

# MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR: AZERBAIJAN’S STRATEGY, RUSSIA’S STANCE AND TÜRKİYE’S ROLE

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## Abstract

The Second Karabakh War marked a significant turning point in the geopolitics of the South Caucasus, highlighting the evolution of military strategies and the mutual interactions of regional powers. This article analyzes Azerbaijan’s military strategy, Türkiye’s role, and Russia’s stance in the context of the Second Karabakh War. As a result of the war, Azerbaijan re-established its sovereignty over its internationally recognized territories, leading to a new geopolitical reality in the South Caucasus. The article examines the war’s military, diplomatic, and political aspects, evaluating the impact of technology and regional powers in modern conflicts. Additionally, it analyzes Azerbaijan’s strategic planning to restore territorial integrity since the 2000s and explores its effective use of modern warfare tools, including unmanned aerial vehicles and high-precision weapon systems. This success was made possible through tight military cooperation and the highly coordinated implementation of modern military thought. In this process, Türkiye’s active involvement in military training, technical equipment, and strategic consultancy significantly contributed to Azerbaijan’s operational efficiency. On the other hand, Russia sought to maintain a balanced stance during the conflict but ultimately played the role of the primary mediator in ending the war. While Russia did not openly defend Armenia, it emphasized its alliance with Armenia within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) framework. The Second Karabakh War unfolded with Azerbaijan’s successful military strategy, Türkiye’s support, and Russia’s balanced position. Azerbaijan’s victory reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus and created new realities. This research also examines the war’s military, diplomatic, and political dimensions within a scientific methodology, contributing to the study of modern conflict management, regional power policies, and sovereignty issues within the framework of international law. The article also emphasizes that the Second Karabakh War will have long-term effects on regional security dynamics and that regional alliances and power balances will be reshaped. In this context, Azerbaijan’s victory has created significant opportunities not only in military terms but also diplomatically and economically.

**Keywords:** Russia, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Second Karabagh war, strategy, diplomacy.

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## İKİNCİ KARABAĞ SAVAŞI'NDAKİ ASKERİ OPERASYONLAR: AZERBAYCAN'IN STRATEJİSİ, RUSYA'NIN TUTUMU VE TÜRKİYE'NİN ROLÜ

### Öz

İkinci Karabağ Savaşı, Güney Kafkasya'nın jeopolitiğinde önemli bir dönüm noktası olmuş, askeri stratejilerin gelişimini ve bölgesel güçlerin karşılıklı etkileşimini gözler önüne sermiştir. Bu makale, İkinci Karabağ Savaşı bağlamında Azerbaycan'ın askeri stratejisini, Türkiye'nin rolünü ve Rusya'nın tutumunu analiz etmektedir. Savaş sonucunda Azerbaycan, uluslararası hukuk ilkeleri çerçevesinde tanınan toprakları üzerindeki egemenliğini yeniden tesis etmiş ve Güney Kafkasya'da yeni jeopolitik bir gerçeklik oluşmuştur. Makale, savaşın askeri, diplomatik ve siyasi yönlerini inceleyerek modern çatışmalarda teknolojinin ve bölgesel güçlerin etkisini değerlendirmektedir. Ayrıca, Azerbaycan'ın 2000'li yıllardan itibaren toprak bütünlüğünü yeniden sağlama sürecinde hayata geçirdiği stratejik planlamayı analiz etmekte ve modern savaş araçlarından – insansız hava araçları ile yüksek hassasiyetli silah sistemlerinden ustaca yararlanmasını incelemektedir. Bu başarı, aynı zamanda askeri operasyonlarda sıkı iş birliği ve modern askeri düşüncenin yüksek koordinasyonlu uygulanması sayesinde mümkün olmuştur. Bu süreçte Türkiye'nin askeri eğitim, teknik donanım ve stratejik danışmanlık alanındaki aktif katılımı, Azerbaycan'ın operasyonel verimliliğine önemli katkılar sunmuştur. Rusya ise çatışmada dengeli bir tutum sergilemeye çalışmış, ancak nihayetinde savaşın sona erdirilmesinde ana arabulucu olmuştur. Rusya, Ermenistan'ı açıkça savunmamış, ancak Kolektif Güvenlik Anlaşması Örgütü (KGAÖ) çerçevesinde onun müttefiki olduğunu vurgulamıştır. İkinci Karabağ Savaşı, Azerbaycan'ın başarılı askeri stratejisi, Türkiye'nin desteği ve Rusya'nın dengeli tutumu çerçevesinde gerçekleşmiştir. Azerbaycan'ın zaferi, Güney Kafkasya'daki jeopolitik durumu değiştirmiş ve yeni gerçeklikler yaratmıştır. Araştırma aynı zamanda savaşın askeri, diplomatik ve siyasi boyutlarını bilimsel metodoloji çerçevesinde ele alarak, modern çatışmaların yönetimi, bölgesel güçlerin politikaları ve uluslararası hukuk kapsamında egemenlik meselelerinin incelenmesine katkı sağlamaktadır. Makale, ayrıca, İkinci Karabağ Savaşı'nın bölgesel güvenlik dinamikleri üzerinde uzun vadeli etkiler yaratacağını ve bölgesel ittifaklar ile güç dengelerinin yeniden şekilleneceğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Azerbaycan'ın zaferi, sadece askeri değil, aynı zamanda diplomatik ve ekonomik açıdan da önemli fırsatlar doğurmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Rusya, Azerbaycan, Türkiye, İkinci Karabağ savaşı, strateji, diplomasi.



## ВОЕННЫЕ ДЕЙСТВИЯ ВО ВТОРОЙ КАРАБАХСКОЙ ВОЙНЕ: СТРАТЕГИЯ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА, ПОЗИЦИЯ РОССИИ И РОЛЬ ТУРЦИИ

### Аннотация

Вторая Карабахская война ознаменовала собой значительный поворот в геополитике Южного Кавказа, подчеркнув эволюцию военных стратегий и взаимное влияние региональных держав. В данной статье анализируется военная стратегия Азербайджана, роль Турции и позиция России в контексте Второй Карабахской войны. В результате войны Азербайджан восстановил свой суверенитет над международно признанными территориями, что привело к формированию новой геополитической реальности в Южном Кавказе. Статья рассматривает военные, дипломатические и политические аспекты войны, оценивая влияние технологий и региональных держав на современные конфликты. Кроме того, в ней анализируется стратегическое

планирование Азербайджана в его усилиях по восстановлению территориальной целостности с 2000-х годов, а также эффективное использование современных средств ведения войны, включая беспилотные летательные аппараты и высокоточные системы вооружения. Этот успех стал возможен благодаря тесному военному сотрудничеству и высококоординированному внедрению современных военных концепций. В этом процессе активное участие Турции в военной подготовке, обеспечении техническим оснащением и стратегическом консультировании существенно повысило оперативную эффективность Азербайджана. Россия, в свою очередь, стремилась сохранять сбалансированную позицию во время конфликта, но в конечном итоге сыграла ключевую роль посредника в его завершении. Несмотря на то что Россия открыто не поддержала Армению, она подчеркнула свой союз с ней в рамках Организации Договора о коллективной безопасности (ОДКБ). Вторая Карабахская война развернулась в рамках успешной военной стратегии Азербайджана, поддержки со стороны Турции и сбалансированной позиции России. Победа Азербайджана изменила геополитический ландшафт Южного Кавказа и создала новые реалии. Данное исследование также рассматривает военные, дипломатические и политические измерения войны с применением научной методологии, внося вклад в изучение современных методов управления конфликтами, политики региональных держав и вопросов суверенитета в рамках международного права. Статья также подчеркивает, что Вторая Карабахская война окажет долгосрочное влияние на региональную динамику безопасности, а также на перераспределение региональных альянсов и силовых балансов. В этом контексте победа Азербайджана открыла значительные возможности не только в военной сфере, но и в дипломатическом и экономическом плане.

**Ключевые слова:** Россия, Азербайджан, Турция, Вторая Карабахская война, стратегия, дипломатия.



## Introduction

The Second Karabakh War marked a key turning point in regional security, demonstrating the significant impact of new military technologies and modern strategic warfare. It examines how the military strategies and technological advancements that shaped the trajectory of the conflict aligned with international legal norms and contributed to a redefinition of the regional security paradigm. In this context, the study reviews the existing literature on the war technologies employed during the conflict, presents a detailed analysis of its military dimensions, evaluates the events through the lens of international law, and offers a thorough examination of Türkiye's active strategic role alongside Russia's more ambiguous position. The central research questions are as follows: How did Azerbaijan utilize modern warfare technologies and adaptive military strategies, and what impact did these have on the progression and outcomes of the conflict? In what ways did Russia's ambiguous stance and Türkiye's diplomatic interventions influence military operations and shape international responses? How did these dynamics contribute to evolving interpretations of international law and regional security architecture? The primary hypothesis posits that Azerbaijan's innovative

operational tactics and effective integration of advanced warfare technologies played a decisive role in shaping the trajectory of the conflict. Simultaneously, it is hypothesized that Russia's ambivalent position, contrasted with Türkiye's proactive diplomatic and legal engagements, not only challenged the legitimacy of the conflict but also critically exposed alleged violations of international law. Through this multifaceted analytical approach, the study seeks to provide a profound re-evaluation of contemporary warfare dynamics, the strategic application of military technology, and the evolving influence of international legal frameworks. In doing so, it aims to make a significant contribution to the scholarly discourse on conflict theory and international relations in the post-Soviet space. Türkiye, by providing military assistance, expertise, and technological support, particularly through the deployment of Bayraktar TB2 drones, demonstrated its growing influence in modern warfare and its expanding role in regional conflicts. This assistance reshaped power dynamics in the South Caucasus, challenged traditional spheres of influence, and altered strategic calculations. Russia pursued a balanced policy throughout the conflict, maintaining neutral relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia. Despite Armenia traditionally being considered a close ally, Moscow refrained from direct military intervention due to several geopolitical factors, including its broader strategic priorities, its interest in maintaining leverage over both sides and its desire to avoid confrontation with Türkiye. Instead, Russia positioned itself as a mediator, ultimately brokering the trilateral ceasefire agreement of November 10, 2020. This agreement not only ended hostilities but also reinforced Russia's role as a key power broker in the region, deploying peacekeeping forces to Karabakh and ensuring its continued presence in the South Caucasus. Beyond its military and geopolitical dimensions, the war had significant legal and diplomatic implications. Azerbaijan consistently framed its military operations within the framework of international law, emphasizing that it was liberating its territories from occupation by United Nations Security Council resolutions. This legal justification strengthened Azerbaijan's position on the global stage, garnering diplomatic support from various countries and international organizations. The successful conclusion of the war allowed Azerbaijan to restore its territorial integrity after nearly three decades, marking a historic turning point in its national struggle. Furthermore, the conflict underscored the evolving nature of Türkiye-Russia relations. Despite supporting opposing sides in several regional conflicts including Syria and Libya, Türkiye and Russia managed to maintain a pragmatic approach during the Second Karabakh War, avoiding direct military confrontation and instead focusing on diplomatic engagement. The war highlighted the complex yet cooperative nature of their relationship, in which competition and collaboration coexist. How both nations navigated the conflict demonstrated their capacity to engage in regional power politics while avoiding direct clashes. The Second Karabakh War not only reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus but also set new precedents for modern warfare. Its implications extend beyond Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the immediate region, offering valuable insights into the intersection of military technology, diplomacy, and international law.

