

A Comparative Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy on the Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflicts (1988-2020)

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ABSTRACT *With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relative stability that prevailed in the Caucasus region during the Cold War period dissolved into instability and conflicts. This article is based on a comparative analysis of Turkish foreign policy in the context of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflicts. During the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Türkiye gave political and military support to Azerbaijan, but this support was not sufficient to change the course of the conflict. Türkiye showed an ardent interest in playing a mediator role. However, its mediator role was limited due to domestic and external circumstances. During the Nakhchivan conflict, Turkish policymakers brought up the possibility of interfering militarily to end the conflict in line with Türkiye's legal commitments. However, Türkiye's pro-Azerbaijani position took the form of discursive reactions and border militarization. When the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War erupted in 2020, Türkiye played a much more assertive role to the point of actively contributing to tilting the balance in favor of Azerbaijan. This article compares Türkiye's position on the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflicts and discusses its impacts and implications in the context of the regional dynamics.*

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh Wars, Nakhchivan Conflict, Turkish Foreign Policy, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Armenia

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Introduction

After a brief overview of independence following First World War, Azerbaijan and Armenia became Soviet republics from 1922 until 1991. The Soviet Union's territorial policies created the background condition of the ethnic conflict between both countries.¹ With the 1921 Treaty of Moscow, Nakhchivan, which consisted of an Azerbaijani majority, was declared an autonomous region within the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic. With this treaty, the Soviet Union and Türkiye assumed guarantor roles in the protection of the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan.² The status of Nakhchivan as an autonomous region under the protection of Azerbaijan as well as guarantor countries was confirmed in the 1921 Treaty of Kars signed between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia.³ Nakhchivan became an exclave after it was removed from Azerbaijan's borders following the transfer of Zangezur to the Armenian Soviet Republic in 1921.⁴

The status of Nagorno-Karabakh was a debated issue within the Soviet leadership in the 1920s. Soviet authorities weighed in on the strong economic relationship between Karabakh and Azerbaijan and the benefits of having good diplomatic relations with Türkiye.⁵ They recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as an inseparable part of Azerbaijan. In 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region was created as part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.⁶ The Nagorno-Karabakh region (which consisted of a Karabakh Armenian majority) was created inside Azerbaijan in 1923. Even though an Armenian party elite was attributed the right to administer the region, they were not able to practice real autonomy.⁷

The mid-1960s witnessed Armenian irredentist nationalism, the driving force of which was Soviet Armenia.⁸ Mikhail Gorbachev's reformist policies presented Armenians with a unique opportunity to mobilize support for territorial revisionism regarding Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh.⁹ In other words, during this period, Armenian irredentist nationalism evolved into a mass Karabakh movement focused on "the unification of the ancestral Armenian lands" (Miatsum).¹⁰ A petition prepared by the Armenian Academy of Sciences in 1987 that demanded the transfer of Karabakh and Nakhchivan to the Armenian Soviet Republic rekindled the territorial aspirations of the Armenians.¹¹ Even though Gorbachev is known to have been sympathetic to the Armenian cause, he maintained the status quo policies of his predecessors.¹²

The incongruence between the territorial borders and ethnic dynamics created the background condition of the conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia.¹³ The Soviet Union was established as "a hierarchical federation of ethnically defined territories."¹⁴ It consisted of Soviet republics, autonomous Soviet re-

publics (such as Nakhchivan), autonomous regions or oblasts (such as Nagorno-Karabakh) autonomous areas (Okruqi).¹⁵ The Soviet ethno-territorial federalism aimed to create a Soviet identity. In other words, the Soviet authorities believed in the idea that under socialism, nations would grow closer and eventually merge into one identity.¹⁶ Quite the contrary, Soviet policies instigated polarization along ethnic, linguistic, and cultural lines.¹⁷

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With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relative stability in the Caucasus region during the Cold War period dissolved into instability and conflicts. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which started in 1988, evolved into a full-scale war in 1992. The Nakhchivan conflict erupted in the same year, following Armenian militias' attack on Nakhchivan (an autonomous territory within Azerbaijan). With the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 1994, Nagorno-Karabakh turned into a frozen conflict. After a period of sporadic clashes, it again erupted as a full-scale war in 2020.

This article compares Türkiye's position on the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Nakhchivan conflict, and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and discusses its impacts and implications by taking into consideration the regional dynamics. This article is organized as follows. The first section provides an overview of Azerbaijan-Armenian conflicts. The second section sheds light on how Turkish policymakers formulated foreign policy in each conflict by considering political, military, and mediation dynamics. The third section is devoted to the comparative analysis of Türkiye's foreign policy during the conflict periods. The final discussion analyses the role of Türkiye in the Caucasus region against the backdrop of the changing power balance in the region.

