The End of the Myth of "Big Brother"? Armenian Collective Memory and Russia's Role in The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

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Introducing the dominant narrative: Russia as the Protector of Armenians

In September 2023, tragic events took place in Nagorno-Karabakh, which became another chapter in the decades-long Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict (1988 to present). At the centre of the conflict is Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian-populated enclave within Azerbaijan, though Armenians often refer to it by its ancient name, Artsakh. The conflict started in 1988, when both Armenia and Azerbaijan were part of the USSR, and Armenians in the region demanded unification with the Armenian Republic. Inter-communal violence followed. As the USSR collapsed, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians declared independence in 1991, and sporadic violence turned into full-scale war. With the support of Armenia, the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic won the First Karabakh War. However in 2020, the Azerbaijani government launched a military operation that ended in a humiliating defeat for Armenians. Russian peacekeepers were subsequently stationed in the region. A few years later, when the Azerbaijani government launched a new operation against the Armenians of the region in September 2023, Russian peacekeepers were unwilling or unable to stop it. The entire Armenian population of the region, which at that time numbered around 100,000 people, was forcefully displaced.

Present-day forced displacements of Armenians reactivated a deep-seated trauma within Armenia's historical memory. About a hundred years ago, in the aftermath of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey, Armenians had to flee the territory of what is today Eastern Turkey. Following the withdrawal of Russian imperial forces from the area, Armenians were left at the mercy of advancing Ottoman troops. Although they took place over a century ago, these events still have huge significance for Armenians. This is due to the geopolitical continuity between the Russian Empire, the USSR, and post-Soviet Russia on the one hand, and a similar geopolitical continuity between the Ottoman Empire and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey on the other, the latter being Azerbaijan's main ally in the current conflict. However, what seemed remarkable about the events of 2023 was not only the speed of the destruction of an entire community but also the complete inaction of the Russian peace-keeping forces stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenian perceptions of Russia have been changing since the Armenia-Azerbaijan War of 2020, and these changes have affected not only Armenia's foreign policy choices, but also the place and significance of Russia within the collective memory of Armenians. In the "44-day war" of 2020, Russia failed to support its traditional ally Armenia when a large-scale war broke out with Azerbaijan, which was supported in turn by Turkey. This lack of direct support, which in Armenia was perceived as Russia's tacit approval of Azerbaijani actions, repeated itself across several more armed clashes after 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh itself and on the Armenia-Azerbaijani border, forming a pattern that culminated in the events of September 2023. The complicity of Russian troops in the events of 2020-2023 came as a shock to many Armenian inhabitants of the region, who, like many generations before them, had been told that Russia was there to save them from attacks by their neighbours.

The image of Russians as 'protectors' and 'saviours', has been deeply embedded in Armenian political mythology throughout the past two centuries, serving in turn as a justification for the domination of the Russian Empire, then Armenia's 'Sovietization', and, finally, for Armenia's neo-colonial dependence on the post-Soviet Russian Federation. This mythology has been largely based on events connected to the rule of the Ottoman Empire, where Russia often positioned itself as the defender of the region's Christian population, par-

ticularly Armenians. This narrative was constructed through official discourse but often contradicted by actual historical developments, leading to severe disappointment and anger among Armenians when Russia either ignored their calls for help or sided with Armenia's enemies. Over time, Armenian intellectuals, dissidents and politicians of different generations have challenged this acquiescent attitude towards Russia, deconstructing its imperialist origins and showing the harm that it had done and continued to inflict on Armenians. Yet, in the last two hundred years, each time Russia temporarily withdrew its support, it nonetheless somehow managed to restore its political influence over Armenia, renewing the very mythology that constructed the image of Russia as the country's 'protector.' Will the tragic events of 2020-2023 turn the tide and become the final nail in the coffin of Russia's mythological image as the 'protector of Armenians'?

Conflict, Narratives, and Empire

The context of Russian Expansion: Armenians under Ottoman and Persian Rule

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is closely connected to the heritage of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, as well as to the policies of post-Soviet Russia. From the point of view of the peoples of the South Caucasus, the Soviet Union can be seen as the continuation of the Russian Empire in a new form, and post-Soviet Russia's policies can be seen as neocolonial.

