



The NATIONAL INTEREST

F O U N D A T I O N

Armenia's Foreign Minister Resigns While Azerbaijan Denounces Some Evacuating Armenians for Their Destruction of Property

In the wake of last week's peace deal regarding the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia's foreign minister has resigned while Azerbaijan has denounced the destruction of property by some evacuating Armenians. The recent agreement will allow Azerbaijan to take back control of territories that had been occupied by Armenian forces since the mid-1990s, and has prompted political upheaval in Yerevan, culminating in the resignation of Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and a call for early parliamentary elections. The lead up to the territorial handover outlined in the terms of the agreement has also seen some Armenians fleeing the region controversially burn homes and forestry areas, actions that have been condemned by Azerbaijan. Ultimately, despite the differing ways that it has generally been received by Armenians and Azeris respectively, the Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal's cessation of hostilities there has come as a relief to the international community who feared that the clashes might further devolve into a large-scale and drawn-out regional conflict.

While the agreement has been celebrated as a victory in Azerbaijan, it has been met with outrage and mass protests among many in neighboring Armenia. The incumbent government there is facing a political crisis as a result of massive public pressure in opposition to the terms outlined in the peace deal. In response to this, Armenian President Armen Sarkisian has called for the holding of early parliamentary elections, expressing his sentiment that they are necessary to alleviate the dissatisfaction of the general population and that this viewpoint seems to be overwhelmingly shared by other political leaders and figures in the country as well. So far, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has rejected calls for him to resign and instead has dismissed his foreign minister and presented a 15-point road map of action to take in an effort to address the ongoing crisis. Pashinyan has also acknowledged the difficult concessions made in the 'painful' peace agreement, but has attempted to defend his actions to the public by arguing that signing it was his only option due to the circumstances that had transpired in Nagorno-Karabakh.

By the beginning of next month, Armenia will be required to withdraw from three areas of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding territories, all of which will then come under the control of Azerbaijan. This past weekend, the Azeris postponed one of the regional takeovers until November 25th after a request from Armenia, but denounced the behavior of certain fleeing residents in the soon-to-be transferred area for their destruction of property and wildlife. After the peace deal was announced, some of the citizens planning to evacuate set their houses on fire to vindictively make them unusable for any potential future occupants. In the village of Charektar, multiple homes were seen burning and power lines found cut this past Saturday in advance of the now slightly-delayed transfer. The actions were met with condemnation by Azeri officials, with President Ilham Aliyev labelling them "ecological terror."

In addition to the two parties directly involved, external actors in the region such as Russia and Turkey have played an integral role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict itself as well as the mediation attempts to end the fighting, and will likely continue to do so moving forward. During the course of the armed hostilities, Russia sold weapons to both Armenia and Azerbaijan, while Turkey was clear in its support of the Azeri military efforts – even credibly being accused of sending Syrian proxy fighters to aid their cause. Throughout the negotiation process, Russia benefited from the breakdown of prior ceasefire agreements and was able to establish itself as the main mediating force, ultimately brokering the recent peace deal which was signed by Armenia and Azerbaijan. With respect to the current post-agreement phase, both Russia and Turkey are due to act as the major peacekeeping forces in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Around 2,000 Russian troops are being deployed to the region, while Turkish counterparts are also set to join them at an observation post in order to help monitor the implementation of the ceasefire between Armenian and Azeri forces. Issue analysts point to these developments as an indication that Russia and Turkey have gained more power and influence in the region as a result of the events that have unfolded concerning Nagorno-Karabakh over the past two months.