### **1) Historical Aspect of the Karabakh War**

The Karabakh conflict represents a historically rooted and multifaceted issue that

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has profoundly influenced the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus. Its origins date to the 19th century, particularly following the expansion of the Russian Empire into the region. After the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay between Russia and Iran, Russian authorities implemented a policy of resettling Armenian populations from Qajar Iran and the Ottoman Empire into territories including Karabakh, Zangezur, Nakhchivan, and Irevan. While ostensibly framed in humanitarian terms, this policy served strategic objectives aimed at consolidating Russian political and military control over the South Caucasus. According to official Russian records, approximately 40,000 Armenians were relocated from Iran and over 84,000 from Ottoman territories to the region between 1828 and 1831.<sup>1</sup> This migration significantly altered the demographic composition of Karabakh and adjacent areas, gradually diminishing the numerical predominance of the Muslim-Turkic population.<sup>2</sup> The settlement of Armenians precipitated not only demographic shifts but also profound changes in land ownership, local administrative structures, and the broader social fabric. The historically multicultural character of Karabakh grew increasingly fragile due to rising tensions and external interventions during this period. This demographic reconfiguration constitutes a foundational element in understanding the historical context of contemporary regional conflicts. The mass relocation of Armenians to territories within modern-day Azerbaijan particularly Karabakh and Zangezur disrupted the ethnic balance and established conditions conducive to future Armenian nationalist movements. Against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's decline in the late 1980s, Armenian separatists demanded Karabakh's annexation to Armenia. Protests beginning in February 1988 escalated into armed clashes. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the conflict evolved into a full-scale war. A 1994 ceasefire agreement left Karabakh and seven surrounding districts under Armenian control. The war resulted in approximately 30,000 fatalities and displaced over one million Azerbaijanis, many of whom became refugees or internally displaced persons.<sup>3</sup> During this period of escalating separatist activities, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet government failed to adequately assess the crisis. The resolution of March 24, 1988, titled "Measures to Accelerate the Socio-Economic Development of the Karabakh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijani SSR (1988–1995)" appeared deliberately designed to obscure the underlying separatist dimensions of the conflict.<sup>4</sup> Such measures emboldened Armenian separatists, intensifying hostilities. Moscow further advanced the separation of Karabakh from Azerbaijan's jurisdiction through the January 12, 1989, decision by the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet establishing a "Special Administrative System" in Karabakh.<sup>5</sup> This structure aimed to facilitate annexation to Armenia, but sustained resistance by Azerbaijanis led to its

<sup>1</sup> Shavrov Nikolay Nikolaevich, *Novaya ugroza russkomu delu v Zakavkaz'ye: predstoyashchaya rasprodazha Mugani inorodtsam* (Baku: Elm, 1990), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Zeynep Akarslan, "Azərbaycan Gazetesinə Göre "Karabağ'ın Son Günleri," *ETÜT Dergisi* 9 (2024): 77.

<sup>3</sup> "Qarabağın tarixi," Azərbaycan Respublikası Müharibə, Əmək və Silahlı Qüvvələr Veteranları Təşkilatı, accessed 18.03.2025, <https://veteran.gov.az/az/memories/qarabagin-tarixi>

<sup>4</sup> "Ermənistan-Azərbaycan münaqişəsi: tarixə baxış," Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsinin Prezident Kitabxanası, 282, accessed 18.03.2025, <https://files.preslib.az/projects/conflict/gl1.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> "Ermənistan-Azərbaycan münaqişəsi: tarixə baxış," 177.

abolition on November 28, 1989.<sup>6</sup> It was replaced by an “Organizational Committee,” which Armenia exploited to declare the unconstitutional unification of Karabakh with Armenia on December 1, 1989, a direct violation of Azerbaijani territorial integrity. Moscow’s tacit acceptance of this act exacerbated tensions. Under Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet leadership then committed a critical violation against Azerbaijan. Disregarding constitutional obligations, the Soviet state deployed heavily armed forces to Baku on January 19–20, 1990, resulting in violent suppression and civilian casualties. The January 20 tragedy, however, galvanized Azerbaijani resolve for independence and territorial sovereignty. The following day, Heydar Aliyev condemned the Soviet leadership’s actions at Azerbaijan’s Moscow representation. By late 1991, the Republic of Armenia initiated open warfare against Azerbaijan. Armenian forces breached Azerbaijani borders, allied with separatist groups in Karabakh, and occupied multiple cities and villages. Between 1991 and 1993, Armenian military control extended to Karabakh and the districts of Lachin, Kalbajar, Aghdam, Jabrayil, Fuzuli, Gubadli, and Zangilan. Post-1994 ceasefire agreements prompted diplomatic initiatives to resolve the conflict. The Bishkek Protocol (May 1994) solidified the truce, though political negotiations continued.<sup>7</sup> From 1995, the OSCE Minsk Group mediated between Azerbaijan and Armenia, proposing solutions including Armenian withdrawal from occupied territories and Azerbaijani economic concessions. Despite intermittent talks between 1994 and 2020, no substantive political resolution emerged. The Second Karabakh War (2020) marked a turning point: Azerbaijani military operations reclaimed significant territories. A trilateral statement by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia in November 2020 ceased hostilities and restored lands to Azerbaijani control.<sup>8</sup>

## 2) Technological Innovations in the Second Karabakh War: A Comprehensive Literature Review

Military technology played an irreplaceable role in the Second Karabakh War. The six-week conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 highlighted how crucial modern military hardware is in contemporary warfare. Security experts Thomas Baranec and Beskid Juraj report that the Armenian army deployed around 170 tanks, 250 armored vehicles, and more than 360 tanks and howitzers.<sup>9</sup> The war saw the extensive use of drones, precision-guided munitions, and electronic warfare capabilities, which significantly impacted the outcome of the conflict. One striking factor was the extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which significantly contributed to Azerbaijan’s military successes. Drones, mainly supplied to Azerbaijan by Israel and Türkiye, provided real-time battlefield intelligence, enabling Azerbaijani forces to track Armenian troop movements and defensive positions. To this end, the drones were equipped with precision munition, and the Azerbaijani army could thus perform surgical sorties targeting

<sup>6</sup> “Ermənistan-Azərbaycan münaqişəsi: tarixə baxış,” 66.

<sup>7</sup> “Ərazi itkilərimizin səbəbləri və tarixi gerçəklər,” Azərbaycan Milli Kitabxanası, accessed 18.03.2025, <https://www.anl.az/down/meqale/hurriyyet/2021/avqust/752539.htm>

<sup>8</sup> “İlham Əliyev xalqa müraciət edib,” Official website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed 18.03.2025, <https://president.az/az/articles/view/45924>

<sup>9</sup> Heydər Piriye, Rəşad Təhirov & Xəyal İskenderov, “Müharibənin bitmə müddəti və sülh şərtləri (İkinci Qarabağ müharibəsinin nümunəsində),” *Journal of Hərbi Bilik* 166/4 (2020): 6.

Armenian-occupied zones. An unmistakable consequence of the drone attack by Azerbaijan was seen in the scale of Armenian troops' losses, the technical destruction of a considerable number of Armenian air defense elements, and the damage of the armored formations. The effectiveness of the armed forces of Azerbaijan to no little extent is due to the application of precision-guided munitions. Azerbaijan possessed sophisticated missiles and rockets, e.g., Israeli-originated LAR-160 and Turkish-originated TRG-122, that could be used to attack targets with high precision. Such weapons were widely used in attacks on Armenian fortifications including the destruction of hundreds of key military posts and military command and control facilities. Besides unmanned aerial vehicles and precision-guided munition employment, Azerbaijan also initiated the usage of high technologies (electronic warfare devices) regarding the Armenian C2 system. Azerbaijani military personnel used sophisticated jammers to interrupt Armenian communications networks and thus substantially hampered their capacity to maintain effective military operations. This made a significant contribution to the Armenian forces that had already reached their maximum capacity in dealing with the drone and missile attacks. In contrast, the Armenian military was heavily dependent on Soviet-era technology, such as obsolete air defense systems and tanks. While Armenian forces did possess some modern weaponry, such as the Russian-made Iskander missile system, they were ultimately outgunned and outmaneuvered by Azerbaijan's more advanced military technology. Military use of technology in the Second Karabakh War is not limited to the war but extends far beyond it. The war highlighted the importance of investing in advanced military capabilities, particularly for countries in regions prone to conflict. Azerbaijan's military strength ultimately resulted from its ability to respond to new threats and effectively utilize advanced technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles, precision-guided munitions, and electronic warfare systems. Furthermore, the crisis exposed the need for nations to have a robust defense industry that can produce advanced military technologies. Azerbaijan's capacity to obtain heavy weapon systems from nations such as Israel and Türkiye played a crucial role in its military achievement. On the other hand, the Armenian dependence on obsolete Soviet equipment stressed the need for states to build their defense industries and decrease their dependence on outside suppliers. The Second Karabakh War also showed how the importance of cyber warfare in new battles. Both sides conducted very high-intensity cyber operations in the war, with Azerbaijani forces conducting a string of high-visibility cyber attacks on the Armenian government and military infrastructure. These types of attacks were created to interfere with Armenian combat command and control and to obtain information about Armenian military activities. As an effort to counter this, the armed forces of Armenia also challenged the Azerbaijanis with cyberattacks on governmental websites as well as critical infrastructure. The cyber warfare aspect of the conflict brought to light the importance of states to prepare strong cyber defenses and secure high-level cyber warfare capability. War also illustrated the need to wage information warfare on the battlefield today. Both sides engaged in intense information operations, using social media and other platforms to shape public opinion and influence the narrative of the conflict. Azerbaijani armed forces especially revealed the skill to use social media for disseminating propaganda and