An Overview of Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflicts

The First Nagorno-Karabakh War

In 1988, mass protests erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh, calling for the region to join the Armenian Soviet Republic. These protests triggered clashes between Azeris and Armenians. The Regional Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh applied to the Soviet authorities to break away from the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic to join the Armenian Soviet Republic. The Armenian Supreme Soviet voted to accept Nagorno-Karabakh's joining Armenia. The Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet voted not to relinquish the region. In 1989, the Karabakh Armenians created an unofficial National Council to govern the region, which was evaluated as a direct threat to the Soviet and Azeri authorities.¹⁸ Violence against the Aze-

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under Moscow's direct rule in January 1989. They aimed to prevent inter-republican border revisions that could put the federal structure of the Soviet Union at risk. After three months, Moscow returned control of the region to local authorities.²⁰ In the aftermath of Moscow's intervention, Azeri refugees, who fled to Azerbaijan during the clashes, returned to Nagorno-Karabakh.²¹

The involvement of the Soviet authorities did not end the conflict. After Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent republics, the conflict intensified.²² In 1991, Azerbaijan passed a law that abolished the autonomous status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In response, Karabakh Armenians voted for independence in a referendum. Yet, 25 percent of Azeris that made up the population in Nagorno-Karabakh boycotted it.²³ Following the referendum, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region declared its independence from Azerbaijan and the establishment of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁴

With the independence of Azerbaijan and Armenia, a domestic dispute within the Soviet Union became an interstate dispute. The clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the region developed into a full-scale war in 1992.²⁵ Azeri forces increased retaliatory attacks against Armenian forces. They recaptured northern Nagorno-Karabakh, which led thousands of Karabakh Armenians to seek refuge in Armenia.²⁶

After Azeris fired rockets on Armenian villages in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenians seized the Azeri town of Khojali in the region and killed hundreds of people. Azerbaijan declared a three-day mourning period over the Khojali massacre.²⁷ The massacre prompted international condemnation. After Armenian militias seized Shusha in 1992, the only remaining Azeri stronghold in the region, Armenia was able to take control of the whole enclave.²⁸ All of the Azeris were forced out of the region.²⁹ With the seizure of the Azerbaijan city of Lachin, which is located on the edge of Nagorno-Karabakh, a corridor was opened between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁰

In 1992, the Minsk Group was established under the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (renamed Organization for Security and Cooperation in 1994) to provide a peaceful resolution to the Karabakh conflict. The co-chairs of the Minsk Group are Russia, the U.S., and France.³¹ A year later,

ris in Nagorno-Karabakh increased, which sparked mass protests in Baku.¹⁹

The Constitution of the Soviet Union prevented territorial changes without the consent of the affected Union Republic. The Soviet authorities rejected the demands of the Karabakh Armenians and placed the region

the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 822, which called for a ceasefire.³² In 1993, the Azeri-Armenian conflict went beyond Karabakh as Armenian militants seized the Azeri-populated provinces near the Karabakh region: the rest of Lachin province and Kelbajar, Agdam, Qubatlı, Jebrayıl, Fizuli, Zangelan, and part of Agjabedi and Terter provinces. As a result of these operations, more than half a million Azeris were displaced.³³

In May 1994, the Bishkek Protocol (a provisional ceasefire agreement) was signed by the representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia, the (unrecognized) Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and Russia's representative to the OSCE Minsk Group. The ceasefire was brokered by Russia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital. The protocol stipulated the end of hostilities and the continuation of peaceful meetings for the resolution of the conflict. The signing of the protocol did not lead to the demilitarization of the region, the return of Azerbaijani territory occupied by Armenia, or the return of refugees.³⁴ In the aftermath of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, 20 percent of the Azeri territory fell under the Armenian occupation.³⁵ Some 700,000 Azeris (which account for 10 percent of Azerbaijan's population) became displaced in the region.³⁶ Throughout the war, the Republic of Armenia increased repression of Azeris within its borders and expelled 250,000 Azeris.³⁷

With the absence of a peace agreement, the conflict became a frozen conflict. A peace proposal provided by the Minsk Group after the OSCE Lisbon Submit in 1996 that contained a provision regarding the granting of Nagorno-Karabakh a self-rule Azerbaijan was rejected by Armenia. The Minsk Group's 1997 proposal that contained provisions regarding the withdrawal of Armenian forces was rejected by the Karabakh administration. Another Minsk Group proposal in 1998 that suggested granting Nagorno-Karabakh de-facto independence was rejected by the Azeri side.³⁸ Other Minsk Group-initiated peace processes proved futile. Before the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, sporadic violations of the ceasefire occurred in 2008, 2016, and July 2020. The clashes in 2016 brought the two countries to the brink of war (the Four-Day War).³⁹ The United Nations Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 of 1993, a number of resolutions and declarations adopted by the UN General Assembly, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation that called for the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh proved ineffective.⁴⁰ In addition to the ineffectiveness of international and regional organizations, negotiations that took place after the ceasefire turned out to be unproductive, providing a permissive condition for the resumption of the conflict.⁴¹

