

What Does the Nagorno-Karabakh Deal Mean for Russia?

Regional analysts disagree on whether the latest ceasefire should be treated as a Russian geopolitical victory.

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The latest deal allows for significant territorial gains for Baku, including lands first seized by Armenian forces in the 1988-94 conflict. **Gavriil Grigorov / TASS**

The new Russia-brokered peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a sign of Moscow seeking to reaffirm its influence in the conflict over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, analysts said Tuesday. But they disagreed on the level of the Kremlin's success.

Unlike previous agreements brokered by Russia and the U.S. which have fallen through within minutes, the latest deal marks the first attempt at mediation through the deployment of third-party peacekeepers. At least 1,960 Russian troops were [deployed](#) to the region just hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin [announced](#) the arrangement.

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Most analysts agree that this agreement is an achievement for the Kremlin — showing that it was able to reaffirm its status as a decision-maker in the conflict despite Turkey's emergence as a key player backing Azerbaijan.

Michael Carpenter, the managing director of the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, [called](#) the agreement “a geopolitical victory for Putin.”

Kirill Koktysh, a faculty fellow at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, echoed this view, contrasting Russia's actions with those of fellow OSCE Minsk Group members France and the U.S.

“Moscow has shown yet again that it can be the only regional broker, although Yerevan had high hopes for Paris and for the OSCE,” Koktysh told The Moscow Times. “Both sides even gave the opportunity [for regional mediation] to Washington but, in the end, Moscow emerged as the only guarantor.”

Fyodor Lukyanov, chief editor of the Russia in Global Affairs journal, said the agreement reaffirms Armenia's security dependence on Russia and marks “the end of the OSCE Minsk Group” that “will no longer play a decisive role in European policy.”

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Rauf Mammadov, a residential scholar at The Middle East Institute, [added](#) that “Ankara's role in the post-conflict process remains ambiguous.”

Lukyanov believes that cooperation with Turkey, which [deployed](#) its forces to work alongside Russia's peacekeepers, will be a complicated matter, though Russia will likely persevere.

“Speaking of Russia's ability to deal with Turkey, it is astounding how, over the last five years, Russia has been able to achieve its own goals in situations where interests collide or contradict each other. We saw it in Syria, to some extent in Libya, and now — in the South Caucasus,” Lukyanov noted.

Not a victory

Mark Galeotti, a senior fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, disagrees, arguing that the agreement that came hours after an Azerbaijani surface-to-air missile shot down a Russian Mi-24 helicopter was not a victory for the Kremlin but rather an attempt “to manage its decline.”

Galeotti warned that the latest situation is reminiscent of Russia's response to its Su-24 bomber's downing in Syria in 2015. To hold Turkey responsible, the Kremlin imposed widespread sanctions, which, according to Galeotti was its attempt at “masking weakness.”

“This is neither mature statecraft nor self-confident hegemony,” Galeotti wrote in an op-ed for The Moscow Times on Tuesday. “This is managing decline, a Russia that in regional terms is strong in capacities, weak in will, trying to make the best of a situation, and in the process

disappointing its allies and doing nothing to deter its challengers. All one can say is that at least the guns are silent now — but for how long?”

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Military analyst Aleksandr Golts, in an [interview](#) with the Echo Moskvy radio station, similarly called the Russia-brokered truce the “best way out” given the much worse scenarios that could play out as a result of Russia’s regional policy line of the past 20 years.

Dmitry Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, offered an optimistic but cautious view of Russia’s move, [warning](#) against premature celebrations of the agreement.

“With Russian peacekeepers in place, the ceasefire can last. The road to the final accord will be long and rocky. Armenia will find it hard to accept defeat. Russia proved to be indispensable but had to accept Turkey’s role. New regional balance is in place.”

No matter the actual influence foreign powers may have on the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, only the two key players will have the final say over the region’s fate, Lukyanov said.

“All in all, Russia does not bear the burden of a conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh. This is a matter of sovereign Armenia and sovereign Azerbaijan.”

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