for politicizing perceptions inside and outside national borders. Conclusion The Second Karabakh War illustrated the important, if not critical function of military technology in contemporary warfare. War also brought with it a desire to arm ourselves with the next generation of military equipment such as drones, precision weapons, and electronic warfare. Additionally, it highlighted the need that should be undertaken to develop strong defense sectors within the countries and to decline its reliance on foreign subcontractors. Furthermore, war has brought to the foreground the role of cyber and information warfare in contemporary warfare. It drew attention to the importance of the fact that all countries need to strengthen their cyber defenses and make an effort to acquire superior cyber offensive capabilities. Finally, it highlighted the necessity for change and the need to adopt emerging technology to attain a strategic edge on the battlefield. In terms of a larger picture, the Second Karabakh War has a significant implication for regional and global security. Warring dramatically exposed the existing strains between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as the potential for new conflict in that part of the world. It also validated the importance that countries need not only to get their future military capabilities updated but also to build up strong defense industrialization. For example, war has also shown the significance of diplomacy and international cooperation to prevent/resolve conflicts. The international community played a valuable role in contributing to the mediation of the conflict and the implementation of a ceasefire and has demonstrated, thereby, the necessity of further diplomatic engagement and collaboration in the world. War strategy, from the point of view, of the Second Karabakh War emphasized on demand of adaptive thinking and innovation in developing advanced technology. It raised a requirement for army cyber security skills to be cyber security trained and developed with military-funded sources to achieve cutting-edge levels of cyber warfare. It also highlighted the importance of information warfare and the necessity for military forces to conduct “good information operations” themselves. As a consequence, the conflict placed further light on the significance of military preparedness, as well as the requirement for states to make investments in 21st-century military technology to retain a military strategic edge on the battlefield. Therefore, the war demonstrated that military preparedness is of significant strategic value to national security as by being able to adapt and invest in cutting-edge technology, states are equipped to protect their national interests. Conclusions The Second Karabakh War was a pivotal war that highlighted the role of military technology in modern warfare. War, in turn, unveiled the necessities (onto the agenda) of developing high-end equipment, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, highly lethal precision munitions, and electronic warfare capability. It also revealed the need for countries to build their defense industries and reduce their dependence on foreign suppliers. In addition, the conflict demonstrated that cyberwarfare and information warfare are paramount in contemporary warfare, as well as the necessity for nations to build strong defenses against cyber threats and to make investments in sophisticated cyber capabilities. It also emphasized what diplomacy and international cooperation are in the early stage of conflict prevention and settlement, and what kind of military forces should be equipped with adaptable and technologically adept characters to have a strategic advantage on the battlefield. There was also a substantial



media war in the Second Karabakh War. Had Azerbaijan not successfully suppressed or at least contained the consequences of the Armenian disinformation campaign implemented via media during the Second Karabakh War and after, the fallout for Baku would have been worse than imagined.<sup>10</sup>

The liberation of the city of Shusha from occupation was an important strategic factor for Azerbaijan. Despite the formation of a powerful assault group, the Azerbaijani army managed to advance within the city. After intense clashes, the resistance of the Armenian forces was broken by midday on November 7, when Major Gündüz Safarlı's unit raised the Azerbaijani flag over the Shusha City Administration building<sup>11</sup>.

Consequently, on the night of November 7, the Azerbaijani army succeeded in gaining control over the majority of Shusha. On November 8, Azerbaijani forces fully secured control of the city. It should be noted that the Azerbaijani military effectively employed various unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), notably the Turkish-made Bayraktar TB-2 and the Israeli-made Harop/Harpy loitering munitions, to destroy numerous Armenian short-range amphibious surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, including the 9K33 OSA and 9K35 Strela-10. The Armenian forces relied on heavily fortified defensive positions in difficult terrain, ballistic missiles, and the layered defense doctrine characteristic of Russian military strategy, emphasizing overwhelming firepower.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, Azerbaijan prioritized the development of its military capabilities, leveraging the revenues from its rich natural gas and oil reserves to procure advanced heavy weaponry from Russia, Türkiye, and Israel, thereby strengthening its armed forces. Ultimately, Azerbaijan achieved a significant victory by reclaiming occupied territories through its enhanced combat capabilities, superiority in information warfare, proficiency in employing modern weaponry, and technological dominance in unmanned aerial systems.<sup>13</sup>

### **3) Military Aspects of the Second Karabakh War**

The Second Karabakh War attracted the attention of many foreign researchers and experts, not only because of the modern technologies used but also due to the unique battle strategies employed. The US, German, and many other NATO military strategic research centers during the post-war period started to explore the military uses of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) as innovations by the Azerbaijani military. This was further demonstrated by a rare, confidential NATO meeting held in Berlin to review the 44-day war, with high-ranking Pentagon officials participating virtually through secure internet channels. One of the first senior officers to comment on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in the Second Karabakh War was US Army Chief of Staff General

<sup>10</sup> Khayal Iskandarov, Piotr Gawliczek & Jerzy Tomasik, "Termination of War: Factors Affecting the Outcome (In the Example of the Second Karabakh War)," *Civitas et Lex* 3/35 (2022): 9.

<sup>11</sup> Tural Həsənarayev, "Azad Şuşa (birinci hissə): Qələbəyə gedən yol," Topchubashov Center (2021), accessed 02.06.2025, <https://top-center.org/az/analytics/3252/free-shusha-part-one-way-to-victory>

<sup>12</sup> Okan Yeşilot & Gülcan İncelik, "Kadim Türk Şehri Şuşa ve İkinci Karabağ Savaşı'nda Şuşa Muharebesi," *Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi* 14/1 (2025): 141.

<sup>13</sup> Ece Göksedef, "Dağlık Karabağ: Türkiye, Azerbaycan'ın Askeri Kapasitesini Geliştirmesinde Nasıl Rol Oynadı?," BBC News Türkçe (2020), accessed 07.06.2025, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-54379105>

James McConville.<sup>14</sup> While some sources describe the political nature of the war as complex, Operation Iron Fist had a straightforward objective: to expel Armenian forces from occupied Azerbaijani territories and enable the return of nearly a million internally displaced people.<sup>15</sup> Between September 27 and November 10, 2020, Armenia shelled the Terter, Agjabadi, and Goranboy regions, both on the battlefield and outside the conflict zone, 5 times at different times using phosphorus bombs, a banned and extremely dangerous weapon of mass destruction.<sup>16</sup> Besides new technical opportunities, the strategies used by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan by experts, military think tanks, and other country researchers are also being examined for their peculiarity. The Azerbaijani Army attack was conducted taking into account the detailed reconnaissance, fire damage, and UAV attacks.<sup>17</sup> Even though this method has been similar to the method of the Turkish Armed Forces in the city of Afrin in the province of Idlib in 2018, it was, in every aspect, quite a different approach both in terms of scale and terrain, and the objective military power.

At first glance, both sides appear to rely heavily on Russian-made weapons, vehicles, equipment, and ammunition. However, a closer examination reveals a more nuanced picture. While the model names may be similar, the systems in Azerbaijan's arsenal are generally more advanced or have undergone significant upgrades. For instance, although both Armenia and Azerbaijan possess the Russian-made S-300 surface-to-air missile system, the versions differ markedly. Armenia operates the older Soviet-era PT models, whereas Azerbaijan fields the more modern PMU-2 variant. The technical differences between the PT and the PMU-2 often regarded as a precursor to the S-400 Triumph (NATO reporting name: SA-21 Growler) air defense system are substantial and have considerable implications for operational effectiveness. Furthermore, unlike Armenia, which conducts its defense activities almost exclusively within a Russia-centric framework, Azerbaijan has sought to diversify its defense partnerships. In this regard, two countries stand out in particular: Israel and Turkey. In recent years, Azerbaijan's growing defense cooperation with Israel has not only facilitated access to advanced weapons and sensor technologies but has also provided critical technical support needed for the development of its domestic defense industry.<sup>18</sup>

The Second Karabakh War is not only impressive as the use of high technology weapons. Demonstrations of using UAVs in this conflict for the goals of detection, destruction of buildings well as of guidance of rocket and artillery strikes and street and building-to-street encounters generated motivation towards changing the means of warfare and, as a result, this involved a new paradigm in military achievement, that is, large-scale warfare. Subsequently, approaches to warfare used by the Azerbaijani Army

<sup>14</sup> Serget Tseltski, "The Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in Armed Conflicts in Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh," *Pathways to Peace and Security* 56/2 (2023): 183.

<sup>15</sup> Heydar Piriye & Elshan Hashimov, "Second Karabakh War: Military-political and Military-Technical Aspects," *Journal of Proceedings of Science* 21/1 (2023): 8.

<sup>16</sup> Piriye & Hashimov, "Second Karabakh War," 10.

<sup>17</sup> "Pilotsuz uçuş aparatlarının (PUA) ordu və müasir dövrün müharibələri üçün verdiyi töhfə," Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed 14.03.2025, <https://mod.gov.az/az/pre/53548.html>

<sup>18</sup> Cenk Özgen, "44 Günün Ardından: 2020 Karabağ Savaşı'nın Askeri Açısından Analizi," *Giresun Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi* 7/1 (2021): 109.