The Nakhchivan Conflict

In addition to Nagorno-Karabakh, Nakhchivan became a point of contention between Armenia and Azerbaijan. As mentioned previously, Nakhchivan is an



Azerbaijani people visit Alley of the Martyrs, a cemetery dedicated to those killed by Soviet troops in 1990, as they gather to celebrate the deal reached to halt fighting over the Nagorno-Karabakh region on November 10, 2020.

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exclave territory of Azerbaijan. It is an autonomous republic and has a constitution. It is the only Azeri territory that has a direct border with Türkiye. In addition to Türkiye, it borders Iran and Armenia. The chairman of the Supreme Assembly is the highest official in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Executive power lies with the Cabinet of Ministers and legislative power lies in the Supreme Assembly.⁴²

In 1990, Armenia occupied Nakhchivan's Karki village.⁴³ The village's name was changed to Tigranashen.⁴⁴ On May 2, 1992, Armenian militias attacked Nakhchivan and opened fire on villages close to Türkiye. On May 18, they attacked Sadarak, one of the seven regions of Nakhchivan. A week later, Azeri militias retaliated by firing artillery shells on the Armenian side. Armenian militias also attacked the Ordubad region of Nakhchivan. In 1993, clashes in Nakhchivan stopped temporarily. Yet, in 1994, Armenian forces attacked Sadarak once again and captured hills in this region. Clashes intensified again in 1996, and many people lost their lives during the clash between Azerbaijani and Armenian troops in the Yerashhavan village of Nakhchivan. Despite sporadic clashes and attacks, Nakhchivan remains within the authority of Azerbaijan. Yet, Karki remains under the occupation of Armenia.⁴⁵

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

In the period between the First and Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Azerbaijan developed a centralized, authoritarian system with the further consolidation of the political power of the Aliyev family. In 2003, Ilham Aliyev suc-

ceeded his father, Heydar Aliyev, as the new leader of Azerbaijan.⁴⁶ Against the backdrop of its huge hydrocarbon revenues, Azerbaijan made important investments in modernizing its army.⁴⁷

While Azerbaijan was consolidating its power, Armenia went through domestic political struggles from 2018 onwards. A series of mass protests resulted in the ousting of then Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan (the Velvet Revolution). The protesters called for democratization and anti-corruption steps. By the time the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War took place, Armenia was embroiled in a political struggle between the new and old political elites and radical changes in the bureaucratic cadres, which decreased the country's political, military, and diplomatic capabilities.⁴⁸

Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated after Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan delivered a speech in 2019 that called for unification between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.⁴⁹ Border clashes that erupted in the Tovuz region on July 12, 2020, were a triggering event that escalated tensions into a full-scale war.⁵⁰ On September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive along the front lines of Nagorno-Karabakh. Within hours, Armenia and the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh leadership sent armored fighting vehicles to the front and mobilized its troops.⁵¹ On the same day, the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Russia, France, and the U.S.) called on both sides to cease hostilities and stressed that the conflict should be resolved on peaceful terms.⁵² A few days later, the United Nations Security Council gathered and called on both countries to immediately halt the fighting.⁵³ Azeri and Armenian foreign ministers met in Moscow on October 10 and agreed on a temporary humanitarian ceasefire. Yet, it never materialized with the continuation of the clashes in and outside the conflict zone. On October 17, France's mediation efforts and its shuttle diplomacy between Baku and Yerevan failed.⁵⁴

The Azeri forces' capture of Susha on November 8 constituted a major victory for the country and changed the course of the war in favor of Azerbaijan.⁵⁵ On November 9, a Russian-mediated ceasefire came into effect. The ceasefire statement stipulated the return of the Agdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin districts to Azerbaijan; the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin Corridor for the term of five years; the establishment of a peacekeeping center; the return of displaced people and refugees under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the exchange of prisoners of war, and opening of transport communications between the Nakhchivan Republic and the western regions of Azerbaijan.⁵⁶ The ceasefire statement mentioned neither



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counterpart stressed the unresolved nature of the conflict and demanded resumed talks on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. A few weeks later, a joint monitoring center was opened in the Agdam region of Azerbaijan where Turkish and Russian personnel were tasked with monitoring the ceasefire in the region through unmanned drones.⁵⁸

