
Negotiations Between Armenia and Azerbaijan are About Chronology

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The Secretary of State of the United States Hillary Clinton has arrived the capital of Azerbaijan Baku, before her trip to Yerevan to make fresh push for Nagorno Karabakh conflict resolution. Azerbaijan and Armenia have agreed on the basic principles, but the devil is in the details.

The basic principles, set forth by the mediators, do not discuss the details. They are simply principles upon which Armenia and Azerbaijan should resolve Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The essentials of those principles are the following. Armenia is called to withdraw its troops from the 7 regions surrounding Nagorno Karabakh (those areas are secured by Nagorno Karabakh army and not by the Armenian army.). Another principle calls for a land corridor between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Refugees should be allowed to return to their original dwelling places. The final status of Nagorno Karabakh is decided in a referendum.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have welcomed these principles. It seems that if there is a plan on the table and the conflicting parties have welcomed the plan the final peace should not be far from the reach. Yet, the negotiations got stuck, as the conflicting parties are trying to agree on the chronology of these events.

Azerbaijan's position is that first 7 surrounding regions of Nagorno Karabakh should be liberated. Then communications open. The refugees should be allowed to return. In the meanwhile Nagorno Karabakh keeps a special interim status, and then at some unspecified point in time there can be referendum about the final status. Several months ago the president of Azerbaijan speaking to the Russian Vesti program had said this interim status can last as long as 100 years. Also, the current constitution of Azerbaijan does not allow a referendum in only one section of the country.

Armenia's position is that this will not solve the problem and will only prolong it. Armenian side, which currently represents Nagorno Karabakh in the negotiations process, currently brings forward only two main points. First, the status of Nagorno Karabakh is the central issue and is at the core of the problem. Armenia says we need start with the status and not prolong it. The second is the return of the refugees. Armenia says it understands the need for the return of the refugees, but says we will open another set of problems when Azeri refugees return to live in the same villages with Armenian at a time when the two nations are still in the state of war. What are the laws that will govern both communities. How will Azeris live with Armenians when every day Azerbaijan reminds of using force if negotiations fail? Here we see logic in Armenia's approach.

The last thorny issue for the both sides is the details of the referendum. Who will have the right to vote? Is it Nagorno Karabakh's present population? Is it the Armenian majority and the Azeri minority, or as Azerbaijan wants to see, the entire Azerbaijan? If the entire Azerbaijan is going to vote of how Nagorno Karabakh Armenians are going to live, this does not make sense. If Armenian majority and the Azeri minority of Nagorno Karabakh are going to vote about the future status of the region this makes sense. However, Azerbaijan does not like this approach as it thinks it will lose Nagorno Karabakh.

This where where Secretary Clinton wants to be helpful. She will try to mend faces and convince the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia that final peace is a better option than long lasting negotiations with daily threats of war resumptions.
