



Event Report

"The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Current Situation and Possible Developments"

Lecture by Mr. Narek Adamyan, Co-founder of the Orbeli
Analytical Research Center, Armenia

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1.0 Synopsis

On 20th February 2022, the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS) and the Armenian Embassy in Doha co-organized a lecture delivered by Mr. Narek Adamyan, Co-founder of the Orbeli Analytical Research Center in Armenia, a governmental think tank founded three years ago to provide analysis and policy recommendations to the Armenian government and other clients. Held at CHS, the discussion focused on the long-standing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, and was moderated by Professor Sultan Barakat, Founding Director of CHS.

This event builds on the longstanding commitment of CHS to promoting dialogue and advancing analysis of conflict response, peacemaking, and post-conflict recovery. The lecture also advances CHS' aim of collaboration as it brought together researchers and scholars, students, diplomats, and other interested individuals - including members of the Armenian and Azerbaijani diasporas in Qatar - who engaged actively in the event. In November 2021, CHS hosted H.E. Farid Shafiyev, a former Azeri diplomat, to discuss geopolitical developments in the South Caucasus.

2.0 Public Lecture by Mr. Narek Adamyan

Mr. Adamyan began his lecture by providing an overview of the second Karabakh/Artsakh war in September 2020, which lasted 44 days until the declaration of a Russian-brokered ceasefire in November 2020. Marked as the bloodiest military operation between Armenia and Azerbaijan since 1994, Mr. Adamyan cited Azeri attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh as the start of the conflict. The second Karabakh/Artsakh war demonstrated the decades-long conflict's internationalized nature with the involvement of various actors from beyond the Caucasus, including Turkey and Pakistan who openly supported Azerbaijan in its 2020 operations. Mr. Adamyan noted that the 2020 war resulted in the deaths of 4,000 Armenians and 3,000 Azeris. He added that it also revealed persistent complexities to the conflict that render the pursuit of a political settlement an act of 'wishful thinking' with the absence of substantive discussions between the two primary conflict parties.

Adamyan advanced the claim that the historical roots of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict lie in the massacres committed against Armenians during the First World War and throughout the twentieth century in the region, including in two Azeri cities: Sumgait in 1988 and Baku in 1990. He stated that the Karabakh/Artsakh conflict is not simply an issue of territorial expansionism by Azerbaijan, but it has sectarian ethnic roots. For Adamyan, these expansionist ambitions were fueled by the USSR's Stalin, which created conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. He emphasized Karabakh peoples' rights to independence, freedom, and dignity.



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On meditation efforts, Adamyan stated that substantive negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan do not exist. He noted that the Azeri president's declaration of the end of war fails to take into account Armenia's persisting concerns, and Armenia has pushed for talks to continue with Azerbaijan. Adamyan added that the Minsk Group - that consists of the United States, France, and Russia, and is the only international platform with a clear mandate to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict - has not yet considered the conflict 'resolved.' Adamyan referenced the U.S. president's visit to Southern Armenia in which he stated that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan cannot be considered resolved until the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region is finalized. These sentiments were also shared by the French President Emmanuel Macron. In contrast to the formal statements of the Minsk Group, the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov stated that resolving border disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan do not require the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

Mr. Adamyan then moved to providing an overview of Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Russian relations. He described how Turkey openly supports Azerbaijan in the conflict, whom it refers to as a 'brotherly' state. He added that whilst Turkey and Azerbaijan consider the clause on the opening of all corridors and communication infrastructure in the region in the November 2020 ceasefire agreement an opportunity to realize the Turkish-Azeri corridor, Armenia has emphasized its lack of necessity. Furthermore, Armenia is concerned over 100 of its citizens imprisoned in Baku, which the Minsk Group is working towards returning to Armenia. He also described moments of cordiality between the two nations during the presidents' visits to both countries to watch Armenia-Turkey football matches in 2008, which signaled hope for a normalization of societal and political relations. Adamyan stated that whilst Armenian and Turkish efforts towards improving their relations have stalled, recent bilateral meetings in 2022 offer hope for a more positive relationship to emerge between the two bordering nations - whose geographical proximity necessitates the presence of productive relations.