In February 2021, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and de facto Nagorno-Karabakh representatives discussed cooperation on humanitarian issues under the mediation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and agreed on the exchange of the remains of the missing people. In April, the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group put out several confidence-building measures that included “releasing all prisoners of war and detainees, exchanging maps of the minefields, guaranteeing international organizations free access to Nagorno-Karabakh, protecting cultural and religious sights, and fostering direct contact between communities.”⁵⁹ In June 2021, Azerbaijan accepted to release 15 Armenian detainees in exchange for Armenia's delivering of information on the location of landmines in the Agdam district against the backdrop of the mediation efforts of the U.S. and Georgia, along with the EU and current OSCE chair Sweden.⁶⁰

Under the mediation of the European Union (EU) in April 2022, Armenian and Azeri leaders expressed their readiness to start peace talks. A month later, both sides established commissions to deal with demarcation and security issues. Both sides met in Brussels, yet no agreement was reached. September 2022 witnessed the deadliest escalation since the 2020 war with the violation of the ceasefire that resulted in the killing of hundreds of soldiers on both sides of the border.⁶¹

Taken together, the 2020 war resulted in a clear defeat for Armenia. Azerbaijan recaptured seven districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh and 30 percent of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, including the district of Hadrut and the strategic town of Shusha.⁶² Unmanned arial vehicles (UAVs, aka drones) played a decisive role in Azerbaijan's military victory. Learning from its past mistakes in

the status of Nagorno-Karabakh nor the OSCE Minsk Group's future role.⁵⁷

On January 11, 2021, Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan signed a new agreement on the opening of transport communications. During the follow-up press conference, Azerbaijani President Aliyev expressed the country's readiness to establish good neighborly relations with Armenia. However, his Armenian

the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and the Four-Day War in 2016, Azerbaijan relied on many special forces in small military saboteur groups to force out the Armenians from the occupied territories.⁶³ The country's victory also took place against the backdrop of relatively decreased Russian support for Armenia due to Pashinyan's pro-Western orientations in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution, and the passive role played by the U.S. due to the 2020 presidential elections.⁶⁴ The following section sheds light on Türkiye's foreign policy during the three conflicts.

Türkiye's Foreign Policy toward the Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflicts

Türkiye recognized Armenia shortly after it declared independence in 1991 and sent humanitarian aid. It showed its determination to develop neighborly relations with Armenia by inviting the country to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.⁶⁵ Türkiye was also interested in the construction of oil and gas pipelines that would include Central Asian states as well as Armenia.⁶⁶ However, Türkiye's moves to form good neighborly relations were offset by Armenia's hostile attitudes. The Declaration of Independence of Armenia stated that the country would work for the events in 1915 to be recognized as "genocide." In addition to this, Armenia brought the claim that the 1921 Moscow and Kars Treaties, which determined its border with Türkiye, were not valid.⁶⁷

As a result of Armenia's not recognizing the border established with the Moscow and Kars Treaties, Türkiye decided not to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia. It maintained that it would not form diplomatic relations unless Armenia abandoned its territorial claims on Türkiye, dropped genocide allegations, and returned occupied territories in Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.

Türkiye and the First Nagorno-Karabakh War

When the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict first started, Türkiye adopted a neutral stance. Yet, as the conflict escalated and turned from an intra-state conflict to an interstate conflict, Türkiye sided with Azerbaijan.⁶⁸ Turkish policymakers called for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and argued against the inclusion of the Karabakh Armenians as a party to the negotiations.⁶⁹ Türkiye closed its border with Armenia following the capture of Kalbajar by the Armenian forces in 1993.⁷⁰

After efforts of the Minsk Group proved futile due to irreconcilable differences between the parties involved in the conflict, Türkiye along with Russia and the U.S., launched a peace initiative that called for the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Kalbajar, a sixty-day ceasefire, and continued peace talks.⁷¹ This is also called the "3+1 initiative."⁷² Even though Azeri and Armenian authorities initially agreed on the plan, it was rejected by the Karabakh Armenians on the

grounds that it did not provide sufficient guarantees for their security.⁷³ As the fighting intensified in the region, Türkiye reinforced its border with Armenia.⁷⁴

During the conflict, Türkiye engaged in active mediation efforts. Then Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin conducted shuttle diplomacy in the Caucasus and Europe. Türkiye also played a role in bringing the conflict to the table of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. While mediation efforts were going on, Turkish authorities ensured that Türkiye would not militarily interfere in the conflict.⁷⁵

Between 1991 and 1992, Türkiye sent 5,000 submachine guns, grenade guns, and ammunition to Azerbaijan through secret air operations.⁷⁶ Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed a military cooperation agreement in 1992. From 1992 onwards, Turkish military officers began to give training at the base of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan.⁷⁷

