very existence of Armenia (the Turkish–Azeri then very prominent narrative of 'two nations, one state'). According to interviews with veterans and their personal recollections, this sense of common identity or the struggle for a common cause also decreased the perception of the real threat posed by the Azerbaijani's offensives and Turkey's closure of the border, aiding the Armenian military men in fighting a heavily asymmetric war.

This asymmetry of war was reflected also in the population, land mass and economic advantages of being a fossil fuel rich country – Azerbaijan is more than twice the size of Armenia's territory and population. In terms of available state power, Azerbaijan also held the advantage, according to

> Comparing Correlates of War (COW) data for the two countries for the period of the 1990s, Armenia tended to have roughly half of Azerbaijan's aggregated measured power resources; in the early years, during the active phase of the war, the ratio was closer to 3:1 in Azerbaijan's favour.[48]

However, according to Saideman, these 'measurable strategic power advantages enjoyed by Azerbaijan were overridden by idiosyncratic factors on the ground, including the strength of Armenian nationalism and its ability to mobilize men to fight'.[49]

Returning to the beginning of the conflict, although open military hostilities did break out in 1991, essentially the real escalation of the conflict began with the targeted ethnic killings of Armenians in Sumgait in 1988. These killings touched a raw nerve with Armenians and reignited the image of martyrdom and the call for 'survival'. This de facto started the conflict, which today despite the de jure ceasefire in 1994 is still underway: the incessant arms race between the two

countries, almost daily sniper fire and ever-growing casualties on both sides on the line of contact, continued cyber attacks and counter attacks, continued belligerent discourse, and specifically Azerbaijani led and sponsored ethnic hate propaganda.[50]

Baku has been the driving force behind the arms race, with Armenia falling behind both in terms of the quantity as well as sophistication of weaponry. Over the course of the past decade, through this incessant weapon stockpiling coupled with an aggressive and belligerent narrative, Baku was sending a message that it was preparing for war, which we witnessed in April 2016.[51] Despite the largely unsuccessful Azerbaijani offensive, many military experts predict yet another large-scale military offensive in the course of 2017. This way, Azerbaijani political leadership has managed to continuously save face and earn much needed political dividends in order to continue keeping a strong hold on power domestically. The fossil fuel wealth of Azerbaijan has largely benefited the Aliyev family and the upper-level political elite in Baku, whereas poverty, unemployment and poor growth of GDP per capita have remained as a serious challenge for Azerbaijan's economy, which is continuing to be heavily fossil-fuel dependent. In the light of this, the belligerent and borderline racist political narrative of official Baku is paramount for the Aliyev's government to sustain the image of Armenians as arch-enemies, and reduce any possible domestic discontent or opposition to his ever-growing autocratic hold on power.[52] Expert opinions are split on whether a full-scale resumption of military hostilities, similar to those in the mid 1990s, will actually occur, taking into consideration Baku's constant warnings of full-scale offensives, but also considering the potential economic losses that especially Azerbaijan will incur (e.g. disruption of fossil fuel flows). The reasons range from the unpredictability of the potential outcome of the war, despite Azerbaijan's perceived military superiority, to the fact that Baku will not be risking its fossil fuel flows outside Azerbaijan (certain sections of Azerbaijani pipelines fall within shooting range of Armenian forces), unless, of course, the oil and gas prices drop to an unprecedented low, in which case Baku's government will also be faced with potential domestic instability. Other reasons, of course, include the sheer humanitarian crisis that a full-scale offensive can cause. The active phase of war caused, according to International Crisis Group's estimates, between 22,000 and 25,000 deaths, and more than one million refugees and IDPs in both countries.[53] However, as the 'passive phase' of war continues to take lives on both sides, predominantly on the line of contact, it dangerously continues to dehumanize the opposing sides. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) Report, although there are a limited number of outstanding differences that remain, the inability to bridge these are due more to lack of political will than an inability to devise compromise formulas.[54] This is largely explained – in both cases of Armenia and Azerbaijan – with the fact that for the populations of both countries the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was at the core of the construction of the new nationhood. It produced and carried overwhelming significance and symbolism, as throughout the years of the war and afterwards, it continued to evoke nationalism, tied to the land, the people slain in the conflict and those who left

their homes as a result of it. Hence, it is not surprising that the conflict was and continues to be at the centre of the political discourse of both countries. However, what needs to be underlined, referring back to the ICG's statement about lack of political will, is that the conflict, due to its symbolic nature and national weight, was and continues to be employed by the political leadership as both a power-legitimating and power-consolidating tool.

Over- or under-securitization?

Emerging at the dawn of the Soviet empire and growing exponentially, the national sentiment around Nagorno-Karabakh shaped a new mind-set, a new set of beliefs and values and, most importantly, a sense of unity and purpose proper, and even as the discourse on the sovereignty of Armenia began to evolve, Karabakh still remained at the core of the sprouting Armenian nationhood. Even the genesis of designating the Karabakh movement coincided with the growing demand of the masses – it grew from the Nagorno-Karabakh movement to the Karabakh Committee and finally to the Armenian Pan-National Movement (APNM). Entering its new-found sovereignty in a state of war, the emergent Armenian political leadership, their discourse and their internal and foreign policy strategies were all shaped in one way or another by the NK war. Thus, this conflict, due to its potential to mobilize a strong national sentiment, became a powerful political tool. As the account of the three presidential terms and their respective conflict-related narratives show below, the NK conflict, despite the ceasefire, has continued to be a discursively potent political instrument. The 'ethnic outbidding' by rival political elites over the conflict-related narrative occurred in the period from 1988 to 1992, during the election cycle of 1995 and 1996, and again in 1998 when Ter-Petrosyan began to actively advocate for a concessional resolution of the NK conflict and potential benefits of that deal, such as the border opening prospects with Turkey (thereby reducing Armenia's dependence on Russia).[55] However, as further analysis shows, the timing of this proposal was a strategic miscalculation on Ter-Petrosyan's part, mainly in terms of the role the securitization or rather the under-securitization of political discourse played at the time, essentially costing him his presidency. Kocharyan's ascent to power was largely due to the same type of 'ethnic outbidding' which the APNM and Ter-Petrosyan employed at the beginning of the 1990s.

When Ter-Petrosyan returned to politics to rival Sargsyan in 2007, the subject of the NK conflict re-emerged. Ter-Petrosyan blamed Kocharyan for offering the same but simply rephrased solution to the Karabakh conflict and for 'reducing Armenian nationalism to primitive hatred towards Turks'.[56] However, Kocharyan's focus during his presidency had been to prove that in the existing conflict and closed borders, economic development was possible and no one-sided concessions were necessary.[57] Kocharyan consolidated his new political elite around this strategy, and although the country recorded economic growth, it moved significantly backwards as it registered increased monopolization of various vital sectors and the growth of the oligarchy and its 'infiltration' into politics, which in turn

hurt economic competition and in the long term resulted in economic volatility.[38] Meanwhile, the strategy towards the NK conflict essentially did not change. When Sargsyan succeeded Kocharyan, the succession was interpreted as a way of keeping the 'Karabakh clan' in power. Ter-Petrosyan came to power because of his role in the Karabakh movement, the Committee and later the APNM. In the light of the political prominence of Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia, Kocharyan's political legitimacy in Armenia was justified through his 'affiliation' to NKR as well – he was originally from Nagorno-Karabakh, he was the unrecognized republic's president as well as being credited with a more nationalistic and aggressive discourse on Karabakh, opposing Ter-Petrosyan's more concessional stance. By the time the fifth presidential elections were organized, the political and economic power structures were allegedly under the control of the 'Karabakh clan' and, with Sargsyan being a core member of this 'clan', such control became more explicit.

