

The Future of Crises in South Caucasus in the Wake of Russia-West Conflicts

Mohammad Dejkam¹, Yaghoub-Ali Olad² & Mohammad Fatemi²

¹ Faculty of Communication Sciences, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting University, Tehran, Iran

² Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

Correspondence: Mohammad Dejkam, Faculty of Communication Sciences, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: m.dejkam@chmail.ir

Received: July 26, 2016 Accepted: October 8, 2016 Online Published: October 30, 2016

doi:10.5539/jpl.v9n9p92

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v9n9p92>

Abstract

South Caucasus region due to various reasons including ethnic diversity, religions and geographical position has long been witnessing various crises such as Karabakh and south Ossetia crisis. Among these, Karabakh crisis has a direct impact on the national interests of Islamic republic of Iran; because, this crisis has been developed in the northern borders of Iran and between the two countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia that in addition to neighboring Iran, both share some historical, cultural, ethnic, and even religious commonalities with Iranian people. In this study, the main question is that in case of failure of the West in confrontation with Russia in Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, will the West, to compensate its failure, use these crises of the South Caucasus region to inflict the security and interests of Russia? Almost certainly, if the victories of Russian-oriented groups in different areas of the Ukraine crisis as well as the occurrence of significant victories for the government and the people of Syria and Iraq in fighting terrorism such as ISIS and Al-Nusra groups particularly success in reclaiming the occupied cities from terrorists, the West will surely take actions against interests and security of Russia. The triggering one of the dormant crises of south Caucasus by the west is more likely than other crises exist within the borders of the Russian federation and central Asia.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Karabakh crisis, Russia, US, the West

1. Introduction

South Caucasus region due to various reasons including ethnic diversity, religions and geographical position has experienced various crises such as Karabakh and south Ossetia crisis. Karabakh or Karabakh was one of the Iran's political divisions from Safavid era onwards. In 1813, under the terms of the Treaty of Gulistan, this region was lost by the Persians to the Russian Empire. The beginning of Karabakh crisis dates back to 1950 when sanguinary conflicts took place between Muslims and Armenians. From 1988, with the decline of Moscow power and the reforms of Gorbachev, sporadic clashes were started between Armenians of Karabakh and Azeris, and resulted in the Soviet military intervention in 1990s and the Armenian massacre of January 20, 1990. After the independence of the Azerbaijan and Armenia, the conflict between the two countries continued and the attempts of Islamic Republic of Iran and the four resolutions of the United Nations could not put an end to these conflicts. On May 9, 1994, the defense ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia and the representatives of Armenian separationists in Karabakh signed the ceasefire agreement and on May 12, 1994, the two sides with the acceptance of the Minsk group plan established a truce which have not yet become a definitive peace. With the Karabakh war, seven regions adjacent to Karabakh that is 17 to 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory and includes 120 kilometers of Azerbaijan's shared borders with Iran were occupied by Armenians. Karabakh crisis has already become a complex conflict in which religion, ethnicity or territory are not the only factors of the crisis, but a crisis with a flavor of all three factors and the demands of regional and international powers have prolonged it.

Due to the importance of security in Iran's borders with both Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as the national interests of Iran in the South Caucasus region, in this study our purpose is to evaluate the future of crises in the South Caucasus with respect to the conflicts of the West and Russia in this region with focusing on Karabakh crisis. The main question of this research is that, in case of failure of the West in confrontation with Russia in Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, shall the West trigger these crises to inflict the security and interests of Russia in order

to compensate its failure? If the answer is “yes”, which crisis is more likely to start again? Is there a possibility of re-igniting the Karabakh conflict? How about Ossetia crisis?