(the use of drones) are as fundamentally different from those of local insurgencies as they can be. There was a difference also in the scale of the war, in the potential of the belligerents, and also in the fact that the war took place in mountainous areas and extremely difficult terrain. Especially over mountainous topography where change of elevation smoothly transitions create steep change gradients, the position of hostile personnel and hostile military has the potential to be determined in more difficult ways, and there could still be a potential for uncertainty as to the enemy's intelligence. This presents challenges associated with military operations planning, reconnaissance, determining gun positions and simultaneously unobserved enemy items as well as decision-making under optimal use of the very last moment. In this respect, the widely employed reconnaissance and attack unmanned air vehicles deployed by the Azerbaijani Army to effectuate the Second Karabakh War was a workaround for preexisting issues. Multiagency combination of UAVs in practice at the Azerbaijani Army integrating with systems, such as missile weapons, and artillery weapons (arms) allowed the identification of enemy APC and ADF weapons systems vulnerabilities. Due to the lack of obtaining revetments from the current Radio Electronic Warfare (REM) and ADF, the enemy army met at least one grave disaster. As such, the enemy, in the war, destroyed more than 1000 ADF and artillery systems (including armored and light) and more, as well.

Although the present era is marked by the everyday use of new technologies, the tactical and weapons departments of older industries have not been eradicated. Although the technological superiority of the Azerbaijani Army and the successful use of UAVs played an indispensable role in achieving victory, units employed traditional tactics and weapons to clear and strengthen the liberated territories. As a result, during the war, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan occupied the main positions, gained full control over the Iranian state border, and began a movement west toward the Lachin corridor of major strategic importance. No village, settlement, or city was considered liberated until the full strengthening of the positions was completed. The Azerbaijani soldier, using a clever application of the basics of tactics and weaponry, astonished experts worldwide. Military analyst Mikhail Kofman pointed out that during the first few weeks of the fighting, the Azerbaijani Army was advancing more slowly in reaction to the retreat of the Armenian Armed Forces.<sup>19</sup> Still, two weeks later, the advance rate of the Azerbaijani Army had enormously increased. The Azerbaijani troops were today employing their tactical victories more confidently, gaining ground rapidly and putting the Armenian fighting force in a more awkward and risky position.

In the post-war period following the signing of the Trilateral Statement, Armenia's continued provocations and its persistent adherence to an expansionist policy marked by non-constructive behavior rendered the launch of an anti-terror operation inevitable. One of the primary factors necessitating this operation was Armenia's systematic evasion of its obligations under the Trilateral Statement, often using various pretexts to avoid compliance. Specifically, Armenia failed to fully withdraw the remnants of its armed forces from the Karabakh region and took no effective measures to disarm the illegal Armenian

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<sup>19</sup> Piriyeve & Hashimov, "Second Karabakh War," 13.

armed groups operating there. Moreover, the Armenian military-political leadership, in direct violation of international legal norms and principles, continued to carry out covert and illegal transfers to sustain the remaining Armenian military units and unlawful armed detachments within the Karabakh economic zone. In response to these provocations, and to prevent further illicit military transfers, a border checkpoint was established on April 23, 2023, at the bridge over the Hakari River at the entry point of the Lachin-Khankendi road through joint efforts of the State Border Service and units of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces. As a result, all movement and transportation along that route have since been conducted by the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan.<sup>20</sup>

During the Karabakh War, the drone footage released by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense emerged as a significant strategic element within the context of psychological warfare. These videos played a critical role both in demonstrating the effectiveness of operations on the ground and in causing a decline in morale on the Armenian side. Firstly, the released drone footage showcased the Azerbaijani military's advanced technological capabilities and operational superiority. This not only reinforced the perception of victory and success among the domestic audience but also created a realistic impression of the war's progress in the international arena. At the same time, the impact of these visuals on the Armenian side was decisive in the psychological dimension of the conflict. The continuous and systematic dissemination of these images had a deterrent effect on Armenian soldiers and civilians alike, accelerating the moral collapse tied to the inevitable outcome of the war. Considering the importance of information and image control in psychological warfare, the use of drone footage is regarded as a tool for achieving informational superiority in modern conflicts. Azerbaijan's effective sharing of these visuals through media outlets and social platforms weakened the resolve of Armenian troops on the battlefield and instilled fear among the civilian population. Moreover, as the war evolved into a "battle of images," it complicated efforts by the Armenian military and political leadership to mount an effective counter-response. In conclusion, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense's use of drone footage constituted a vital aspect of psychological warfare during the Karabakh War; it undermined enemy morale and functioned as a powerful propaganda tool in advancing Azerbaijan's military and political objectives.<sup>21</sup>

After the Second Karabakh Victory, the victory parade held in Hankendi marked a historic moment reflecting Azerbaijan's great achievement and the pride of its people. The ceremony took place with great enthusiasm, featuring the disciplined march of soldiers, the passionate singing of national anthems, and the waving of flags that became symbols of the victory. This parade was not only a military celebration but also engraved in memory as a symbol of Azerbaijan's determination for territorial integrity and its struggle for freedom. With the strong participation of the public, the event conveyed the

<sup>20</sup> Coşqun Məmmədov, "Antiterror tədbirləri tam və qəti Qələbəni təmin etdi," Azərbaycan Milli Elmlər Akademiyası (2023), accessed 08.06.2025, <https://science.gov.az/az/news/open/26636>

<sup>21</sup> Zakir Rzazadə, "Drone Imagery During the Second Karabakh War: Conflict Solidarity and Air Sovereignty," Milliyyət Araşdırmalar Mərkəzi (2021), accessed 07.06.2025, <https://milliyyet.info/siyaset/drone-imagery-during-the-second-karabakh-war-conflict-solidarity-and-air-sovereignty/>

significance of the victory and the hopes for a new era to the whole world.<sup>22</sup>

#### **4) Analysis of the Second Karabakh War from the Perspective of International Law**

Continuous sporadic conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia have escalated to violence when the Armenian military attacked military and nonmilitary Azerbaijani targets from 27 September 2020. From the clashes that started on 27 September 2020, Azerbaijan immediately started the process of regaining occupied territories.<sup>23</sup> In those subsequent days, these clashes started to be called the Second Karabakh War, and the Armenian army, which incurred heavy losses and pulled back earlier days of the war, started to openly strike civilian settlements far from the front line. According to media reports, 19 civilians (among them children, women, and the elderly) died and 55 received injuries as a result of the artillery shelling of the Armenian army as of 2 Oct 2020.<sup>24</sup> Attacks on civilian communities continued to rise over the next few days. In the attacks launched against Ganja, the second largest city in Azerbaijan and at least 100 km away from the front line, between October 4 and 6, 32 people, including children, women, and the elderly, were injured and one person lost his life. In these attacks, the Armenian army indiscriminately attacked houses, shops, and public buildings.<sup>25</sup> Armenian armed forces carried out attacks on November 7, 2020, targeting the energy infrastructure of the Republic of Azerbaijan, but the attacks were unsuccessful. On the same days, the cities of Aghdam, Barda, Goranbay, and Terter were also victims of missile and artillery strikes by the Armenian army.<sup>26</sup> Armenia violated the humanitarian ceasefire agreed on on October 10, 2020, and made a missile strike on Ganja on October 11, 2020, in which 9 people died, 34 civilians were injured, and many civilian objects were badly damaged.<sup>27</sup> These actions undertaken by Armenia are not targeting military structures, but rather civil structures, and have the purpose of creating fear and panic in the population. Every one of these attacks carried out by the Armenian army toward civilian settlements beyond the line of front within the 2nd Karabakh War amongst others comprises violations of the basic protocols of International Humanitarian Law. As is known, these agreements bring regulations regarding conflicts, and while these rules are being put forward, the principles of "limiting the weapons and methods of armed conflict" and "protecting civilians and non-combatants (hors de combat) in armed conflicts" are being sought to be provided to protect soldiers and civilians under certain conditions in cases where war continues.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Yalçın Sarıkaya & Araz Aslanlı, *Kürekçay Anlaşmasından Şuşa Beyannamesine Karabağ* (Ankara: Kripto, 2024), 139.

<sup>23</sup> "Letter dated 29 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General," Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, accessed 02.01.2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3885761?v=pdf>

<sup>24</sup> "Report on the destructions and human casualties caused by the regular shelling of the Azerbaijani civilian settlements by the Armenian armed forces," Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed, 01.02.2025, <https://ombudsman.az/storage/3JoKdB9WwCWawAachxW7ALKJqE8ddLmjuQUHtUJJ.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> "Report of the Fact-Finding Mission of the Ombudsman in Ganja (4-6 October 2020)," Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed 01.02.2025, <https://ombudsman.az/storage/HO2dzc4ir77h00Tt07zYH8601fgOzR8HPTTgF006.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Cüneyt Yüksel & Hüseyin Yüce, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict from the Perspective of International Law and the Armistice Agreement Ending the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War," *İstanbul Hukuk Mecmuası* 80/3 (2022): 1022.