The emphasis of the following analysis of the three political administrations focuses on the narrative and policies on Nagorno-Karabakh and how these were employed as political tools to either gain political dividends, or control and sustain power.

Ter-Petrosyan: the cost of the presidential chair

Placing his fourth cigarette in his iconic cigarette holder, Ter-Petrosyan casually leaned back in his chair, lit up and said:

> I will not go now into the details of the conflict resolution formula; we just have to understand that maximalist approaches can be counterproductive. So we need to offer a realistic approach, and if we are realistic, then, I believe, we must understand that there is no alternative but the compromise. That is it.

When asked to be more specific, in the light of the context (the interview was conducted in 2010) and changed circumstances, he nevertheless refrained from details and referred to his speeches and documents, stating 'you will find everything there'. As previously stated and further analysed below, Ter-Petrosyan's position on the NK conflict following the ceasefire and more specifically in 1998 was interpreted as defeatist and concessional, and was used against him in the mounting political pressure aimed at his resignation.

The release of the Karabakh Committee leaders in 1989 from their half-year imprisonment by the Soviet authorities led to their increased popularity and following among both Soviet and Diaspora-based Armenians. Committee leaders were deliberate and strategic in institutionalizing their activities within the APNM, embracing a coalition of other forces and running in the still Soviet Armenia's parliamentary elections of 1990. Although officially most of the APNM members ran as independents, unofficially their affiliation was known to the public and they came second after the Communist Party of Armenia.

Ter-Petrosyan continued to remain the political frontman of both the Committee and the APNM, and succeeded in consolidating various political forces under the APNM's umbrella. Although all these different entities focused their work on various issues – ranging from helping refugees to rebuilding the earthquake zone – the core mission of the APNM in the early days remained the unification of Karabakh with Armenia.

On one hand, one would expect the Armenian people to elect a nationalist, given the mobilization of the people around the NK cause.[59] On the other hand, one might have expected that the Armenian people were not ready to jump from a 'sterile' Soviet political discourse into a heavily nationalist outburst.[60] Although the first presidential election in 1991 was assessed by three US election observers as 'far from fair', and the discrepancy between Ter-Petrosyan (83 per cent) and Hayrikyan (7.2 per cent) was very wide, the latter fact might indicate that the final result might have been inaccurate but not necessarily unfair.[61] Following the elections, the opposition began to put pressure on Ter-Petrosyan to acknowledge the independence of Karabakh, with big demonstrations calling for his resignation. It is interesting to note that 'the opposition backed down in August when Ter-Petrosyan threatened to hold a referendum to test public confidence in his leadership'.[62] Thus, Ter-Petrosyan's 'non-maximalist' position on Karabakh was initially accepted, but following the victorious outcome of the war his popularity began to diminish. He employed other strategies to show his continued allegiance to the Karabakh issue, appointing Robert Kocharyan as Armenia's Prime Minister and bringing a number of Karabakhi military leaders into the Armenian government.[63] Hence, the Karabakh issue began to grow further in terms of its political and national significance. There were two realities on the ground – one of a war of liberation in Stepanakert and another of a struggle for political power in Yerevan. In mixing the two, Ter-Petrosyan had strategically miscalculated.

Ter-Petrosyan's loss of political control began in 1996 when he ran for re-election. In these presidential elections his main contender was Vazgen Manukyan, a fellow Karabakh Committee member who had later become his leading opponent. Manukyan's criticism of the government and Ter-Petrosyan personally was focused on widespread corruption and the failure to undertake significant reforms, whereas the Karabakh issue remained largely peripheral in the political narratives of the campaign. When the Central Electoral Commission announced the election results, the opposition turned to the streets and stormed the parliament.[64] To resolve mounting pressure, Ter-Petrosyan turned to the military and security forces for help, and they put the uprising down by force.[65] By inviting the military to solve a political question, Ter-Petrosyan essentially undermined his own political control, especially given his position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Following his re-election in the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections, Ter-Petrosyan fell under both domestic and international pressures. Shortly after, Ter-Petrosyan announced his position and suggested plan for the resolution of the NK conflict. It is unclear, given the timing of this move, whether he did this in an attempt to 'legitimize' his allegedly fraudulent re-election or to regain his

popularity, particularly in the eyes of the international community. What is clear, however, is that this move was grotesquely untimely and significantly bold, given its arguably compromising nature. On 26 September 1997, in a nationally televised press conference, Ter-Petrosyan made a statement in which he openly favoured the stage-by-stage solution proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group.[66] It is important to note here that the then Ter-Petrosyan's senior adviser, NK negotiator and secretary of the Security Council Gerard Libaridian, has only recently (January 2017) publicly released an account of the meeting, which took place in June 1997, where not only the then leaders of the NK, but also members of his own government (who later opposed the phased deal) had agreed in a closed-door meeting to the stage-by-stage deal, only to publicly oppose Ter-Petrosyan a few months later.[67] Ter-Petrosyan's position and statement was met with a large-scale resistance from opposition groups, the opposition print media and even Ter-Petrosyan's own cabinet members. Painting a grim picture of what was about to happen to Armenia if it did not offer compromise, Ter-Petrosyan released a sequel on 1 November titled *War or Peace: Time for Reflection*.[68] In this article (the previous one was a press conference), Ter-Petrosyan went on to elaborate on the notion of territorial integrity versus self-determination, that Armenia would surely lose that battle, that 'we should know better' since Armenia had anyway lost most of its territory when it made claims to it at the beginning of the twentieth century, that holding a non-compromising position on Karabakh would mean deeper isolation, a deteriorating economy and greater dependence on Russia. Instead, Ter-Petrosyan suggested the step-by-step or 'phased' approach, starting with the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the Azerbaijani territories around Karabakh, hence leading to a gradual confidence-building and a long-term solution to the conflict. Attributing almost all of Armenia's problems squarely to the conflict, Ter-Petrosyan saw a universal solution in the conflict's resolution. However, he underestimated the symbolic, existent and almost tangible value of Karabakh in the process and outcome of creating a new Republic of Armenia, and his very role in that entire process. He also underestimated the de facto victory of the Armenians in the NK war, a military victory which the Armenian people had not seen since the Bagratids had waged war against the Arabs at the beginning of the eleventh century.[69] So, misjudging the timing to roll out this proposal or the role of that victory and the value of those lands, which had been fought for at the expense of human lives and in the process of constructing a new nationhood, proved to be politically detrimental. As a result of this miscalculation as well as the political manoeuvres of those who wished to see him leave the presidential office, a political crisis broke out, culminating in several of Ter-Petrosyan's ministers and a large block of APNM members resigning or withdrawing their support and demanding the president's resignation. The most vocal supporters-turned-opponents were the Minister of Defence, Vazgen Sargsyan; Prime Minister, Robert Kocharyan; and the Minister of National Security, Serzh Sargsyan.[70] Saideman and Ares concluded that 'It was Ter-Petrosyan's switch from ardent irredentist to attempted peacemaker that led to his government's collapse, as his earlier actions had tied his hands from pursuing any other policy.'[71]

The three strongmen argued that Ter-Petrosyan's decision to agree to the Minsk Group's proposal was against both Armenia's and Karabakh's national interests because it did not secure Karabakh's future status. Moreover, the document had not recognized Azerbaijan's territorial integrity either. In the words of Libaridian, then Ter-Petrosyan's adviser:

> Ter-Petrosyan was compelled to resign because he accepted as a basis of negotiations a document that did not secure Karabakh the recognition of its independent status but also did not prejudge the territory's future status, did not recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, precluded the use of force to impose a status unwanted by Karabakh, and left the possibility open for any solution, including independence.[72]

It is important to note that today, some 20-plus years after Ter-Petrosyan first introduced this formula and its key points, both Kocharyan and Sargsyan who were vehemently opposed to it, had later during their respective administrations essentially agreed to the formula's key points. Under Kocharyan's and Sargsyan's administrations the status of Karabakh still remained unclear (subject to a referendum), Azerbaijan's territorial integrity was not clearly recognized and any possibility, including independence for Karabakh, was left open.[73] In his interview, Vazgen Manukyan stated that Ter-Petrosyan's demise was not due to his position on Karabakh but to an internal power struggle and his ill timing with going public on his stance on the Karabakh conflict. The Karabakh conflict and Ter-Petrosyan's position on it was spun against him, and a conflict narrative was used as a political tool.

