

## Analyzing Russia's Interests in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire Agreement

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### Abstract

The Nagorno-Karabakh war has been one of the most important conflicts in the South Caucasus. The two nations involved, Azerbaijan and Armenia, have been in conflict more times than in cooperation ever since their independence from the Soviet Union. The territory disputed, Nagorno-Karabakh, has been internationally recognized as Azerbaijan's since the United Nations General Assembly Resolution in 2008. However, this did not stop the conflict, as seen with the newest escalation happening in September of 2020. In the majority of the conflict, Russia has been a constant presence, being a mediator as well as a military supplier to both countries. Russia also has been involved in peacekeeping efforts, sending peacekeeping forces to Nagorno-Karabakh. In November 2020, a ceasefire agreement was reached involving Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia. This paper aims to examine Russia's interest in its involvement in the conflict, the weaknesses of the ceasefire agreement, and Russia's gains from the agreement and the overall situation. This paper found that Russia's interests lay in its economic relationship with Armenia and Azerbaijan and in exercising influence in the region with the deployment of its peacekeeping contingent.

**Keywords:** Russia; Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; Nagorno-Karabakh 2020 ceasefire agreement; Russia peacekeeping forces

*Perang Nagorno-Karabakh telah menjadi salah satu konflik terpenting di Kaukasus Selatan. Kedua negara yang terlibat, Azerbaijan dan Armenia, telah lebih sering berkonflik daripada bekerja sama sejak kemerdekaan mereka dari Uni Soviet. Wilayah yang disengketakan, Nagorno-Karabakh, telah diakui secara internasional sebagai milik Azerbaijan sejak Resolusi Majelis Umum Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa pada tahun 2008. Namun, ini tidak menghentikan konflik, seperti yang terlihat dengan eskalasi terbaru yang terjadi pada September 2020. Dalam sebagian besar konflik, Rusia merupakan kehadiran konstan, menjadi mediator serta pemasok militer bagi kedua negara. Rusia juga terlibat dalam upaya pemeliharaan perdamaian, mengirim pasukan penjaga perdamaian ke Nagorno-Karabakh. Pada November 2020, dicapai kesepakatan gencatan senjata yang melibatkan Azerbaijan, Armenia, dan Rusia. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kepentingan Rusia dalam keterlibatannya dalam konflik, kelemahan perjanjian gencatan senjata, dan keuntungan Rusia dari perjanjian tersebut dan situasi secara keseluruhan. Tulisan ini menemukan bahwa kepentingan Rusia terletak pada hubungan ekonominya dengan Armenia dan Azerbaijan dan dalam menjalankan pengaruh di kawasan itu dengan pengerahan kontingen penjaga perdamaannya.*

**Kata kunci:** Rusia; konflik Nagorno-Karabakh; perjanjian gencatan senjata Nagorno-Karabakh 2020;



## Introduction

A conflict of territory is nothing new in the international system. The concept of conflict has been present since the beginning of human history as disagreement arose between two or more parties concerning material benefits. Territory is one of the most important elements in conflict, where the parties involved identify their position and demand their 'right' over the other for seizing the territory. One such example of territory conflict is between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. A six-week war in the South Caucasus in autumn 2020 changed the dynamics of Azerbaijan and Armenia's decades-long struggle. The conflict revolves around Nagorno-Karabakh (or Mountainous Karabakh, also known as Artsakh in Armenian) and the neighboring territories that are internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani authority over much of the land it lost to Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh forces prior fighting in the 1990s, including a section of Nagorno-Karabakh and practically all surrounding territories, has been restored as a result of the war. The remaining region of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the city of Stepanakert, is under Armenian hands. Around 2,000 Russian troops were sent to the conflict zone as part of a ceasefire deal mediated by the Russian Federation (Welt and Bowen 2021).