While empires commonly pursue a 'divide and rule' policy in their territorial conquests, the practical reality of colonial rule is often more complicated. Conflicts and differences are indeed exploited by imperial powers to impose and perpetuate their rule over their subjects but some of these conflicts and differences pre-exist imperial imposition and are not necessarily created artificially by the empire itself. This convoluted relationship between colonial order and social fracture is best described by the words of Maulana Mohammed Ali, a Muslim Indian scholar and activist, commenting on how Hindu-Muslim antagonism had been exploited by the British Empire: "there is a division of labour: we divide, you rule."[1] Imperial policies often exploit differences and heighten conflicts that already exist, in order to, first, conquer and then, execute their domination of the periphery. Furthermore, empires exploit these conflicts to serve their interests, while at the same time engaging in conflict management, or in certain cases, conflict resolution. Thus, empires not only exploit conflict, but can also provide a certain kind of conflict resolution ("Pax Russica" or "Pax Sovietica" in our case). This role of conflict mediator is used by those actors who pursue colonial or neo-colonial policies to achieve the continuity of post-imperial/colonial geopolitical influence, legitimising political meddling and diplomatic authority.

This type of conflict exploitation, management, and resolution, structured the complicated relationship between the Russian Empire and the Armenian-Azerbaijani situation, and, on a larger scale, between Armenians and their various Muslim neighbours.[2] By the late 17th century, Armenian lands were divided between two major Muslim Empires, Ottoman and Persian, administered locally through feudal lords of Persian or Turkic origin. Among the rare exceptions were the Armenian meliks (i.e. semi-independent princes of the Karabakh region). Religion was not just a social marker of identity, but also as a political category that determined the place of indigenous populations in the imperial hierarchy, thus making Christian Armenians inferior in relation to their Muslim rulers and neighbours. This situation created resentment among Armenians, which was articulated predominantly by the educated representatives of Armenian communities in Armenia and across the Armenian diaspora. Time and again, Armenians rebelled against their Ottoman rulers, while missions were also sent to European countries, which asked for help to liberate Christian Armenians from their Muslim overlords.[3]

The Russian Empire as the "Saviour" of Armenians

This inter-ethnic and interreligious tension opened the door to European imperial powers. In the Caucasus the most active was the Russian Empire, which positioned itself not just as the disseminator of modern civilization in the East, but also as the defender of Eastern Christianity. The precarious position of Armenians, Georgians and other Christian communities vis-à-vis their Muslim rulers and neighbours became political tools that were used by the European powers to justify their meddling in

the affairs of the Caucasus and eventual territorial conquest.[4] These concerns were put forward by Russia in its confrontation with the Persian and Ottoman Empires, particularly the two Russian-Persian and the Russo-Turkish wars that took place in the 19th century.[5] After absorption into the empire, Russian rule supposedly solved existing contradictions between various religious and ethnic groups, a claim that became the framework for the imperial cultural narrative and the ideological basis for continuing Russian domination.[6] The cultural-political aspects of imperial conquest thus invite various analogies from other imperial/colonial contexts characterised by divided ethnic and religious groups. While it would be naive to see these differences and conflicts as artificially created, they were nonetheless used by the empire to advance its goals.

After the Russian Empire was replaced by the USSR, the previous Tsarist narrative of 'protecting Christians', gradually became transformed into the Soviet narrative of the 'voluntary accession' of Armenia into Russia. In this narrative, not only was the inclusion of Armenia into the Russian Empire viewed as a positive event, but Russia also took on the role of the defender of the Armenians that had remained oppressed within the Ottoman Empire, an oppression that culminated in the Armenian Genocide of 1915. As is usually the case with such cultural narratives, the Russian 'saviour' role was loosely based on some historical events, while being contradicted by many others. Historian Ronald Suny highlighted that, in reality, Russian policies "fluctuated... from declarations of protection for fellow Christians to persecution of a newly conscious national minority".[7]

This narrative was, however, a useful one during the time of the USSR, both for the Soviet centre and the local Armenian elites. It crucially underscored the peculiar compromise between Armenian nationalism and Soviet hegemony, which was formed by the late Soviet period. Armenians were allowed expressions of national identity, and even of a nationalist agenda, as long as it was not aimed against Russia/the USSR. This narrative faced severe criticism by the end of the Soviet rule, when this compromise began to unravel due to Perestroika and the Karabakh conflict. However, as I will discuss in the next section, a certain version of this narrative returned to the political and ideological space of post-Soviet Armenia in the aftermath of the First Karabakh War (1992-1994) and became the basis for the neo-colonial dependence on Russia that underscored Armenia's post-Soviet experience. Today, as the post-Soviet status quo goes up in flames in the Caucasus, the narrative of the 'Russian Saviour' is once again being questioned in Armenia.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in Post-Soviet Context