2. Iran and Karabakh Crisis

After the start of war among the two countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Iran tried, within the framework of its national interests and good neighborly relations with neighbors adopt a mediation policy in crisis. This caused Iran to be accused of favoring the other party by both sides involved in the crisis, especially Azerbaijan. But what is clear is that Iran's support for the war-torn region is undeniable. On the other hand, contrary to the claims of some officials of Azerbaijan, Iran did not stop military support to Azerbaijan's army and military groups such as Amunlar group during the Karabakh war. After the end of war, Iran had different ways of diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis like presenting a peace plan which was faced with a cool reception by officials of the two countries involved in the conflict due to different reasons such as intervention of Russia and US.

There are three reasons for Iran's mediation in the process of Karabakh conflict: (1) The conflict occurred near the Iranian border and its continuation threatened the interests and security of Iran; (2) Iran, based to Islamic and human duty, considered it as a duty to stop the killing and displacement of Muslims in Azerbaijan with internationally accepted methods; (3) Any resolution of the conflict by Iran could lead to the increasing influence of Iran in the region (Vaezi, 2008). Azerbaijan has called for Iran's support against Armenia, and by ignoring Iran's financial aid and food to the people of Azerbaijan during the war, accuses Iran of supporting Armenia. Azar Azimov, deputy foreign minister of Azerbaijan told the *Hürriyet Daily News* in an interview in Baku on Oct. 5, 2012: “If Armenia is so tough in negotiations [over Nagorno-Karabakh] it's because the support it receives from Iran as well as from Russia. Iran gives life to Armenia,” (Turkish Weekly, 2012) Former head of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan Haji Agha Nuriev in an interview with *Aran News* on June 6, 2011, said: “It is true that our government is not willing to release the realities of Nagorno-Karabakh War because for many years they have been silent about Iran's role in helping our country, and even some of them have been distorted. Currently, the government neither denies nor confirms the military aid of Iran; in fact, they have adopted an apparent policy of silence” (Aran News, 2012). Mohsen Rezae, then commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in an interview with *Azari Sahar Network* on Feb. 27, 2013 stated: “A large number of Iranians participated in the Karabakh war that in addition to the return of the wounded to the country, a large number of Iranian martyrs of Karabakh war are also buried in Baku... In addition to the equipment to Azerbaijan, gave them the necessary guerrilla trainings” (Fars News, 2013). Vice Chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Iranian Parliament, Mansour Haghhighatpour in response to the claim of one of Azerbaijan's ruling party representatives against himself said: “It is a long time that I say I have hundreds of pages of written records and images, and videos over a hundred hours, all of which affirm our support to Azerbaijan in Karabakh war; I am ready to reveal my reasons and documents in media... The supreme leader has introduced Karabakh as an Islamic country and has prohibited any helps to occupiers of Islamic lands; in this case, how we can train Armenians?” (Aran Moghan News, 2013)

In general, it can be said that the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and lack of support for Azerbaijan from Iran or Iranian support for Armenia, is Azeri officials' excuse to put pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran; they are aware of the support of Iran to the people of Azerbaijan, but for multiple reasons including fear of the growing influence of Iran in their country and the region, have no desire to the help of Iran or Iranian mediation to resolve the crisis. Negative publicity of Azeri media against Iran and zooming in the relations of Iran and Armenia is the determined policy of Baku government. This is while having a good relationship with both sides is a prerequisite for mediation and on the other hand, the volume of economic relation of Armenia with some countries such as US is much more than the volume of its relations with Iran, and also the dollar value of Iran's annual economic exchanges with Azerbaijan is more than that with Armenia. (Olad, 2011)

3. Russia-West Conflicts

Russia, after getting rid of the problems following the collapse of Soviet Union, especially the economic problems, was after regaining the superpower position of Soviet Union, especially in the scene of international relations. This desire caused the intensification of conflicts between this country and the west with the leadership of United States; because the reemergence of Russia in the field of power and international relationships was considered a threat to its interests. The west, with numerous invasive procedures such as colored revolutions, attempted to attack Russia's interests and confine this country to its own realms and borders. Then, their conflicts reached its peak when Russia was not allowed to participate in the process of military invasion of the west to Afghanistan and Iraq with the excuse of attacks of September 11th. In the process of Libya events and overthrowing of Gaddafi's government, Russia took it as huge offense to be played by the west. Therefore, in

future events, Russia attempted to define its interest by not cooperating with the west. . Crisis in Syria, Iraq and Ukraine opened a field of confrontation between the West and Russia's interests clearly.

