



Under The Radar

*A dive into the news
you might have missed*



TRAFALGAR STRATEGY

Trouble in the Caucasus

What happened?

A fragile ceasefire crumbled in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh after shelling between Armenian and Azeri forces resumed mere minutes after a Russian-mediated truce came into effect. The disputed territory - referred to as Artsakh by ethnic Armenians - is claimed by Azerbaijan despite its ethnically-Armenian population having voted to come under Yerevan's control.

The current skirmish is the first since a brief four-day war between the two countries in 2016, and the longest battle between the two sides since a six-year war between the two former Soviet states was halted in 1994. The Azeri forces are being backed by weapons from Turkey, while Armenia continues to draw support from its Russian patron.

What does it mean?

Long coveted for its rich mineral resources, Nagorno-Karabakh looks set for a prolonged period of strife. With the Trump administration distracted by the upcoming U.S. election and Vladimir Putin apparently reluctant to intervene decisively on the side of Armenia, the Turkish-assisted push by the Azeris will be difficult to rebuff.

And while Democrat candidate Joe Biden has called for an increased U.S.

presence on the diplomatic front, any U.S. assistance is likely months away owing to the prolonged transition period (should Biden indeed win). Even without the distraction of the election it's not clear Donald Trump would care to intervene. If anything, he'd be more likely to support the Azeris given the Trump Organization's previous interests in the Baku hotel market.

"The strongest weapon in the Armenian arsenal remains its diaspora"

Without more weapons the Armenians will not be able halt the Azeri surge. Azerbaijan has been investing its bumper oil profits into its military for nearly 20 years now and that gap will not be overcome unless the Russians push in behind Armenia. Whether Vladimir Putin will be willing to do so is another question. The Russian strongman is likely still sore at Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who came to power on the back of a popular movement in 2018. One can certainly envision a situation in which Putin demands concessions from Pashinyan in return for more military support.

The strongest weapon in the Armenian arsenal remains its diaspora, especially the contingent in the United States. A tweet or Instagram post from Kim Kardashian might not stop the war, but it will help keep the issue on the agenda until the potential change in US administrations.

White smoke

What happened?

On Wednesday Pope Francis' support for same-sex unions went public. Francis told an interviewer that: "Homosexuals have a right to be a part of the family. They are children of God and have a right to a family. Nobody should be thrown out or be made miserable because of it".

Until now, Pope Francis had mainly opted to allude to his position on sensitive issues or made his feelings known through proxies. What is remarkable about his words on Wednesday is the openness of them; there is no second guessing what he meant and what this means for the church.

What does it mean?

President Trump and Big Tech aside, no subject has received as much attention in Under the Radar as the Catholic Church and the leadership of Pope Francis (see: 08/04, 07/05, 12/06, 02/10). The majority of this coverage has been well meaning criticism from people with a stake in seeing the pope deliver on his promise to modernise the church, bringing it kicking and screaming into the 21st century like the 2,000 year old organisation it is.

Like other religions, Catholicism has a mixed and complex approach to same-sex unions. Followers are divided on the topic

and there is a distinct split in Catholic majority countries which recognise civil unions versus those who have legalised same-sex marriage. Ireland, Mexico and Argentina, for example, are in the latter camp whereas Italy and Croatia are two Catholic majority nations which recognise civil unions instead.

"The church needs a reformer; someone with vision, but also a figure that can speak out against injustice"

The stance taken by the pope will not lead to change within the church overnight, quite the opposite in fact, as there will be inevitable backlash from a powerful conservative caucus within the Vatican and further afield. What it does do, however, is present followers with a question: do they agree or disagree with the pope? This could prove to be a true test of faith.

Francis is popular to a degree - he is the pope after all - and hopefully this announcement is just the start of him coming good on early promises. The church needs a reformer; someone with vision, but also a figure that can speak out against injustice. Action on religious freedom and anything in support of those facing persecution - such as the Uighurs in China - would be a good use of papal time.

Breaking up big tech

What happened?

The US government has filed charges against Google, in what is set to be one of the biggest and most important antitrust cases of all time. The tech giant stands accused of violating competition law to protect its monopoly over advertising and online searches.

So far, 11 states have filed charges alongside the Department of Justice. More are likely to follow in what is generally being viewed as a bipartisan issue.

What does it mean?

Some commentators see this as a front by the Trump administration to prove that they will take big tech seriously in an unlikely second term. After all, Trump was elected as a populist, but has failed to enact any meaningful populist policies.

And while they are partially correct, they shouldn't play down the threat this poses to Google. Legislators have zeroed in on where Google is most vulnerable in the eyes of antitrust law – extremely questionable supplier agreements. By breaking these up, smaller competitors could be able to grow their market share.

The DoJ has already found that Google's agreement with Apple accounts for 20% of the latter's global income, while also uncovering emails between them expressing how they should "work as if

we are one company". This is a warped philosophy and one that is likely to have led to restrictive contracts that eliminate competition.

Meanwhile, commentators expressing doubts about the sincerity of the Trump administration are missing the wider political point – the enthusiasm of Republican politicians brings to an end decades of libertarian ideology. The Republican Party is likely to be more interventionist, certainly in matters concerning big tech, regardless of whether Trump wins or loses.

And they will find plenty of Democrats willing to work with them. Senator Elizabeth Warren, who was an early frontrunner in the Democratic primaries, is a strong advocate of breaking up big tech in similar fashion to how Teddy Roosevelt toppled the industrial monopolies of the late 19th and early 20th century. This potential bipartisanship offers hope that legislators will come down harder on Google than the underwhelming antitrust case against Microsoft in 1998, which set off two decades of weak antitrust enforcement. After all, this is now the era of 'The Social Dilemma', the wildly popular Netflix documentary awakening people to the harm caused by Google and co.

Left-wing desire to topple the tech overlords, right-wing distrust of woke liberal culture in Silicon Valley, and viral pop culture hits have created mass popular support for curbing big tech's power. The next generation of Republican leaders would be wise to rebuild the post-Trump brand on this issue.

This Weeks Must Reads

China and Covid-19: what went wrong in Wuhan?

[Financial Times](#)

“For all of the Chinese system’s shortcomings in the earliest days and weeks of the outbreak, the rest of the world should have been on high alert”

- Tom Mitchell, Sun Yu, Xinning Liu and Michael Peel on the first days and weeks of the pandemic.

The persecution of the Uyghurs is a crime against humanity

[The Economist](#)

“The evidence of a campaign against the Uyghurs at home and abroad becomes more shocking with each scouring of the satellite evidence, each leak of official documents and each survivor’s pitiful account.”

- The Economist on the plight of the Uyghurs.

The Beheading of a Teacher in France Exposes a Cultural Schism That Threatens President Macron’s Future

[Time](#)

“It also presents a steep challenge to President Emmanuel Macron, just 18 months before he faces re-election, that threatens to shift the national conversation to the turf of the country’s resurgent far-right.”

- Kenny Farquharson on the first minister’s potentially confession to the Salmond inquiry.

Want to see how the landscape is shaping up on election night? Look to North Carolina

[CNN](#)

“The state has become a key battleground and features a close presidential matchup between President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden”

- Harry Enten on North Carolina’s pivotal role in the U.S. Election.



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