



The Karabakh War: Azerbaijan's Geopolitical Superiority Over Armenians*

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Abstract

Both modern-day Armenia and Azerbaijan were part of the Soviet Union from the 1920s to 1991. During that time, Nagorno-Karabakh, which had a multiethnic population mostly consisting of ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijani Turks, was officially controlled by Azerbaijan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan and Armenia became independent states. Since then, the struggle between Azerbaijan and Armenia has remained on the status of Karabakh. In the first Karabakh War, Armenia gained the upper hand with the help of Russia over unprepared and isolated Azerbaijan. While Karabakh is legally considered part of Azerbaijan, this region was controlled mainly by Armenian-backed separatist governments. Over the past several decades, Azerbaijan has prepared itself well to regain lost territory by developing its economy, training military personnel, acquiring cutting-edge equipment, and building diplomatic assets. In the recent Karabakh War, Azerbaijan gained geopolitical advantages, outperformed its rival Armenia in almost every arena, and successfully liberated most of its lost territory. The Azerbaijani government has been working on rebuilding and reconstructing liberated territories under the new local administration of Karabakh.

Key Words: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bilateral Relations, Karabakh, Geopolitical Advantage.

EL Codes: F59, A1, F5.

Karabağ Savaşı: Azerbaycan'ın Ermenilere Karşı Jeopolitik Üstünlüğü

Özet

Hem günümüz Ermenistan hem de Azerbaycan, 1920'lerden 1991'e kadar Sovyetler Birliği'nin parçasıydı. Bu süre zarfında, çoğunlukla etnik Ermeniler ve Azerbaycan Türkleri başta olmak üzere çok etnikli bir demografik yapıya sahip olan Karabağ resmi olarak Azerbaycan'ın kontrolündeydi. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan bağımsız devletler haline gelmiştir. Birinci Karabağ Savaşı'nda Ermenistan, hazırlıksız ve yalnız kalmış Azerbaycan'a karşı Rusya'nın yardımıyla üstünlük sağlamıştır. Karabağ yasal olarak Azerbaycan'ın bir parçası olarak görülse de bu bölge çoğunlukla Ermeni destekli ayrılıkçı hükümetlerin kontrolü altındaydı. O tarihten bu yana Azerbaycan ile Ermenistan arasında Karabağ'ın statüsü konusundaki mücadele devam etmiştir. Geçtiğimiz birkaç on yıl boyunca Azerbaycan, ekonomisini geliştirerek, askeri personeli eğiterek, son teknoloji ekipmanlar satın alarak ve diplomatik ilişkiler geliştirerek kaybettiği toprakları geri kazanmaya kendini iyi hazırlamıştır. Son Karabağ Savaşı'nda Azerbaycan elde ettiği jeopolitik avantajlar ile, neredeyse her alanda rakibi Ermenistan'a karşı üstünlük sağlayarak kaybettiği toprakları başarıyla özgürlüğe kavuşturmuştur. Azerbaycan hükümeti, Karabağ'ın yeni yerel yönetimi altında kurtarılmış bölgelerin yeniden inşası için çalışmalar yapmaya devam etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Azerbaycan, Ermenistan, İkili İlişkiler, Karabağ, Jeopolitik Avantaj

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Introduction

According to Azerbaijani historian Mirza Jamal Javanshir Garabaghi (1773-1853) "*Karabakh is bounded by the Araz River to the south, Kur River to the east, Goran River to the north, Karabakh mountains to the west*" (Jannatov, 2016: 52-54). Karabakh means "Black Garden" in the Turkic language, and it was initially named Arsakh-Artsakh in historical texts. The name Arsakh-Artsakh is also related to the ancient Sakh people who built a centralized great empire stretching from East Turkistan to the Black Sea under the leadership of Alp-Er Tunga (7. B.C), and they were the ancestors of the modern Turkic people. From Sakh to Hazar's and Seljuks to Qajar's various Turkic empires took control of the territory until the Russian Empire occupied the region in the 19th century. Based on historical facts, Azerbaijan claims they are the original inhabitants and legitimate landowners.