The analysis of media reports and the speeches of the opposition leaders shows very little enquiry into what exactly Ter-Petrosyan was considering as a compromise. The narrative produced by the opposition and its media at the time was more focused on branding Ter-Petrosyan a 'traitor', a 'Masonic mastermind' and a 'Jewish spy' rather than on examining the proposal of the resolution formula. The media was actively circulating unconfirmed information about Ter-Petrosyan's alleged membership of the Masonic Eastern Lodge and referring to Ter-Petrosyan's spouse, Lyudmila Pleskovskaya, who is of Jewish origin.

In their interviews, members of Ter-Petrosyan's former administration also reflected on the idea that he was open and detailed as to why he considered resorting to compromise, and that, compared to the administrations that followed him, he made the conflict 'accessible' to the public. Many also commented on the advantageous positions that Armenia had at the time of Ter-Petrosyan's administration compared to Kocharyan's and Sargsyan's period, and the fact that although Ter-Petrosyan's proposal was branded as too appeasing, today Armenia has lost a lot more in the negotiating process, from NK's removal from the negotiating table to Armenia's agreement to the Madrid Principles (both described further in the analysis of Kocharyan's policies on NK). If, following the ceasefire, Azerbaijan's economy was weak, today, its fossil-fuel rich economy has the capacity to 'outgun' Armenia in the arms race and hence gain a considerably

significant military leverage. If the immediacy of resolving the conflict following the ceasefire agreement had been relevant and played into Armenia's interests, today the prolonged status quo has actually hurt Armenia. It might have been beneficial to the ruling regime, but in terms of the conflict and Armenia's interests, it has damaged Armenia significantly.

In general, the responses to the question of Nagorno-Karabakh focused on how the Ter-Petrosyan period was marked by progress and potentially beneficial development of the conflict resolution process, and how the post-Ter-Petrosyan period, in contrast, was marked by Armenia's deteriorating position in the conflict resolution process. Most of the respondents agreed with the notion that, although the rhetoric of the conflict changed significantly from Ter-Petrosyan to Kocharyan and Sargsyan's administrations, the strategy towards the conflict essentially remained the same. More importantly, Vazgen Manukyan, Ter-Petrosyan's main rival at the time, stated in his interview that 'if it was not for the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, they [Vazgen Sargsyan, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan] would have come up with another reason to seize power from Ter-Petrosyan'.[74] This suggestion by a former opposition politician supports the assertion that Nagorno-Karabakh was politically exploited to acquire and consolidate power. Moreover, the notion that it was the rhetoric that was changing and not the strategy towards Nagorno-Karabakh further strengthens the argument that the narrative was at work and not the actual strategies or their results.

Kocharyan: moving Stepanakert to Yerevan

On 3 February 1998, Ter-Petrosyan gave a brief four-minute resignation speech aired on almost all the television channels, stating that in order not to undermine the stability of the country and to prevent a political crisis from breaking out, as well as due to pressure from the 'known' political forces he was resigning. His speech concluded with words of apology 'for mistakes' and for what he 'could have done and did not do'.[75]

Kocharyan's appointment as interim president, with the backing of the most prominent strongman, Vazgen Sargsyan, the Karabakhi elite, the military and the returned Dashnaktsutyun Party ensured his election victory in the presidential elections of March 1998.[76] It is important to note that neither the 1998 nor the 2003 presidential elections elicited a substantial debate on alternative solutions (to those of Ter-Petrosyan) to the NK conflict. From the outset, the discourse adopted a deeper nationalist tone, appeasing the conservative segments of society both in Armenia and the Diaspora. The NK conflict was often referred by Kocharyan himself and his administration to *Hay Dat* ideology, claiming that as Nagorno-Karabakh is historically an Armenian land, returning it was a matter of historical justice. This narrative was also shifting the focus of the conflict from the struggle of self-determination to a different and contested dimension.

By changing the format of the negotiations, Kocharyan left very little room to manoeuvre in the Karabakh conflict itself, subsequently controlling the process of narrative construction around Nagorno-Karabakh by stating a number of

times in his public speeches to 'refrain from speculating on the NK conflict in political terms'.[77]

Kocharyan's essential 'privatization' of the NK process was also marked by his decision to 'replace' Nagorno-Karabakh at the negotiating table. Attributing his previously held post as the President of NKR to his advantageous position in representing Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as arguing that Armenia as a recognized country would be more effective in representing NK's interests, Kocharyan effectively assisted in removing NK from the negotiating table. This shift in the negotiating format also changed the essence of the conflict from a struggle for self-determination to an inter-state conflict. This was, arguably, one of the most damaging errors to date on the part of Armenian diplomacy in the NK negotiation process. When I asked Kocharyan's former speaker, Viktor Soghomonyan, to elaborate on this and explain why Kocharyan had agreed to this unfavourable change in the negotiation format, Soghomonyan effectively avoided answering the question. He stated, that 'I will answer to the extent to which I can publicly speak about the issue'.[78] He then referred to an article in the newspaper *Haykakan Ashkharh* (11 February 2001), assuring me that answers to this question would be found. The referred article was only archive available and was a disappointment insofar as it detailed and criticized the conflict resolution proposal to which Ter-Petrosyan had agreed, highlighting the fact that Kocharyan had 'changed that course' without elaborating on why and how Kocharyan had agreed to the removal of Nagorno-Karabakh from a negotiating format.

According to Ter-Petrosyan's former aide, Levon Zourabyan, Kocharyan's rise to power and the removal of Nagorno-Karabakh from the negotiating table was achieved under the watch and with the help of the international community.[79] He explained the motivation behind it as 'simplifying the conflict by putting an NK president in power in Armenia and by default ousting the third [and main – Nagorno-Karabakh] party to the conflict from the negotiating format', thus changing the format, essence and narrative of the conflict from an oppressed minority's struggle for self-determination to an inter-state conflict. Zourabyan also stated that Nagorno-Karabakh was 'the nerve of Armenian politics' both because it is a matter of national security and critical to internal political power struggles. Although during both Kocharyan's terms of office, Nagorno-Karabakh as a national issue was pushed to the backstage of political narrative, it remained the backbone of his ascent to and subsequent control of power. The military that Kocharyan brought from Stepanakert increased its leverage in the country following his assumption of the presidency and gradually blended into the country's politics, blurring the lines between the military and political elites. This very incursion of the military and the former Karabakhi politicians into the politics of Yerevan contributed to the militarization and radicalization of opinion, the radicalization of national discourse, as well as weakening the more moderate and balanced political discourse.