3.1 Syria Crisis

The crisis of Syria started with the public protests in this country with the excuse of lack of some freedoms and afterwards it turned to the scene of intervention by representatives of the west and the United States in this country. The countries that do not even stand the sight of democracy in the structure of their hereditary government suddenly support establishment of democracy in Syria and they become concerned about the rights and freedoms of this country. Russia, due to the numerous reasons such as its historical experience in the past and having interests in Syria such as military base, not only did not accompany the west, but also ruined the plans of the west and its representatives in Syria by standing beside countries such as Islamic Republic of Iran and China, while preserving the legitimate government of Syria. The role of Russia in preventing the attack of United States to Syria is one of the paragons of such actions. Currently, Russia is considered as one of the main supporters of legitimate government and people of Syria, especially after the presidential election of Syria, and every victory of Syria government in its fight against terrorist groups and reclaiming the occupied territories is construed as a victory for Russia and a failure for the west.

3.2 Iraq Crisis

After failure in Syria, the west created a new forefront in its fight with Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia. This new front was created in the borders of Iraq by one of the terrorist groups that is active in the Syria crisis and created the dream of overthrowing Iraq government by the support of some domestic elements in this country in the thoughts of the west and some autocratic states of the region for a short period of time. With the taken measurements of supporting countries of Iraq government and its people, the west has failed in achieving this dream; therefore, every victory of Iraq government and its people in this front is the victory of Russia against the west.

3.3 Ukraine Crisis

Ukraine is one of the targets of colored revolutions of the west for damaging the interest of Russia that for some time threatened the interests of Russia in the region by overthrowing the pro-Russian government and establishing a pro-west government. After the overthrowing the pro-west government and retaking of the power by pro-Russians, west was after regaining the power in this country with different excuses that resulted in creation of another crisis. Until now, the situations have been in favor of Russia because Russia was able to separate Crimea from Ukraine and connect it to its own lands. The winning of Russia in this crisis was not limited to Crimea; it also could preserve its interests in different fields or gain new interests.

4. Discussion

Almost certainly, if the victories of Russian-oriented groups in different areas of the Ukraine crisis as well as the occurrence of significant victories for the government and the people of Syria and Iraq in fighting terrorism such as ISIS and Al-Nusra groups particularly success in reclaiming the occupied cities from terrorists, the West will surely take actions against interests and security of Russia. Now, due to the imminent new crisis to hit the interests of Russia, the question arises as which area provides a better context to create a new crisis for the West? To answer this question we can imagine three fertile areas of crises as geographical location of future crises: Within the borders of the Russian Federation, central Asia, and South Caucasus.

- Within the borders of the Russian Federation: Major crisis in the north Caucasus region i.e. Chechnya separatists and other Wahhabi terrorist groups in the region have been controlled by Russia, and is no longer a serious crisis for the security and interests of Russia in the near future. Perhaps it can be said that one of the main areas of this success was the withdrawal of Bandar bin Sultan from Saudi political scene and the management of Saudi Arabia's intelligence agencies that played a fundamental role in supporting Chechen and Wahhabi terrorists.
- Central Asia: In countries bordering with Afghanistan, i.e. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, the probability of crisis by terrorist groups such as the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIL for undermining the interests of Russia is expected. Considering the domestic conditions in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the two countries have a greater chance for the candidate this potential crisis. Andrei Kazantsev, director of the analytical center of Moscow state institute of international relations, introduced the threat of ISIS for post-Soviet countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. He believes that the gathered terrorist groups in the borders of Afghanistan with Central Asian countries is a serious challenge to regional security (Fars News, 2014) In general, the Central Asian region has the perfect background for the crisis against the security and

interests of Russia and even Iran; However, due to various geographical, political, cultural reasons, in terms of being prone to crisis, it has lower importance and priority compared to the South Caucasus region, and it is less likely to cause crisis.