After the Khojaly massacre in 1992, a mass demonstration was held in Türkiye, calling for Türkiye's military intervention. The Turkish media started to criticize Türkiye's mild stance on the issue. Leaders of opposition parties supported a more pro-Azerbaijani stance.⁷⁸ In 1993, then Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Hasan Hasanov asked Turkish Chief of General Staff Doğan Güreş to give direct military support. Yet, Türkiye rejected direct engagement in the conflict.⁷⁹ Another bilateral military cooperation agreement was signed in 1996.⁸⁰

Overall, Türkiye's military support for Azerbaijan during the war came in the form of sending traditional armaments and training the Azeri military.⁸¹ Throughout the conflict, Türkiye and Azerbaijan made significant progress in their military cooperation. Türkiye maintained its political support for Azerbaijan even after it became a member of the OSCE Minsk Group. Furthermore, it promoted Azerbaijan's position on the conflict in international forums and refused to normalize its relations with Armenia until the occupied Karabakh territories are returned to Azerbaijan.⁸² In sharp contrast, Russia and Iran adopted a pro-Armenian stance. Russia was concerned about the mobilization of its Turkic-speaking minorities in the case of a possible Azerbaijani victory. Similarly, Iran was worried about the mobilization of millions of Azeris living within its borders.⁸³

While Türkiye opted out of militarily engaging in the conflict, it showed an ardent interest in mediatorship. Türkiye's inspiration to play a mediator role during the conflict initially fit in with the U.S. vision, which saw Türkiye as a model for newly independent republics in the Caucasus region out of the fear that the power vacuum resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union could lead to the rise of fundamentalism among Caucasus Muslims.⁸⁴ However, as the

conflict intensified and came to the point of threatening regional stability, the U.S. took on a stronger role under the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).⁸⁵ Importantly, from 1993 onwards, Russian foreign policy became more assertive on the back of the vision that the country's exclusive dominance in the Caucasus region would be essential in regaining its power in the post-Soviet space.⁸⁶ The growing U.S. role in mediation and Russia's increasing assertiveness in its near abroad gave Türkiye little maneuvering room in its mediation efforts.

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Moreover, Türkiye's mediating role was rejected by Armenia and Karabakh Armenians on the grounds that Türkiye sided with Azerbaijan.⁸⁷ Iran also saw Türkiye's mediation interests as part of its efforts to increase its influence in the region and intensified its mediation practices as a counter-move.⁸⁸ Iran evaluated Türkiye's contact with the U.S. on issues related to the conflict in terms of the growing U.S. influence in the region.⁸⁹ After the 1994 Bishkek Protocol, Türkiye articulated its interest in deploying its peacekeeping forces in Karabakh. Yet, its proposal was rejected by Russian and Armenian officials.⁹⁰

Türkiye and the Nakhchivan Conflict

When Armenian militias first attacked border villages near the Turkish border, then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel framed it as a border violation, explaining that there was no extraordinary situation. However, the attack of Armenian militias on Sadarak in May 1992 increased the threat perception of Turkish policymakers as Sadarak has strategic importance being a border region between Türkiye and Nakhchivan. While the attacks on Sadarak continued, Haydar Aliyev, then leader of the Nakhchivan regional administration, called on Türkiye to intervene, warning that Sadarak could fall to the Armenian forces at any moment. As the attack increased, Demirel called then U.S. President George Bush and stated that Türkiye could not remain silent as a guarantor country.⁹¹

On May 18, 1992, Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü stated that Türkiye signed the agreement that led to the existence of Nakhchivan and that it would protect the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan. İnönü called then Armenian Foreign Minister Raffi Ovanisyan and demanded that the attack on Nakhchivan be stopped immediately. Turkish authorities also explained Türkiye's concern about the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan to the representatives of the Russian Federation and the U.S.⁹²

Between 2011 and 2020, Azerbaijan predominantly bought drones, armored patrol vehicles, rocket artillery, and missiles from Türkiye. In 2020, before the war commenced, Turkish military exports to Azerbaijan increased six times

that Türkiye could no longer remain silent about Armenia's attacks on Nakhchivan by pointing out that the change of borders through violence is unacceptable for Türkiye. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that Türkiye would never accept *fait accompli* the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan.⁹³

On May 19, 1992, Türkiye deployed a mechanized brigade and division to the Armenian border. A statement was published after the gathering of the Council of Ministers convened under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Demirel stated that the Armenian militias' attacks would seriously affect Türkiye's balanced policy toward achieving peace in the region. A week later, Demirel met with Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin. After the meeting, Yeltsin gave the message that Russia ensured that the existing conflicts within the borders of the former Soviet Union would be resolved through political means. In the joint Turkish-Russian declaration signed after the meeting, Armenia was condemned, and it was emphasized that the conflicts on the Armenia-Nakhchivan border were worrying.⁹⁴