All this coincided with Azerbaijan's growing oil wealth, which contributed to the growth of its military budget (from $175 million in 2004 to $4.8 billion in 2015) and subsequently to increased war rhetoric.[80] As such rhetoric continues to

be the most effective way of 'saving face' for the Azerbaijani political elite given their wartime territorial losses, it seemed to grow in parallel to the increase in oil revenues. While Azerbaijani officials continued to justify their rhetoric under the pretext of being 'the victimized party' and thus possessing the right to resolve the issue at any cost, Kocharyan in turn appeared in Stepanakert wearing a military uniform and calling people to be prepared 'for the worst-case scenario'.[81] While the Azerbaijani media quotes officials calling for the resumption of military hostilities, Armenian political leaders prepared their population for war.[82] According to a poll conducted by the International Republican Institute, Baltic Surveys, in March 2007, Armenians had more confidence in the army (85 per cent) than in the Church (77 per cent), the president's office (40 per cent) or parliament (29 per cent).[83] This is not out of the ordinary, as many other studies, surveys and polls have shown in the past that the army has consistently been the most trusted institution.

In the light of the militarization of the political narrative and subsequently of Armenian public opinion, as the above data indicates, Armenia was even more disadvantaged diplomatically than during Ter-Petrosyan's administration. Under Kocharyan's administration, the negotiation process continued to stall and Armenian positions arguably weakened as NK lost its seat at the negotiating table, the status quo of the unresolved conflict was not working in Armenia's favour (as Azerbaijan continued to accumulate oil wealth and increase its military spending) and Kocharyan's leadership saw the emergence of the Madrid Principles in 2007, which essentially proposed the same phased approach as did Ter-Petrosyan.

In their interview responses, Kocharyan government members appeared to take particular care in wording what for them constituted a compromise, realizing that it is in reality the most contentious issue in the NK conflict, especially given that it was the reason why Kocharyan managed to come to power. Undoubtedly, though, there was an agreement across the board that compromise had been necessary. It is worth noting that the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vardan Oskanian, at the time of the interview was out of politics and heading a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), which perhaps explains why he was so critical of the post-Kocharyan government for 'focusing on the format and not the content of negotiations' and being close to 'a full-scale war', referring to the post-2008 period.

The majority of the respondents focused not so much on the NK solution, what it would constitute and the potential compromise that Armenia would be willing to accept, but more on the 'threat of war', the 'arms race', Armenia's 'military preparedness', Azerbaijan's 'muscle flexing', Azerbaijan's 'increased military spending', the odds of the war actually breaking out, and so forth. Most of the respondents spoke of a 'dead end' in the negotiations, that the OSCE Minsk Group's primary role was the 'prevention of war' and not mediation, and that there would be no real progress in negotiations in the 'foreseeable future'. It would require a 'generation change' before any positive progress in the conflict resolution could be recorded.

The respondents from Kocharyan's former administration spoke of the lost momentum during Ter-Petrosyan's presidency, and, in return, members of

Ter-Petrosyan and post-Kocharyan administrations spoke of the 'numerous mistakes' and lost momentum during Kocharyan's administration. Compared to respondents from Ter-Petrosyan's administration, Kocharyan's entourage blamed Azerbaijan for its maximalism, reflecting very little on Armenia's positioning, what Armenia potentially could do and what might constitute an acceptable compromise. Essentially, most of the arguments of Kocharyan's administration were aimed at justifying the status quo and explaining why it was the best option available.

When in March 2006 Kocharyan was confronted at a press conference with the question on NK's position in the negotiating format, he justified NK's removal from the format by stating that 'Armenia can represent Nagorno-Karabakh better, it has better and higher level access in the international community' and hence 'Nagorno-Karabakh's interests will be represented on a higher level, something that Nagorno-Karabakh would not be able to do'.[84] Kocharyan did outline the disadvantage of 'Azerbaijan using this opportunity to reduce the conflict to only a two-party versus three-party conflict', but, in his words, 'the advantages outweighed this disadvantage' and that 'the international community knows the essence of the conflict anyway'.[85] However, he failed to mention that, despite the international community's 'knowledge' of the conflict, the symbolism of reducing the negotiations to two-party talks resulted in the change of the conflict's narrative, where in reference to Armenia and Armenian forces such words as 'aggressor state' or 'occupational forces' and 'occupied territories' found much wider usage.

Kocharyan's 'privatization' of the negotiation process over the NK conflict and the militarization of the discourse during his presidency contrasts greatly with the actual results at the negotiating table. The results were that the strategy inherited from the previous administration did not essentially change, the status quo had further weakened Armenian positions in the conflict resolution processes and Nagorno-Karabakh yet again was symbolically and discursively used to legitimize and consolidate power domestically.

Sargsyan: more talks, fewer results

Despite entering Armenian politics in the early 1990s, the persona of Serzh Sargsyan is often associated in both print and online media with Nagorno-Karabakh. It is important to note here that there are many individuals in Armenian politics who are referred to as members of the 'Karabakh clan'. However, they are not necessarily from NKR but have some sort of affiliation or association to it, either military, or political, or can simply favour and 'assist' the politics and strategy of 'the clan'.

According to most of the official sources, Serzh Sargsyan was born in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh. However, some sources argue that he was born in Tegh village in Syunik, which is located in the south-eastern part of Armenia and is the last village on the border with NKR. According to official sources, Sargsyan attended school in Stepanakert and then moved to Yerevan, Armenia, to receive his university degree in philology. In 2012, based on some alleged evidence but without citing confirmed sources, the opposition media began to

speculate about Sargsyan's graduation from a Baku-based Transcaucasian Communist Youth School, which was the KGB's 'grooming' agency in the South Caucasus. Prior to the NK conflict and Armenia's independence, Sargsyan's career was predominantly within the structures of the Communist Party in Stepanakert. The many speculations about his early life and background largely come from his successful and accelerated growth within the Communist Party and almost immediate transition into the NKR movement and shortly after politics in Yerevan.

Throughout the 1990s, Sargsyan served in various security and defence-related senior positions under both Ter-Petrosyan's and Kocharyan's administrations – from Minister of Defence (1993–5, 2000–7) to Head of State Security Department, Minister of National Security (1995, 1996) and Head of the National Security Council (1999–2007). Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, he often appeared on television sporting military camouflage and talking with a heavy Karabakhi accent. Despite some short-term civilian positions that he held (e.g. Head of Presidential Staff, 1999–2000) and the consecutive 'civilian' image that he began to cultivate close to the end of Kocharyan's second term (allegedly, he was groomed as Kocharyan's successor early on), Sargsyan remained largely associated with the military, the power structures at large and Nagorno-Karabakh in particular.

Following Prime Minister Margaryan's 'convenient' passing in March 2007, Kocharyan appointed Sargsyan as Prime Minister – ten months prior to the presidential elections. This appointment carried a threefold message: first, that Sargsyan would be 'elected' as the next president; second, that Kocharyan would continue to remain in power by proxy (after the end of his second term); and third, given Sargsyan's 'affiliation' to the 'Karabakh clan', both the strategy and narrative on Nagorno-Karabakh was expected to remain the same.

Indeed, Sargsyan won in the largely contested 2008 presidential election, but the Putin–Medvedev scenario was not replicated in Armenia as some analysts and political opposition forecasted. Kocharyan withdrew from politics and went on to take a senior position in a Russia-based corporation.[86] As for the third expectation, neither the strategy nor the narrative on Nagorno-Karabakh changed with Sargsyan's ascent to power.