The emergence of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict

The short interregnum of 1918-1920, between the break-up of the Tsarist Empire and its re-emergence in the form of the Soviet Union, was marked by the formation of independent republics in Georgia, Armenia, and elsewhere in the South Caucasus. These new republics, though short-lived, ensured that when Russia returned to the region, it had to accommodate the new political and social realities on the ground. This is how Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan became Soviet republics, as political units with many attributes of statehood, rather than simple provinces of Russia. Today, all three countries, though in different forms, consider these short-lived independent republics, rather than the subsequent quasi-autonomous Soviet republics, to be the beginning of their modern nationhood. At the same time, in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the conflict that started in 1918-1920 was frozen, rather than resolved by the advent of the Soviet power. As a result, after a forced pause of over six decades, this conflict re-ignited as the USSR became weaker in the late 1980s.

The Soviet annexation of the South Caucasus in 1920-1921 had a two-fold effect for the existing Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry. On the one hand, the conflict was given a certain resolution, at least for the time being: Nagorno-Karabakh was awarded to Azerbaijan, but an autonomous unit was created there to satisfy some of Armenia's demands. But the way it was resolved institutionalised the conflict and, in effect, froze and perpetuated it. On 5 July 1921, the Caucasus Bureau of the Bolshevik Party decided that the region of Karabakh was to be merged into the Azerbaijani Soviet Republic. In order to sweeten the deal for local Armenians, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region was created in 1923.[8]

Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations Through the Soviet Period

The solution imposed by the Soviets did not remove the contradictions that had led to the conflict in the first place. In the postwar decades, as both Armenia and Azerbaijan were engaging in covert nation-building processes, the contradictions between the interests of the Armenian population of the region and those of the Azerbaijani leadership in Baku appeared again. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh complained about ethnic discrimination and encroachment on their cultural and linguistic rights. They claimed that the Azerbaijani leadership was pursuing a policy that aimed to transform the demographic balance in the region, and pointed to the example of another autonomous region in Azerbaijan, Nakhijevan, where Armenians had constituted almost half of the population in the 1920s and only 1 to 2 % remained by the end of the Soviet period.[9]

In the eyes of Karabakh Armenians, the most obvious solution to these grievances was not the pursuit of civil rights, only possible in a democratic system, but rather the transfer of the region from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. Representatives of the Armenian population of the region, including prominent Communists and intellectuals, repeatedly sent requests to Moscow for the transfer of the region during the Soviet period. These requests were usually supported by Armenian Communist party bosses in Yerevan, and opposed by the leadership of the Azerbaijani Communist Party in Baku.[10] These requests were denied and the general public knew little about them.

The Karabakh Conflict and Movement for Independence in Armenia

The last time such a request was sent to Moscow, however, things got out of control. This was already the age of Perestroika, a wide-ranging campaign for reforming the Soviet Union, launched by Mikhail Gorbachev. An important part of Perestroika policies was 'glasnost', the practice of making issues open and public. So, when their request was once again denied, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh made it public. In February 1988, thousands of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians demonstrated in support of the request in Stepanakert, the capital of the autonomous region. These local protests prompted huge rallies in Yerevan and Baku both in support of, and against, the request. Such large-scale rallies were unprecedented for the Soviet Union, indicating how the regional equilibrium, achieved through imperial-style rule, was compromised.[11]

At the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian society as a whole was overwhelmingly under the influence of the traditional narrative that pictured Russia (in this case the Soviet Union) as the protector and saviour of the Armenian people. However, as the Armenian national movement was becoming stronger, this narrative was increasingly questioned by Armenian intellectuals. Among the most influential voices, Rafael Ishkhanyan deconstructed this idealising narrative to point out that it also implied that Armenians are doomed to extermination by Turkey without Russia's protection. He argued that Armenians needed instead to take their fate into their own hands and become political subjects, dealing with neighbours on the basis of their own national interests.[12] These ideas were shared by many in the leadership of the Armenian National Movement (thereafter, ANM), the main opposition party. As a result of the first democratic elections in 1990, the ANM came to power and, as the USSR collapsed, led Armenia to independence.