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict dates back to 1988, when Karabakh's predominantly Armenian population launched an independence movement and demanded unification with The Soviet Armenia. The movement is in light of Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost reform policies, which allowed these aspirations to gain momentum and subsequently shape a nationwide independence movement in Armenia and Karabakh and all over The Soviet Union. The dispute soon evolved into a full-fledged war of ethnic violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1992 after the disintegration of The Soviet Union and the two nations gained their independence (Zurich 2013). The war lasted for two years and has left over 30,000 casualties and about a million refugees and internally displaced people. In 1994, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a ceasefire with Russian mediation in Bishkek.

Although often considered as "frozen conflict", the Nagorno-Karabakh has never been truly frozen. Violence has never disappeared along the contact line, and tensions have remained high. Since the 1994 agreement, Armenia and Azerbaijan have tried to solve the conflict through different actors' mediation, although it has never been successfully achieved. Many violations of the ceasefire agreement have also occurred in the conflict zone. This has led to an uncomfortable status quo between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the region. With conflict largely unsolved, a huge escalation

of violence broke out in the brief four-day April 2016 war (Askerov et al. 2020). Although a ceasefire was reached on April 5th, the result of the war remains inconclusive. Some have said that Azerbaijan gains relatively minor but important territory, while some noted that the status quo had been preserved and no significant changes happened due to the war (Akhundov 2016; Liakhov 2016).

The unresolved conflict led to the newest full-scale escalation of the conflict in September of 2020 in the deadlocked region. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War lasted for 44 days with the usage of drones, sensors, long-range heavy artillery, missile strikes, and information warfare in social media. Three ceasefires brokered by Russia, France, and United States failed to stop the conflict (Hovhannisyan & Bagirova 2020). It was not until the fourth attempt that a ceasefire agreement was signed between the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin in November 9th 2020. From the brief history of the conflict, Russia's role can be seen as one of the external actors of the conflict. Russia's role is not just as an external mediator between the two nations but also to take advantage of the conflict. Economically, Russia is a weapon supplier to both countries. Russia is also trying to establish more of its influence in the South Caucasus region. The South Caucasus region has a significant geopolitical connotation as it is a crucial region with many economically important minerals and energy resources. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war ceasefire agreement has important implications for Russia's interest, and this paper will attempt to explore and explain how the agreement benefits Russia's interests.

### **Literature Review**

The research in this paper uses a library research method. This method emphasizes research by collecting various kinds of information from books, magazines, articles, and various sources related to this research (Mandalis 2020). In this study, the researcher tries to collect various sources related to the Armenian and Azerbaijani conflicts and the interests of Russia, including several journal articles, reports, and news articles. One of the journal article is entitled "Analisis Kepentingan Rusia dan Turki dalam Konflik Armenia-Azerbaijan Pada Tahun 2020" by Ahmad Zainal Mustofa (2021). In this article, the author stated that Russia is a military weapon supplier to both countries, and therefore has economic interests in the ongoing development of the conflict. Russia is also one of the parties in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement, and its brokering of the agreement gained Russia an important boost of reputation in the international space. Another literature is a brief paper titled "In Russia's Hands: Nagorno-Karabakh After the Ceasefire Agreement" by Andras Racz

published on European Union Institute for Security Studies. This brief analyses whether the ceasefire agreement has laid the foundation for a long-term, stable, and sustainable settlement. In doing so, it discussed the weakness of the ceasefire deal from the stability of the present territorial settlement aspect and the legal status of the Armenian-controlled parts of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian peacekeeping forces, and how the ceasefire agreement benefits Russia's interest in the region.

