How Western Powers are Trying to Undo the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace

When Russia recently succeeded in bringing peace between the warring Armenia and Azerbaijan, it sent shockwaves across the West, particularly France and the US, the other two members of the Minsk Group. That Russia was able to mediate negotiations and achieve peace single-handedly and swiftly meant that it was in full control in the South Caucasus. Not only was peace achieved, but the Minks Group, too, was left rudderless. It was a regionally oriented solution, offering no room for extra-regional powers to step in and manipulate the situation to their advantage by pushing for placing an outside “peace-keeping” force in the region. However, while Russia was able to end the war, the outside powers effectively continue to seek ways to exploit the delicate situation by inserting and projecting so-called “ambiguities” and “uncertainties” and the need for “long-lasting” peace. In other words, France, and the US, are trying to re-ignite the war machine to continue their “peace-business.”

On November 17, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told French parliament that Russia must “remove the ambiguities over refugees, the delimitation of the ceasefire, the presence of Turkey, the return of fighters and on the start of negotiations on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh.”

On the same day, the US State Department unleashed its own rhetoric to demonize Russian brokered peace as fragile and “in-complete.” The November 17 statement showed that the US would accept only such solution as achieved through the Minsk Group. It said,

“Ending the recent fighting is only the first step toward achieving a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We urge the sides to re-engage as soon as possible with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-Chairs to pursue a lasting and sustainable political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the Helsinki Final Act principles of the non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the self-determination and equal rights of peoples. As a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States remains fully engaged in this effort.”

On November 20, keeping with their previous statements, the office of the French president said that “We want the Minsk Group to play its role in defining the surveillance”, adding also that “The end of the fighting should now allow the resumption of good faith negotiations [through the Minsk Group] in order to protect the population of Nagorno-Karabakh.”

It is evident that the idea of “protecting” the population and deliberate projection of “humanitarian crisis” is only a way to show how fragile the situation is [under Russian watch] and that conflict can break-out once again.

The US and France, by pushing for international supervision of the ceasefire, are only trying to reduce Russia’s role in the region and enhance their own. In other words, France and the US are playing a zero-sum game whereby a Russian brokered and Russian supervised peace can only be mean a strategic loss for them.

Unlike Turkey, the US and France have no direct stakes in South Caucasus other than their desire to minimize Russia’s role and keeping the so-called “Russian under-belly” unstable. Turkey, on the other hand, is a close ally of Azerbaijan and has been involved in the conflict since it began in September. Turkey, which is already at odds with France over Libya, sees in Azerbaijan a territory of its influence.
While Russia does have concerns about the presence of Turkey-backed militias in the Caucasus, Putin is still coordinating with Erdogan. This is crucial in so far as the Russians want to keep the region free from militant activity.

For the US and France, Russia’s coordination with Turkey could also be the beginning of something the Astana process, which was highly instrumental in pushing Western powers out of Syria, massively reducing the US ability to manipulate Syrian peace process. The Astana process made sure that Syrian peace process was not a ‘made-in-America’ thing.

French officials have said that “We understand that the Russians are talking to the Turks regarding a possible formula, which we don’t want, that would replicate the Astana (process) to divide their roles in this sensitive region.”

Their opposition is not difficult to understand given that a replication of Syrian peace process in South Caucasus will effectively end the relevance of Minsk Group and brush Western powers aside permanently.

As it stands, Iran, too, is coordinating with Russia to speed up the process. It remains that the peace agreement was in many ways influenced by Iran’s idea of ‘regional approach’ to the conflict. Iran’s foreign minister already has made plans to visit both Moscow and Baku to supplement Russian diplomacy to give traction to the peace agreement. Unlike the Minsk group, Iran is suitably placed as a peace-maker. It has friendly ties with states in the Caucasus, and has been closely coordinating with Russia and Turkey through the Astana peace process. It is not an extra-regional power and deeply shares Russian and Turkish interest in keeping the West out of the region.

As a Russia-Turkey-Iran configuration matures and takes shape, the room for the proponents of internationalizing the conflict and peace agreement will shrink. We can expect both France and the US to continue their diatribe in coming weeks and months.

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