However, the ongoing Karabakh conflict shed light on the contradiction at the heart of the ANM's agenda, between the challenges in solving disputes with neighbour states and the need to establish independence from Moscow. In the early stages of the conflict this contradiction was not so obvious, because Moscow was perceived as an ally of Azerbaijan. However, upon Armenia's independence, part of the new political elite, led by first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan, realised that in the long-term this contradiction needed to be resolved. Their solution was to find a compromise with their Azerbaijani neighbours, while at the same time building a pragmatic relationship with the former imperial metropole.[13]

Balancing Independence and Security: Armenia in Post-Soviet Period

However a satisfactory compromise was difficult to find. Azerbaijan and Turkey were not open to the ANM's overtures, while internally the proposal was unpopular among the public in Armenia, especially, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, who worried that then-President Ter-Petrosyan was going to

subordinate their interests in order to find a compromise with Azerbaijan. The seemingly impossible resolution of the conflict turned the ANM government to Russia once again, to fulfil the role of security ally. The very people who had led Armenia to independence eventually concluded an alliance with Russia out of necessity, which included outsourcing important elements of Armenia's security to Moscow. Of course, at the time of the decision the majority of Armenians did not understand it as compromising Armenia's independence and sovereignty. Besides, by the 1990s, Russia was then President Boris Yeltsin's new Russian Federation, a country that positioned itself as a democracy in alliance with the West.

The ANM government, did not abandon its efforts to find a compromise with Turkey and Azerbaijan. However, Ter-Petrosyan's approach was not shared by many, even in his own team. Internal contradictions eventually emerged in February 1998, when Ter-Petrosyan was forced out of power by his own associates. Eventually, he was replaced by Robert Kocharyan, the former leader of Karabakh Armenians, who rejected Ter-Petrosyan's approach as "defeatist", claiming that he could have got a better deal on Karabakh. In reality, the change in political leadership meant that finding a compromise with its neighbours was going to be even harder, since neither Baku or Ankara seemed particularly interested in making concessions. On the contrary, Azerbaijan's leadership was openly stating that its goal was to return to Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories at any cost, including military means, and was arming at a massive pace. Hence, Armenia's dependence on Russia was set to grow.

As the balance of power between Armenia and Azerbaijan tilted in favour of the latter, Armenia's dependence on Russia increased. In the 2000s and especially 2010s this diplomatic alliance increasingly came to look like a neo-colonial dependency. Armenia's reliance on Russia in terms of security gave Moscow a major political leverage, which was used to expand Russia's influence in Armenia across various sectors including the economy, mass media, and culture. Armenia had little choice but to join Russian-dominated security and economic organizations, first in 2002 the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), and then, in 2015, the Eurasian Economic Union. All this was happening notwithstanding Russia's parallel strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, which included massive weapon sales to Azerbaijan.[14] Obviously, Russia's military exports to Azerbaijan angered the Armenians, but these concerns were dismissed by Russian officials, while successive Armenian governments were often unable or unwilling to raise the issue with Moscow, at least publicly.

The End of Russia's Protector Role?

As Armenia found itself once again under Russia's hegemony, the cultural narrative of Russia as protector became re-actualized once more, since it served as the ideological backbone of its neo-colonial dependency. By the second half of the 2010s a consensus formed within Armenia's political and intellectual elites about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which considered the preservation of the status quo the most desirable outcome for Armenia. The consensus entrenched Russia's role as Armenia's main security ally, the alliance viewed as a viable guarantee of security for Armenia and Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is worth noting that this consensus was never openly articulated, but was also rarely challenged by influential actors. Even the revolution of 2018, which brought down Serzh Sargsyan's authoritarian regime, did not initially challenge this consensus. Even though the new Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan and his party Civil Contract, while being in opposition, had been critical of Armenia's relationship with Russia, they changed course after coming to power. Pashinyan did attempt, to a limited extent, to pursue a more equal relationship between Moscow and Yerevan, and challenged Russian influence in Armenia's internal politics. However, Pashinyan did not challenge the basis of Russia's neocolonial influence in Armenia, which was embodied in Russia's role as the sole security ally and guarantor.[15]

While Armenian elites were unwilling to get rid of the mythologized narrative of Russian protection, the course of events once again shattered these illusions in ways that proved painful and dramatic. A large-scale war started in 2020, as Azerbaijan attacked the de facto Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, which prompted Armenia to step in to protect. In what became known as the "44-day War" Armenia suffered a humiliating defeat.[16] Over the course of this conflict, Russia maintained a relatively neutral position, while Turkey fully and openly supported Azerbaijan. Eventually, when an Armenian defeat became obvious, Russia stepped in

and mediated a ceasefire agreement on November 9, 2020, which included the stationing of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, who were also to take control over the so-called Lachin corridor, the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

Once again reality demonstrated that reliance on Russia as sole guarantor of security was not enough to solve Armenia's issues. As Armenian society was slowly recovering from the shock and trauma of defeat, voices calling for a re-appraisal of Russia's role in the conflict became difficult to ignore. Russia's position in the aftermath of the 2020 war increased public criticism, since in numerous ensuing episodes of violence Russian peacekeepers effectively let down the Armenian side, failing to prevent or stop Azerbaijani attacks on Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh or on Armenia itself. However, there was little that Armenia could do about this, as it seemed that Russia's influence and the Russian military were the only thing that stood between defeated and weakened Armenians and new Azerbaijani attacks.