When Ter-Petrosyan returned to politics after a ten-year silence to run in the presidential elections, he extensively reflected on the topic of NK in his campaign. It remains a matter of speculation whether this had to do with his losing the presidency because of NK, or NK continuing to be a pressing political issue. Taking this into consideration, Sargsyan strategically avoided elaborating much on Karabakh both during the campaign and shortly after his election to power. Given the bloody nature of the post-election opposition-led rallies and Sargsyan's plummeted political rating, he had to employ a strong political card in order to 'legitimize' himself both with the international community and domestically.[87] Given Ter-Petrosyan's unfortunate past in using the NK issue for legitimation purposes, Sargsyan opted for the other strong card – Turkish–Armenian relations. However (as elaborated in the next chapter), Sargsyan failed to reassess the level

of interconnectedness between the NK issue and Turkish–Armenian relations, and his Protocols were still-born. It was widely speculated in the media after the fact that he either failed to strategically assess the connection of the NK conflict to the Turkish–Armenian Protocols, or that he was well aware of that strong connection but went into the deal anyway in order to increase publicity for his foreign policy strategy. Some of the respondents argued that there were clear reassurances from the mediating parties that Turkey would sign the documents, and hence his administration went along with the deal. It is important to reiterate here that Turkey closed its border with Armenia not due to Yerevan's Genocide recognition efforts, but as a retaliation for Armenia's offensive in the NK war in 1993. However, what Sargsyan managed to gain was momentum (with the Protocols) and the diversion of public attention from his legitimacy to a potentially historical shift in the relations with the neighbour.

The following years were marked by the intensity of meetings and the number of declarations signed between Sargsyan and Aliyev mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group as well as Russia. This intensity was triggered by a number of factors, most prominently the Russian–Georgian war in August 2008. In Sargsyan's words, the war triggered the NK conflict resolution process to 'move from a passive to an active stage'.[88] However, no substantial progress was recorded. Neither the strategy nor the narrative on the conflict changed. At least publicly, Sargsyan did not go on record until November 2016 admitting to his and his government's readiness regarding the return of territories in an extensive interview with Dmitriy Kiselev, aired by the Russian government-funded media outlet 'Sputnik'.[89]

The Russians initiated and signed a declaration in November 2008 between the three presidents – Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani – agreeing 'to solve the conflict only by political means' was non-binding and did not result in any subsequent action. The unprecedented media attention and promises of a break-through in the Kazan Summit of June 2011 also failed to register any progress in the negotiations. Instead, Azerbaijan's military budget passed its $2 billion mark, the intensity of its war rhetoric increased and the Armenian government subsequently tried to keep pace in the arms race and bellicose narrative. Given the stalemate and international pressures, some analysts argued that Sargsyan could have symbolically resorted to an act of good will and implemented a number of one-sided diplomatic concessions, which might ultimately have benefited Armenia and put pressure on Azerbaijan. For instance, unilateral withdrawal of snipers from the line of contact – due to Azerbaijan's refusal to withdraw its snipers – would send a strong message to the international community, put pressure on Azerbaijan and, more importantly, would not undermine Armenia's and Nagorno-Karabakh's security positions. Alternatively, Sargsyan could have declared that at least one of the contested seven territories is cleared of all settlements and no new settlements are to take place. Sargsyan's administration failed to strategize long-term or implement proactive diplomacy, most likely fearing a backlash from the society and more nationalistic opposition groups, as well as further deterioration of the already unpopular image. Instead, the narrative squarely avoided any mention of compromise and focused primarily on reiterating concern over

Azerbaijan's increased war rhetoric and military budget, and the need to resolve the conflict 'by peaceful means'. It is important to note here that all the while Azerbaijan continued to hold a maximalist stance of no compromise and continued to threaten the resumption of military hostilities. Although this bellicose narrative was common for the authorities in Yerevan, the large-scale military offensive launched by the Azerbaijani forces in April 2016 came as a surprise. Most Armenian official sources reported around 92 military deaths, three civilian deaths, which were qualified as war crimes, and loss of territory amounting to 800 hectares of land.[90] This was a wake-up call not only for the administration but also for the population at large, as a result of which multiple investigations into the wrongdoing of the military budget were launched. More importantly, the events of April 2016 restarted the much-needed public debate about NKR, which ranged from a need for a proactive and offensive military strategy to the return of territories with no preconditions. As mentioned above, 2016 also marked Sargsyan going on public record in stating that the Armenian side, or more accurately his administration, is ready for a compromise of territories in return for the status of the NKR. Ultimately, Sargsyan was politically pressured to be more open about the conflict resolution process, and in an interview with Kiselev, he also stated that Armenia had for a long time been ready to sign a peace deal (the two sides coming closest during the Kazan talks in 2011). However, it is official that Baku has been continuously and repetitively stalling the process. For Aliyev, NKR's self-determination was essentially not acceptable, as he and his administration had for years been propagating Azerbaijani territorial integrity and that the NKR is 'historically Azerbaijani land'. When asked in the interview regarding the 'incompatibility of the three main principles of NKR's conflict resolution process' – the non-use of force, self-determination and territorial integrity – Sargsyan retorted to Kiselev that 'the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan will remain intact as Nagorno-Karabakh has never legally been a part of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan, so these principles are very much compatible'. Essentially, Sargsyan's administration was 'banking' on the knowledge that Aliyev would never agree to NKR's independence – hence, they were ready to give up territories and later speak about it publicly.

It is important to note here that although Armenian political leadership, both during Kocharyan and Sargsyan's administrations, referred to the seven territories around NKR, which are under Armenian control as 'liberated territories', they were ready to return those territories if the two sides agreed to a peace deal. Essentially, it was the status of the NKR which was the key element for the last two administrations in Yerevan, yet they were 'feeding' the public with a different narrative – also maximalist, whereby neither territories nor the NRK proper would be returned to Azerbaijan.

In his interview, former Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan stated that 'the solution to the conflict is one – the self-determination of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh'. This theme reoccurred time and again in the interviews, highlighting the notion that 'an entire generation grew up free and returning back to Azerbaijan is unfathomable'. Many respondents referred to Azerbaijan's unacceptable rhetoric,

the calls for war spreading 'anti-Armenian' propaganda and openly falsifying history. Many respondents also dwelt on the idea that the OSCE's primary role was more about 'preventing war' rather than resolving the conflict because it essentially had no 'feasible' or 'foreseeable' solution given the 'asymmetric perception of reality' and, moreover, Azerbaijan's 'war propaganda' and 'blatant preparation for war'. While the opposition talked about the lost momentum, Armenia's previous diplomatic blunders and mistakes, and its weakened position at the negotiating table due to its leadership's lack of political legitimacy, it also dwelt extensively on the idea that 'we must prepare for war'. If, before, various political analysts – from pro-government to opposition – were discussing the possibility of a 'war by accident', meaning that sniper fire and border skirmishes could accidentally spiral into full-scale military operations, now many began to seriously 'calculate' when Azerbaijan would actually strike. Many predicted 2014, as it marked 20 years since the signature of the Bishtek Protocol in 1994, declaring a ceasefire and essentially humiliation for Baku; it was also the year when Russia was busy with its winter Olympics and, more importantly, that year marked an all-time low in oil prices and there was a steep drop in Azerbaijani currency. However, the attack did not come until 2016. What became the ultimate target of criticism was the administration's awareness that at some point an attack was imminent (given the continuous and constant warnings of Baku officials), yet it continued to allow wide-scale corruption in the defence sector, which could be argued had led in one way or another to a weakening of the defence lines.[91]

At the beginning of his first term, Sargsyan and his administration, possibly fearing the recurrence of Ter-Petrosyan's scenario of forced presidential resignation, especially in the light of the abortive Turkish–Armenian protocols and substantial political pressure that followed, opted to respond to Azerbaijani war rhetoric and the arms race with an increased militarization of both its defence budget and narrative. The OSCE Minsk Group continued to act more as a deterrent to the resumption of war rather than as an effective mediating party, largely due to the Azerbaijani maximalist position, but also due to Sargsyan's administration heavy reliance on the notion that the conflict's status quo was benefiting Armenia and the NKR. This dynamic changed following the April 2016 resumption of military hostilities – Sargsyan's administration engaged in a more open form of communicating to the public the content of the negotiation process and not only the format. This led not only to the increased prominence of the NKR issue in Armenia's politics (especially on the eve of the parliamentary elections of 2017), but also to the questioning of the effectiveness of the OSCE Minsk Group's mediation efforts and the increased narrative articulated by various domestic actors about considering a military offensive as a viable solution to the current political and diplomatic stalemate.

