

Various Implications of Pelosi's Visit to Yerevan

In Light of New and Emerging Geopolitical Realities

Nargiz Gafarova

Topics of discussion

Geopolitical shift in the South Caucasus and the effect of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi's visit to Armenia on these. The reactions of regional powers like Russia and Iran on Armenia's new foreign policy course. How will Pelosi's visit change/affect the foreign policy of Armenia in the nearest future?

This document summarizes a roundtable discussion that took place on 26 September 2022 at ADA University under the auspices of the Institute for Development and Diplomacy and was hosted by IDD Director Fariz Ismailzade. A list of participants is provided at the end of the document.

The discussion focused on the most recent events and changes related to foreign policy of the South Caucasus states with focus on Armenia and the visit of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi to Yerevan almost immediately after an escalation of hostilities and armed clashes on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan in September 2022 that resulted in hundreds of fatalities. The discussion related specifically to issues like geopolitical changes in the region, possible implications of Pelosi's visit to Yerevan, the impact of the forthcoming November 2022 midterm elections in America and the prospects of Russia's disengagement from the region. The discussion touched upon the growing ties between Armenia and the Western states and institutes. This document concludes with policy implications and recommendations for policymakers in Baku.

Nargiz Gafarova is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Development and Diplomacy at ADA University, where she previously served as Project Manager of its Centre for Excellence in EU Studies.

Geopolitical Shifts in the South Caucasus

Geographical proximity to other theaters and the intensity of events therein make the South Caucasus a crossroad of great powers interests and regional conflicts. Pelosi's visit to Yerevan may shed light on ongoing debates regarding new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus.

Participants noted that, in recent years, Western influence in the region was perceived to have been at an all-time low. This could be well observed during and after the Second Karabakh War, when Russia was the main peace broker and Turkey emerged as a new regional power that allied itself with Azerbaijan. At the same time, as Russia sharpened its focus in the conflict over Ukraine, its engagement in peace negotiations between Baku and Yerevan declined. Partly as a consequence of this, the region's states have started looking more seriously for other partners, which opens the way for heightened engagement by the West.

Summary of Major Points

The discussion flow was lively and was imbued with insightful yet diverging views by the participants. Many agreed that the Second Karabakh War has significantly affected geopolitical circumstances in the South Caucasus. This shift has affected the balance of power in the region.

Participants' views could be divided into two groups along the following lines: those who considered that Pelosi's visit to Armenia did not constitute a danger for Azerbaijan (they attributed her visit largely as being due to domestic American electoral campaign politics and fundraising opportunities); and those who considered the Pelosi visit as representing the crystallization of U.S. foreign policy towards Azerbaijan (they pointed to various postwar developments like the refusal of the U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan to visit Shusha, a rise in the number of visits of senior Armenian officials to Washington, ongoing disagreements between Türkiye and America, displeasure with America's opposition to the proposed 3+3 initiative). Participants disagreed on the state of unity within the West, with some pointing to evidence that while the United States may be more inclined to supporting Armenia, the EU has been more even-handed, as evidenced by the view in Brussels that Azerbaijan is and should remain a strategic energy partner of the European Union—especially in light of the decision to divest the block of Russian hydrocarbons in light of Russia's war against Ukraine.

Another point of discussion was the actual and possible reaction of regional powers, particularly Russia and Iran, to the perceived shift in Armenia's foreign policy course towards the West. The moderator sought to elicit responses from participants with regards to whether such a shift would create tensions between Armenia and both Russia and Iran—Yerevan's traditional strategic allies—in light of the fact that both states are seen as

being in confrontation with the West and thus should not favor Yerevan's aspirations to build a closer relationship with the West. Participants noted the strategic distraction of both Russia and Iran (the former due to the war in Ukraine and the latter due to internal dynamics and unrest), which could affect their ability to focus on ongoing geopolitical processes in the South Caucasus. One participant noted that it seems more difficult to expect Moscow and Tehran to be able to "walk and chew gum at the same time," given the high level of strategic distraction. At the same time, other participants noted, this strategic distraction is precisely the reason why Armenia is looking for new partners, coupled with the perception in Yerevan that neither Moscow nor Tehran supported sufficiently the Armenian position both during and after the Second Karabakh War, including the during the September 2022 clashes along the non-delineated Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Participants also discussed American interests and the directionality of U.S. strategic policy towards the South Caucasus beyond the Pelosi visit. The context examined the distinction between the foreign policy postures of the three South Caucasus states: Azerbaijan is at once a growing energy supplier to the European Union and a state that carefully balances between the West and Russia-Iran); Georgia aspires to both EU and NATO membership yet seeks not to increase tensions with Russia, which occupies two of its provinces; and Armenia is a CSTO member and ally of Iran. It was mentioned that none of the countries have formally joined in the West-led sanctions and export restrictions regime imposed on Russia.