Despite international law recognizing Karabagh as a legitimate Azerbaijan territory, Armenia also claims it as its historical land. This is mainly related to the many ethnic Armenians inhabiting Nagorno-Karabagh in modern times. However, in the demographic change, Armenian immigration and the expulsion of Azerbaijani Turks by Russia and the Armenian government at various times played a crucial role. Russian envoy in Iran, Nikolay Shavrov, said:

We started colonization by placing the others, not the Russians, in the Southern Caucasus region. After the 1826–1828 wars, between 1828 and 1830, we placed more than 40.000 Iranian Armenians and 84.000 Turkish Armenians in the territories with the best public area. More than 1 million out of 1.3 million Armenians in Southern Casasia as of the beginning of this century are not native inhabitants of the region but rather were placed by us... (Şihaliyev, 2023: 330).

Both sides proclaimed Nagorno-Karabagh as their territory by emphasizing historical interpretations and racial presence. However, the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict has broader implications not only for Azerbaijan and Armenia but also for regional and global actors such as Russia, Iran, Turkey, the U.S., and the EU.

The Armenian occupation of Karabakh against international law was one of the main regional and international problems. It endangered the peace and security of the Southern Caucasian region. It has triggered an unending conflict and human tragedy between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Moreover, it has become a battleground for global and regional powers struggling to gain influence and pursue national interests. Dealing with this conflict to benefit the geopolitical environment, diplomatic assets, and national capabilities of Azerbaijan and Armenia play a crucial role.

In the first Karabakh War during 1988-1994, Armenia gained Russian military support. Moreover, Armenia also received Iran's weaponry aid during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, and this significantly assisted in Yerevan's efforts to overcome Turkey and Azerbaijan's economic bans (Şihaliyev, 2023: 334) and occupied Azerbaijani territories. These include parts of Karabakh (the districts of Shusha, Kalbajar, Lachyn, Gubadly, Zangilan, Jabrayil, Fuzuli, Khojavand, Khojaly, Aghdam, and Tartar), as well as 7 villages in the district of Gazakh and the village of Karki in the district of Sadarak (İmranlı, 2007: 8-11). However, Azerbaijan never accepted this occupation and brought this issue to various international platforms. At the same time, Azerbaijan kicks off a long-term strategy of preparation to liberate its lost territory. These include economic build-up, military training, logistics, buying up cutting-edge military

equipment, and gaining broader diplomatic international support. Recent Azerbaijani military operations against Armenia to liberate its lost territory proved that Baku outmaneuvered its rival in almost every arena and successfully returned most of its lost territory.

1. Geographic And Demographic Advantages

Geography, such as location, territory size, soil characteristics, rain and water resources, climate, etc., plays a crucial role in countries’ development. A country with abundant fertile land and water resources and a favorable environment has great potential to feed larger populations and develop. Geography is not the only determinant factor of any country’s development but is one of its main components.

The location of a country and its climate affect economic growth and development. This occurs by affecting transport costs, disease burdens, and agricultural productivity. Geography also seems to influence economic policy choices (Gullap & Mellenger, 1998: 180).

Figure 1: South Caucasian Map



Source: Tarihistan.org, July 26, 2021.

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia are in the South Caucasus region and were former members of the Soviet Union and gained independence in 1991. Although they have a similar climate, in many aspects, they are different. Azerbaijan has a large territory compared with Armenia. Most importantly, it has long beaches in the Caspian Sea, which is rich in mineral resources such as oil and natural gas. Moreover, the Caspian Sea provides strategic advantages to Azerbaijan in terms of transport, building, and developing relations with outside the world in trade, economics, security, and so on.

Armenia is a small country by its size of territory and population compared with its hostile neighbor. Yerevan has no connections to the seas, making it difficult and vulnerable to communicating and building trade and other relations with the wider world. Geographical misfortune also plays a negative role in the country’s overall economic growth and development.

Table 1: Azerbaijan and Armenia Comparison by Land Area and Population

Country	Land (km ²)	Population1991 (thousands)	Population2023 (thousands)
Azerbaijan	86,600	7,271	10,175
Armenia	29,740	3,618	2,780

Source: Data World Bank.org, 2023.

Demography is also one of the key components of determining a country’s overall potential. Size of population, age, health, fertility, education levels, and productivity affect economic growth and development. This is also one factor determining a country’s future development. When Azerbaijan and Armenia became independent in 1991, Baku had demographic advantages over Yerevan. Since then, the demographic gap between them has widened from 2/1 to more than 3/1 in just over three decades. This development trend makes it difficult for Armenia to compete against Azerbaijan without steady external support from the great powers.