On Armenian-Russian relations, Mr. Adamyan noted that whilst Armenia and Russia have enjoyed diplomatic relations for 30 years - which include a mutual assistance treaty between the two nations signed in 1997 that is still in effect - their relations have also seen some challenges, particularly since Russia is careful with spoiling its relations with Azerbaijan. He affirmed that no anti-Russian sentiments exist in Armenia.

Adamyan concluded his lecture with his expectations for the region's future. He noted that although Armenia suffered great losses in the second Karabakh/Artsakh war and in the 2020 ceasefire, it still has many tools of leverage to employ in Nagorno-Karabakh, including in becoming its main partner in the implementation of projects. He stated that the Karabakh/Artsakh conflict cannot be resolved through military means, and despite the Azeri president's claim that the war is over, Armenia and the Minsk Group insist otherwise.



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3.0 Q&A between Professor Sultan Barakat and Mr. Narek Adamyan

At the culmination of the public lecture, Professor Sultan Barakat engaged in a deeper conversation with Mr. Adamyan on the resounding socio-political intricacies of the conflict. Professor Barakat raised questions on the following topics: the causes of the stalemate of negotiations, the status of people in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the roles of Iran and Israel.

The stalled negotiation process

Professor Barakat began by reframing the discussion to a more academic perspective. He asserted, despite that previous negotiation attempts since 1994 have been fruitless, negotiation is the only way forward to resolve the Karabakh/Artsakh conflict. He proceeded with asking about the reasoning behind the negotiation stalemate. From Mr. Adamyan's perspective, he believes that the lack of political will with elites is the main cause of the stalled negotiation process.

He cited past agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan that have failed due to an inability to reach a settlement and due to the increased interference from regional actors. Relating the situation to the present day, Mr. Adamyan contends that the only way a negotiation process can succeed is if it includes the people on the ground and enacts a process directly with civil society actors and youth.

Current status of Nagorno-Karabakh citizens

The political status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region has remained unstable and unresolved since Azerbaijan's takeover in 1991. In order to understand the lived realities of affected populations in the territory, Professor Barakat inquired about the current state and perspective of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Due to the destructive toll of the second Karabakh/Artsakh war, many citizens lost their homes and fled to neighboring countries for safety, causing half of the area's population to escape the war. Mr. Adamyan explained that although Armenian forces have retracted, Russian peacekeepers occupy the regions of Nagorno-Karabakh outside of Azerbaijani control albeit lacking a mandate for their continued presence. Additionally, opposing forces along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan regularly engage in fighting, causing further casualties on both sides.

Iran and Israel's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The final question Professor Barakat asked pertained to the balance of power between regional actors, specifically Iran and Israel. He questioned their settlement roles and how their



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interference affected the local dynamics within Nagorno-Karabakh. Mr. Adamyan explained Iran's complicated role as it appears to support Armenia but it provided political and military support to Azerbaijan during the 2020 war. Iran's role is mitigated by Baku's allies, Turkey and Israel, who may threaten Iran's strategic and security interests in Azerbaijan. Moreover, he pointed to the Iranian interest in de-escalating the crisis by their support for political negotiations, in which Iran's President Hassan Rouhani insisted on restoring security in the region by finding a lasting solution to the conflict.

Contrastingly, Israel's benefit from the Karabakh/Artsakh conflict stems from the geopolitical power axis against Iran and their shared interests in arms and oil. Mr. Adamyan noted the close relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel due to Israel's provision of arms, drones, and weaponry to Azerbaijan. This military backing has soured the relationship between Armenia and Israel who are not ready to be cordial with a power that supports their enemy.