During the conflict, Özal made bold statements regarding Türkiye's possible reactions to the conflict. He stated that the conflict would not be resolved unless Türkiye showed its teeth, emphasizing the similarity between Nakhchivan and Cyprus. He contemplated the possibility of Türkiye's attack on Armenia. Mustafa Akşin, then Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the United Nations Security Council, said that Türkiye would not allow the invasion of Azerbaijan and that it would defend Azerbaijan. On April 5, 1993, Türkiye deployed a military unit to the Nakhchivan border. Türkiye's increased military activity on the border was met with concern by Armenia. Then Armenian Ambassador to Moscow Felix Mamikonyan stated that this situation would force Armenia to retaliate. Armenian President Levon-Ter Petrosyan accused Ankara and Baku of failing to resolve the conflict.⁹⁵

During the conflict, Özal adopted a pro-interventionist stance while Demirel shied away from bringing up the idea of military intervention. President

Özal passed away on April 17, 1993, and Süleyman Demirel became president instead. During Demirel's presidency, the Turkish-Armenian border continued to be militarized and the Turkish Armed Forces jets made reconnaissance flights on the Türkiye-Armenia border.⁹⁶

At the Çankaya Summit held on September 3, 1993, with the participation of President Demirel, Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin, Minister of National Defense Nevzat Ayaz, and Chief of General Staff General Doğan Güreş contemplated sending soldiers to stop the attacks in Nakhchivan. Yet, this idea was not put into practice. Meeting with President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev on September 9, 1993, Çiller confirmed the option of military intervention was out of the question and stated that instead of this, Türkiye could send peacekeepers to the Nakhchivan region together with Russia.⁹⁷

On September 11-12, 1993, Türkiye began to send tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft, armored personnel carriers, and mortar units to the Armenian border. Armenia retaliated by digging trenches simultaneously on the other side of the border. Following the end of hostilities in Nakhchivan, which ended in 1994, political tensions between Türkiye and Armenia calmed down. The option of military intervention was not brought up by Turkish policymakers when later sporadic clashes occurred in the region.

Türkiye and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Türkiye both gave political and military support to Azerbaijan. Turkish authorities affirmed Türkiye's support for the country in several statements. For example, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Türkiye stood by Azerbaijan. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Azerbaijan's right of self-defense to protect its territorial integrity. Then Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stressed Türkiye's support to Azerbaijan both on the field and at the negotiation table.⁹⁸

During the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan's artillery and rocket systems operated in close coordination with Türkiye-made drone warfare assets.⁹⁹ According to Michael Kofman, the Second Karabakh War illustrated the inadequacy of the Soviet missile defense systems in combating drone warfare weaponry.¹⁰⁰ In Kasapoğlu's words, the war did not signal the end of the era of the tank, but it showed that "main battle tanks, along with other traditional land warfare platforms, would make easy targets for unmanned aerial systems (UAS) unless they are accompanied by an organic composition of mobile short-range air defenses, electronic warfare assets, and counter-UAS systems."¹⁰¹

Turkish President Erdoğan meets Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian PM Pashinyan ahead of the first meeting of the European Political Community in Prague, Czech Republic, on October 6, 2022.

TURKISH
PRECEDENCY / AA



As of 2020, Armenian military spending accounted for \$634 million whereas Azerbaijan's was \$2.24 billion.¹⁰² Between 2011 and 2020, Russia was the main exporter of arms to both countries. Some 93.7 percent of Armenian arms imports came from Russia. Countries that export arms to Azerbaijan are more diverse: Russia (60.1 percent), Israel (26.6 percent), Belarus (7.1 percent), and Türkiye (2.9 percent).¹⁰³

Türkiye's military support to Azerbaijan has increased significantly over the last 10 years. In 2010, Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed the "Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support" according to which they committed themselves to support one another in the case of third-party aggression and conduct joint military exercises.¹⁰⁴ From 2010 onward, bilateral military cooperation was further strengthened. Joint military drills became more and more frequent.¹⁰⁵

