

# Azeri Minister of Defence: Chance of war is close to 100% with Armenia

Baku threatens war with Armenia

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The moderate course of the meeting of the Council of CIS Defense Ministers in Kazakhstan on Tuesday was broken by a sensational revelation by the Azeri defense chief Safar Abiyev that “as long as Azerbaijani territory is occupied by Armenia, the chance of war is close to 100 percent.”

The sharp boost of bellicose statements by official Baku has been clearly felt since the beginning of this autumn when on September 7 President Aliyev stated that “for the purpose of restoring control over the whole territory of the republic, Azerbaijan is ready to resort to any measures, including application of force.”

Three days later Abiyev’s claimed: “War is underway and the enemy starts to shoot at our positions.” He repeated the words of President Aliyev that only for military needs official Baku spends a sum comparable to the whole budget of Armenia.

Deputy Speaker of the Armenian parliament Vahan Hovhannisyan, who is a senior member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), responded to the MOD’s statement saying that in military operations in the early 1990s, Azerbaijan’s military budget exceeded the financial possibilities of the defending Armenian population, however this superiority did not play a decisive role.

The peculiarity of the latest statement of the Azeri minister is the very format of such a statement. The Commonwealth of Independent States is not a militarized bloc, however at the table of discussions there were also heads of defense departments of post-Soviet countries that are part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Five of the six members of this military-strategic alliance, namely Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus, are connected between themselves by alternating borders and only Armenia is in land isolation.

However, in accordance with the fundamental principles of the CSTO “any member country can expect help from the collective quick-reaction forces of the CSTO in the event of a threat to its security.” Thus, Abiyev’s statement is associated with a gauntlet thrown before the foundations of the CSTO and currently the Armenian political establishment expects a corresponding reaction from this military-strategic alliance.

Nevertheless, while the CSTO is pondering over the advisability of accepting the Azeri gauntlet, Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan stated on November 29: “The armed

forces of Armenia are always ready to defend the country's borders and the Azerbaijani side must consider that if it chooses a military way of solving the issue, it will have to solve more complicated problems than it solves now."

However, it is in the recent time that aggressive statements of Baku officials are "backed up" with unprecedented powerful information support. Practically on a daily basis Azerbaijani news agencies report about growing tensions on the contact line, which create an atmosphere of the need for retaliating. In particular, in the past few months the Day Az agency has been replete with daily reports about killed and wounded Azeri officers and soldiers.

Now few doubt that Baku is developing schemes of establishing its control over the territories of the former Azerbaijani SSR. Despite numerous statements about the possibility of renewed hostilities "in order to recover occupied lands", there are no reasons to assume that Azerbaijan is planning a large-scale counter-offensive along the whole frontline. Apart from other things, a large-scale war will create a threat to the functioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline that lies close to the security zone and whose operation fills the military budget of Azerbaijan. It is evident that in the event of a new war, Armenian defense forces may as well permit themselves to deliver target strikers against the oil pipeline, or as Kocharyan said, "take a decision that the military situation will require." It is beyond doubt that Azeri authorities realize well such a prospect.

A blitz local operation that Azerbaijan is likely to be preparing for is quite a different thing. Such a scheme implies waging an active war on a small area with a huge loss of human lives. It is a situation that Baku is ready for to a certain degree. The "big war in a small area" scenario fraught with a seeming transformation into large-scale military operations is oriented to intervention of the international community, in particular the United Nations. Official Baku has repeatedly tried to shift the discussion of the Karabakh problem from the OSCE to the UN format with a prospect of redeployment of an international peacekeeping contingent on the frontline, including along the whole perimeter of the Armenian-Azeri state border. According to one of the schemes being developed in Baku, Nagorno-Karabakh will be thus cut off from Armenia by the "blue helmets" and the occupation regime of the UN. However, a well-considered military provocation in the form of a small war is needed for that, for which Azerbaijan is likely to be preparing for.

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