In this article, the researcher will use neoclassical realism theory of International Relations to explain about Russia's involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh war. Neoclassical realism is a branch of realism first coined by Rose (1998). The primary goal of neoclassical realism is to explain nations' foreign policies by referring to both the international and national (domestic) levels. According to Baylis et al. (2001) the key tenets of neoclassical realism are that foreign policy is the product of international structure, domestic factors, and dynamics between the two. According to neoclassical realism, states can regard each other as both security threats and valuable economic partners at the same time; "for irrational national collective identity politics to coexist with rational self-interest" (Sterling-Folker 2002). To put it another way, "cooperation and competition cannot be separated;" cooperation "can be used and often is used to compete" (Doran 2010). Neoclassical realism helps to understand Russia's somewhat permanent interests at various stages of post-Soviet foreign policy, including providing security and autonomy, maximizing material utility, and maximizing status/prestige (Kropatcheva 2012). In international level, Russia's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be seen as pursuing its domination of the South Caucasus region through Armenia and Azerbaijan. While in the domestic level, it is a matter of economic interest as both countries are important economic partners of Russia's defence industries.

### **The Importance of South Caucasus for Russia**

The Caucasus, located between the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Caspian Sea, has always played an important role in world history. It has been considered an important geopolitical center since ancient times, allowing people to travel deep into the Eurasian continent and establish major land canals and transportation networks. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, one of the most important geopolitical elements in the region emerged. As a result, the areas north of the Greater Caucasus remained on the territory of the Russian Federation and the former Transcaucasian territory of the Soviet Union, while the three South Caucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia became sovereign states. As a result, the South Caucasus has become a sub-region in its own right, not yet fully

formed, but real from a geoeconomic and geopolitical point of view and recognized by all major international powers (Bekiarova 2019).

Traditionally, Russia has seen the South Caucasus as a zone of longstanding political responsibility and interests. With Russia dominating all social spheres in the late 18th century, the state played an important role in the development of Caucasian society. Geographical proximity and common history, language, culture, family ties, migration and many other threads connect the peoples of the region to Russia, which outnumbers other countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was temporarily pushed out of the political arena in the South Caucasus. Russia's return to the so-called post-Soviet space is that the region is governed by "increased reliance on external sources which are more likely to create instability and crisis." (Kanchev 2008). Robert Kagan, a prominent experts, explains that "what Russia wants today is what great powers have always wanted: to maintain predominant influence in the regions that matter to them, and to exclude the influence of other great powers" (McDougall 2007). This region is a zone of direct interest to Moscow in terms of ensuring the security of the Russian Federation. As such, Moscow is sensitive to any attempts by external or regional powers to establish their control in the region. Russia is using every tool at its disposal to assert its strength, such as a military presence in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Armenia, where military bases have been established. Support for political and government groups near Moscow, as well as reliance on business and energy, and other hybrid tactics are among the many means employed (Bekiarova 2019).

### **Russia in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

In Russia's engagement with the post-Soviet space frozen conflicts, the state foreign policy within the space and the broader international system reveals a duality in attitude towards international norms and conduct. Russia's actions have been shaped within the post-Soviet space by a combination of strategic interest, relative weakness in the 1990s, and incapacity and lack of long-term strategy. In the South Caucasus region in particular, ethnic conflicts have the potential to spread to the North Caucasus, along with the erosion of influence and consequent weakening of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) alliance in comparison to the United States with other alliances such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Abushov 2019). Maintaining regional stability is therefore important for Russia's security interests.

Since the Karabakh issues turned into an international conflict between the two sovereign states, Russian troops have been taking advantage of the situation. Russia has strong security and economic ties to Armenia, where

Russia guarantees Armenia's security through collective and bilateral treaties. Both countries are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In the event of aggression, CSTO members agree to defend the territorial integrity of other CSTO members. A bilateral agreement between Russia and Armenia also binds Russian forces stationed in Armenia to ensure Armenia's security (Welt and Bowen 2021). The new international situation created an advantageous ground for the Russian troops already present in the region to help Armenian paramilitaries invade Azerbaijani territories beyond Karabakh. Russia's military assistance for Armenia worked perfectly for the Russian policy of subduing Azerbaijan, which refused Russia's military presence in their territory, without Russia having to deploy troops on the remainder of its territory. Russian military support also played a crucial role in Armenian military success against Azerbaijan. Undoubtedly, Russian support was crucial to Armenia's military success.

Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia has never expelled former Soviet and current Russian troops from its territory. Since the conflict began, Russia has provided Armenia with everything it needs for the war, especially weapons and fuel. Not only materials and supplies, the Russian 366th Motorized Infantry Regiment also supported Armenian troops in the Khojaly massacre on February 25, 1992, which killed 613 people, injured 487 and captured 1,275 Azerbaijanis (Goltz 1998). The Kremlin's role has essentially made Russia an active party in the development of the conflict (Askerov 2020). However at the same time, Russia has aided the two sides to reach a ceasefire agreement in May 1994 as a co-chair of Minsk Group of the CSCE/OSCE which was the dominant institution for settling the conflict. This has led to a weird situation of Russia in the conflict as neither a fair nor impartial mediator.

Despite Russia's support for Armenia in the early years of the conflict, the country has also developed ties with Azerbaijan over time. While many view Russia historically as closely linked to Armenia, both parties to the conflict now view Moscow as a desirable mediator. Since the 1990s, Azerbaijan has been led by authoritarian governments that have sought to maintain independence from Russia. At the same time, these governments have sought Moscow's support to balance domestic and international pressures. Baku and Yerevan are interested in developing bilateral relations with Moscow outside of the Nagorno-Karabakh context. Russia regards Armenia as a strategic ally as both countries share the same integration project which are the CSTO and Eurasian Economic Union. However, Moscow also appreciated its partnership with Azerbaijan and feared that it was also losing influence in Azerbaijan, which partly explains Moscow's

involvement in Baku. There is also a commercial motivation for selling arms to Azerbaijan, which pays full price for these arms, unlike Armenians that can buy Russian arms at a discount (Markedonov 2018).

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan rely heavily on Russian military supplies. Russian and modernized Soviet era equipment, including tanks and artillery, is used by both countries. Prior to the war in autumn 2020, Russia is said to have maintained a policy of parity, in which neither side gains a considerable edge over the other. By providing Armenia with weapons and military equipment at reduced costs and through loans, Russia was able to balance Azerbaijan's procurement of advanced weaponry. Armenia has received sophisticated capabilities from Russia, including the 9K720 Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile and SU-30SM fighter jets (Welt and Bowen 2021) By selling weapons and military equipment to Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia is able to create conditions in which it can earn more from arms sales while also exerting influence in the region.

Aside from military supplier, Russia's role as mediator can once again be seen in the 2020 flare up of the Nagorno-Karabakh war on September 2020. On November 9 2020, after failures of previous ceasefire efforts, Russia was finally able to broker a ceasefire on November 9 when Armenia was on the verge of defeat. Russia's attitude as a mediator between the Armenian and Azerbaijani conflicts certainly benefits them. Not only political gain, but their existence in the eyes of the world becomes more respected. Russia managed to mediate the conflict by holding talks in Moscow. For Russia, the agreement to end the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh underscores its main role in the region. Russia could optimize its capacity to act as an intermediary.

Russia has such power in the region that it has the ability to escalate or de-escalate the conflict at any time to suit its own objectives. Russia has been a behind-the-scene party in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, helping Armenia since the conflict began. Surprisingly, Russia is simultaneously playing two opposing and conflicting roles on the same topic. Russia's predisposition would normally prohibit it from serving as a mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia's priorities do not include resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh war, as resolving the conflict would damage the Kremlin's influence in the region. It is also no surprise that Russia not only provides weaponry to Armenia but also sells them to Azerbaijan (Askerov 2020). Russia has made a significant contribution to the emergence of this conflict and has maintained it for geostrategic reasons. There is no evidence that Russia has made any effort to turn this conflict into a just and durable peace agreement. In reality, Moscow's use of a double standard has been one of the most serious issues throughout

the negotiation process.