In addition to its demographic advantages, Azerbaijan is surrounded by racial and religious brothers from all sides. In the south, there are over 30 million Azerbaijan Turks in neighboring northern Iran, Türkiye in the west, and the east, there are many independent Turkic states such as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, all of which have both racial and religious affinities. Even in the north, the Russian Caucasus is mostly dominated by Muslim populations. Georgia is different but has close ties with Azerbaijan and Turkey. This makes it easy for Azerbaijan to trade and communicate with the outside world. Geographical locations also give Baku an advantage in receiving external support when needed. Armenia, facing difficulty in gaining and receiving external support and its unfavorable geographical location, plays as a handcuff.

2. Financial Strength and Economic Potential

Like geography, demography, culture, institutions, and history, the economy also contributes to a country’s competitiveness with other countries. How a country that is wealthier and more prosperous naturally gains advantages over other countries that are poor and lack resources. When a country is rich and has an abundance of wealth, it can invest in the development of other areas that can help increase its overall competitiveness—from military to education, improving logistics to buying up diplomatic alliances, all necessities to wealth distributions and financial investments.

Table 2: Azerbaijan and Armenia’s Economic Comparison

Country	Azerbaijan	Armenia
GDP 2022 (billion Dollar)	78.72	19.50
GDP per 2022 capita (dollar)	7,773	6,551
Exports 2021 (billion dollars)	21.69	3.02
Imports 2021 the (billion dollars)	11.55	5.35
Trade Balance to GDP 2021 (%)	18.58	-16.85
Debt (%GDP) 2021	20.68	60.25
Personal remittances received in 2022 (billion dollars)	3.95	2.03

Source: Data World Bank.org, 2023; Country economy, 2023.

Compared to Azerbaijan with Armenia from various angles, it has absolute advantages over Armenia. Azerbaijan has the largest economy and is wealthier by overall per capita GDP than Armenia. Baku also accumulates a great sum of wealth by maintaining a positive trade balance. In contrast, Armenia has a negative balance of trade and greater debt to the national GDP.

With the outbreak of the Russian–Ukraine War, remittances to Armenia were soaring compared to previous years. Some expect this to be a good phenomenon resulting from

Armenian effective governance and wise economic policies. In contrast, this is a temporary phenomenon and will have no long-lasting positive effects. *“These ‘hot money’ inflows will fall as quickly as they have increased if this accidental factor disappears. So, pinning big hopes on them or setting ambitious objectives because of them is just wrong”* (Azatutyun, 2022, July 27).

Neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia has developed or modernized economies. Azerbaijan’s economic growth highly depends on energy and greatly affects international energy prices. The contributions of non-energy sectors have been moderate to the country’s economic engagements with the world. Azerbaijan’s exports are dominated by oil and natural gas, which account for over 90% of its exports. In 2022, petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals and crude oil accounted for about 51% of Azerbaijan’s exports, and the share of petroleum gases and other gaseous hydrocarbons was 39% (trendeconomy.com, 2023). The remaining consisted of aluminum, cotton articles thereof, edible fruit and nuts, and peel of citrus fruit or melons. The share of industrial products and high-tech commodities was very slim or almost did not exist. Contradictory to its energy and raw material exports, manufactured products and high technology commodities occupy the top lists. Azerbaijan’s economy is not innovation-driven, and the leaders of the country did not pay sufficient attention to the country’s industrialization. Therefore, Baku very much depends on the world to fulfill its demand for manufactured and tech-based products. Its economic well-being is dependent on God’s bestowed abundant natural resource extraction and increasing energy prices. Armenia has more population that lives under the poverty line 24.8% and this ratio for Azerbaijan is less than 6% (Data World Bank, 2024).

The economic overview of Armenia is not better than that of Azerbaijan. This country is not geographically misfortunate but economically poor and backward. It has a small economic size, and its exports are very limited. Among its multi-billion-dollar exports, natural or cultured pearls, precious or semi-precious stones, precious metals, metals clad with precious metals, and articles thereof occupy the top list (trendeconomy.com, 2023). However, compared to Azerbaijan, Armenian exports are a little bit more diversified. Armenia exports manufactured products such as electrical machinery and equipment and parts, manufactured tobacco, articles of apparel and clothing accessories, and beverages.