- South Caucasus: Currently, there are three contexts for making crisis against Russia in the South Caucasus region which in order of priority and likelihood are: Karabakh crisis, South Ossetia crisis, and ISIS crisis. Among these, the crises of Karabakh and ISIS, if ignited, can jeopardize the security and interests of Iran. The followings are some of the most important evidences of crisis in the south Caucasus:
 - The presence of Russian warships in Azerbaijan and a recent visit of a Russian general (Shoigu) to Azerbaijan strengthen the likelihood of unrest in the South Caucasus. Gregory Trofimchov, a Russian political analyst told “Akhar. az” News Network: “Karabakh is not the only matter of the region; the problem is the spread of Ukraine instability to other neighboring countries by terrorist groups like ISIS” (Tasnim News, 2014);
 - Irakli Garibashvili, Georgian Prime Minister's statement on a recent trip to Brussels stating that “we could begin direct negotiations with Russia and are ready to continue it; however, territorial integrity is a crucial matter for us and as long as the issue is related to our territorial integrity, we do not compromise ” (ISNA, 2014). Also, according to other internal news of Georgia, including the resignation of Minister of Foreign Affairs Following the decision of Prime Minister to dismiss the defense minister, who was supported by the West because of allegations of corruption against senior defense officials. Foreign minister stated the reason for his resignation and his four aides as: “to show that the country is threatened”, which can indicate the possibility of crisis in Karabakh;
 - The decision of nearly forty thousand Wahhabis in Azerbaijan to leave the country permanently to Turkey and Syria due to restrictive legislation and strict regulations against the radical groups, especially Wahhabis in Azerbaijan. Although it can be inferred that Wahhabis are to leave their country to help the terrorists are defeated in Syria and Iraq or perhaps this news is a rumor for the morale of the terrorists that are defeated; but can also be an evidence of the likelihood of unrest (Nagorno-Karabakh crisis or military action of ISIS) in Azerbaijan. The news related to Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan large-scale operation in the fight against ISIS elements and arresting a number of them (regardless of its veracity) also can be inferred in line with this news;
 - Israel put Azerbaijan in its security list and has requested from their citizens to avoid from travelling to this country in sensitive conditions. Israeli ambassador in Baku stated the position of Azerbaijan and for its neighbors as the reason for this action. Due to similar actions of Israel in the past, there is the possibility of a crisis in Azerbaijan in future;
 - Military drill of Azerbaijan (between Sept. 13 and Sept. 20, 2015) held concurrently with the invitation of civilians by Azerbaijani Defense Ministry to participate in the training and maneuvers and exercises. It was described as rare, and was told that the Ministry of Defense put on the agenda of training citizens to deal with possible war with Armenia, or even to deal with ISIS;
 - The shot down of an Armenian helicopter by Azerbaijani armed forces on November 11, 2014 fell inside the demilitarized zone separating Azerbaijan and Armenia killing all three crew members. After this incident which was the most serious military incidents on the border of Nagorno-Karabakh since 1994 ceasefire, Yerevan by threatening Baku, stated that: "The consequences of this unprecedented escalation of tension will be very painful for Azerbaijan” (Harutyunyan, 2014);
 - Karabakh Liberation Organization (KLO) declaration of war after the fall of Armenian helicopter as well as the statements of some of Azerbaijani experts and scholars for the start of war in response to the violation of ceasefire by Armenian armed forces;
 - The killing of two Azerbaijani troops by Armenian armed forces stationed in Karabakh during the operation of discovery and return of the bodies of three crew members of the shot down Armenian helicopter;
 - Widespread violations of ceasefire by Armenian and Azerbaijani troops such that Azerbaijani Defense Ministry announced that Armenian armed forces had 51 times violated the ceasefire regime at various sectors of the front (APA.az, 2014....);
 - The German newspaper “Die Zeit” in an article on Putin's future plans for the region wrote: “Putin is trying to defeat Ukraine in the negotiations, and if Russia was defeated in Ukraine, Other disputed areas that now are off like Abkhazia, South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria in Moldova, and Karabakh in