### **Ninth of November Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire Agreement: Flaws**

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war officially ended with the signing of a ceasefire agreement in the evening of 9 November 2020. The agreement was signed in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev as the signatories. The agreement consists of 9 points, which are: complete ceasefire and end to all hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, returning on Aghdam District to Azerbaijan, deployment of Russia's peacekeeping contingent, installment of peacekeeping command post to enforce the ceasefire, return of Kalbajar District to Azerbaijan from Armenia, the returnment of refugees and internally displaced persons to Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent areas, exchange of prisoners of war, as well as the unblocking of all economic and transport connections in the region (President of Russia 2020). The agreement confirms Azerbaijan's complete victory and resolves Azerbaijan's main grievances: loss of territory and mass displacement of its people. On the other hand, Armenian forces suffered staggering losses and the agreement prevented their complete destruction. All Armenian troops are ordered to evacuate the Nagorno-Karabakh region and a Russian peacekeeping contingent is deployed to ensure a ceasefire and stability. Russian peacekeepers are now securing not only that part of Nagorno-Karabakh still under Armenian control, but also the Lachin/Berdzor corridor, which is expected to remain the only permanent open land link between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

However, while the agreement did end the war, the process and implications of the contents have glaringly obvious weaknesses. Many have noticed that the agreement was not truly negotiated, no real plan for reconstruction, stabilization, or reconciliation (Stronski 2020). The agreement mostly translates to Azerbaijan's military victories and does not even mention the central problem between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which is the status of the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenia population in it. On the problem of the party involved in the agreement, the ceasefire agreement did not mention or even reference to either the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) nor its Minsk Group, even though the Minsk Group has been in charge of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution since the end of the first Nagorno-Karabakh in 1994 and have Russia as one of its co-chairs (RÁCZ 2021). Turkey, as the other major external party in the conflict, also did not become a signatory party to the ceasefire agreement either.



The stability of the territorial settlement stated by the ceasefire agreement is a critical factor in determining the overall viability of the settlement. As the ceasefire came into effect immediately starting from midnight on 10 November 2020, several highly volatile situations happened all along the frontline, cementing the tactical situation irrespective of infrastructural, social, geographical, or other conditions. The return to Azerbaijani authority of the seven occupied regions around Nagorno-Karabakh is also causing problems on the newly restored old boundary between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Rácz 2021). An example of a particularly sensitive issue is on the case of Shusha, captured by Azerbaijani forces, and Khankendi, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh which remained under Armenian control. The two cities, now located on opposite sides of the line of contact, could be a point of tension in the future as their proximity increases mutual vulnerability to gunfire and shooting.

The vagueness of the agreement also causes a problem on the issue of troops' withdrawal. The agreement has no mention on the exact parameters of the withdrawal, and resulted in different interpretations between the two sides. Baku interprets the requirements as all Armenian military forces, while the Yerevan and the de facto leadership in Karabakh interpret it as applies only to the armed forces of Republic of Armenia, and not include the armed formations of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. This has led to a number of clashes between the remaining separatist units and the Azerbaijani military (Rácz 2021).

Another very important weakness of the ceasefire agreement is about the lack of political settlement attached to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. During and after the war, negotiations focused on the military-technical specifics of ending hostilities, such as exchanging prisoners of war, protecting civilians, and ensuring that the ceasefire was properly implemented. Meanwhile, little progress has been made on the political future of the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh that are still under Armenian control (Rácz 2021). Nagorno-Karabakh's lack of political status is a blow to the territory self-governing institutions, causing uncertainty and insecurity among the Armenian people. Without acknowledging the need for the political status of the entity to be addressed, the agreement appears to lack the foundation for community cooperation (Ohanyan 2020). Baku's official position has been that all regions controlled by Armenia are an important part of Azerbaijani territories, and therefore has no intention of granting autonomy to the Armenian population. With Armenian forces having suffered a crushing loss in the conflict, the Karabakh Armenians can only rely on Russian peacekeeping forces for security. The presence of Russian forces in Karabakh is the sole guarantee the Armenians have in