<sup>27</sup> "Ermenistan'ın Karabağ'daki Eylemleri: İnsan Hakları İhlalleri ve İhlallerin Takibi," Grand National Assembly of Türkiye Assembly, accessed 01.02.2025, [https://www.tihek.gov.tr/upload/file\\_editor/2021/10/1634982902.pdf](https://www.tihek.gov.tr/upload/file_editor/2021/10/1634982902.pdf)

The first principle is being applied in the context of the Hague Conventions, and the second in the context of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols. The first principle is being applied in the context of The Hague Conventions, and the second in the context of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols. In this sense, it is necessary to comply with this set of rules. These applicable regulations defined by the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols which regulate civilians will be enforced during both international and non-international confrontations, regardless of the lack of a declaration of war or the recognition of a declaration of war by one of the warring parties. And under these rules, no matter which party starts the fight, they will be used. As provided for in Article 51/2 of the First Additional Protocol, targeting civilians is forbidden. Under the controlling regulations, in international armed conflicts, the parties are obliged to differentiate between civilian and military objectives and the latter should be entertained by military objectives. Therefore, civilians will benefit from general protection during conflicts. Under this protection, civilians who do not take part in the fighting are not subject to target, at the same time any violence or threat that could produce disorder and panic in society is forbidden. Thus, the attacking adversaries are required to discriminate against each other, with no such attack being allowed. Conflicting states shall not target civilian, state, or public property indiscriminately.<sup>28</sup> Although appropriate legal provisions of the international humanitarian law have been taken, in recent times Armenia has regularly carried out massive artillery and/or missile bombings of residential settled areas beyond the fighting line, more specifically in the cities of Ganja, Barda, and Terter during the Second Karabakh War, violating civilian protection rules stipulated in the Geneva Conventions and the First Additional Protocol. Furthermore, it is known that some of the groups sustained severe damage in the attacks. For instance, in the armed conflicts, the Armenian army involved in, dead has been, many children and women have perished.<sup>29</sup> Conflicting states will not be permitted to indiscriminately attack civilians, state, or public facilities. In this regard, it has been established that these attacks have employed the Smerch cluster bomb and Smerch parachute-delayed high-explosive fragmentation rocket in particular, targeting the town of Barda. It is known that these rockets are in the inventory of the Armenian army, so it is understood that they carried out the attack either directly or by assisting the separatist forces in Karabakh.<sup>30</sup> Despite these regulations, the Armenian army carried out attacks against the Imamzadeh Religious Complex and the Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox Church, violating international humanitarian law.<sup>31</sup> Indeed it is not only cultural and religious assets, but also natural environment that no longer should be open for doubt. In particular, the use of methods and equipment capable of environmentally safe, lasting, and serious impact on a

<sup>28</sup> "Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949," IV. Geneva Convention, accessed 01.02.2025, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article53>

<sup>29</sup> "Report of the Ombudsman on Child Casualties Occurred as a Result of Attacks on Civilian Settlements of Azerbaijan," Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed 02.02.2025, <https://ombudsman.az/storage/4XALmwc7WrjkOFTF95kQu5fRYjiZOR7RYGobVIK4.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> "Armenia: Cluster Munitions Kill Civilians in Azerbaijan," Human Rights Watch Report, accessed 02.02.2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/30/armenia-cluster-munitions-kill-civiliansazerbaijan>

<sup>31</sup> "Fact-Finding Mission Interim Report of the Ombudsman concerning Religious Monuments in Ganja," Assembly Security Council, accessed 02.02.2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3926174?v=pdf>

significant portion of the natural environment is prohibited. Even though the natural environment cannot be defended from the final, large scale and severe damage as a result of conflict there should be means by which this can be prevented. Additionally, retaliatory attitudinal and behavioral responses to the natural environment are also forbidden. It was observed during the Second Karabakh War that Armenians felled trees and burned forested areas where they had been forced to leave. Turkish SİHA and UAVs were key to the Azerbaijani success during the war and were successful in targeting about \$1 billion of the Armenian armed forces' military equipment.<sup>32</sup> Armenia's claim that Türkiye is a direct or indirect party to the conflict and violates civilian rights has been accepted by the ECHR. The materials presented by Armenia do not contain any concrete evidence proving that the Turkish Armed Forces have conducted military operations on Armenian territory or sent military or paramilitary groups to the conflict zone. Therefore, this decision can be considered as a decision devoid of legal basis. Following the signing of the Armistice Agreement on November 9, the said precautionary measures were lifted.

The strategic deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles and armed variants significantly influenced Türkiye's role during the Second Karabakh War. These platforms provided critical intelligence by conducting real-time surveillance and target reconnaissance, enabling precision strikes with smart munitions that disrupted enemy defenses effectively. Beyond combat applications, their high-resolution imaging capabilities served as tools for information warfare, shaping narratives through carefully curated battlefield footage. In addition to Azerbaijan's Turkish-made UAVs/UCAVs, multi-barreled rocket launchers such as the T-122 Sakarya and T-300 Kasırga were purchased for the army.<sup>33</sup> Turkish-Azerbaijani relations further improved during the Second Karabakh War, and these relations continued after the war. We can enumerate some of the areas related to the formed relations as follows; Strategic partnership, economic cooperation, energy projects, defense cooperation, cultural and human relations.

Türkiye and Azerbaijan have been consolidating their defense cooperation. On June 15, 2021, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made his second significant visit to Azerbaijan following the military parade organized for the Second Karabakh War. During this visit, the "Shusha Declaration" was signed in the city of Shusha, which had just been liberated from occupation and held symbolic significance as a historical cultural center of the Turkic world. The agreement, officially titled the "Declaration on Allied Relations Between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye," was published in Türkiye's official gazette on March 23, 2022, thereby entering into force.<sup>34</sup> When examining the provisions related to bilateral relations, the preamble of the Shusha Declaration emphasizes the friendship and brotherhood between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. It also references the Treaty of Kars of 1921, the 1994 Agreement on the Development of Friendship and Multidimensional Cooperation between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of

<sup>32</sup> "The Second Karabakh War Patriotic War or "Operation Iron Fist," Virtual Karabakh, accessed 14.03.2025, <https://www.virtualkarabakh.az/en/post-item/52/2871/the-second-karabakh-war.html>

<sup>33</sup> Levent Özdemir, "The Changing State of Affairs and Türkiye's Role in Nagorno Karabakh Issue," *Journal of Individual & Society* 11/2 (2021): 83.

<sup>34</sup> "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Mütteliklik İlişkileri Hakkında Şuşa Beyannamesi," Türkiye Resmi Gazetesi, accessed 15.03.2025, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2022/03/20220323-1.pdf>

Azerbaijan, the Protocol on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and the 2010 Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance. By citing these agreements, both parties affirmed that their provisions remained in force and declared that the Shusha Declaration provided a new perspective on bilateral relations without undermining the previous agreements. As a result, the relations between the two countries, which had reached the level of “strategic partnership” with the 2010 agreement, were elevated to the status of “alliance” with the Shusha Declaration. During a press conference in Shusha, Azerbaijani Prime Minister Ali Asadov and Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay stated that the Shusha Declaration marked the peak of bilateral relations.<sup>35</sup> The declaration contains comprehensive provisions that impact various sectors such as military, security, political, economic, energy, humanitarian, cultural, and media relations. In the military field, the declaration envisages strengthening defense capabilities through joint training and exercises, thereby enhancing the operational coordination of the two armed forces. Additionally, it includes statements supporting the organization of joint military exercises with the armed forces of other friendly countries.<sup>36</sup> The inclusion of such provisions elevates military cooperation beyond bilateral relations, extending its influence to the wider Turkic world. Furthermore, the declaration emphasizes that these military collaborations are not directed against third countries and reaffirms the right to legitimate self-defense. According to the agreement, in the event of any threat or attack against either party, both countries are to respond swiftly and decisively in a coordinated manner. The document places particular emphasis on joint production and technology exchange in the defense industry. Beyond wartime cooperation, the agreement stipulates that the national security councils of both countries will hold regular official meetings on security matters, even in the absence of external threats. It also outlines cooperation in areas such as naval, air, space, cybersecurity, and media sectors.<sup>37</sup> A key aspect highlighted in the Shusha Declaration is the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, which is expected to significantly deepen trade cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The mutual commitment of the two countries to ensuring stability, security, peace, and prosperity in the South Caucasus is a crucial aspect of the declaration. Both Türkiye and Azerbaijan have expressed their belief that under the new status quo, a peaceful environment in the region can be established. They have also emphasized their readiness to engage in cooperation and coordination with all regional countries, including Armenia, to achieve this goal. This statement demonstrates that the growing cooperation between the two nations is not a regional threat but rather an opportunity for regional development and peace. Another domain where the Shusha Declaration is expected to have an impact is the broader Turkic world. Türkiye and Azerbaijan have stated their intention to involve other Turkic states in the cooperation and coordination established between them. This underscores the two countries’ aspirations for greater integration within the Turkic world. The aim of increasing

<sup>35</sup> “Azerbaijani premier says Shusha Declaration is ‘pinnacle of ties’ with Türkiye,” Anadolu Agency, accessed 15.03.2025, <https://www.aneas.com.tr/turkey/2022/11/05/azerbaijani-premier-says-shusha-declaration-is-pinnacle-of-ties-with-turkiye>

<sup>36</sup> Türkiye Resmi Gazetesi, accessed 15.03.2025, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2022/03/20220323-1.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Ferhat Pirinççi & Mehmet Çağatay Güler, *Çıkmazdan Çözüme Karabağ Sorunu* (İstanbul: SETA Yay., 2021), 205.



coordination within the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and strengthening its institutional capacity can be interpreted as part of this vision. If positive responses are received from other Turkic states, the Shusha Declaration could evolve into a strategic document that serves as the foundation for a regional alliance network.<sup>38</sup>

Joint military exercises are being conducted, and activities involving military training and technology transfer are taking place together. Also, Türkiye's military advice and operational support to Azerbaijan is a central pillar of the partnership. Affective and human relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan are also deep. The shared history, language, and cultural background that supports bilateral relations underlie a close relationship and shared culture and understanding between peoples. The Second Karabakh War further united and strengthened the Turkish and Azerbaijani brotherhood. Especially since the early 2000s, joint exercises conducted by the Azerbaijani and Turkish armies have made significant contributions to enhancing the combat capability of the Azerbaijani army, successfully carrying out combat missions in challenging geographical conditions, and adapting the army to modern standards. Throughout history, numerous military exercises have been conducted between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Exercises such as "EFES," "Anadolu Ankası," "Winter Exercise," "Anadolu Ulduzu," "Erciyes-2019," "Anadolu Qartalı," "Mustafa Kemal Atatürk," "Unshakable Brotherhood," "TurAz Qartalı-2019," and "TurAz Qartalı-2020" have played a significant role in the structuring of the Azerbaijani army and will continue to make important contributions to military development and combat skills in the future.<sup>39</sup>

Azerbaijan, a state that gained independence when the Soviet Union disintegrated, is of immense importance to Türkiye in the Caucasus. Resuming closer than just historical and cultural affinity, the regional geopolitical significance of the location in which Azerbaijan is located has a curing effect as well. If, west of the Anatolian Peninsula, a bridge stands as Azerbaijan and east of the Anatolian Peninsula, a gateway stands as Turkestan, then through them, the West and the East shall meet at a distance of 200 miles. To paraphrase, both countries continuously relate politics to foreign policy. In 1994, Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev adopted the term "One Nation, Two States" during a visit to Türkiye, which resonated as a slogan of Türkiye and Azerbaijan.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Türkiye showed solidarity with Azerbaijan in the hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia through the statements of the President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of National Defense. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has openly stated in many of his speeches that he wants Türkiye to be at the table, including in bilateral talks to be held in any peace agreement to be made during this period. President Ilham Aliyev stated in a press conference that "The Turkish Army is a most

<sup>38</sup> Durdu Mehmet Özdemir & Gökmen Kantar, "Şuşa Beyannamesi'nin Önemi ve Olası Etkileri," *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 12/2 (2023): 733.

