

**International Workshop:
Stability and Peace in the Caucasus:
The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh,
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The following address was delivered at this conference as the keynote speech, by Dr. Brenda Shaffer, Research Director, Caspian Studies Program, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA. Tom de Waal, journalist and author on the Caucasus, chaired the session.

We have gathered together in this very picturesque village setting, esteemed negotiators both from the past and the present, honorable diplomats and officials, professional facilitators and researchers on both conflict resolution and the Caucasus, from many places, including: Germany, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, US, France, Iran and Turkey. Many of the primary diplomats responsible for the recent breakthroughs in the negotiations on Nagorno-Karabagh are currently present in this room, or on their way. They have been fulfilling their mission passionately and selflessly.

Recent developments in the peace process over Nagorno-Karabagh are encouraging. However, let us not let this beautiful setting or the recent encouraging developments distract us from the dangers that are inherent in this process. An unsuccessful peace initiative is often worse than no peace initiative. Expectations are being created in the region for some sort of treatment; issues are being charged and politicized. Consequently, voices calling for war are now growing in both Azerbaijan and Armenia. If the latest round of negotiations fails, war could easily emerge in the area again, and greater suffering can transpire again.

Thus the first task of our conference, and for any of you who are involved in the negotiations, is to remember that Nagorno-Karabagh is a very serious issue. Please be aware of the treacherous consequences of failure. However, at the same time, the status quo --- no war-no peace -- is no longer an option in the Caucasus.

In the past decade through the period of the war, Armenia has lost a significant portion of its population to emigration. In Azerbaijan, over 800,000 refugees have lived for over eight years in awful conditions. Must the refugees be punished because they have not chosen the path of violence to force the international spotlight on their desperate situation? Let us reward peoples who have not used violence towards each other for seven years, but have been concentrating on rebuilding their families, on continuing the education of their children, and on preventing disease instead of using terror as we have seen in other venues in the world.

In relating to the origins of this conflict, we have heard phrases all the time such as "ancient hatreds," and "burdens of history." We have heard descriptions of the peoples in the region in

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religious terms: "Christian Armenians vs. Muslims and Shiite Azerbaijanis." But actually this is not a conflict of religion. This is not a conflict of culture. Even history is a choice.

When constructing histories, we choose our myths. Myths, I don't mean in a pejorative sense. We can tell a history of the Caucasus, if we talk up until the middle of the 19th Century, Tbilisi was primarily an Armenian city, Baku was an international city, of which the Azerbaijani population was a minority, and in Yerevan, the Muslim Turkic population was the majority. Cultures fostered each other. People intermarried, and people traded. Then we could tell a history of just the 20th Century. We can mention massacres. We can mention destruction. We can pick and choose the myths as we choose to build different political movements.

Take for instance the literature by Sabir, who is evoked as one of the most important literary figures of the Azerbaijanis in the early 20th Century. His literature is filled with the image of the Armenian as a subject for emulation, a subject for study for the Azerbaijanis, and as an important partner for building the Caucasus.

However, we have political entrepreneurs on both sides, who at the time of building the national movements and the new states choose to emphasize certain historical events. Instead of saying, "Yes, we could foster a Caucasian identity" or build a political movement on the basis of, "Yes, there is a we," not emphasizing so much the "they," each political movement had to emphasize the "they." So in Armenia, the major national movement was not called the Armenian Democratic Movement, it was called the Karabagh Committee. And the chant for *miyatsum*, unification, was one of the most important chants mobilizing the national movement at the time.

In Azerbaijan, at the same time, when building the "we," when building the new state, the calls for war and rallying to fight also played a huge role in the building of the new national state and the national movement. Politicians on both sides chose a version of history and emphasized certain events and certain myths. Yes these things took place. But other things have taken place in the Caucasus as well.