4.0 Audience Q&A

Contextualizing the narrative

Professor Barakat then opened the floor for audience Q&A. The Q&A session began with a question on the history of conflicts and their trajectories in shaping society's narratives amidst a hostile environment. The audience member asked Adamyan whether he believed Armenians should embark on an introspective and critical reflection of their history, since doing so would aid Armenians in deconstructing their narrative of victimhood. In response, Mr. Adamyan stated that digging through the past would be unproductive in an attempt to find a solution for the present and future. He stated that invoking societal will to resolve the issue is a more productive alternative that does not rely on interrogating the past - an exercise that would have "disgraceful consequences."

Armenian vision for peace

A member of the Azeri diaspora in Qatar offered his perspective of the conflict. He explained that Azerbaijan wanted to avoid further violence at all costs, but they felt war was their only option after protracted tension between the two nations. Acknowledging the internalized strife between both sides of the conflict, he asked the lecturer what Armenia's society envisions for a peaceful future. Mr. Adamyan responded by stating that a sustainable approach towards peace must tackle the manipulative tools employed by the political elite. He emphasized the need to work with society to share their concerns and needs with governmental members. Adamyan highlighted that the only viable solution is a political solution that allows for Armenia and Azerbaijan talk directly with one another. To resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, he recommended advancing for self-determination that releases its people from military occupation.



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Another member of the Azerbaijani diaspora offered her sentiments. She criticized the self-victimization that is rife in the Armenian narrative of the conflict, along with the tendency of both sides to employ the labels 'winners' and 'losers' in the war because it is a losing game for both Armenians and Azeris. She pressed Mr. Adamyan on his message for peace, which she felt was lost in his lecture. Mr. Adamyan replied to her comments by offering to focus on the individual experiences of the people still residing in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, who experience negative attitudes and hate from Azerbaijan which stalls any progress in negotiations and conflict resolution. Adamyan stated that more serious efforts need to be taken in discussing deep-rooted issues and creating a solution to overcome their differences.

Systemized hate in education

A former Armenian minister asked whether there was observable evidence of systemized hate within Armenia's education system that promoted hateful sentiments towards Azerbaijanis. Mr. Adamyan responded that he is unaware of such educational content and has not come across any forms of hateful teachings towards Azeris. He shared that he has come across videos of Azerbaijanis pushing onto their youth hateful sentiments against Armenians. Professor Barakat interjected to share that social media can distort realities, so the validity of such information should be scrutinized.

What should be done?

Mr. Adamyan was implored to elaborate on what he believed would be necessary to do in the Karabakh/Artsakh conflict. Adamyan's answer was threefold: to maintain the territorial integrity of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, to cease the aggressive use of force, and to embark on a plan for self-determination for the Nagorno-Karabakh people. Mr. Adamyan explained that by pursuing these three pillars can facilitate a peace process and overcome setbacks that impeded the peace process before.

Behavior of political elites

The final question of the session concerned the role of political elites in Azerbaijan in inciting violence and hatred towards Armenians. Mr. Adamyan replied to this claim by clarifying the distinct roles of society and the political elite, whereby the political elite are detached from society and will offer different views that do not reflect popular sentiments. Mr. Adamyan criticized the complete relinquishing of the peace process to governmental actors and highlighted the need for civil society to be included in making decisions for peace. His final remark was: "if the political elite is left to solve the situation, and their only response is to incite war, then we must change them".



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5.0 Key Messages

Overall, the lecture highlighted the importance of political will in ending the conflict, in addition to sustaining dialogue outside formal politics and amongst civil society so that peacebuilding efforts are more effective. In his closing remarks, Professor Barakat expressed that conversations like this are essential in overcoming the tension from both sides, and reaffirmed the importance of including civil society representatives to creating inclusive and representative dialogue that addresses deep-rooted issues. Professor Barakat invited the audience to continue their exchange of concerns and opinions with one another on the conflict, which he reiterated as a fundamental step towards sustainable peace.