Diversification of export commodities is a good indicator of economic health and future growth. However, in the Armenian case, the situation is complicated. While it can export some non-energy commodities, its value is very limited. Compared to its hostile neighbor, which has an economy about four times larger and exports about six times bigger, this shadows Armenia’s advantages of export diversification. In addition, Armenia imports more than its exports and has a higher debt percentage to GDP than Azerbaijan. While Azerbaijan’s economy is less diversified, it has tremendous energy resources that can be sold to the world market. and abundant wealth to buy up its necessities. Azerbaijan also uses economic weight to outmatch Armenia by buying diplomatic assets and influencing foreign media.

3. Military Buildup and Diplomatic Strength

Military power is one of the key components that determine a country’s competitiveness. It is also one of the main factors in evaluating a country’s independence level. If a country is militarily strong and has a robust arms industry, it will gain more advantages in safeguarding

the peace and security of the state. If a country is weak militarily compared to its adversary, it is more vulnerable to external threats and faces difficulty maintaining territorial integrity and political sovereignty. Even this is true in modern times. Sometimes, international laws and regulations are unable to stop the violations and war between nations worldwide, just like the Armenian occupation of Karabakh in 1988-1994 and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine.

There were ethnic issues between Azerbaijan Turks and Armenians in Karabakh even before the Soviet Union collapsed. The problem continues even after the emergence of independent Azerbaijan and Armenia. While Karabakh was legally an Azerbaijani territory, most of the ethnic Armenians and the Armenian government were not satisfied, and they determined to change the status quo. When the Soviet Union collapsed, both Azerbaijan and Armenia declared independence. Karabakh voted to secede from Azerbaijan and declared the independence of the Karabakh Republic. However, the newly independent Azerbaijan rejected abolishing Karabakh’s self-rule and wants to integrate it fully into the rest of the country (www.polgeonow.com, 2020). The small-scale clash among various groups turned into a full-scale war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. With the support of Russia and Iran, Armenia gained the upper hand and successfully occupied Nagorno-Karabakh.

Figure 2: Azerbaijan and the Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh



Source: insights.grcglobalgroup.com, 2022.

While Azerbaijan was right to claim the territory by international law, due to its incapability in the military and lack of diplomatic support, it lost the right to struggle against Armenia. There was some support from Turkey and other countries for Baku, but it was very limited and was not enough to change the outcome. The UN Security Council, in its resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884, demanded that Armenia withdraw its troops immediately from the territories it has occupied in Azerbaijan (Alkan & Mehdizadehyoushanlouei, 2020: 205-210). However, without real international pressure and with the support of some major global and regional powers, Armenia did not want to obey international laws and kept occupying Nagorno-Karabakh. The only option remaining for Azerbaijan to regain its lost territory is to prepare for an armed struggle.

After the war, Azerbaijan lost a large amount of land and thousands of lives, and Azerbaijani Turks in Nagorno-Karabagh even faced genocide (ex. Hocali Genocide in 1992) or were forced to migrate to other parts of Azerbaijan. These bring huge personal and financial burdens and harm to the national pride of Azerbaijan. Baku’s government was also pressured by its people to find a solution to regain its lost territory.

Azerbaijan has done its homework well researching the cause of loss and admitted its weakness. Moreover, they developed a long-term strategy to build up its economy, modernize the army, and buy up broader diplomatic support to regain its lost territory. Azerbaijan exploited its vast natural resources and generated enormous wealth. It converted economic wealth into military assets. Baku buys billions of dollars in cutting-edge military equipment from Israel, Türkiye, and other countries. More than 60% of Azerbaijani weapons imports came from Israel between 2017 and 2020. Azerbaijan purchased a wide variety of drones, missiles, and mortars from Israel between 2010 and 2020 (Saltman, 2023, October 4). Turkey, on the other hand, played a crucial role in training Azerbaijani personnel, providing various assistance, including the use of Bayraktar drones.