Foreigners, as well, were not especially helpful here, always emphasizing history and always emphasizing religious debates as if history does not matter when you talk about Canadian-US relations or US-Mexican relations. In North America, we could also tell a history of borders that have been changed and populations that have been massacred. But here for some reason, history does not matter. For some reason, what we assume in the Caucasus, in the Middle East and other places, is that history has a bigger impact.

Yes we have also heard that this is a religious conflict. Is it so? Look at the coalitions of the major partners of cooperation. For instance Armenia, populated primarily by Christians, is in very good cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Religion does not form the basis of the coalitions in this area. Nor is religion part of the rhetoric of the debate here. If at all, religious leaders have played a positive role as a force of moderation and reconciliation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Identities can be based on a number of concepts. Now it is very popular that we connect identity to territories and borders. But actually this is a new concept. Identity was not always connected to

territory. Can we maybe compromise on territory, but still retain our identities? Can they be in a different sense and be liberated from only territories?

Also in our identities of collectives, we have a number of elements. They can be related to as primordial, some sort of more ancient ties that we either construct or we have. They can be civil, and they can be sacred. Can we not build identities within the Caucasus that emphasize more the civil, and the place for primordial and for sacred is maybe less connected to territory?

One of our goals should be depoliticization of history, as much as possible. Let the historians do their jobs, and let the diplomats and military officers do theirs. And, let's try not to connect these so much.

I would like to talk about a few of the elements that have been constructive and maybe less constructive in this conflict.

Outside activity: I don't believe that the international community, whether it is in the form of honorable organizations like your own, or in terms of governments, have always been constructive in this conflict. Many times, Baku and Yerevan have not taken enough responsibility because they have been waiting for initiatives from the OSCE, or waiting for initiatives from outside groups, assuming that they – the outsider – would take care of them.

Also, there is an element of naiveté that I think pervades many of the politicians in the Caucasus who assume that the elements of international law and international justice will be applied to their region. In fact if we look at international law, it has not been very helpful for this conflict. Each side has been armed with international law with the idea that they possess absolute justice. One has the side of self-determination; the other has the side of territorial integrity. So really, international law, with these two conflicting ideas, has actually only put the two sides to the struggle further apart, each one believing that they have the just cause. Rule of law could be more important in the Caucasus but not necessarily international law.

A key element in the recent development and in the recent, I would say, breakthrough or successes in the Nagorno-Karabagh negotiations has been the relative cooperation between the US and Russia. This conflict has certainly, certainly in the past been inflamed and escalated due to the rivalries and due to the intervention of outside powers, especially in the early 1990s in the case of Russia.

But Russia has changed in many aspects over the last decade. And we must allow Russia a learning curve. We must make sure this is no *Pax-Americana* peace. Any peace to succeed in the Caucasus must be one that Russia feels it can have a stake in, will not undermine, and will try to protect. It has to be seen by Russia as serving some of its interests.

The same is true of Iran and Turkey. They must also feel that they have a stake in this peace, and to feel that "While it may not be our best deal, or our ultimate deal, it is something that is worth preserving and not undermining."

Many times when the US assesses the region, one of the problems in its policy is that when there is a gap between what it would like to see in the region and what it sees in the region, it tends to believe in what it would like to see in the region. Many times, this creates incorrect policies.

Leading up to an agreement: what do we need to do? First, each side must accept the principle that neither side will dictate to the other its history or its identity. Each side will be responsible for its version of history, its origins, the numbers of people it had in the region at different periods of time, prevailing leaders, prevailing cultures, which song came first, which poem came first. Each side is responsible for its own version of its history and its culture.

Second rule. Let's depoliticize what we can, such as history, such as coffee. In January, I visited in the Caucasus. I was always in a dilemma every time I was offered coffee, because each time I was offered a political dilemma: "Would you prefer instant coffee, or alternatively Turkish coffee, or Armenian coffee?" Every time I went to drink, I was making a political statement. Until I went to a home in Yerevan and met one of the disciples of Gerard Libaridian, who is right here in this room, and she asked me, "would you like instant coffee or Eastern coffee?" Finally, while through my coffee choice I was making a statement, but not so bold. I believe we must, taking the lessons from Mr. Libaridian, try as much as possible to depoliticize anything we can, such as coffee.