Conclusion

The walls of the Khrushchev-era panel building in downtown Yerevan where I grew up used to shake when the military tanks passed by, leaving a dark ingrained

track on the asphalt of the street. Having spent the core years of my childhood in a country that was in a state of war, spending most of my homework hours under candlelight and listening to radio reports as often the only source of media at the time (due to shortage of newspapers and extensive power outages), I witnessed how Armenians lived by and for the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The liberation of Karabakh was the most powerful, mobilizing force for Armenians during those years. My family endured with pride all the shortcomings of especially cold winters without electricity and heat, burning old furniture or history of the Communist Party volumes in order to keep warm and cook food. The war was a grim but a new beginning for the Soviet-weary Armenians often very intimately intertwined with the notion that we were creating a new state.

From the onset it was Karabakh and the ensuing conflict that legitimated the new political leadership in the country. Initially, a heroic leadership grew unpopular following its inability to govern effectively or build lasting and sustainable democratic institutions. The attempts to create a working institutional infrastructure that would be capable of handling post-Soviet and post-war economic dilapidation largely failed. Moreover, that lack of infrastructure or perhaps not enough political will to create it led to rampant corruption, which entirely disillusioned a formerly mobilized society. Unwilling to re-elect its once 'heroic leaders', society opted for an alternative. Fearing loss of power, Ter-Petrosyan invited the military and the strongmen to 'assist' in 'winning' the election. This was the beginning of the end of his presidency. Arguably, in an attempt to legitimize his hold on to power and political office, Ter-Petrosyan decided to engage in 'proactive diplomacy' and roll out his position on Nagorno-Karabakh, which entailed compromise. The political opposition both in his own camp and across the political fence took advantage of Ter-Petrosyan's miscalculation and spun the sensitive subject of concessions on Karabakh against him, effectively forcing him to step down.

The political change, yet again, happened because of Karabakh. The exception was that this time it was more about the narrative around the conflict than actions or actual policies. Gaining power on the wave of his nationalistic narrative, Kocharyan further 'justified' his arrival by 'privatizing' the negotiation process and effectively assisting in the removal of Nagorno-Karabakh from the negotiating table. In his words, he brought 'symmetry' to the process. In reality, he brought about the nationalization and militarization of the narrative and its distancing, as well as society's, from the content of negotiations.

The change or arguably the reproduction of the political administration after Kocharyan's two presidential terms happened by default, but again with the Karabakh 'criteria' in mind. The power was, as expected, handed down to a fellow strongman, member of Kocharyan's entourage or the 'Karabakh clan'. Although retaining many of Kocharyan's protégées, Sargsyan created an entourage of his own and increasingly outbalanced Kocharyan's receding power in the government. However, Sargsyan essentially had to 'inherit' the militarized narrative of the NK process in order to contrast with the alternative rhetoric articulated by a re-emerged Ter-Petrosyan. Trapping himself in the increasingly belligerent rhetoric

on Karabakh, Sargsyan attempted to show progress in the conflict negotiation process by attending mediator-initiated meetings and commenting positively on the expectations. However, as his predecessor, Sargsyan also relied heavily on the contested notion of the status quo of the conflict benefiting Armenia and the NKR. This notion could have been argued effectively had there been proper handling of the defence budget and strong defence positions along the borders. As the April 2016 four-day war revealed, this was not the case.

The case of the NK conflict and the way the political leadership of post-Soviet Armenia handled it shows that, guided by the logic of power legitimation, power consolidation and self-preservation, political leaders were ready either to offer concessions without any strong guaranties for the NKR's status or unnecessarily militarize the conflict.[92] And although Karabakh, being the nerve of Armenian politics, continues to be a powerful deterrent, for the very same reason it continues to be one of the most powerful and widely used political tools.

Notes

1 Interview questions are listed in Appendix II: Interview questions.
2 Harutyun Marutyan (2009) *Iconography of Armenian Identity: The Memory of Genocide and the Karabagh Movement* (Yerevan: Gitutyun, NAS RA, 2009).
3 Peter Rutland (1994) Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46 (5): 839–61, 840.
4 It is important to make the differentiation here between Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Armenians of Azerbaijan, where the latter were not part of the struggle but merely the victims of the conflict (were slain or became refugees).
5 In 1997, Ter-Petrosyan appointed Kocharyan as the prime minister of Armenia, after the latter served as NK president (1994–7). Ter-Petrosyan also appointed Serzh Sargsyan to the posts of Minister of Defence (1993–6) and Minister of Interior and National Security (1996–9). Ter-Petrosyan's appointee was also Vazgen Sargsyan to the post of Minister of Defence (1995–9).
Stepanakert, or Khankendi in Azerbaijani, is the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh.
6 In the late 1980s, the NK conflict was covered by the Soviet print media both in Russia and Armenia. Following Armenia's independence, most newspapers published information on a daily basis on the situation on the front lines. The war all the way through the mid-1990s was at the heart of the country's happenstance, and the economic deprivation and closed borders were direct by-products of the war. Following the ceasefire in 1994, parliamentary elections in 1995 and presidential elections in 1996, the NK conflict theme re-emerged more prominently.
7 While underlying preconditions existed far earlier, the actual conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh originated at the beginning of the twentieth century when the Armenian-populated territory became a trading card for Bolshevik Russia in courting ethnic sentiments of Kemalist Turkey. For more, see Richard H. Dekmejian (1968) Soviet–Turkish Relations and Politics in the Armenian SSR, *Soviet Studies* 19(4): 510–25.
8 The name *Artsakh* (Arm. Արցախ) has various etymological interpretations, among them that it has Urartian origins, that it is named after the Armenian king Artaxias (according to David Lang) or that the beautiful nature of Karabakh was home to the first Armenian *nakharar*, Aran Sisakean.
9 Bo Petersson and Eric Clark (2003) Boundary Dynamics and Construction of Identities, in *Identity Dynamics and the Construction of Boundaries*, Bo Petersson and Eric Clark (eds) (Lund: Nordic Academic Press), pp. 9–10.