Participants also noted that Pelosi's has helped Armenia in its information war during the September fighting to discredit Azerbaijan. Yet, they noted that this propaganda offensive did not produce any concrete help from the U.S. or other Western actors in supporting Armenia in the ongoing conflict. Some participants underlined the differences between statements made by Pelosi and U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken on the recent fighting. While Pelosi chose to engage with only one side in the ongoing conflict, Blinken has opted to engage with both sides, facilitating high-level meetings between Baku and Yerevan and expressing American support for a peace deal.

Another point of discussion was the heightened pressure on American Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan from both internal and external sources of influence. The context that one participant indicated was that Pashinyan seems to understand that it is in his interest to be remembered as a "peacemaker" rather than a "war loser." This, together with a clinical assessment of the realistic alternatives for Armenia to the pursuit of a peace agreement with Azerbaijan, is what is driving his present course of action, notwithstanding the pressures he faces. Still, this same participant added, these pressures are not insignificant. Peace is closer than it has been in decades, but this does not mean it is close. "At present, peace remains elusive, but by no means illusive," the participant concluded.

Armenia's new foreign policy behavior was described by some participants as an attempt to replicate Azerbaijan's balancing foreign policy. This also explains the tone of Pashinyan's recent speech at the UN General Assembly, which was quite different

from past rhetoric: his speech did not, for example, address traditional Armenian claims to “self-determination” or make arguments regarding “remedial secession.” Armenia’s quest to replicate Azerbaijan’s foreign policy of balancing may result in further moves to improve the country’s stability and, in turn, further alter its foreign policy image.

The discussion came to an end with the assertion by one of the participants that some external actors—e.g., the United States, Russia, and Iran—that had previously or are currently disengaging from the South Caucasus, each for its own reasons has opened the door for other players like Türkiye and the European Union to attempt to increase the dynamism and weight of their respective engagement in the region. This participant concluded that Pelosi’s visit to Armenia should be thus understood as a one-off publicity stunt that will not affect Azerbaijan negatively in the long-term.

Recommendations

- Azerbaijan should increase its high-quality information flow to key foreign stakeholders to increase awareness with regards to its position regarding the ongoing peace process with Armenia and related issues. In this regard, Baku-based think tanks should be additionally supported in various ways.
- Azerbaijan should maintain its multi-vectored and balanced foreign policy in the context of global geopolitical and geo-economic transformations. This is the safest and most prudent course of action to advance the peace process as well as further other Azerbaijani vital interests. Greater diplomatic engagement (utilizing a whole-of-government approach) is an integral part of this endeavor.
- Azerbaijan should more actively push for a rapid resolution of all outstanding issues with Armenia on acceptable terms so as to secure the regional peace dividend and pave the way for permanent strategic stability in the South Caucasus—at least in the context of providing energy security and diversity of supply to the European Union. Azerbaijan has already become a strategic part of European Commission’s REPowerEU Plan, and the achievement of peace in the region will further guarantee the provision of stable, reliable, and heightened gas supplies to the EU.


Institute for Development and Diplomacy


Round Table Discussion: Recent visit of Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the US House of Representatives to the region and its implications for the peace process

September 26, 2022

List of Participants

| No: | Full Name | Title | Organization/ Institution |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | <i>Dr. Fariz Ismailzade</i> | Director | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 2 | <i>Ms. Ayyun Hajiyeve</i> | Deputy Director | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 3 | <i>Mr. Damjan Krnjevic Miskovic</i> | Director for Policy Research, Analysis, and Publications | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 4 | <i>Mr. Akhmed Gumbatov</i> | Head of Energy and Sustainable Development Program | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 5 | <i>Ms. Nargiz Ismayilova</i> | Head of Executive Education | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 6 | <i>Ms. Inara Yagubova</i> | Research Fellow | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 7 | <i>Ms. Nargiz Gafarova</i> | Research Fellow | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 8 | <i>Dr. Maxime Gauin</i> | Research Fellow | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 9 | <i>Ms. Anastasia Lavrina</i> | Research Fellow | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 10 | <i>Ms. Sabina Amirova</i> | Manager, International Projects | Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University |
| 11 | <i>Mr. Zaur Shiriyev</i> | Analyst | International Crisis Group |
| 12 | <i>Mr. Farhad Mammadov</i> | Director | Center for Strategic Studies |
| 13 | <i>Mr. Rusif Huseynov</i> | Co-founder and Director | Topchubashov Center |
| 14 | <i>Mr. Ruslan Suleymanov</i> | Independent political analyst and journalist | |
| 15 | <i>Mr. Fuad Chiragov</i> | Deputy Director | Center for Studies of the South Caucasus |
| 16 | <i>Dr. Vasif Huseynov</i> | Senior Fellow | Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) |
| 17 | <i>Dr. Esmira Jafarova</i> | Board Member | Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) |
| 18 | <i>Dr. Gulshan Pashayeva</i> | Board Member | Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) |
| 19 | <i>Dr. Asim Mollazade</i> | Member of Parliament | Milli Majlis |
| 20 | <i>Dr. Araz Aslanli</i> | Chairman | Caucasian Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies |
| 21 | <i>Mr. Ahmad Alili</i> | Director | Caucasus Policy Analysis Centre (CPAC) |