

Liberated Karabakh

Policy Perspectives by
the ADA University Community

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Preface

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This book is being published on the first anniversary of the end of the Second Karabakh War. During this war, which lasted 44 days, Azerbaijan liberated Karabakh: a territory that more or less encompasses the former Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and its seven surrounding regions. This liberation—achieved through a combination of military and diplomatic success—brought to a definitive end an occupation that had unequivocally violated the Azerbaijani constitution and directly contravened international law. One could thus conclude that as a direct result of the war's outcome, de jure and de facto realities have again achieved congruence after having been in opposition for nearly three decades.

The book's formal or exoteric intention is provided in its subtitle: to serve as a platform for members of the ADA University community to provide their respective perspectives on the topic at hand. This topic can be articulated in general terms with the following interrogatory: what caused the Second Karabakh War to start and end as it did? In other words, what were the proximate affronts and provocations, as well as the immediate grounds, that led to the cessation of a stalemated negotiation process, and how did this bear upon Azerbaijan's military and diplomatic victory and Armenia's military and diplomatic defeat? Directly or indirectly, each chapter concerns itself with, if not providing direct answers to such and similar weighty questions, then at least in laying out one or another of its specific aspects in as straightforward a manner as possible.

Although this is an academic, interdisciplinary book published under the imprint of ADA University Press (at the initiative of our venerable rector, we may add), it is not “academic” in the narrow sense that is often portrayed by contemporary critics as being too abstract or too technical in content for a non-specialist audience. Rather, its contributors examine serious questions concerning some of the most important political issues human beings can encounter, and they do so for the most part using everyday ordinary language devoid of excessive jargon and abstraction, which all too often obscures rather than illuminates what is fashionably called “scholarly literature.” Thus, the reader will find in these pages articles that take seriously the possibility, first articulated by Thucydides so long ago, that an inquiry into the flow of a particular set of political events against a backdrop of war and an elusive quest for peace, as experienced by both belligerents and onlookers, each of whom made judgments and miscalculations in their respective deliberations and actions, can serve as a “possession for all time” (Thuc. I:22.4)—that thinking through why such events happened as they did and not otherwise could produce something more valuable than the “winning of applause of the moment” (ibid.); in other words, that examinations of the Thucydidean sort can provide insight into aspects of human nature that are constant.

Of course, this is not to say that our ambition is Thucydidean in scale or scope, much less depth: certainly, no edited volume should aim so high. But it would be impudent (foolish, even) to dismiss a priori even the possibility that a book like this one could be of use to sober and reflective human beings of this and future generations (Thuc. I:22.4-5; II:48.3)—irrespective of whether such readers had a discernable stake in the conflict over Karabakh itself. Perhaps the most inoffensive similarities between the Thucydidean undertaking and our own is that he then, and we now, are contemporaries of the war and the underlying conflict about which we write, and that the various accounts contained in the respective works produced are confirmable by firsthand participants and eyewitnesses still alive (Thuc. I:22.1-3).

An especially important object lesson in politics that this book drives home—as it happens, one articulated first and thus with great lucidity by Thucydides—is the antithesis between a nation’s dreams and the reality of its power; this antithesis is sempiternally coeval with political life (Thuc. VI:31.5-6; VII:75.6-7; VII:87). In other words, this antithesis—or, at the

very least, the possibility of an inquiry into this antithesis—has been around for as long as human beings have lived together in political communities advancing claims to justice, set down laws in accordance with these claims, and witnessed the perversion of these same claims by those who advanced their particular or private interests to the detriment of the common good of their political community in the name of advancing those same claims. Here we can recall another Thucydidean antithesis, applicable in principle everywhere and always: that of the burdens and responsibilities of statecraft and the necessary acknowledgment of even an accomplished statesman’s inefficacy in the face of grave disadvantage (Thuc. V:85-116). This is, of course, even more applicable in cases involving political communities led by run-of-the-mill politicians. What statecraft requires most, everywhere and always, is a clinical examination of what *cannot* be achieved.

This book is also not strictly speaking academic in that its contributors sometimes seem to follow a view first articulated by Xenophon, famous in some circles as the author of the *Hellenica*—which begins with a claim of continuity with Thucydides’ masterwork—that “it is noble, just, pious, and more pleasant to recall the good things more than the bad” (Xen. *Hell.* V:8.26). This should, of course, not take anything away from an understanding, shared by the likes of these two thinkers and their intellectual progeny, of one’s duty as consisting in seeing political things as they truly are and to communicate this understanding to those who are by nature endowed, and by education equipped, to hear and bear them.

