

# Peace Negotiations Over Karabakh: Opportunities and Challenges

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The 44 Days War has already changed the status quo on the ground in Karabakh. As a result of the Azerbaijani victory, Türkiye came to the Caucasus not just on behalf of the Turkic world but also as a member of NATO. Subsequently, the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine has weakened the Russian presence in the Caucasus. So, it can be said that the former Nagorno-Karabakh, which was created by the Soviet authority, will not come back since Azerbaijan has already declared Karabakh as an economic region. After the brief introduction, it's time to focus on the historical and political background of the Caucasus in the modern period.

It's clear that the modern political history of the Caucasus is associated with multiplying Russian presence in the context of Tsarist and Soviet regimes. The Caucasus was first invaded by Tsarist Russia and then by the Turkmen-Chay Treaty (1828), which became the first juridical text that brought colonial rule to the Caucasus. Therefore, the Turkmen-Chay Treaty was the basic text of the colonial establishment of Azerbaijan. So again, the modern political establishment of the Caucasus (and then the South Caucasus) was built by Tsarist Russia and then continued, strengthened, and even institutionalized during the Soviet period. Soviet Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan are still the longest-standing state periods in the modern political history of both countries. For a comprehensive understanding related to political and military changes in the region, the Russian presence should be taken into consideration. The Russian presence and intervention were the main barriers to peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the last 30 years. Hence, Azerbaijan developed balanced diplomacy, which succeeded. However, the reality and even the status of Karabakh have already changed on the ground. Simply, the Soviet Nagorno-Karabakh administrative division has already become a historical issue.

Due to long-lasting colonialism, invasion, and even the uncertain political situation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, peace negotiations have different axes. For this reason, signing the peace agreement will not be straightforward. Moreover, the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan will ratify the new status of Karabakh. As a result of the 44 Days War, Azerbaijan and its allies have questioned and weakened Russian hegemony/establishment in the South Caucasus. Deploying the Russian military forces as peacekeeping forces will not leverage Russia as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Meanwhile, the geopolitics of the region has already changed on the ground, and all sides, especially Azerbaijan and Türkiye, have insistently been working on a respective peace agreement. In this sense, the five principles offered by the Ministry of the Republic of Azerbaijan would be

an opportunity for constructive negotiations. However, as it was mentioned above, Russia has still maintained its presence in both countries. Further, Azerbaijan follows such a strategy that is based on “practicality” and “pragmatic” principles. So, Azerbaijan is just interested in “good willingness” and “contribution” rather than “preferring one platform over another one.”

The 44 Days War and the peace negotiations that began right after the war, by the initiative of Azerbaijan, brought opportunities and challenges as well. The first opportunity for Armenia was that Armenia could become an independent state and break its subjection. Since Armenia has different types of dependency, which blockade the independent decision-making process. The Armenian Diaspora is still standing in the first place and influences the Armenian governments. However, the reality and context of the region are different, which dramatically changed after the 44 Days War. The Karabakh War and the peace negotiations are an important opportunity for Armenia to get rid of being a “Paper Leviathan.”

To summarize: the shaking of Russia’s two-century hegemony; the victorious Azerbaijan adopted a rational attitude in the peace talks; NATO’s involvement in the region through Türkiye; the efforts of the Yerevan administration to take the right steps from time to time can be expressed as opportunities. Furthermore, the fact that Turkey and Azerbaijan keep diplomatic doors open to Armenia is a very important advance for peace talks. Further, peace will open doors to deal with and even solve security problems and enhance economic ties, which are mentioned by Azerbaijan in five principles. However, the current situation and escalating tension show that Armenia is unwilling to contribute to peace.

Therefore, the challenges should be taken into consideration as well as opportunities. First, as it’s mentioned above, the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan will not be effortless. The 44 Days War and the victory of Azerbaijan changed the political and administrative establishment of Karabakh. There should be implemented such a mechanism that will guarantee the sovereignty of Azerbaijan over the Karabakh. In this sense, it can be predicted that the possibility of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan hangs on the Agdam-Khankendi Road.

Consequently, to complete and ensure the sovereignty of Azerbaijan, Armenia first should be ready to recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and not just leave it in words. Karabakh and its Armenian population is and will be the internal issue of Azerbaijan, and it is understood that Azerbaijan will not back down from this stance. Additionally, the ongoing Russian-Ukraine War and its respective implications for the peace negotiations are still on the table as a challenge. Russia will not declare its fully motivated support for peace unless it wins the war or is defeated by Ukraine. Furthermore, the Armenian elected government is still looking for ways to break former elites from politics and even the military, who are focused on revenge or a new war. For this reason, it can be said that Armenia is still suffering from a failed or weakened central government. It can be conceptualized that the Armenian government will make the final decision to continue as a *paper leviathan* or an independent state.

In conclusion, despite all the negativities and difficulties, it can be said that a peace agreement will be signed. First, Azerbaijan maintains and repeatedly declares its goodwill for peace despite the historical victory. To finalize, Armenia and its allies should take into consideration that Karabakh

and its Armenian population are and will be an internal issue of Azerbaijan. Therefore, to control all movements and changes and prevent illegal developments, including smuggling within its territory and borders, the international community should respect Azerbaijan's sovereignty.