

Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians Fall Victim to the EU's Dependence on Hydrocarbons and Pashinyan's Betrayal

By [Steven Sahiounie](#)

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More than 30 years of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is drawing to a close, and Armenia is the loser.

On September 19, following the death of four soldiers and two civilians, Azerbaijan pushed aggressively to control Nagorno-Karabakh, and the next day the Armenian forces agreed to lay down their arms in the Armenian majority enclave.

Azerbaijan previously had waged a war of attrition to cut off supplies to the 120,000 Armenians. Despite Russian peacekeepers being stationed there since December 2022 tasked with keeping the Lachin corridor open, Azerbaijan blockaded the narrow mountain road which links Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh.

On September 18, Red Cross trucks carrying food and medicine finally gained access to Nagorno-Karabakh.

"An agreement has been reached on the withdrawal of the remaining units and servicemen of the Armenian armed forces ... and on the dissolution and complete disarmament of the armed formations of the Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army," the Armenian authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh said in a statement.

Europe's insatiable demand for energy is in part supplied by Azerbaijan's gas and oil resources.

In January, the EU signed a natural gas import agreement with Azerbaijan, as the EU moved away from Russian supplies. Within months, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, announced a new agreement to double gas imports from Azerbaijan while visiting Baku.

In response to the new agreement, about 50 French legislators denounced the move that would place Europeans dependent on a state with war-like aspirations, referring to Azerbaijan's aggression against the Armenians.

Energy analysts have pointed to the West's hypocrisy in the conflict, as they negotiate gas and oil at the expense of the Armenians.

Azerbaijan saw their chance to finish off a decades-long dispute with Armenia as the West turns to Baku for oil, and turns away from Russia.

In the middle of the conflict is Nikol Pashinyan, the Prime Minister of Armenia since 2018.

He faced intense domestic pressure in 2020 after he agreed to a Russian-brokered ceasefire that ended a 44-day war between ethnic Armenian, and Azerbaijani forces who had achieved victory, after taking back a third of the breakaway territory, and an additional seven surrounding districts.

Pashinyan had faced calls to resign in 2020, as angry crowds protested in the capital Yerevan after the defeat then, and he faced thousands of protesters in Yerevan on Wednesday asking him again to resign, after viewing the surrender of the breakaway region as a final humiliating defeat.

In the past, Pashinyan reversed his position and recognized that Nagorno-Karabakh was part of Azerbaijan and gave up on his previous claim. However, he demanded that Azerbaijan agree to protect the rights and security of the Karabakh Armenians, but Azerbaijan refused.

Pashinyan is pursuing a pro-Western policy, and in early September, Armenia announced humanitarian aid to Ukraine and undertook a joint military exercise with the US, which began on September 11.

Pashinyan's critics have said he has moved towards the US and NATO, and away from his former alliance with Russia, which is a neighbor and has peacekeeping forces in the area. The Armenian people look at results, and have seen Pashinyan's failures mounting up, while they have seen a lack of any American involvement in their conflict, which leaves them wondering what is driving Pashinyan's decision to go West, when the US has not helped Armenia other than bread crumbs in humanitarian aid, and the EU are depending on Azerbaijan.

Armenia ceded territory in and around Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan after the 2020 defeat, and 2,000 Russian peacekeepers were placed to guarantee the safety of the Armenians as stipulated in the ceasefire, but despite their presence armed skirmishes continued on the border.

Washington provides security assistance to Azerbaijan through a presidential waiver to Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. US ally Israel is Azerbaijan's principal supplier of weapons. The Azerbaijani army is trained by the Turkish military, another US-NATO ally. Despite having an awful human rights record, Azerbaijan is a strategic partner for the West.

The US is not allied to Armenia, but has diplomatic relations, although Washington is not legally bound to Yerevan by any bilateral or multilateral security agreements

Experts are left wondering: why is Pashinyan moving away from Moscow, when Washington has never moved towards Yerevan? Are there secret promises from the US only Pashinyan knows about? Will a coup unfold in Yerevan to remove Pashinyan before he can reveal his motives?

In 1921, Stalin separated the predominantly Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia, and attached it to Azerbaijan, and this became a permanent tension between the two.

During the USSR collapse in 1991, the separatist Republic of Artsakh declared independence from Azerbaijan; however, it was not internationally recognized. In 1994, Armenia won the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, resulting in the de facto independence of the Republic of Artsakh, but Azerbaijan refused to acknowledge it.

The Armenian defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh is a decisive victory for Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, who has made the reunification of his country a priority.

Azerbaijan had taken advantage of the significant revenues from oil and gas to build up their military arsenal from Turkey, and this turned the tide in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, Azerbaijan's forces overpowered the Armenian military in the conflict which Baku had launched with the support of Turkey.

On Tuesday, the Turkish Defense Ministry admitted they are supporting Azerbaijan, but denied playing a direct role in the recent victory at Nagorno-Karabakh.

On Wednesday, Hikmet Hajiyev, Azerbaijan's presidential foreign policy advisor said they aimed to "peacefully reintegrate" Armenians living in the separatist region and that it supports a "normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan".

At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Wednesday, officials were warning about a possible "ethnic cleansing" of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan is Muslim as well as their ally Turkey, who has a history of genocide against the Armenians in 1915, as well as the Syrian Christians.

In March 2014, the US sponsored Radical Islamic terrorists crossed from Turkey into the Armenian village of Kessab, Syria. They raped, killed, and occupied the village for three months during which every home and business was destroyed. In April 2014, Ahmed Jarba, the president of the political wing of the US sponsored Free Syrian Army visited Kessab to congratulate his troops, and then left Syria to sit in the Oval Office with President Obama. After almost a decade, Kessab still sits destroyed and the Armenian residents have almost all gone due to US sanctions preventing any rebuilding, donations, or investment for recovery. A similar fate may await the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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Steven Sahiounie is a two-time award-winning journalist. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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