<sup>39</sup> Hüseyin Hüseyinli, "İkinci Qarabağ Mühəribəsi Zamanı Türkiyənin Cənubi Qafqaz Siyasəti," *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi* 11/5 (2024): 3588.

<sup>40</sup> Selman Ögüt & Rümeyza Ülkü, "Evaluation of Türkiye's Role in The Second Karabakh War From International Law," *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences* 22/1 (2023): 312.

acceptable model for us” and “we have further agreements with Türkiye”.<sup>41</sup> With the latest Armistice Agreement, it was accepted that Azerbaijan would take back a significant portion of its Armenian-occupied lands. The groundwork for establishing a corridor between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, which Azerbaijan had not been able to establish land connections with for decades, was prepared. In addition, the provision for the deployment of an international peacekeeping force led by Russia to Karabakh is noteworthy in many ways, especially the fact that Türkiye will be included in the new status quo in Karabakh. The Türkiye-Russia Joint Monitoring Center officially began operations in Azerbaijan’s Aghdam district in January 2021.<sup>42</sup> The establishment of such a center was explicitly stated in Article V of the Trilateral Declaration. The primary objective of this center was to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia after the Karabakh war and to detect any violations. The joint operation of Türkiye and Russia within this structure is noteworthy in terms of deepening regional cooperation between the two countries. The presence of the joint center ensures effective monitoring of the ceasefire, thereby reducing the risk of conflict in the region. Through this center, Türkiye, as Azerbaijan’s strategic partner, played an active role in the region. Another aspect of the joint center was that it primarily assumed an observer role and did not have the authority to intervene directly. The establishment of the Türkiye-Russia Joint Center in Karabakh was a significant development that influenced the geopolitical balance in the region.

One of the institutions established to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict was the OSCE Minsk Group. Throughout the negotiation process, the Minsk Group proposed several settlement options, including the Package Deal, the Phased Settlement, and the Common State proposal. Both the Package Deal and the Phased Settlement were based on the principles of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and Karabakh’s affiliation with Azerbaijan, and were therefore rejected by Armenia. The Common State proposal, on the other hand, implied the termination of Karabakh’s affiliation with Azerbaijan, and was consequently rejected by Azerbaijan.<sup>43</sup>

Since 1991, the diplomatic and economic relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan have evolved into a strategic partnership, especially during the Second Karabakh War.<sup>44</sup>

### **5) The Contribution of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye to Exposing Armenia’s Violations of International Law in the Context of the Second Karabakh War**

Throughout known human history, although no effective system has been

<sup>41</sup> President of Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev, “We will create a small model of the Turkish army in Azerbaijan,” Anadolu Agency (2021), accessed 30.01.2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/azerbaycan-cephe-hatti/azerbaycan-cumhurbaskani-aliyev-azerbaycanda-turk-ordusunun-kucuk-modelini-olusturacagiz/2158236>

<sup>42</sup> “Türkiye-Rusiya Birgə Monitorinq Mərkəzinin açılış mərasimi keçirilib,” Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed 15.03.2025, <https://mod.gov.az/az/news/turkiye-rusiya-birge-monitorinq-merkezinin-acilis-merasimi-kecirilib-video-34668.html>

<sup>43</sup> Alaeddin Yalçınkaya, “Karabağ Sorununun Çözumsuzluğünde, AĞİT Minsk Sürecinin “Planlı” Katkısı,” in *Kadim Vatan Karabağ*, ed. Betül Karagöz Yerdelen, Alâeddin Yalçınkaya, İrade Memmedova, (İstanbul: Divan Kitap, 2022), 91.

<sup>44</sup> Okan Yeşilot, “Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkileri (1991-2021),” *Karabağ: Dünü, Bugünü, Yarını* (İstanbul: Selenge Press, 2021), 165.

established that would not leave the killing or massacre of defenseless people unpunished in wars, it has been possible to at least consider these massacres as prohibited acts in the common law system of humanity. Over the last century or so, states have come a long way in understanding and accepting that not every method of defeating the other party is legitimate when fighting against each other. The Geneva Conventions of 1864,<sup>45</sup> the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 have made significant legal progress not only in improving the condition of soldiers wounded or sick in war, but also in prohibiting weapons and methods that cause unnecessary suffering to the enemy and civilian casualties. The purpose of the prohibitions brought by the relevant agreements is to prevent unnecessary deaths, unnecessary suffering, and unnecessary destruction without completely preventing the requirements of war, especially defensive wars. Within this framework, two fundamental goals are aimed to be achieved, namely “limiting the weapons and methods of armed conflict” and “protecting civilians and non-combatants (*hors de combat*) in armed conflicts”. These rules, which have been put forward and have now been almost entirely put into writing by international multilateral agreements, have become comprehensive rules applied in all situations where collective protection of civilians is required, whether in international armed conflicts or internal conflicts, regardless of who started the armed conflict and whether there has been a formal declaration of war.

The study of the Second Karabakh War from all aspects is of great importance for the modern history of Azerbaijan. The main object of the study is the role of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT) in exposing the war crimes committed by Armenia during the Second Karabakh War. During the war, Armenia carried out attacks targeting civilians and civilian residential facilities located many kilometers away from the combat zone. As a result of these attacks by Armenia, a total of 93 civilians, including 12 children and 27 women, were killed, 454 civilians were injured, a total of 13,360 residential and non-residential buildings, 346 vehicles were damaged, and 1,018 farms were damaged.<sup>46</sup> It was stated that ambulances and medical facilities were among the civilian elements targeted, educational institutions were deliberately targeted, vital civilian infrastructure such as electricity, gas, water, and communication stations were targeted, serious damage was done to the electricity and energy infrastructure, and residential areas were left without electricity. On the other hand, attacks on historical and cultural monuments are also noteworthy methods. As a result of the bombing, it was determined that the walls of the “Imamzadeh Complex” in the Ganja State Historical and Cultural Inventory and the century-old “Alexander Nevsky” Russian Orthodox Church had deep cracks as a result of the bombing, and it was reported that both historical and religious monuments were seriously damaged. The detection of evidence regarding the crimes in question and the prosecution of those who committed or participated in these crimes are as important as the existence of relevant rules to ensure justice and prevent similar crimes. The official

<sup>45</sup> “Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field,” Geneva Convention, accessed 02.02.2025, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/120-IHL-GC1864-EN.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> “44 gün sürən Vətən Müharibəsi (II Qarabağ müharibəsi),” Prosecutor General’s Office of Azerbaijan, accessed 30.01.2025, <https://genprosecutor.gov.az/az/page/azerbaycan/i-ve-ii-qarabag-muharibesi/44-gun-suren-veten-muharibesi-ii-qarabag-muharibesi>

positions held by those who committed or participated in such crimes, including the presidency, prime ministry, or ministry, are not matters that prevent their criminal liability and prosecution when they are brought before competent national or international judicial bodies. Armenia's attacks, as well as its actions targeting health facilities and vehicles, also constitute acts contrary to Article 35 of the 1949 Geneva Convention No. I. Similarly, deliberate attacks on educational facilities violate Articles 51 and 52 of Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Each of these attacks on facilities constitutes a war crime.<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch has confirmed that the Armenian Armed Forces used prohibited cluster munitions and at least one other type of long-range rocket in the October 28 attack on the city of Barda. The organization said in a statement that it reviewed photographs of cluster munitions debris taken by international and local journalists and residents and that two of the weapons were identified as a Smerch cluster munition rocket and a Smerch parachute-delayed high-explosive fragmentation rocket. It noted that while Armenian forces had Smerch multiple rocket launchers, the Nagorno-Karabakh forces did not, making it likely that Armenian forces carried out the attack or provided the ammunition to the Nagorno-Karabakh forces. Armenia has mined a large area of Azerbaijani lands, including lands that are not designated for military purposes, for nearly 30 years. In addition to posing a threat to human life, mined areas also hinder the efficient use of land. Despite the fact that areas have been cleared of mines for a long time, the number of civilian casualties and deaths due to regular mine explosions is increasing.

Grand National Assembly of Türkiye has prepared a report titled "Rights violations during the tension and conflict process that started with the attack on Azerbaijan", which reveals and documents the unlawfulness committed by Armenia. At the first meeting of the Human Rights Investigation Commission of the Turkish Grand National Assembly on October 13, 2020, of the 4th Legislative Year of the 27th Legislative Term, it was decided to establish a Sub-Commission to identify on-site the attacks on Azerbaijani civilian settlements outside the conflict zone and the rights violations suffered by nearly 1 million displaced Azerbaijani citizens expelled from Karabakh and to call on international human rights defending institutions and organizations to take action within the framework of the Geneva Convention. As a result of the actions mentioned above, when the clashes ended, it was stated that 93 civilians were killed, 454 civilians were injured, 3326 detached houses were destroyed, 504 civilian facilities were destroyed, and 120 multi-story residential apartment buildings were demolished.

Violating the right to life of civilians is also a clear violation of Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), to which both Armenia and Azerbaijan are parties, and is an action that leads to the legal liability of the State of Armenia and those who commit it. In addition, deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure can also be considered a violation of Article 14 of the ECHR. Because the attacks violate the rights protected in the Convention by discrimination based on nationality and ethnic

<sup>47</sup> "Advisory Service On International Humanitarian Law," International Criminal Court, accessed 02.02.2025, [https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file\\_list/cpi.en\\_.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/cpi.en_.pdf)

origin. Damaging civilian property and preventing the use of property also constitutes a violation of the right to property as defined in Article 1 of Additional Protocol I to the ECHR. It has been announced that Azerbaijan has filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) regarding all these issues. Armenia's use of weapons and methods prohibited by international humanitarian law during military operations are actions that should be evaluated separately.<sup>48</sup> The relevant reports state that Armenia uses cluster munitions, which are prohibited in wars as an indiscriminate weapon.<sup>49</sup> The use of cluster munitions is prohibited by the Convention on Cluster Munitions, signed in 2008, to which more than 100 countries are parties.