Be that as it may, in the front matter of too many books of the present sort, editors feel the need to summarize the content of the chapters contained within its pages; we have chosen to forgo this recent convention for the simple reason that we do not wish to abridge and hence simplify the respective positions, theses, and arguments of our authors. If nothing else, this is a matter of basic respect for the abilities of our colleagues to put forward their scholarly productions as they see fit, without untoward mediation presented to a readership anterior to the encounter with the texts themselves.

We should like to mention that some of the book’s chapters appeared in earlier form in the pages of recent issues of *Baku Dialogues*, a quarterly policy journal whose institutional home is ADA University, and which, as

Hafiz Pashayev notes in the Foreword to this volume, we re-launched only a few weeks before the onset of the Second Karabakh War.

On a personal level, we can also add that we have visited the liberated areas on several occasions, both together and separately—as have some of the other contributors to this volume. We have seen with our own eyes evidence of unconscionable conduct that took place during the nearly three decades of occupation; and we have come to the considered view that its full impact could only be brought to light in the wake of the Second Karabakh War. Much of what took place in those lands during the last 30 years was successfully and, it seems, purposefully hidden from the eyes of the world. This uncovering is perhaps the most important moral consequence of the war that produced the liberation of Karabakh.

There are of course other consequences that derive from Azerbaijan's victory: geopolitical, legal, economic, social, and environmental. Any reasonable rank-ordering of these would place the impunity of non-compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, the inequity of prohibiting the right of return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and the untrammelled countenance given to lucrative sophistry that misshapes public opinion at or near the top of the list. However that may be, we contend that the chapters in this book, taken as a whole, provide an overview of many of these and similar consequences in a way that should help the reader form a more complete picture of the issues at stake—at least some of which are reverberating far beyond the Silk Road region: this part of the world that looks west past Anatolia to the warm seas beyond, north across the Caspian and the Great Steppe, east to the peaks of the Altai and the arid sands of the Taklamakan, and south towards the Hindu Kush and the Indus valley, looping around to the Persian Gulf and back up across the Fertile Crescent and onward to the Black Sea littoral.

Perhaps the most important long-term consequence of the Second Karabakh War is that it opens the prospect for reconciliation, which is normally predicated on the instauration of a political process that culminates in a genuine, sustainable peace. There are indications that the modes and orders of the peacebuilding project to come could well bear fruit. Obviously, this will take much time and sincere commitment by

Armenians and Azerbaijanis alike (and at least some of their neighbors and perhaps their neighbors' neighbors as well). The 10 November 2020 tripartite statement ended the war but not the underlying conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan: this historic document is, in terms of scope, more than a narrow ceasefire agreement but less than a general peace treaty—taken as a whole, it lays out a binding framework of obligations for establishing an interconnected set of normalization arrangements that for all the world appear to be clearly intended to represent concrete steps towards a comprehensive peace (we invite those who doubt the binding nature of this document to consult Articles 2.1(a) and 7.2(a) of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties). We are aware that some view this document with suspicion, other with cynicism. Given the status quo ante of the interbella period, however, the tripartite statement surely is a welcome improvement. That being said, bringing the conflict to a formal end may well require synchronous efforts by neighbors, regional actors, and outside stakeholders. Working in concert could help tame illusory remonstrances and revanchist ambitions; choosing to work at cross-purposes would not only run counter to the spirit of the tripartite statement whilst producing no reversal of fortune for the vanquished, it would also perpetuate deepening disrespect towards international law, whose demotion under various guises has contributed significantly not only to the breakdown of negotiations that served as a prolegomena to the Second Karabakh War but also to a general breakdown of world order.

The South Caucasus may never have been the world's most important geopolitical theater, but figuring out how to incorporate the new regional order that has emerged as a consequence of the liberation of Karabakh may well turn out to be a bellwether of contemporary international relations. Failure here could accelerate existing acrimonious trends; success may herald the prospect of reaching accommodations elsewhere and, in turn, produce consensus on a sufficient number of new or revised rules of the road to stave off the worse consequences of a precipitously transforming world without precedent in human history. In the past, agreement on the rules of the road led to a general acceptance of the existence of a correlation between extended periods of stability and a common commitment to the legitimacy of an international order based on maintaining the balance of power. The new geopolitical reality in the

South Caucasus that is emerging in the wake of the Second Karabakh War, admittedly in fits and starts, provides the latest opportunity to reaffirm the veracity of this ultimately Thucydidean proposition, alongside so many others.

When the First Karabakh War came to an end, one side rejoiced whilst the other wept; when the Second Karabakh War came to an end, the other side rejoiced whilst the first wept. In a generation's time, both nations have thus known both triumph and tragedy. We therefore dedicate this book to all the victims of the conflict over Karabakh, to their compatriots, and to the forging of a lasting and sustainable peace between reconciling foes.