10 Most of the historians who support this view are Azerbaijani – e.g. Ziya Bunyadov, Farida Mammadova, etc.
11 They were previously referred to as Tatars or Caucasian/Transcaucasian Muslims (see Bournoutian, *A History of Qarabagh*, 1994).
12 Mark Malkasian (1996) *'Gha-Ra-Bagh!' The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press), p. 18.
13 Arran refers to the lowlands and mountainous areas of Karabakh. The name was used in ancient and medieval times.
14 Tatev, Gladzor, Gandzasar.
15 Bournoutian argues that it was due to a number of reasons, mainly because Russia signed a treaty in 1805 with Ebrahim Khan of Karabakh, which guaranteed his family the governorship of the reign in exchange for his becoming a Russian vassal. Another primary reason was the fact that the Armenian *meliks* of Karabakh were not a cohesive military or political group. They lacked a leader and their struggle against the Karabakhi khans was not to create a new Armenia but was rather driven by regional interests. Sentiments of ethnicity, religious unity and nationalism had yet to be developed among the Armenians, according to Bournoutian.
16 George Bournoutian (1994) *A History of Qarabagh: An Annotated Translation of Mirza Jamal Javanshir Qarabaghi's Tarikh-e Qarabagh* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers), pp. 15–20.
17 Christopher Walker (1998) Between Turkey and Russia: Armenia's Predicament, *The World Today*, 44(8/9): 140–4, 142.
18 At the beginning of the twentieth century almost half the population of Nakhichevan was Armenian; however, after the territory was given to Azerbaijan, the Armenian population began to decrease rapidly. Today, Nakhichevan is an Autonomous Republic in Azerbaijan populated only by Azeris (Christopher Walker (1991) *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity* (London: Minority Rights Group Publishers), pp. 64–5.)

    Zangezur or Syunik is one of the 15 historical provinces of the ancient kingdom of Armenia.
19 Walker, Between Turkey and Russia: Armenia's Predicament, 142.
20 Michael Croissant (1998) *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT: Praeger), pp. 18–19.
21 Ibid.
22 The Bureau released the following statement:

> Proceeding from the necessity for national peace among Muslims and Armenians and of the economic ties between upper [mountainous] and lower Karabakh, of its permanent ties with Azerbaijan, mountainous Karabakh is to remain within the borders of the Azerbaijan SSR, receiving wide regional autonomy with the administrative centre at Shusha, becoming an autonomous region.
>
> (Ibid.)

23 Lenin was optimistic about Ataturk's 'communist sentiments' and the prospect of spreading the proletarian revolution across the Middle East. When Kemal's envoys met Soviet representatives in Moscow in March 1921, among other issues they discussed the borders of Soviet Armenia. As a result of that meeting, Lenin's desire to court Ataturk for possible future 'proletariat fraternity' and Ataturk's desire to further weaken Armenia and establish a link with Azerbaijan coincided. Karabakh and Nakhichevan were given to the Azerbaijan SSR, but Zangezur – Moscow's sole concession to Yerevan – was left to Armenia, most likely to ensure that Turkey did not have access to the Caspian Sea and a direct link to Azerbaijan. As a result of that meeting, Armenia also lost Surmalu (Mount Ararat) and the town of Igdir. See Malkasian, '*Gha-Ra-Bagh!' The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia*, 24.

24 Christopher Walker (1991) *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity* (London: Minority Rights Group Publishers), p. 108.
25 See Christopher Walker, Between Turkey and Russia: Armenia's Predicament, 140–4.
26 Ibid., 143.
27 Tamara Dragadze (1989) The Armenian–Azerbaijani Conflict: Structure and Sentiment, *Third World Quarterly*, 11(1): 55–71, 64.
28 Ibid.
29 Ronald Suny and Joe Stork (1988) What Happened in Soviet Armenia? *Middle East Report*, 153: 39.
30 Ibid., 38.
31 Malkasian, *'Gha-Ra-Bagh!'*,148.
32 Ohannes Geukjian (2012) *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of the Soviet Nationality Policy* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing), p. 29.
33 Ibid.
34 Rutland, Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia, 839.
35 See Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*.
36 Christopher Zurcher (2007) The Post Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the South Caucasus (New York: NYU Press), p. 159.
37 Ibid., 160.
38 Ibid.
39 Stephen Saideman and William Ares (2008) *For Kin or Country: Xenophobia, Nationalism and War* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 83.

Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was a politically unique administrative unit within the USSR as it was a heavily Armenian-populated enclave within the Azerbaijani SSR.

40 Operation Ring, or, in Russian *Операция Кольцо*, was a code name for an operation conducted by Soviet Internal Security forces, OMON and Azerbaijani SSR OMON in May 1991. It aimed at the forced deportation of the Armenian civilian population in northern parts of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as bordering regions with the Armenian SSR. The deportations were accompanied by killings, torture, rape and kidnappings.
41 The August Putsch of 1991 was a coup d'etat attempt of the Soviet political forces (GKchP and KGB) to take control from Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.
42 The Communist Party won 136 parliamentary seats out of 259.
See Dieter Nohlen, Florian Grotz and Christof Hartmann (2001) *Elections in Asia: A Data Handbook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 335.
43 On 23 August 23 1990, Armenia declared independence, becoming the first non-Baltic country to partition from the Soviet Union.
44 Bill Keller (1991) Armenia Yielding Claim on Enclave, *The New York Times*, 23 September. Available at: www.nytimes.com/1991/09/23/world/armenia-yielding-claim-on-enclave.html (accessed 8 December 2014).
45 Ronald G. Suny (1999–2000) Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia, *International Security*, 24(3): 139–78: 157.
46 The seven adjacent territories, which were not part of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, but are currently controlled by the NK and Armenian forces, are Kelbajar, Lachin, Fizuli, Kubatli, Jebrail, Zangelan and Agdam. The reference here is made to 'most of Karabakh proper' to refer to the region of Shahumyan, which was claimed by the NKAO authorities in 1991.
47 Among the prominent military commanders were late Monte Melkonian (USA), Jirayr Sefilian (Lebanon), late Vigen Zaqaryan (Lebanon), late Garo Kahkeljian (USA) and late Mher Chulhajian (Lebanon) (according to an interview with Jirayr Sefilian).
48 Saideman and Ares, *For Kin or Country*, 90–1.
49 Ibid.

50 While Armenian politicians contribute to the intolerance existing around the conflict, Azerbaijani politicians and their state machinery articulate Armenophobic hate propaganda, where an axe murderer is proclaimed a hero. Safarov, an Azerbaijani officer, axed an Armenian officer to death while asleep in Budapest in 2004 during a NATO-sponsored course. He was sentenced to life in prison, but later, under Baku's political pressure and allegedly a lucrative financial settlement, he was transferred to serve the rest of his sentence in Baku. Upon arrival to Azerbaijan, Safarov was pardoned, given multiple financial rewards and proclaimed a hero. This struck yet another raw nerve with the Armenian community around the world.

51 Baku recently signed two large arms deals with Israel for $1.6 billion and $300 million for the purchase of unmanned drones.

52 Second Report on Azerbaijan (2007) *European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance*, Strasbourg, 24 May. Available at: http://hudoc.fcnm.coe.int/XMLEcri/ENGLISH/Cycle_03/03_CbC_eng/AZE-CbC-III-2007–22-ENG.pdf (accessed 20 June 2015).

Ilham Aliyev became the president of Azerbaijan in 2003, following the death of his father, Heydar Aliyev. Aliyev Senior was independent Azerbaijan's president from 1993 to 2003, and also was the leader of Soviet Azerbaijan between 1969 and 1982

53 International Crisis Group (ICG) (2007) Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War. Executive Summary and Recommendations, *Europe Report*, 187: 1, 14 November.

The active phase of war effectively ended with a ceasefire, which was signed in Bishkek in May 1994.

54 International Crisis Group, *Europe Report*, 187: 4.

55 Saideman and Ares, *For Kin or Country*, 97.

56 Robert Kocharyan being the former president of Nagorno-Karabakh spun his origin and war record to his benefit. He is even credited with saying that 'nobody can represent Karabakh better than me' and virtually being responsible for single-handedly driving NK off the negotiating table.