Between 2011 and 2020, Azerbaijan predominantly bought drones, armored patrol vehicles, rocket artillery, and missiles from Türkiye.¹⁰⁶ In 2020, before the war commenced, Turkish military exports to Azerbaijan increased six times.¹⁰⁷ That year alone, Azerbaijan bought \$120 million worth of defense equipment from Türkiye (that included drones, rocket launchers, ammunition, and other armaments),¹⁰⁸ making the country the world's fourth-largest importer from Türkiye. In July 2020, two weeklong Azerbaijani-Turkish military exercises took place at different locations in Azerbaijan, during which large quantities of Turkish military equipment (including F-16 jets, Bayraktar TB2 attack drones,

and TRG-300 Kaplan missile systems) were transferred to Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁹ During these military exercises, Turkish military officers trained their Azeri counterparts on the deployment of multi-launch missile systems, air defense systems, and the operation of the Turkish-made attacking drone Bayraktar TB2.¹¹⁰ In addition, the combat readiness of Azeri forces was tested.¹¹¹

While Armenia remained heavily reliant on Russian weaponry, Azerbaijan was able to diversify its weapons through its imports from Türkiye and Israel. The Azerbaijani army successfully used the Bayraktar TB-2 UAVS (which effectively destroyed the Russian air defense system in Syria and Libya) against Armenian forces.¹¹² Turkish Bayraktar TB2 UAVs carried MAM-L-type laser-guided bombs produced by Roketsan (a defense company based in Ankara) also played a significant role in the war.¹¹³ KORAL electronic warfare system also played a very crucial role in the war.¹¹⁴ Air defenses in Nagorno-Karabakh, which mainly included older Soviet or Russian systems, proved ineffective against Azerbaijani drones purchased from Türkiye and Israel.¹¹⁵

Türkiye's growing aspiration for mediatorship during the Karabakh conflict went hand in hand with a special relationship developed between Türkiye and Azerbaijan based on the concept of Turkic brotherhood

Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy on the Azeri-Armenian Conflict

During the First Karabakh War, Türkiye gave political and military support to Azerbaijan. Even though at the beginning of the conflict, Türkiye adopted a neutral role, eventually it adopted a pro-Azerbaijani policy. Turkish policymakers actively supported Azerbaijan on the international stage. Türkiye provided Azerbaijan with weapons and opened the door for the training of the Azeri military. Yet, Türkiye did not formulate a decisive military policy toward the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict even though it adopted a pro-Azerbaijani policy. Turkish policymakers did not discuss the option of military interference to end the conflict. This took place against the backdrop of a strict attachment to the Kemalist doctrine, which prohibits military adventurism beyond Türkiye's borders. NATO's decision to stay neutral during the conflict was another constraining factor.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, any involvement in the conflict would have risked Türkiye's membership process in the European Economic Community and the level of trade between Russia and Türkiye.¹¹⁷

As seen in then Prime Minister Demirel's statement that Türkiye was not "in-different to the suffering of the Azerbaijanis, but one step too many by Türkiye

Türkiye's initial optimism regarding its regional policy following the independence of Turkic states was offset by Russia's near-abroad policy

conflict went hand in hand with a special relationship developed between Türkiye and Azerbaijan based on the concept of Turkic brotherhood (coined by Heydar Aliyev as “one nation, two states”). But at the same time, it ran counter to Russia's aspirations to restore its power in the Caucasus region in the post-Cold War period.¹¹⁹

Russia gave political and military support to Armenia during the First Karabakh War. In 1991, the Russia-Armenia security agreement was signed.¹²⁰ Since 1992, Russia provided weapons and fuel aid to Armenia, and Russian volunteers fought alongside Armenian soldiers in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹²¹ Furthermore, being concerned about Azerbaijan's influence on Iranian Azeris in its territory, Iran supported Armenia during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.¹²² The strong support given by Russia and Iran to Armenia gave Türkiye little room for maneuvering during the war.

Even though Türkiye was a member of the Minsk Group, it could not play a significant mediator role both during and after the war. In the context of the dominant role played by Russia, the competition between Türkiye and Iran in the Caucasus region, and the position of Armenians and Karabakh Armenians during the negotiations as well as Türkiye's limited expertise in mediation during the conflict period, Türkiye's mediator role was rather limited.¹²³

In sharp contrast to the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkish authorities repeatedly emphasized the possibility of Türkiye's intervention to end the Armenian attacks against Nakhchivan. Turkish political actors' contemplation of military intervention cannot be evaluated in terms of military adventurism which was prohibited by the Kemalist doctrine as it was based on Türkiye's guarantor rights in protecting the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan affirmed in the Treaties of Moscow and Kars. Türkiye's guarantor rights regarding Nakhchivan share similarities with its guarantor rights regarding Cyprus derived from the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee.¹²⁴ Yet, Russia warned Türkiye against making a provocative move that would result in a regional war.¹²⁵ Furthermore, with the end of hostilities in Nakhchivan, the region faded from the government's agenda.

would put the whole world behind Armenia,”¹¹⁸ Turkish policymakers also calculated that Türkiye's military intervention in support of Azerbaijan would play into the hands of Armenia, keen on showing Türkiye as an aggressive state.