Table 3: Azerbaijan and Armenia Military Comparison 2023

Country	Azerbaijan	Armenia
Total Population (million)	10.11	2.77
Available Manpower (million)	5.07	1.68
Active personnel (thousands)	65	45
Reserve Personnel (thousands)	300	210
Defense Budget (billion dollars)	0.632	3.10
Purchasing power (billion dollars)	140	40
Total Aircraft	148	64
Tanks	920	519
Armored Vehicles	29,312	11,896
Total Artillery	486	183
Airports	23	7
Roadways km	24,981	7,700
Railroad km	2,944	780

Source: data.worldbank.org, 2024; Global Firepower.org, 2023.

As shown in the table above, Azerbaijan has an advantage in terms of the quantity of manpower and military personnel. Besides this, Azerbaijan outnumbered both in military equipment of various types and road coverage, which is essential in providing logistics. In addition, Azerbaijan holds a formidable naval power that Armenia lacks due to its landlocked geographic characteristics. This provides Azerbaijan with tremendous advantages in receiving aid, providing logistics, and diplomatic maneuverability in the international arena.

Moreover, Azerbaijan's economic power is many times greater than Armenia's, and its military budget is about five times greater. This enabled the Azerbaijani army to receive more financial support and purchase various high-tech military equipment. According to the Stockholm International and Peace Research Institute, between 2009 and 2018, Azerbaijan's military spending totaled almost \$24 billion, and Armenia spent slightly more than \$4 billion in the same period (Bhutia, 2019: 1). Azerbaijan's source of arms supply varies. Most importantly, Israel and Turkey. Russia and other European countries are formidable arms suppliers to Baku.

Armenia's traditional arms suppliers are mainly Russia and, recently, India. Iran has close historical ties with Armenia and a main strategic alliance with Azerbaijan. Because of the U.S.-led international sanctions on Tehran, Yerevan did not dare to openly buy Iranian arms. The Armenian disadvantage first comes from its very limited defense budget and financial capability to buy the necessary modern equipment. Second, Armenia failed to build a robust arms industry and diversify its military partners. Yerevan's military buying mostly originates from Soviet or

Post-Soviet-Russian types of equipment. Russian military technologies are lagging behind Western counterparts in terms of modernization, and it has also been tested in Ukraine that Russian equipment struggling to cope with cutting edge western technologies. Even Turkish drones and other military supplies that use modern technologies are superior to their Russian counterparts. India provided formidable arms to Armenia. However, its arms technologies also have very close links with Russian technologies, which did not match with the Western counterparts that Azerbaijani gained. And this was in the Karabakh War 27 September 2020 – 10 November 2020.

The 2020 Karabakh War was not only fought between two rival powers. *“In essence, the war was fought between two strategic paradigms, one belonging to the 21st century and the other the remnant of 20th-century military thinking”* (Kasapoğlu, 2021: 3). In just 44 days, Azerbaijan defeated the Armenian army and regained most of its lost territory. The Armenian army equipped with traditional weapons and using outdated military strategies failed to counter the modernized Azerbaijani army equipped with 21st-century technologies such as AI and drones.

As a geographically alienated country, Armenia also failed to gain broader diplomatic support from the world. The Western world, especially the U.S., and Europe remained neutral while there were some criticisms of Azerbaijan. No country in the West was openly involved in the war or stood in solidarity with Yerevan. Russia, which is the most influential power and determining factor among Caucasians, abstained from taking sides in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. In the recent one-day war in September 2023, Russia again kept silent, showing unwillingness to participate in the Karabakh War. As a strategic alliance and security guarantor, Russia failed to materialize its support and disappointed Armenia. Possibly, Russia did this to punish Armenia for its pro-Western stance. Pashinyan stated, “We decided to ratify the Rome Statute when it became clear to us that the CSTO and the instruments of the Russian– Armenian strategic partnership were not sufficient to ensure Armenia’s external security”. Russia responded to the ratification as an *“extremely hostile”* step (<https://carnegieendowment.org>, 2023).

Moreover, Russian calculations might come from its involvement in the Ukraine War and turning the main points to struggle against the West. Involving the Azerbaijan–Armenian conflict to risk its relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey does not serve Moscow’s national interest, especially at this critical time. Iran strongly advocates and supports Armenia. However, with Russian direct involvement, Iran cannot change the result. Despite its concern and interest in maintaining the prewar status quo, it has very limited capability and maneuverability to do so. Iran has been under the Western embargo for several decades, and this adversely affects the modernization of its economy and military. Besides this, most of them are in the north with neighboring Azerbaijan, where over 30 million Azerbaijani Turks live inside Iran. Any Iranian open support for Armenia or direct involvement counter-affects its domestic policy. This necessitates the Iranian government to take precautionary steps.