maintaining their de facto statehood and separate from Azerbaijan in the absence of internationally backed legal guarantees from Baku (Rác 2021). While the Armenian-administered Nagorno-Karabakh continued to exist after the ceasefire agreement, the withdrawal of Armenian military units and the restrictions were imposed on who was able to visit from Armenia. This led to Moscow effectively replacing Yerevan as the patron of Nagorno-Karabakh (The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict In Its Fourth Decade 2021).

### **Russian Gains on the Ceasefire Agreement**

On the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement and overall situation of the war, it created a context favorable to Russia. On the Armenian side, Russia's first goal will probably be to take advantage of the situation to bring to power a more loyal Armenian prime minister. This can be seen as since the signing of the agreement, protests has come from Armenian population, taking the agreement as a betrayal from the present prime minister and projecting the blame of the defeat onto him (Minzarari 2020). This is because while Pashinyan never actually challenged Armenia's special relationship with Russia, he did take on individuals connected to Moscow, such as Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan (Bechev 2020). By doing so, the war has played into Putin's hands by diminishing Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Russia's second goal is to instill fear in the people of Armenia by propagating the idea that Armenia cannot survive as a state without Russia. Russia allowed Azerbaijan to reclaim all of its territory around Nagorno-Karabakh in order to create the required sense of threat, making the enclave's future defense extremely difficult. The defeat by Azerbaijan also highlights Armenia's military vulnerability. Russia will take advantage of Armenia's sense of vulnerability to persuade the country's people and authorities to accept stronger ties with Russia, thus creating a stronger dependency of Armenia toward Russia (Minzarari 2020). Meanwhile, on Azerbaijan's side, Russia did President Ilham Aliyev a huge favor by refusing to use its electronic warfare weapons against Azeri drones. This was crucial to Baku's military victory, and it makes it clear to the Azeri public that maintaining their war victories is reliant on positive relations with Moscow. While this won't result in the same level of vulnerability as Armenia, but it will begin to establish a dependency.

On the context of the ceasefire agreement, while it mostly shows Azerbaijani achievement, Russia has also made significant gains. First, by acknowledging Azerbaijan's territorial gains, the agreement promotes Moscow's positive relationship with Baku, which is necessary for the two countries' strategic alliance to continue to grow (Rytovuori-Apunen 2021).

The two countries have cooperated on military and military-technical since 1998, and have concluded over 40 agreements. As Russia is one of Azerbaijan's largest arm suppliers, counting for nearly two-thirds of Azerbaijan's defense import, it is crucial for Russia and Azerbaijan to maintain friendly and cooperative relationship (Mehdiyev 2022). Second, the agreement made it possible for Russia to achieve a goal it couldn't achieve back in 1994, which is to send its peacekeepers to the conflict zone. Russian peacekeepers are to protect the rest of Armenian population, separate the two nations, and patrol the Lachin corridor that will connect Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh (Gabuev 2020). Before, Nagorno-Karabakh had previously been the only post-Soviet "frozen conflict" with no Russian "boots on the ground." This provided local parties, like as Yerevan and Baku, more leeway. In the Southern Caucasus, Azerbaijan was also the only country without a Russian military presence (Bechev 2020).