57 As he argued, it was allegedly proposed by Ter-Petrosyan.

58 Largely staffed by individuals from Nagorno-Karabakh, or associated with the region or the war.

59 As had happened in Georgia with Zviad Gamsakhurdia's election as Georgia's first president.

60 As articulated, for example, by Paruyr Hayrikyan, Ter-Petrosyan's main rival of the early 1990s.

61 According to Rutland, Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia, 855, 'most international observers could not attend because of the cancellation of flights'. One question worth raising is 'can an election which, if far from being fair, have results with such wide discrepancy?' More often than not in unfair elections, the runner-up would get 15, 20 or 30 per cent fewer votes, so this wide discrepancy might mean that Hayrikyan was indeed not favourable, nor did Ter-Petrosyan use coercion to win. After all, did Ter-Petrosyan have any mechanisms (state or otherwise) back in 1991 to rig the elections?

62 Ibid.

63 Kocharian Reshuffles the Military Brass, The Jamestown Foundation, *Monitor* 6(54). Available at: www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=21752&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=214&no_cache=1#.VIU-oaSUdrl (accessed 8 December 2014).

64 Vazgen Manukyan gathered 41 per cent and Levon Ter-Petrosyan 51.3 per cent of the votes as per the official data of the Central Election Commission: www.elections.am

65 Allegedly, Vazgen Sargsyan, Armenia's Minister of Defence, employed the administrative state machinery under his control (military, defence structure, security forces, etc.) and Vano Siradeghyan, the Minister of Internal Affairs, also employed his political

position and administrative control to ensure Ter-Petrosyan's victory. Ter-Petrosyan asked for security and military forces to intervene again when the opposition took their protest to the streets.

66 Excerpts from Ter-Petrosyan's Press Conference, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 26 September 1997 (archival records).

67 Gerard Libaridian (2017) The step-by-step approach, the package deal and forgotten moments, *Aravot*, 25 January. Available at: http://en.aravot.am/2017/01/25/188375/ (accessed 14 January 2017).

It is important to note, that the next day, 26 January, a semi-official response was given to this article by the former press-secretary of Robert Kocharyan, Viktor Soghomonyan, denying that this meeting ever took place. Interview with V. Soghomonyan, Լիպարիտյանի պատմածն իրականության հետ առնչություն չունի, *TopNews.am*, 26 January 2017. Available at: http://top-news.am/?p=231&l=am (accessed 14 February 2017).

68 Paterazm te khaghaghutyun: lrjanalu pahy (Պատերազմ թե՞ խաղաղություն՝ լրջանալու պահը), *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, 1 November 1997 (archival records).

69 Notwithstanding the Battle of Sardarapad in May 1918, which was a week-long battle, but was essential for the survival of the Armenian nation as it prevented the advance of the Ottoman forces eastwards.

70 Vazgen Sargsyan was allegedly credited for orchestrating Ter-Petrosyan's 're-election'. It was rumoured in political circles later that Kocharyan orchestrated the 'palace coup' by first going to Vazgen Sargsyan and informing him that Serzh Sargsyan was on board (without the latter being on board), and then by going to Serzh Sargsyan and asking, 'Vazgen is in, are you in?'.

71 Saideman and Ares, *For Kin or Country*, 86–7.

72 Gerard Libaridian (1999) *The Challenge of Statehood: Armenian Political Thinking Since Independence* (Watertown, MA: Blue Crane Books), p. 69.

73 However, as the political opposition spun Ter-Petrosyan's 'treacherous' position on the NK issue, his policy on NK is largely perceived as that of the return of not only the adjacent territories, but also of Karabakh proper. In his latest book on Armenian–Turkish Relations, Հայ- Թուրքական Հարաբերությունները (Yerevan, 2009), he explicitly reaffirms his basic premise that securing strong autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan in exchange for the normalization of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan is the only viable long-term course for the national interest.

74 Interview conducted with Vazgen Manukyan in November 2010.

75 10 Years Ago, YouTube video 4:03, posted by *A1+* on 3 February 2008. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYUYKxnirUs (accessed 23 September 2013).

76 The ban on Dashnaktsutyun was lifted less than a week after Ter-Petrosyan left office.

77 Robert Kocharyan's interview to H1, H2 and Artsakh National Television stations, 2 March 2006. Interview is available in full on R. Kocharyan's official page. Available at: http://2rd.am/hy/02-03-2006-Kocharyani-harcazruycy-H1-H2-ev-Arcakhi-hanrayin-herustaynkerutyunnerin (accessed 20 June 2015).

78 He was having trouble remembering the exact issue and in fact made a call during our interview to double-check the issue and the name of the article.

79 Levon Zourabyan served in Ter-Petrosyan's administration from 1991 to 1998, first as an aide and later as the head of the presidential press office. In the 2012 parliamentary elections he was elected as an MP to the National Assembly.

80 Milda Seputyte and Ott Ummelas (2016) Oil Reaches Help Azerbaijan Outgun Armenia in Military Spending, *Bloomberg*, 6 April. Available at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-04-06/oil-riches-help-azerbaijan-outgun-armenia-in-military-spending (accessed 28 February 2017).

Martin Banks (2016) Azerbaijan Warns of Potential Action Against Armenia, *Defence News*, 3 February. Available at: www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-

budget/leaders/interviews/2016/02/03/interview-estonias-defence-minister-hannes-hanso/78845280/ (accessed 28 February 2017).

81 International Crisis Group, *Europe Report*, 187: 15.

82 Collection of war threat statements by President Ilham Aliyev and other Azerbaijani officials from 2007 to 2015. Available at: www.eufoa.am/uploads/AliyevWarThreats.pdf (accessed on 20 June 2015).

83 International Republican Institute, Baltic Surveys, Gallup Organization, Armenian Sociological Association: Armenian National Voter Study. March 2017. Available at: www.asa.sci.am/downloads/IRI/2007%20March%20Armenia-poll.pdf (accessed 28 February 2017).

84 Robert Kocharyan's interviews to *H1* and *H2* TV stations as well as to Nagorno-Karabakh media outlets, the Q&A is available on the official URL of former president. Available at: www.2rd.am/hy/02-03-2006-Kocharyani-harcazruycy-H1-H2-ev-Arcakhi-hanrayin-herustaynkerutyunnerin (accessed 23 September 2013)

85 Ibid.

86 At least publicly or in the media, Kocharyan was not seen in Armenian politics post 2008. However, many media sources speculate that Kocharyan is involved in Armenian politics by proxy – through Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia Party.

87 Here referring to the brutal clampdown by government forces during the rallies on 1 March 2008, resulting in 10 deaths.

88 President Sargsyan's interview to the national television channel. Available at: http://president.am/events/press/arm/?year=2008&id=16 (accessed 5 August 2013).

89 Full version of the interview can be viewed on: www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyOezqBl4RE (accessed 28 February 2017).

90 Karabakh War Casualty Update, *Armenia Now*, 14 April 2016. Available at: www.armenianow.com/en/karabakh/2016/04/14/armenia-casualties-update-karabakhapril/951/ (accessed 1 March 2017).

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91 In 2014, Transparency International qualified Armenia's corruption risks in the defence sector as 'high'. The full report, Corruption Risk Assessment in Defense Establishments in Armenia, *Transparency International*, 2014. Available at: https://transparency.am/files/publications/1410875966-0-354121.pdf (accessed 20 May 2017).

92 Going to either of the extremes – over-militarizing and over-securitizing the conflict vs. concessions with no strong guarantees of NKR's status – essentially proved to be unsuccessful narratives and consecutive policies. A more balanced approach in both cases arguably could have been more expedient for the NKR, Armenia and the conflict-resolution process in general.