The situation started to change in 2022 when Russia launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as the West started showing more interest in the post-Soviet region in general, and in the South Caucasus in particular. In fact, Western mediation efforts in the Karabakh conflict started before the invasion of Ukraine although, at the time, it was obvious that Russia was the most influential force in the region. In 2022, with Russia overstretched in Ukraine, Western involvement in the Caucasus meant that Armenia was finally getting a chance to move beyond its dependence on Russia. The watershed moment in the Armenia-Russia relationship came in September 2022, a year before the latest clash in 2023, when Azerbaijan launched a large-scale attack on the borders of the Republic of Armenia. At the time neither Russia, nor the Russian-dominated CSTO did anything to help Armenia. On the contrary, Armenia received diplomatic support from the West, as diplomatic pressure on Baku from the United States and the EU helped stop Azerbaijani advances. Soon an EU monitoring mission was placed on the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan. Since then, a process of geopolitical re-orientation has begun in Armenia, which has included not only changes in foreign policy, but also a reappraisal of the Armenia-Russia relationship.

Nevertheless, this change of course in the state of Armenia was not reflected among the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, where the majority continued to pin their hopes on Russian protection. Since November 2020, the presence of close to 2,000 Russian peacekeepers on the ground came to represent the only force preventing a military takeover of the region by Azerbaijan. While there were reservations about their conduct among Karabakh Armenians, the majority of the Karabakh Armenian political elite considered these troops as the only guarantee that Azerbaijanis would not attack. Hence, Yerevan's drive to reduce dependence on Russia was not shared by the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, who hoped that the Russians would help them maintain their de facto independence from Azerbaijan.

The events of the following months dissipated the hopes that Karabakh Armenians placed on Russian peacekeepers. In December 2022, Russian peacekeepers did nothing to prevent an Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin corridor. For several months Karabakh Armenians lived under, first, a partial and later, a complete blockade, a dire situation which Russian peacekeepers simply observed. Finally, on 19 September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a military attack on the positions of Karabakh Armenians, as the Russian peacekeepers looked on. A day later, the de facto president Samvel Shahramanyan was forced to sign what was effectively a capitulation agreement. Within a few days about 100,000 remaining Karabakh Armenians fled the region for Armenia. Once again, Armenians, who had pinned their hopes on Russian protection, ended up being forced out of their homes.

Conclusion: What Next?

Will the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, carried out with Russia's tacit approval, be the final chapter in this sad saga? Will Armenia be able to break not only its economic and military dependence on Russia, but also the cultural and ideological narratives that sustain this dependence? There are signs that Armenian elites and society are, indeed, going through a process of deep reappraisal of the political thinking that has brought Armenians to this catastrophe. Today, in the context of the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, there is hope that countries like Armenia will finally be able to break their dependence on Russia, which has

lasted for centuries. Today, Russian imperialism and colonialism has once again become a topic of global discussion. In this context, societies that have historically been under Russian cultural hegemony are finding the language to talk about their experience, as well as the cultural tools to deconstruct the narratives that have served that hegemony. However, as Armenia's experience of the last two hundred years shows, Russian imperial domination has been surprisingly resilient, and it has been able to re-invent itself in many ways. More concerning is the fact that, each time, it was the contradictions and conflicts between its former imperial subjects which allowed imperialism to return in a new form. Once again, "there is a division of labour, we divide, you rule!". Perhaps it is time for 'us', the people who have been subjected to imperial hegemony, to stop dividing ourselves, so that 'they' can no long rule us.