The country that openly supported and provided arms to Armenia was India. India has a national interest in connecting its economy to Russia and Europe by using both Iranian and Armenian soils. Keeping good relations and building a strategic partnership with Yerevan is

are Delhi's priority in the Caucasian region. Arms export secondary to serve its main strategic goal. In addition, India has concerns about developing relations between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan. Pakistan is India's one of the main adversaries, and they have Kashmir issues. Both Turkey and Azerbaijan support Pakistan on the Kashmir issue against India. Pakistan took sides with Azerbaijan in the Karabakh War. India considers that:

This Turkish–Azerbaijani–Pakistani axis would endanger its grand connectivity project and become more assertive in other regions such as Kashmir, India stepped in to fill the void left by Russia's Ukraine distraction to secure its regional geopolitical and geo-economic interests by striking an arms trade with Yerevan (Tashjian, 2022:1-2).

Thus, India took sides in showing its resistance to Pakistan and its supporters. Resistance to Turkey's imperial aim of establishing a pan-Turkic empire, governed from Ankara, is discernible in the modern-day Caucasus and other parts of Eurasia (Bhan, 2022: 1).

New Delhi's support of Armenia also could not change the outcome of the war and failed to prevent Armenian defeat. Azerbaijan proved its preparedness to quickly defeat rivals and regain lost territories in a very short period. Gaining broader support from friendly countries such as Turkey, Israel, Pakistan, and others also played a significant role in Azerbaijani success.

4. Karabakh Under Azerbaijani Rule

The situation in Karabakh, also formerly known as Nagorno-Karabakh, has been relatively stable since the ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia in November 2020. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region has a long history, and the ceasefire brought an end to the active hostilities. Under the ceasefire agreement, Russian peacekeepers were deployed to the region to monitor the situation and help maintain peace. However, tensions still exist, and there have been occasional reports of ceasefire violations and border incidents.

On September 20, 2023, a day after Azerbaijan launched an armed offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh (also referred to as the third Nagorno-Karabakh war), an ethnic-Armenian enclave inside its borders, a ceasefire took hold. Under its terms, the region's Armenian separatists agreed to surrender and disband, something Azerbaijan has insisted on for some time (www.economist.com, 2023). Since then, Azerbaijan fully controlled the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

After controlling the region, the main task of the Azerbaijani government was to build order and enforce laws to ensure peace and security in the region and population. Baku claimed that *“Work is conducted to enforce law and order in the entire Karabakh region and Azerbaijani police have moved to protect the rights and ensure the security of the Armenian population under Azerbaijan's law”* (The Associated Press, 2023). Because of deep mistrust between Armenian and Azerbaijani communities and fear of ethnic Armenians for their future under Azerbaijani rule thousands of Armenians have already abandoned their homes and many more may decide to flee to Armenia. As of October 3, more than 100,000 people-(more than 80% of its residents) of Nagorno-Karabakh had fled to Armenia, refusing to live under Azerbaijani rule (Martirosyan, 2023: 1).

Efforts are ongoing to find a long-term solution to the conflict, including discussions between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and international mediators. The situation remains complex and delicate, with the need for continued diplomatic efforts to ensure lasting peace and stability in

the region. On January 1, 2024, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), the entity at the heart of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, ceased - officially - to exist (Broers, 2024). The leaders of the Nagorno-Karabakh region failed to achieve their aspirations of statehood, leaving the community to flee in chaos following the 19-20 September fight. According to the observations of the EU Human Rights Commission:

“After the war, security along the international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan remained fragile, with numerous episodes of armed incidents. Constant threats to the life and security of the population living in border villages fueled a sentiment of fear, disrupting their daily lives and undermining the full enjoyment of their human rights. The lack of action to effectively counter the spread of sentiments of hostility, hate speech, and intolerance continued to prevent efforts aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation between the populations affected by the conflict. This combined with the continued lack of a comprehensive approach to dealing with the past and addressing the serious human rights violations committed in the context of the outbreaks of conflict in the 1990s and from 2020 up until today has fueled fear among the population about their safety and respect for their rights.