Such as names of cities. Would it hurt us so much to say in the same breath sometimes Stepanakert/Xankendi or Shusha/Shushi. Is it so difficult? Do we have to make it an issue? Every time that we use these words, we are making some sort of statement. Try to depoliticize the names as much as possible.

In January, in visiting the region, I met the foreign ministry officials in both Armenia and in Azerbaijan. I often met ones who read fluent English, read the Internet daily, and are aware of all the major newspapers and newsgroups. And a shock came to me when I would sit with these same officials one day in Yerevan and one day in Baku, that people who had the same information flow and are fluent in a number of languages, had completely different assessments about their strategic environment.

I found this to be a completely dangerous sign. If you are going to assess your enemy, your rival, however you want to refer to him, you have to have an idea about the information he has, and how he or she will react to it. But if the information is completely different, or at least the interpretation – strength of Russia, reaction of Iran, anything in the strategic environment - we are operating in a certain vacuum.

Let's take this into consideration. As much as people look and sound the same in Azerbaijan and Armenia, they are interpreting their basic strategic environment in completely different ways. This is one element we have to work on. It is not a matter of cultural communication, but more a definition of the basic elements and information in their strategic environments.

We should emphasize this area of how to at least see the basic data in our strategic environments in the same way. And place less emphasis on second track diplomacy. This is not a situation of ancient hatreds or even any hatreds. If you put an Armenian and an Azerbaijani together in almost any social situation, they will probably have more in common and enjoy speaking more to each other than with a European or an American. They don't need the American to come in and teach them

how to be nice to each other. They realize that this is a good thing. They don't have to be taught this. Let's put those same resources into finding proper security arrangements and proper communication on security.

In contrast though, maybe Stepanakert/Xankendi and Baku do actually need some opening of these second-track ties, and the creating of contacts between each other, because they have not had these same kind of contacts like Yerevan and Baku over the past decade.

Another point. We must be quite precise in any of our words in dealing with the Caucasus, or anywhere. I will give you a recent example. After Key West, in the State Department report, Ambassador Cavanaugh was asked about Iran's role in the conflict. He said, "We are regularly updating Iran on the conflict." This one statement led to a flurry of reports and investigations. When he said "we," he meant the OSCE, not the State Department. For the OSCE to be updating Iran is a very regular event. They update Iran on all bordering states and conflict zones. They have frequently updated Iran on the case of Afghanistan, for instance. But because he had said, "We" and "we" was not clear, there was a flurry of media attention in Armenia and Azerbaijan, which interpreted the very idea that Iran was being updated that "This means it is about swaps. They are telling the Iranians about the border. They are giving back Meri. We have to fight for this.."

The Iranian press, taking the lead from the Azerbaijani, also began to interpret that the sides were discussing "swaps" just on the basis of the statement that Iran was being updated. Tehran's press didn't even realize that the source of the news was from an open State Department press conference, and, instead quoted the Azerbaijani press as the source. You can see that through one imprecise word, or one interpretation of a word, we have whole conspiracies and myths. Fear of borders being changed emerged just by one little interpretation, saying "we" vs. saying OSCE or vs. saying the State Department. So we must be very careful, and we must clarify.

Next point. Democracy can have its drawbacks at times of negotiations. Democracy is a great system. But democracy doesn't have to mean populism and tyranny of the masses. Leaders were elected to lead. I call upon Aliev and Kocharian to demonstrate their leadership as invested to them by their publics. Not to do necessarily the popular thing but to do the right thing. The right decisions. The bold decisions such as De Gaulle had to make in Algeria, such as Rabin had to make in the Oslo Agreement. They are not necessarily popular, at least not initially. We must ask the leaders to take the risk to lead, and to take the public mandate they were given.