Azerbaijan will rekindle” (Qafqaz.ir, 2014). This though could represent a projection, but at the same time indicates the seriousness of the crisis in the South Caucasus.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing the presented materials in this study, it can be concluded that if the affairs continue in favor of Russia in Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, which is the inevitable corollary of US-led failure of the West, the likelihood of triggering the crisis by the West against Russian interests with the aim of compensating for the failure is expected. In the event of this, the South Caucasus is very suitable for creating the crisis, because most of the region's crisis is a threat to either Russia's interests or the interests and national security of Iran (Iran as an ally of in Syria and Iraq and also the known enemy of the West's interests in west Asia).

Some of the major obstacles in fanning the flames of war in Karabakh war in Karabakh are: (a) Armenian lobby in the government structure of some Western governments including the United States, (b) the need for security of energy transmission lines in the South Caucasus region as well as the regional energy, (c) improving economic and military conditions of Azerbaijan (though this war can prevent Azerbaijan to get power as a Muslim country). Political factor is the most important factor in the continuation of the Karabakh crisis; so, for its final resolution, this factor should be considered as the most important factor in presenting the crisis solutions; for igniting the crisis again and turning it from potential to actual, political factor is the most important tool. In addition to threatening the interests of Russia and Iran, the overthrow of Ilham Aliyev and establishment of a West-oriented and Russian opposition government (with extensive long-term goals such as undisputed dominance of the west over the region's energy resources) are of the goals of west for fanning the flames of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

References

- APA.az. (2014, November, 10). Retrieved from <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-military/azerbaijan-army-azerbaijani-armed-forces/armenia-violates-ceasefire-with-azerbaijan-51-times-throughout-the-day.html>
- Aran Moghan News. (2013, April 6). Retrieved from <http://aranmoghan.ir/news/5203>
- Aran News. (2012, May 30). Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/AFHjcq>
- Fars News. (2013, February 28). Retrieved from <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13911209000175>
- Fars News. (2014, November 8). Retrieved from <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13930817000038>
- Harutyunyan, S. (2014, November 12). *Armenian Helicopter Shot Down Near Karabakh*. Retrieved from <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/26687991.html>
- ISNA (Iranian Students' News Agency). (2014, November 19). Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/VqccJJ>
- Olad, Y. (2011). Mavane va rahkarhaye gostareshe ravabete eghtesadie Iran ba keshvarhaye mantagheye ghafghaz [Barriers and strategies for expanding economic relations of Iran with the countries of the Caucasus region]. *Unpublished MS thesis*, University of Tehran, Iran. (In Persian)
- Qafqaz.ir. (2014, October 18). Retrieved from <http://qafqaz.ir/fa/?p=9314>
- Tasnim News. (2014, November 11). Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/UoPi4d>
- Turkish Weekly. (2012, October 8). *Upset with Iran, Baku Moves Closer to Israel*. Retrieved from: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/2012/10/08/news/upset-with-iran-baku-moves-closer-to-israel/>
- Vaezi, M. (2008). Mianjigari dar monagheshate beynolmelali: Olgoye mianjigarie Iran dar bohrane Karabakh va Tajikestan [International conflict mediation: the mediation model of Iran in the Karabakh crisis and Tajikistan]. *Nameye Mofid*, 13(61), 159-182. (In Persian)

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).