### **6) Russia's Stance on the Second Karabakh War**

Russia's position on the 2020 Second Karabakh War, which began in September 2020, was complex and multifaceted. As a regional power with significant geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus, Russia aimed to maintain stable relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan while protecting its own security and economic priorities. Russia's long-standing involvement in the Karabakh conflict is reflected in its military presence in Armenia since the early 1990s and its deep historical, political, and economic ties to both countries. While Armenia has traditionally been a close ally and recipient of substantial military and economic support, its recent moves toward a more independent foreign policy, including joining the Russia-backed Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), introduced tensions in its relationship with Moscow. Conversely, Russia sought to strengthen ties with Azerbaijan, a key player in global energy markets, to safeguard access to vital oil and gas resources. This dual engagement required Russia to carefully balance its policies between two countries with competing interests. In the lead-up to the conflict, Russia exercised caution by avoiding direct military intervention, reflecting its strategic calculus to preserve influence without escalating hostilities. The historical legacies of the Russian and Soviet empires contribute to the intricate and multilayered nature of Moscow's relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia's security dependence on Russia is underscored by its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the presence of a Russian military base in Gyumri. Economically, Russia remains a crucial patron in shaping Armenia's domestic and foreign policies. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, has pursued a more autonomous foreign policy but maintains significant economic and strategic ties with Russia, particularly in the energy and trade sectors. These bilateral relations underpin Russia's ongoing interest in sustaining its strategic foothold in the South Caucasus. The divergent trajectories of Armenia and Azerbaijan present Moscow with a challenging task of maintaining equilibrium in the region. During the intense phases of fighting, Russia's role became more pronounced through humanitarian assistance to Armenia and the deployment of military personnel to the contact line aimed at preventing further escalation. However, Azerbaijan expressed

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<sup>48</sup> "Azerbaijan files application to European court over 'gross violations' by Armenia," Anadolu Agency, accessed 16.03.2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/azerbaijan-files-application-to-european-court-over-gross-violations-by-armenia/2769300>

<sup>49</sup> "Armenia: Cluster Munitions Used in Multiple Attacks on Azerbaijan," Human Rights Watch, accessed 16.03.2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/15/armenia-cluster-munitions-used-multiple-attacks-azerbaijan>

concerns regarding Russia's perceived partiality. After the war, Russia has tried to be a major player in the peace process and has been instrumental in negotiating a ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Following the war, Russia emerged as a key actor in facilitating peace negotiations, culminating in the ceasefire agreement signed on November 9, 2020, which ended hostilities and allowed for the deployment of Russian peacekeepers to the region.<sup>50</sup> The ceasefire took effect at midnight, Moscow time, on November 10, 2020. Azerbaijan and Armenia maintained their current positions, while Russian peacekeepers were deployed along the contact line and the corridor between Karabakh and Armenia. Internally displaced persons and refugees returned to the region under the supervision of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. An exchange of prisoners, detainees, and the remains of deceased individuals took place. The blockade on transport and economic ties was lifted, with Russia's Border Guard Service overseeing transport communications. The goal was to establish a lasting resolution to the Karabakh crisis in the interest of both Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>51</sup> The Second Karabakh War has underlined the continued relevance of the South Caucasus as an area of strategic significance and has also raised doubts about the future direction of Russian presence in the area. Russia had a somewhat ambiguous approach to Karabakh. It initiated active diplomatic efforts while simultaneously sustaining the conflict, allowing it to maintain its influence.

### **7) Azerbaijan's National Security Paradigm After the Second Karabakh War in the Context of Securitization Theory**

The securitization process refers to the identification of a particular issue as a security threat and the legitimization of extraordinary measures to counter this threat. This process plays a significant role in international relations and national security policies, profoundly influencing the perception and management of security threats. The securitization process is shaped by factors such as social structures, power relations, and discourse, and it can manifest differently in various contexts. Therefore, understanding the securitization process serves as a crucial tool in analyzing national and international security policies. The national security of the Republic of Azerbaijan encompasses the protection of the state's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, the preservation of the constitutional order, and the safeguarding of human rights. At the same time, it aims to defend the country's national interests against both internal and external threats. This security approach includes not only the protection of the country's strategic interests and regional stability but also the maintenance of domestic peace, public order, and the well-being of the population, along with the strengthening of the state's sovereign rights. Azerbaijan's national security policies are built upon strategies of regional and international cooperation, diplomacy, military deterrence, and economic strengthening.

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<sup>50</sup> "Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation," Official website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed 16.03.2025, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923>

<sup>51</sup> President of Russia Vladimir Putin, "Zayavleniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii," (2020), accessed 02.02.2025, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64381>

Threats to national security can be defined as various processes, factors, and conditions that hinder or endanger the protection of the state's and the population's national interests. These threats can be classified based on their likelihood of occurrence as potential threats (which have not yet materialized but have the possibility of emerging) and real threats (which have either already materialized or are in the process of doing so). Additionally, threats can be categorized into two main groups based on their source: external threats and internal threats. External threats may include geopolitical conflicts among regional and international powers, disputes with neighboring countries that jeopardize border security, terrorism, foreign intelligence activities, and the negative impact of global economic fluctuations on the national economy. Furthermore, external threats often encompass interventions that may target sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the spillover effects of regional conflicts into the country. Internal threats, on the other hand, target the constitutional order, political stability, social cohesion, and public security. These threats include political instability, social unrest, economic crises, organized crime, domestic terrorism, and separatist movements. Additionally, divisions and conflicts among ethnic, religious, or social groups can also be considered serious internal threats to national security.<sup>52</sup>

After the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan reached a dynamic turning point within the framework of national security. This period necessitates a reassessment of the influence of geopolitical powers in the South Caucasus, as priorities and imperatives are shifting. Examining the Second Karabakh War within the context of securitization theory provides a framework for understanding security perceptions and internal security changes in the region. The securitization process also includes how a particular threat is perceived and processed in the societal consciousness. Azerbaijan's anti-terror operation in September 2023 was supported by the media, political leaders, and other power centers to raise public awareness of the severity and urgency of terrorism and regional instability. This process was utilized to garner public support for the operation and encourage active participation in national security policies. Azerbaijan has emphasized the operation's compliance with international law, underscored the importance of international counterterrorism cooperation, and stated that the operation would contribute to regional stability. These efforts were carried out to ensure the operation's acceptance and support at the international level.<sup>53</sup> In the post-war period, domestic security measures have been strengthened, and counterterrorism operations have been intensified. Operations conducted against terrorist organizations and illegal armed groups play a significant role in ensuring national security. On September 19, 2023, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan launched a counterterrorism operation in the region where illegal armed groups were located, aiming to restore the country's constitutional order and neutralize these groups. Within 24 hours of the operation's commencement, the illegal armed units in the region accepted Azerbaijan's demands and surrendered. The primary reason for

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<sup>52</sup> Əli Həsənov, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Milli İnkişaf Və Təhlükəsizlik Siyasətinin Əsasları* (Bakü: Zərdabi LTD, 2016), 79.

<sup>53</sup> "Legal, political and military reasons for Azerbaijan's anti terror ops," Cavid Veliyev, accessed 16.03.2025, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/legal-political-and-military-reasons-for-azerbaijans-anti-terror-ops>

this was the lack of external support for the separatists and the successful military operations carried out by the Azerbaijani army. Once the Azerbaijani army took control of the strategic heights and supply routes of these armed groups for the first time, they had no choice but to surrender. Indeed, while Armenia remained firm in its stance that it would not determine the fate of Karabakh Armenians against their will, the international community also called for direct dialogue between Azerbaijan and the Karabakh Armenians. Consequently, the decision of the Karabakh Armenians to integrate directly into Azerbaijan invalidated the claims made by Armenia and its supporters.

The Azerbaijani government placed the situation in Karabakh at the top of its national security agenda, mobilizing both the public and the international community on this issue. In this process, a leadership role was assumed, and firm determination was demonstrated to ensure national security. One of the most significant outcomes of this operation, which targeted illegal armed groups threatening national security to establish constitutional order in Karabakh, was the capture and transfer to Baku for trial of individuals who had committed war crimes, including acts of violence and torture against Azerbaijani civilians and prisoners. This is considered a crucial step toward delivering justice and has significant implications for the implementation of the state's positive obligation to protect its citizens. Additionally, it should be noted that the operation was an effort to ensure Azerbaijan's full sovereignty and prevent war crimes from going unpunished. From the perspective of securitization theory, Azerbaijan's counterterrorism operation in Karabakh was a legitimate security measure aimed at protecting national security. It was a necessary step to neutralize terrorist groups and separatist organizations operating in Karabakh and to ensure the country's territorial integrity.<sup>54</sup>

Cooperation and deepening relations with regional and global actors are key components of national security strategies. The South Caucasus remains a focal point for many global and regional actors, including Russia, Türkiye, Iran, and Western countries. Within this balance of power, Azerbaijan seeks to secure strategic advantages. Following the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan strengthened its diplomatic and political relations on the international stage and sought new alliances. In particular, its strategic partnership with Türkiye plays a crucial role in regional security policies. Azerbaijan has maintained a firm stance on preserving its territorial integrity and reclaiming occupied territories while adopting a more active diplomacy policy internationally. To strengthen inter-state relations and garner support from the international community, Azerbaijan has engaged in extensive diplomatic efforts. Another key objective of its national security policy is to establish a positive image in the international arena. The diaspora policy, aimed at ensuring Azerbaijanis abroad maintain their rights and national identity, is of great significance in presenting Azerbaijan as a credible actor on global platforms and enhancing its international representation in alignment with national interests.