Market the peace. We must all take a role in marketing the momentum for peace and giving the leaders the courage to say that there is desire from the region and there is desire from the facilitators for peace in the region. Public opinion is not some objective factor like the length of the days or the changes of seasons. You can create and influence public opinion in each of your societies.

I call on the leaders of the political parties - the political opposition in Azerbaijan and Armenia. You have a great opportunity, now, don't you? If Kocharian and Aliev will sign some sort of agreement, you have something you can politicize, and you can very easily attack each of these leaders. Maybe it will be your turn to get into power. So I am going to ask each of you, in Armenia: Ashot Manucheryan, Vladimir Darbinyan, Aram Sargsyan, and Vazgen Manuyan. And in Azerbaijan: Ali Kerimov, Etibar Mammed, and Isa Gambar. We have three choices. One is war. One is status quo,

where Armenia daily loses population to emigration. And 800,000 Azerbaijani refugees continue to sit in awful conditions.

Or we have the situation of a lousy peace, where both sides are going to feel they gave up something sacred to both of them. And both sides are going to feel they got a bad deal. Of those three options, can you, opposition leaders, when you go to attack the presidents if they will make the move for peace, can you with a clear conscience say that what you are doing, what you are calling for is still better than the other alternatives? Again, the alternatives we have are a difficult peace, a war, or status quo.

If you attack the leaders, are you sure you are doing it for the sake of your peoples and for the sake of the area? Or, is it for your own political gain? Can you sleep better with the other options, which are war or status quo, than the peace option, with all its drawbacks, that you might have on your table?

I call upon diaspora leaders as well: Armenian diaspora and Azerbaijani diaspora. On one hand, we are very lucky nowadays that we can have ties to a land that we may not be citizens of, or residents of. But I ask these same diaspora leaders and activists everywhere: can you pay the price of calling for militant positions when your children do not serve in the military there? When you do not pay the price that the homeland will pay for the lack of peace? Can you feel comfortable with that position?

I call upon Armenia. Many in Armenia are saying, why can't things just stay as they are. What is so bad with the current situation with Karabagh? The status quo is bad for Armenia as well. You are losing too many people to emigration. How long can this persist? Maybe you have to change the status quo. I also call upon Armenia to remember that Azerbaijan is not a failed state. I heard this phrase many times while visiting Armenia: "Well, Azerbaijan is a failed state." As if to dismiss any sort of military threat from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is far from a failed state. It is getting stronger on a daily basis. And war is not something to play around with.

On the same level, I also appeal to Azerbaijan. You fought a war once; sometimes you call it a battle, but you lost it. Going to war does not necessarily mean gaining something. And even when you win a war, often the human price is so great in terms of invalids and deaths that it is not worth the price of winning the war. So yes, the war option is there. But think carefully. Is it really worth the price?

All of us should encourage direct trade among bordering provinces even if state-to-state trade and cooperation has not been formally established. Direct trade would be useful in the border areas between Armenia and Turkey, Nagorno-Karabagh and Baku, and between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the territory of Georgia.

I would like to commend the refugees: Yerevan for quickly absorbing those who came to Armenia into society, and not creating an Armenian refugee situation. In Azerbaijan, I commend the refugees for not having a self-imposed status of victimization. I believe that being a refugee is a subjective state of mind despite the difficult conditions. I ask Edward Said, who lives in a nice home in New York, why he chooses to be a refugee.

My children are grandchildren on one side of Holocaust survivors, and on the other side Pogrom survivors from Europe. My children have never been raised to think that they have lost something, that they are refugees, or that they have anything to look back upon, but only to the future. So I commend the refugees in Azerbaijan; I never once heard from their mouths anti-Armenian phrases or talk about violence. They concentrate on only their day-to-day existence and the education of their children, and not on revenge.

So to all us, not to emphasize victimization. **We can remember the past, but we do not have to live in it.**

An agreement. Let's hope than an agreement will work on a settlement based on opening the region and relaxing the borders, not on creating new ones. If states like Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are to survive in a very difficult strategic environment and with many challenges, they need to be as open and as cooperative as possible. Why should we wait for hours on the Red Bridge when trying to pass between two friendly countries like Georgia and Azerbaijan?

