

Geopolitical, strategic layers of conflict unfolding in Greater Mideast

By Armen Petrosyan
Regional affairs expert

**PERSPECTIVE
EXCLUSIVE**

The change in world order, which started in Eastern Europe with the Ukrainian war in February 2022, as predicted, created prerequisites for substantive changes in some other regions as well. The regions that were inevitably affected by the indirect confrontation between Russia and the West, as well as those where there are frozen deep conflicts and undisguised revisionist aspirations, became the scene of such developments. As it is usually recorded in similar historical periods, such processes usually lead to radical changes in geopolitical and security environments in different regions.

The change in world order, which started in Eastern Europe with the Ukrainian war in February 2022, as predicted, created prerequisites for substantive changes in some other regions as well. The regions that were inevitably affected by the indirect

confrontation between Russia and the West, as well as those where there are frozen deep conflicts and undisguised revisionist aspirations, became the scene of such developments. As it is usually recorded in similar historical periods, such processes usually lead to radical changes in geopolitical and security environments in different regions.

A man carries a giant banner comprising the flags of Iran, Syria, the Palestinian territories, and Hezbollah, during a ceremony marking the anniversary of Iran's Islamic Revolution, in Tehran.

The most obvious examples of the above-mentioned are the substantive changes recorded in the framework of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in the South Caucasus, as well as the multi-layered, hybrid confrontation reactivated in the Middle East by the latest round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Of course, it is hard to see a direct connection in the activation processes of the two conflicts mentioned above. However, the time span of the developments, as well as the highly harmonious strategic cooperation between the main players Azerbaijan and Israel, inevitably generalize the logical chain of events. Hence, the one-day aggression of September 19, 2023, unleashed by Azerbaijani authorities against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, who were exhausted from a 10-month siege, may have been a little surprise for the expansionist Ali-

ev regime, but the calculated maximum result of this political plan led to the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh and the forced displacement of more than 150,000 local Armenians who left Nagorno-Karabakh since 2020. Historical Nagorno-Karabakh inhabited by Armenians for millennia was completely depopulated. The Azerbaijani authorities could not have carried out this operation without shadow deals, especially with the key ally Turkey, as well as with Russia, which assumed the role of guarantor of security in Nagorno-Karabakh by the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020, and deployed its peacekeeping units in the region. One of the obvious components of the mentioned but yet-to-be-made-public agreement was Azerbaijan's refusal to negotiate on Western platforms that compete with

Russia in the historical stage of global confrontation and the renewal of the talk of the implementation of regional routes unblocking process with corridor logic. As for the geopolitical and regional political consequences of the process in Nagorno-Karabakh, they are actually within the logic of the development of the realities recorded by the results of the 44-Day War. That is to say, as a result of the Russia-Turkey-Azerbaijan deal, the positions of another regional player, Iran, are once again hit significantly, as well as the positions of the Western players, Washington and Brussels — who initiated active substantive steps aimed at reducing Moscow's role in the South Caucasus after the start of the Ukraine war. Azerbaijan's successful military-strategic operation could not but inspire Israel, one of its key partners in the large region.

The latter has long sought to find a radical solution to the most explosive and bloody Palestinian issue in the world today, especially concerning the Gaza Strip, which has a population of about 2.4 million Palestinians and is considered one of the most densely populated regions on earth. The surprise large-scale attack of the Islamic organization Hamas against Israel on October 7, 2023, that caused unprecedented human, material, and reputational damage (with more than 1,300 lives and 240 captives taken) became a very opportune occasion for the implementation of such a policy. Of course, the Al-Aqsa Flood military operation contained enormous miscalculations at the tactical level, despite pursuing the most serious strategic goals. In particular, the timing of the attack was also determined to disrupt the Saudi Ara-

bia-Israel normalization process, which is of strategic importance for solving the Palestinian problem. This is a cornerstone circumstance because, for example, the Abraham Accords signed between a number of important Arab countries (such as the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco) and Israel in 2020–2021 with the mediation of the US were rightly assessed by Palestinians as a strategic omission since the logic of acting with a common pan-Arab front against the Jewish state was undermined. It implied a complete solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in one package, exclusively along the borders existing before the 1967 Six-Day War and the creation of a Palestinian state with East Al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital. Especially since the middle of 2023, the Saudi Arabia-Israel normalization pro-



The photo shows the ghost city of Stepanakert in the Nagorno-Karabakh region after Azerbaijani forces evacuated ethnic Armenians in September 2023.



Israel launches an airstrike on an apartment building in Rafah, the last refuge in southern Gaza on October 14, 2023.