

Security: Top priority for restoring normality of life in Artsakh after war



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Any discussion of any post-war issue, in one way or another, starts with the question of security. Issues ranging from organization of resettlement of forcibly displaced persons to attempts of reconstructing the 'normality' of life in Artsakh, all start with the issue of security, and security has many dimensions: security of roads, security of communities, security of food and water, policing and so on.

Urgency of defining a new security paradigm

Obviously, we face serious security challenges, whereas persisting uncertainty in almost everything is overwhelming. It is absolutely unclear what the security paradigm of Artsakh is today. From a historical perspective, it was the USSR security, which was quite functional and ruled out wars. Then there was operation 'Koltso', in the result of which we took the ownership of providing security for Artsakh and Armenia, and thus the war in Artsakh broke. The latest security paradigm implied that Armenia was the guarantor of Artsakh's security. The paradigm cracked during the war, resulting in the current uncertainty.

Here is an instance supporting the mentioned statement: immediately after the three parties signed the ceasefire agreement, when all our compatriots in Artsakh were in total uncertainty, one of the leaders of Artsakh communities posted on Facebook: "Hey, people, are you ready to become a Russian province?", and the reactions of many people to the question were quite positive. Explanation is in security. Today what people need the most is security and they want to understand what the guarantee of not firing again will be. If Russia is the one to provide such a guarantee, even if it is a public statement by its political leaders, people at both sides of the conflict line start to hope. However, one needs to understand that such guarantees cannot work in a long term, because it is practically impossible to satisfy the interests of both sides. Therefore, the new security paradigm should be based on the following realities and risks:

1. For the last 20-30 years Azerbaijan publicly employed various historical revisionist hypotheses, for instance, "Armenians have never lived in these territories". Anti-Armenian propaganda was very strong, and it will be very difficult, if not practically impossible, to transform its consequences.
2. Another strong risk is the intervention of Turkey. There are numerous uncertainties regarding Turkey's foreign policy. The Turkey of today demonstrates quite a different behaviour from the one it used to in the past. After this war, the situation will change even more, and obviously, Turkey's influence on Azerbaijan will increase drastically.
3. Ilham Aliyev has already started to talk about the absence of Nagorno Karabakh conflict. He talks of Nagorno Karabakh being 'our land', Armenian churches being 'our churches' and so on. Perhaps some time in the future people in Azerbaijan will realize that the reality is much more complex, that the reality painted by the leadership now is somewhat different, and then certain actions might ensue.
4. We should be able to ensure such a status for Nagorno Karabakh that it will ensure guarantees of its security. To guarantee and ensure security, urgent actions are required today, specifically, organising the return and/or resettlement of forcibly displaced people; continuing negotiations; seeking and confirming more detail-oriented solutions. We should define the new security paradigm immediately, even yesterday. Previously we were



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considering ourselves to be the guarantor of our security. This approach does not work today. We cannot exclude the possibility that some time in the future it may become functional again, but presently, this does not seem to be an option.

Security on the ground; security in the 'routine'

"Azeris have stoned the Armenian cars on the Goris-Stepanakert road"; "Armenian drivers were threatened for overtaking on the road"; "A sniper from Shushi was hitting street dogs in Stepanakert"; "Azerbaijanis do groceries in supermarkets of Stepanakert accompanied by Russian peacekeepers"... Such information circulates among Artsakhis back in Artsakh and those still in Armenia. Often, such information reaches Artsakh from Artsakhi people in Armenia.

Such information gets more frequent, and it is not either confirmed or rejected by official sources. With no visible results, the situation fails to allow people to form a perception that things are under control. Artsakhi people claim that the peacekeepers act professionally and respond fast when they are referred to for whatever issue. The same, however, cannot be claimed about the public agencies in Artsakh. In the result, uncertainties keep increasing and anxiety about future deepens. In such conditions the chain of urgent actions, ranging from the return of forcibly displaced people to normalising the life back in Artsakh, will be implemented rather slowly. It will be very difficult to persuade people to act in line with any long-term strategy. This is the time for clear messages, future vision and fast and professional work. However, it is unclear whether this will ever become a reality or not.

The policy brief is elaborated based on the results of the online off-the-record discussion "Safety and security of life and social and economic activity in communities bordering with Azerbaijan", held on 07.12.2020. The online discussion brought together state officials, independent experts and representatives of international development partners. The opinions expressed in this policy brief are ICHD's and do not reflect the views of UNDP.