Since December 12, 2022, the blocking of the Lachin corridor, the only road connecting the Karabakh region with Armenia, disrupted the distribution of essential goods and services leading to the isolation of Karabakh Armenians, who had to start rationing the available resources. There were also frequent cuts of gas supplies to the region during freezing winter conditions (Council of Europe, 2024:2-3).

Since they took control of Karabakh, Azerbaijan kicked off reconstruction projects in this region. Over the past three years, Baku spent over 7 billion dollars on building two airports, renewing roads, and building houses for resettlement (www.trthaber.com, 2023). Besides these, Azerbaijan is trying to improve diplomatic relations with Armenia and other international actors to build lasting peace and safeguard the security and prosperity of the Karabakh region.

Conclusion

During the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1988-1994, Azerbaijan lost its territory Nagorno-Karabakh to Russia and Iran-backed Armenia. This greatly affects the geopolitics and security of the Southern Caucasus region. Since then, the Armenian-backed government has taken control of the region, and Russian peacekeeping missions have settled there. Russian presence continued based on an alignment of common interest with Yerevan. However, for Azerbaijan, it brought calamities such as losing a large portion of land, economic loss, human casualties, expulsion from its territory, and harming national pride.

Moreover, the defeat in the First Karabakh War also planted the seeds for future Azerbaijani success in 2020 and 2023. Azerbaijan learned from its defeat that there is no victory without a robust economy and strong army and is determined to prepare to regain its lost territory eventually. Baku exploited immense God-bestowed natural wealth such as oil and natural gas, generating massive wealth. It built its economy, roads, and various types of infrastructure. Baku found the change in military technology and military thinking to invest in future warfare.

Armenia is heavily dependent on Russia for its security rather than focusing on

modernizing its armed forces and building up its national capabilities. Besides this, Armenia is landlocked and has no abundant natural resources. This geopolitical disadvantage also negatively affects its development. On the contrary, Azerbaijan is located near the Caspian Sea, which has abundant natural resources and is considered a center of the crossroads between Central Asian Turkic republics and Turkey, Iran, and Russia. These geopolitical advantages and the richness of natural resources play positive roles in opening up its economy to the world market and developing its economy.

In the past thirty years, Azerbaijan performed well in every arena compared to Armenia economically, diplomatically, and militarily. Moreover, Azerbaijan's population has been increasing faster than Armenia's ratio, up from 2/1 to 3/1 in just three decades. Demography is one of the critical factors in countries' economic progress and military arenas. An abundance of manpower will help countries increase production and provide the necessary personnel for their security. In this case, Armenia lags behind its counterpart Azerbaijan in increasing its population and reducing poverty.

Azerbaijan adopted a pragmatic approach to building diplomatic alliances with various countries, including Türkiye and other Turkic states and Western countries, and tried to keep good relations with Russia for its benefit. At the same time, Baku also diversified its military partners and equipped both NATO and Russian armaments. Türkiye and Israel have played crucial roles in the modernization of the Azerbaijani army.

Armenia pursued a policy without clear diplomatic objectives. Especially in recent years, Yerevan has tried to lean on the Western countries, and this adversely affects its relations with Moscow. Armenia also failed to diversify its economy, diplomacy, and military sources. Since combat and competition between rivals depend on national capabilities, any country that lacks national capabilities cannot reach its political objectives. The Karabakh War in 2020 and 2023 showed that the well-prepared and modernized Azerbaijani army defeated the outdated Armenian army. Moreover, it also shows that the key to success depends on economic strength, diplomatic skills, and military power. A country that relies on other countries to safeguard its national interest will be doomed. As times and situations change, countries' national interests also naturally change. Russia is the most important player in the Caucasus region that can change the outcome, and Armenia, with its unrealistic approach, disappointed Russia. Without Russian help, Armenia could not counterbalance its strong adversary, Azerbaijan. In the Karabakh War, Azerbaijan successfully gained Russian neutrality by pursuing real politics and a pragmatic approach. Baku outperformed Armenia in almost every arena, became successful, and regained the Karabakh region.

Çıkar Beyanı: Yazarlar arasında çıkar çatışması yoktur. (Birden fazla yazar varsa doldurulacaktır)

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