The presence of a large number of military personnel, as well as hundreds of Russian civilian professionals and officials whose objective is humanitarian assistance, suggests that Russia's ties with the self-proclaimed state will dramatically rise. These interactions were minimal before the war, and they were still organized through Armenia. As a result, Russia will not only establish a military presence in Nagorno-Karabakh, but will also play a vital role in the region's future development (Rytovuori-Apunen 2021). Another important thing to point out is that the Russian peacekeeping force doesn't have a UN nor OSCE Mandate, as the Minsk Group isn't involved in the agreement. Instead, they have authorization only from the three signatory parties of the ceasefire declaration. The principles of UN peacekeeping also prescribe that the parties have to commit themselves to a political process, yet this operation is only officially stipulated mission to monitor the ceasefire agreement. These make them cannot be considered as traditional peacekeeping operation according to the logic of United Nations or of OSCE. Russian peacekeeping contingent also does not have an exact, internationally agreed mandate and only have points three and four of the ceasefire agreement as its legal backing. However, these points do not define the exact mandate, tasks, responsibilities, or rules of engagement.

Questions also raised about the possibility of Russian force not leaving after the original 5 years span. The agreement stated that the Russian peacekeeping mission will automatically be extended after 5 years for another 5 years period unless any of the signatory party object. History has proven that once Russian peacekeepers tend to not leave after deployed to a territory after conflict, such as the case of Moldova and Georgia. Armenia is unlikely to object as Russian contingent seems to remains as the only

security guarantor of Armenia-controlled parts of Nagorno-Karabakh. Baku may object, as the peacekeeping contingent leaving would open Azerbaijan's opportunity to take back the whole territory, however if Russia decided to just not leave, there aren't many options for Azerbaijan. While Azerbaijani government could turn to the courts, a recent amendments of Russian constitution in 2020 about the supremacy of Russian law over international law might make it complicated for Azerbaijan to legally enforce Russian contingent departure from its territory. Military power would be no use, as it is unlikely for Azerbaijan to risk a full-scale war against Russia over Armenian-controlled parts of Nagorno-Karabakh (RÁCZ 2021).

Third, the agreement also allows Russia to extend its control over border zones in Karabakh and Armenia. The new Line of Contact, as well as the five-kilometer-wide Lachin corridor that connects Artsakh and Armenia through the region regained by Azerbaijan, will be under Russian authority. It also allows Russian border authorities to keep an eye on a new transport route that runs through Armenia and connects Azerbaijan to its western exclave of Naxcivan, which is bordered by Armenia, Iran, and Turkey (RFE/RL 2020). Lastly, the peace agreement ensures that Karabakh remains Russia's primary leverage over Armenian and Azerbaijani security policies and international integration. Armenia will be unable to legitimately oppose Azerbaijan's claims to the remaining lands of Karabakh without Russia. Similarly, without strengthening its ties with Russia, Azerbaijan will be unable to prevent Russia's actions from favoring Armenia in the Karabakh conflict (Rytovuori-Apunen 2021).

## **Conclusion**

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of South Caucasus most influential conflict. As South Caucasus is a strategic and important region for Russia's national interest, its no surprise that Russia want to exert its influence on the countries near it. Since the first war in 1992 to the most recent flare up in 2020, Russia has been a constant external party in the conflict, whether it be as a weapon supplier to both countries or as a mediator. In the September 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Russia's role can be seen in the brokering of the ceasefire agreement signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. The agreement signals a clear Azerbaijan victory amidst Armenia crushing defeat. However, the deal also have glaring flaws and weaknesses, both on the context of the agreement formulation and in the content itself. These such as no mention of Nagorno-Karabakh political status, lack of involvement of past Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement external parties such as OSCE and its Minsk Group, and overall vagueness of the content. Russia's involvement as the sole external party of the ceasefire

also raises the question of what might Russia gain from the agreement. This article suggest that Russia might have four goals in mind, which are to promote a more positive alliance with Baku to maintain the two countries strategic alliances, put Russian military presence in area of the conflict through the deployment of peacekeeping forces, to extend Russia's influence and control over the border zones of Karabakh and Armenia, as well as ensuring that Karabakh will remain Russia's main leverage over Armenia and Azerbaijan. With this ceasefire agreement, Moscow has shown that it remains an indispensable power in the region, and was able to preserve its ties with both Azerbaijan and Armenia (Gabuev 2020).

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