Think of creative options. A positive aspect of the Oslo Agreement was the formation of joint patrols, between Israelis and Palestinians. In the past, we thought about a peace agreement as separating peoples, creating new borders and putting up new forces. Something very positive that for a few years was useful in the Oslo Agreement was joint Palestinian-Israeli patrols. Could this not be useful in this area?

Let's remember that most of the Azerbaijani refugees are from areas outside of Karabagh, areas that I believe Armenia does not intend to hold or even claim to hold. Can we not allow most of the refugees at a very early stage to return to their homes in safety, and get a momentum for success in the region?

Implementation stage: As part of the implementation of peace in the region, diplomatic relations, trade and cooperation between Turkey and Armenia will be necessary. This will be essential to any solution. Only when Armenia feels safe, and when it has cooperation with Turkey, will it be in the situation where it perceives that it has more political alternatives in the area.

Europe: Of course we are going to need you for post-agreement recovery. If, hypothetically, an agreement is signed at the beginning of the summer, winter will come to the area soon. Refugees will have to be returned quickly for peace momentum to emerge and for people to feel that they got something out of the deal. Those homes will have to be built or rebuilt quickly.

Peacekeepers: I don't believe in them. If you are a disinterested party, and thus an objective defender, then your soldiers are not going to fight and die to preserve the peace. And if you are so engaged that you really care about the peace and the situation there, you probably cannot be an uninterested party, and should be considered in actor in the conflict. I don't think that a country that is highly engaged in the region, such as Russia, even if it is an eager candidate, should form the peacekeepers in this region. Whatever we do, we must make it clear that we cannot just change the colors of soldiers' hats. If there will be some sort of peacekeepers in an initial stage, they should not stay for long and not be composed of actors in the region. But again, I do not think this will be good for the region. I believe one of the best elements for guaranteeing the peace –is the threat of war. If the sides realize that violations of the peace agreement could lead to renewed hostilities

between them, they will act to preserve the peace between them. If each side feels they have an international shield to preserve the peace, even if they violate it, this may radicalize behavior. I believe that the people of the region can be the guarantors and keepers of the peace, and not external bodies.

My final message is: People of the region, take responsibility. Do not wait for international mediation. Do not count on international justice. Like I tell my children all the time when they are very idealistic, "Sorry, but life is not fair." Do not count on anyone else for your security.

If you will allow me to be a little sentimental at the end, I would like to quote Nizami. Why the poet Nizami? Well, first because both Azerbaijanis and Iranians claim him as their own, and thus he is a great symbol of the fluidity of culture in this region. Nizami was of Turkic-Azerbaijani origin from Ganja, but wrote mostly in Persian. And, this is what this region is about, is actually about fluidity of cultures, right.

Well Nizami, in his famous Khamsa, which in the East is considered comparable to the works of Shakespeare, and many of the stories are very similar, wrote about great love. One of the most important parts of the Khamsa is about the love of Xosrow and Shiren. Some have interpreted Xosrow to be an ancestor of today's Turks in the Caucasus, and Shiren as a woman who is an ancestor of Armenians. Nizami ended his epic Khamsa relating to the great love between Khosrow and Shiren. The message and the words would be found parallel in Shakespeare. Nizami wrote about Khosrow and Shiren, "This is a very sad and a very beautiful story, because it is the story of love." Thank you.

TOM DE WAAL (Chair): Thank you Brenda. I think that was one of the most eloquent presentations I have heard on this subject. My first thought was that some of your phrases should be made into slogans, then printed into thousands of copies and hung up on the streets of the Caucasus. "A lousy peace is the best option." "Is the war option worth the price?" "We can remember the past, but we don't have to live in it." "History is a choice." "Life isn't fair." These are all very important phrases which I think need to be repeated and remembered.