While Türkiye ruled out a military option, it aspired to play a mediator role between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Türkiye's growing aspiration for mediatorship during the Karabakh

In sharp contrast to the First Karabakh War and the Nakhchivan conflict, Türkiye made a significant contribution to Azerbaijan's victory during the Second Karabakh War by supplying the country with drones.¹²⁶ Bayraktar TB2 attack drones as well as Israel-made radar system kamikaze drones enabled Azerbaijan to gain aerial supremacy over Armenia.¹²⁷ It is important here to highlight the pivotal role played by Bayraktar TB2 attack drones in changing the course of the war in favor of Azerbaijan.¹²⁸ The rapid growth of Türkiye's drone industry made the country competitor to China and Israel.¹²⁹

Bayraktar TB2 is a medium-altitude and long-range tactical unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) system produced by Baykar Makina, for the Turkish Armed Forces.¹³⁰ Bayraktar TB2 drones were first used by Türkiye in Operation Spring Shield in Syria in 2020. During the operation, these drones destroyed dozens of battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, short-range air defense systems, self-propelled howitzers, and eight Russian-made air missile systems.¹³¹ After their successful operation in Syria, Türkiye used them in Libya. Turkish-made drones played an important role in changing the trajectory of the War of the Tripoli (2019-2020) in favor of the UN-recognized government of Libya against Russian, Egyptian, and Emirati interests.¹³²

Turkish senior military personnel advised the Azeri military on the successful deployment of drones and precision artillery strikes.¹³³ Türkiye also provided Azerbaijan with intelligence and logistical support.¹³⁴ After the war, Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed the Susha Declaration in which they expressed their intention to support one another in the case of a threat from a third party.¹³⁵

Discussion and Conclusion

After a brief faltering pause following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia began to impose its influence over the previous Soviet Republics. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict allowed Russia to increase its political-military presence in Armenia.¹³⁶ Azeri authorities were dismayed at Russia's dominant mediator role in the Karabakh conflict while at the same time blatantly supporting Armenia through military aid. Throughout the 1990s, many international observers along with Azeri authorities saw Russia as a hindrance to the resolution of the conflict. Indeed, even though Russia appeared to have adopted a more constructive attitude toward Azerbaijan in the late 1990s, Russia's prime motive behind its mediation efforts was to restore its influence in the post-Soviet space.¹³⁷

By supplying both Armenia and Azerbaijan with weapons, Russia increased its grip on the Caucasus region. It achieved a strong military presence in the region through its military bases in Armenia, South Ossetia, and the Abkhazia

Türkiye's support played an essential role in changing the power balance in the region in favor of Azerbaijan

(Russian-backed breakaway regions of Georgia).¹³⁸ Since 1991, Russia saw the growing interests of the U.S., China, and Türkiye in the region as a threat to its interests. With the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Russia proved itself as the dominant actor in the region, limiting the maneuver of its competitors.¹³⁹

Türkiye's initial optimism regarding its regional policy following the independence of Turkic states was offset by Russia's near-abroad policy. In the context of Russia's dominant political and military role in the Caucasus region, Türkiye could only play a minimal political and military role during the First Karabakh War. Türkiye's reaction to the Nakhchivan conflict took the form of discursive reactions based on the country's legal obligations and border militarization. The Second Karabakh War, on the other hand, allowed Türkiye to materialize its drone power and act as a game changer in the Caucasus region. More specifically, Türkiye's support played an essential role in changing the power balance in the region in favor of Azerbaijan. The war became a landmark of Türkiye's growing aspirations in the Caucasus.¹⁴⁰

However, Russia maintained the mediatorship role it pursued since the start of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War by brokering a ceasefire deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. After the signing of the deal, Russia prevented Türkiye's attempts to dispatch its peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁴¹ On November 12, 2020, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that no Turkish peacekeeping missions would be sent to Nagorno-Karabakh and that the activity of Turkish observers would be limited to the Russian-Turkish monitoring center in Agdam.¹⁴²

Yet, Russia's war in Ukraine opened the door for the weakening of its grip on its former Soviet space. Disappointed by the lack of Russian support during the 2020 war, Armenia mentioned the possibility of leaving the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-initiated military alliance.¹⁴³ Kyrgyzstan's president canceled CSTO exercises within its borders.¹⁴⁴ Taken all together, Russia's distraction due to the Ukraine war might allow other regional actors to increase their influence in the Caucasus, carrying the prospect of bringing more challenges to Russian hegemony in the region and instigating further strategic rivalries. ■

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