Timeline

— 17-18th centuries Armenia is divided between Ottoman and Persian Empires.
— 1804-1813 and 1826-1828 Russo-Persian wars, as a result of which the territories of contemporary Armenia and Azerbaijan are ceded by Persian Empire to Russia.
— 1915-1916 – Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.
— 1917-1918 Collapse of the Russian Empire, as a result of revolution and civil war.
— 1918-1920 Conflict between the independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.
— 1920 Russian Bolsheviks take control of Armenia and Azerbaijan.
— 1921 The Caucasus Bureau of Communist Party decides to award Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.
— 1923 The Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh is created within the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.
— 1988 Protests break out in Nagorno-Karabakh, demanding the transfer of the region to Soviet Armenia.
— 1990 The first democratic elections in Armenia. The Armenian National Movement comes to power, and declares the goal of independence.
— 1991 The collapse of the Soviet Union. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh declare independence. Armenia and Azerbaijan receive international recognition, Nagorno-Karabakh remains a de facto republic.
— 1992-1994 The First Karabakh war ends with an Armenian victory.
— 1998 The first Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrosyan is forced out of power, replaced by the pro-Russian politician, Robert Kocharyan.
— 2002 Armenia joins the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organisation.
— 2015 Armenia joins the Russian-dominated Euarasian Economic Union.
— 2018 The revolution in Armenia leads to the overthrow of the authoritarian regime but dependence on Russia remains.
— 2020 The "44 Day War" in Nagorno-Karabakh, ends with a decisive Azerbaijani victory and Russian peacekeepers enter Nagorno-Karabakh.
— 2023 Azerbaijani military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh lead to the destruction of the de facto republic and the forced displacement of Armenians.

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Footnotes

1 Keay, John. India, a History: From the Earliest Civilisations to the Boom of the Twenty-First Century (London, Harper Press, 2010), p. 464.
2 This status of a discriminated minority did not prevent some Armenian individuals, or institutions (such as the Armenian Apostolic Church) from enjoying a high status under the protection of their Muslim rulers.
3 Panossian, Razmik. The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 111-114.
4 Suny, Ronald G. Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 31-32.
5 The Russian-Persian wars took place in 1804-1813 and 1826-1828, the Russo-Turkish wars took place in 1806-1813, 1828-1829, 1853-1856 (the Crimean war) and 1877-1878.
6 This claim was, indeed, based on some real improvements in the lives of the populations that came under Russian rule, particularly, the Armenians. Thus, thanks to the security and law and order imposed by Russian imperial structures, Armenians were able to engage in trade and crafts, without the fear of being harassed by the local non-Armenian nobility. Suny. Op. cit., pp. 36-37.
7 Ibid., p.31.
8 On these developments see Panossian. Armenians, 249-250, Saparov, Arsène. "Why autonomy? The making of Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region 1918–1925." Europe-Asia Studies 64, no. 2 (2012): 281-323.
9 Panossian. Op. Cit., p. 282.
10 On these developments see De Waal, Thomas. Black garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through peace and war, (New York, NYU Press, 2013) pp.16-23, Panossian, Op. Cit., pp. 281-283, Suny, Op. Cit., pp. 188-189.
11 The trajectory of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the late 1980s to the early 1990s has received a lot of attention, including studies that have highlighted the collective memory aspects of the conflict: De Waal, Thomas. Op.cit; Broers, Laurence. Armenia and Azerbaijan: Anatomy of a rivalry. (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Shnirelman, Victor A. "The value of the past: myths, identity and politics in Transcaucasia." Senri Ethnological Studies 57 (2001): i-465. to name a few. What interests us here is how the course of events in this period influenced the image of Russia (and its Soviet Union and Tsarist iterations) in Armenian national narratives.
12 Ishkhanyan, Rafael. The Law of Exclusion of a Third Force [Errord Uzhi Batsarman Orenqy: Hodvatsneri Zhoghovatsu], (Yerevan, Azat Khosq, 1991) (in Armenian).
13 Libaridian, Gerard J. The challenge of statehood: Armenian political thinking since independence. (Watertown Blue Crane Books. 1999); Libaridian, Gerard J. Modern Armenia: people, nation, state. (New Brunswick and London, Transaction Publishers 2004).
14 Wezeman, Pieter D., Alexandra Kuimova, and Jordan Smith. "Arms transfers to conflict zones: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh." Commentary, SIPRI Newsletter. Solna, Sweden: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2021).
15 On the Armenia-Russia relations in the immediate aftermath of the 2018 revolution see Baev, Pavel. "Preserving the Alliance Against Tall Odds: Armenia's Velvet Revolution as Challenge to Russia" in Ohanyan, Anna, and Laurence Broers, eds. Armenia's Velvet Revolution: Authoritarian decline and civil resistance in a multipolar world (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).
16 Broers, Laurence. "Requiem for the unipolar moment in Nagorny Karabakh." Current history 120, no. 828 (2021): 255-261.