
The conflict is defrozen

Haykakan Zhamanak , Armenia - 12/8/2008

The dramatic developments in neighbouring Georgia in recent days and the hostilities which claimed thousands of human lives are bound to cause serious concern and analysis in other countries of the South Caucasus.

In fact, we witnessed how one of the frozen conflicts in the region exploded in a few hours and this will affect settlement of other conflicts. As the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict was almost equated to the South Ossetian, Abkhaz and Dniester conflicts from the point of view of international perception and presentation during the last years, the events that took place in South Ossetia are crucial for Nagornyy Karabakh and Armenia in this regard. Analysts believe that the practice of military settlement of the regional conflicts after a ceasefire that lasted for years is causing concern.

Comments by Azerbaijani, Armenian analysts

Meanwhile, there are opinions that irrespective of the outcome of the events in Georgia, they have already created a precedent, successful or not, and can influence to some extent the further policies of the states involved in the regional conflicts. We have already reported that that during the first hours of the hostilities a certain inspiration and activity could be seen in Azerbaijan, statements were made from there that Azerbaijan should also follow Georgia's example - to restore its territorial integrity. Yesterday [11 August] Azerbaijani political analysts and experts discussed this topic again. In particular, an Azerbaijani political analyst Ilgar Mammadov, called upon the Azerbaijani government to provide support to Georgia, as "Georgia's success is important for Azerbaijan". He said that "Azerbaijan should provide full support to Georgia, and military support, if necessary. Only in that case we will manage to oust Russia from the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan can have an advantage in the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict and carry out hostilities - to settle the conflict only after it ousts the Russian Federation."

An Azerbaijani military expert, Yasar Cafarli, said that Azerbaijan's economic strengthening irritates Russia, and while choosing its actions, Azerbaijan should take into account that Russia can at any moment attack Azerbaijan as well. "The Kremlin understands that if it yields South Ossetia to Georgia, then a number of defeats will follow this, separatists will be destroyed in Abkhazia, in Nagornyy Karabakh and Dniester," Azerbaijani expert Akbar Hasanov wrote yesterday [11 August].

The reaction to what goes on is, naturally, much more reserved in Armenia. A political expert, Aghasi Yenokyan, believes that it cannot be ruled out that as a result of the events in Georgia we will see some change in Azerbaijan's policy; what is important is that the war has brought about a few tendencies. The first one is the tendency of military settlement of territorial disputes, the second one - creating an updated and changed notion of sovereignty of the states in the region. "Russia did not take into account any sovereignty, and we mean not just that of South Ossetia, but the hostilities carried out beyond its territory [in Georgia proper]," Yenokyan says, adding that Azerbaijan might act like Georgia.

Official reaction

However, although opinions of political scientists and experts are very important in such cases as they create a general understanding of the sentiments in a specific country, official statements made by governments are

much more important. The Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministries made corresponding statements on Friday [8 August]. Azerbaijan backed Georgia's territorial integrity and announced that the South Ossetian issue should be settled based on the principle of territorial integrity. The Azerbaijani government also announced that they back the actions of the Georgian government in South Ossetia and find those lawful and in compliance with international law norms. The Armenian Foreign Ministry expressed concern over what happened in Georgia and voiced hope that the issue will be settled in a peaceful way.

[Passage omitted: The statement of the breakaway Nagornyy Karabakh republic which calls to stop bloodshed and says that military settlements of such issues has no future]

The head of the Nagornyy Karabakh's parliamentary committee for foreign relations, Vahram Atanesyan, said yesterday [11 August] at a news conference that Georgia's attempt to return South Ossetia has failed. Atanesyan described Georgia's steps as an adventure, and Russia's reaction as an equivalent. Atanesyan did not rule out that the NKR government can provide humanitarian assistance to South Ossetia, and also stressed that that the events showed that attempts of military settlement of conflicts are doomed [to fail].

The most important one is the statement made yesterday [11 August] by the spokesman for the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry [Xazar Ibrahim] about continuing the negotiations on settling the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group. Accordingly, Azerbaijan is not going to review the issue of Russia's chairmanship in the OSCE Minsk Group due to the position of the Russian government in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. However, what complicates the situation is that the positions of countries can change at any time.