Azerbaijan's national security policy not only aims to protect the country's internal interests but also seeks to contribute to the improvement of the global security

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<sup>54</sup> Museyib Shiraliyev & Murteza Hasanoğlu, "Güvenlikleştirme Teorisi Bağlamında İkinci Karabağ Savaşı Sonrası Azerbaycan'ın Millî Güvenlik Paradigması," *Güvenlik Bilimleri Dergisi* 13/2 (2024): 280.



environment. From this perspective, Azerbaijan's security policy aspires to play an active role in international processes and contribute to a fair, stable, and democratic world order. In ensuring regional and global security, Azerbaijan prioritizes its own security and national interests while also striving to strengthen intergovernmental cooperation and relationships based on mutual interests. Given its strategic location and natural resources, Azerbaijan is a key player in regional stability and security. Therefore, Azerbaijan's security policy is not solely focused on protecting its borders but also on fostering trust-based relationships with all countries in the region. Particularly, as a critical actor in energy corridors and international trade routes, Azerbaijan is enhancing collaborations to ensure the security of these projects. Contributing to various peace missions and regional security initiatives through the United Nations and other international organizations demonstrates Azerbaijan's commitment to global security while also highlighting that national security can be reinforced through international cooperation.<sup>55</sup>

The Zangezur Corridor holds political, economic, and strategic significance on a regional scale. Due to these characteristics, the corridor is of great importance to the countries in the region, namely Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Armenia, Russia, and Iran. In addition to these countries, the corridor also concerns various regional and global actors. From the perspective of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, this corridor project will facilitate the connection of regions that have long been separated. Consequently, Azerbaijan will be able to establish a land route to its Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan through the Zangezur Corridor rather than via Iranian territory. Furthermore, the corridor will enable both road and rail transportation between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, leading to time savings, cost reductions, and the resolution of multiple logistical challenges. It is projected that the Zangezur Corridor will contribute to annual savings in transportation. Through the Zangezur Corridor, the integration of national infrastructure between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic will also be ensured. Currently, Azerbaijan supplies Nakhchivan's natural gas needs via Iranian territory. However, Iran imposes a 15% deduction on the transported gas as a transit fee.<sup>56</sup> With the establishment of the Zangezur Corridor, Azerbaijan will be able to directly supply natural gas to Nakhchivan, thereby eliminating this additional cost. Furthermore, it is understood that essential infrastructure connections, such as telephone, internet, and electricity, which directly impact daily life, will also be extended to Nakhchivan through the corridor. If all economic routes are established via the corridor, it is anticipated that costs between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan will be significantly reduced, leading to substantial savings.<sup>57</sup> Azerbaijan has also encountered this issue when seeking routes to deliver its existing energy resources to the global market. Initially deemed undesirable due to its high cost, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project was ultimately planned to reach Türkiye via Georgia, largely due to the insistence of the Aliyev administration. Given the ongoing conflict with Armenia, oil and natural gas pipelines, as well as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, were routed

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<sup>55</sup> Shiraliyev & Hasanoğlu, "Güvenlikleştirme Teorisi Bağlamında İkinci Karabağ Savaşı," 295.

<sup>56</sup> Kadir Can Çiftçi & Gülşen Bayat, "Zengezur Koridoru'nun Önemi ve Iğdır Özelinde Türkiye Turizmine Etkileri," *Journal of Academic Tourism Studies* 5/2 (2024): 107

<sup>57</sup> Çiftçi & Bayat, "Zengezur Koridoru'nun Önemi," 108.

through Georgia despite the longer and more expensive path. In this regard, the Zangezur Corridor will further strengthen Azerbaijan's position. If deemed necessary, energy surplus could be transported to Türkiye through shorter pipeline routes. In light of Europe's growing demand for energy resources, Azerbaijan's energy reserves have gained considerable significance, making the Zangezur Corridor even more crucial. Furthermore, a railway project passing through the Zangezur Corridor between Azerbaijan and Türkiye is also under consideration, which would position Azerbaijan as a central hub in railway transportation.

The securitization theory has demonstrated its effective applicability in the context of Azerbaijan. The fact that the Karabakh issue has occupied a significant place on Azerbaijan's national security agenda provides a clear example of how the securitization process operates. Azerbaijan has consistently defined Karabakh as a persistent threat in shaping its national security strategies and has taken extraordinary measures to counter this threat. Furthermore, in this process, Azerbaijan has effectively utilized securitization policies to gain international support and ensure regional security. As a result, following the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan's national security strategies have undergone significant transformations in the military, economic, diplomatic, and social spheres. When assessed within the framework of securitization theory, the effectiveness of Azerbaijan's security policies and its future strategic orientations have been analyzed, providing specific recommendations. These findings offer a significant framework for understanding Azerbaijan's efforts to safeguard national security and maintain regional stability.

### **8) Regional Political Dynamics**

While Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territory continued, a constitutional referendum was held in 2015 that resulted in changes to Armenia's system of government, transferring the majority of the powers of the President of Armenia to the Prime Minister. Although most of the changes approved in the referendum were implemented immediately, the article regarding the transfer of power was decided to take effect at the end of Serzh Sargsyan's term. In this way, Sargsyan was able to extend his time in power until 2018. The issue of Armenia's system of government and the selection of its leaders caused divisions among the Armenian people, and these disagreements turned into street protests starting in 2016. In these protests, Pashinyan gained the support of a portion of the public. Following the street demonstrations supported by the U.S. Embassy in Irevan Europe's largest embassy in Armenia and having been elected as a Member of Parliament in 2012 and 2017, Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister on May 8, 2018.<sup>58</sup>

Western countries generally prioritize their geopolitical interests in their policies toward the Caucasus and Eurasia regions. Due to the area's energy resources, transportation corridors, and strategic location, the West seeks to limit the influence of Russia and regional actors in this geography. NATO's expansion, the emphasis on democratization in the region, and human rights rhetoric constitute the main elements of

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<sup>58</sup> Ömer Lütfi Taşcıoğlu, "İkinci Karabağ Savaşı ve Sonuçları," *Trakya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 25/2 (2023): 546.

the West's overall strategy toward the region. However, this stance creates a basis for reciprocal competition and sometimes conflict with Russia. Especially in disputed areas such as Karabakh and Georgia, the West tends to provide political and diplomatic support to actors like Azerbaijan and Georgia.<sup>59</sup>

Türkiye-Russia relations experienced a fluctuating course before and after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. Following the coup attempt, Türkiye adopted a more pragmatic and multi-faceted approach to its foreign policy, entering a significant phase of improvement and cooperation with Russia. Especially in the Syrian arena, dynamic interactions between conflict and cooperation have developed between Russia and Türkiye. The military agreements in Idlib and the joint mechanisms established in northern Syria are concrete examples of partial cooperation between the two countries. This cooperation has been shaped by the need to maintain security balances in the region and the acceptance of Russia's presence in Syria. However, although Türkiye cooperates with Russia, it continues to maintain strategic concerns regarding Kurdish forces in Syria and seeks a different balance in its relations with the United States.<sup>60</sup>

Relations between Türkiye and the United States have in recent years been driven into a serious crisis, particularly due to disagreements over Syrian policies, defense systems, and regional security issues. This crisis marks the beginning of a new era in Türkiye's relationships with Russia and Azerbaijan. Especially in the Syrian arena, the U.S. support for the YPG,<sup>61</sup> the Syrian extension of the PKK, has deepened Türkiye's national security concerns. While this situation is one of the main reasons for the crisis between Türkiye and the U.S., it has also prompted Ankara to steer its relations with Russia toward strategic cooperation. Türkiye experienced significant problems in military cooperation with the U.S. after procuring the S-400 air defense systems from Russia, which further increased tensions between the two countries.<sup>62</sup>

On the Azerbaijan front, the U.S. stance in the region was particularly notable during the 2020 Second Karabakh War. The U.S. lost its mediation role in regional crises to Russia, while Türkiye's explicit political and military support for Azerbaijan created a new area of tension in Washington-Ankara relations. The close strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan has limited U.S. influence in the region and reinforced the mutual pragmatism between Russia and Türkiye. Within this trilateral framework, the crisis with the U.S. demonstrates that Türkiye has adopted a new foreign policy approach based on a multipolar and regional balance of power. By cooperating with both Russia and Azerbaijan, Türkiye seeks to balance the unilateral influence of the U.S. in the region, creating a lasting atmosphere of tension in its relations with Washington. Therefore, the deepening crisis with the U.S. is reshaping alliance and competition dynamics among regional actors and laying the groundwork for a redefinition of power balances in the

<sup>59</sup> Okan Ancak, "Yeni Avrasyacılık Bağlamında Güney Kafkasya'da Türkiye ve Rusya," *SBF Dergisi* 75/3 (2020): 1129.

<sup>60</sup> Hüseyin Yeltin & Kübra Işık, "Rekabetten İşbirliğine Giden Süreçte Türkiye-Rusya İlişkilerinde Bir Test: Suriye Krizi," *Uluslararası Politik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 3/3 (2017): 46.

<sup>61</sup> İbrahim Kerman & Ertan Efegil, "Terör Örgütü PKK/PYD'nin Suriye'de İzlediği İç Savaş Stratejisinin Değerlendirilmesi," *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1/2 (2017): 164.

<sup>62</sup> Kamal Mohammed & Abbas Abbas, "Türkiye'nin Rusya'dan S400 Hava Savunma Sistemi Temin Etmesinin ABD ve NATO Açısından İncelenmesi," *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 7/91 (2019): 199.

Caucasus and Eurasia.<sup>63</sup>

As a state bordering both Armenia and Azerbaijan, Iran was one of the actors whose stance was most closely scrutinized. Throughout the war, Iran's position remained ambiguous, which provoked strong reactions within the Azerbaijani public. It was not only the Republic of Azerbaijan but also the Azerbaijani Turks residing within Iran's borders who expressed their discontent through various means. Tehran's response choosing to arrest, imprison, and accuse those expressing these grievances rather than seeking to understand them may have been one of its most misguided decisions. Positive opinions or expressions of satisfaction toward Iran, occasionally voiced by the Armenian side, further complicated the situation.<sup>64</sup>

### **9) The Foreign Policy of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev After the Second Karabakh War**

Following the Second Karabakh War, President Ilham Aliyev's foreign policy course has been centered on strengthening Azerbaijan's international position by fully restoring its sovereignty and reclaiming its territories from occupation. This approach is characterized by a multi-vector, balanced, and independent strategy that prioritizes national interests. While previous foreign policy efforts were largely focused on resolving the conflict, the current course extends beyond regional issues to address global challenges such as climate change, energy security, and neocolonialism. Utilizing the diplomatic leverage gained through its historic victory, Azerbaijan fosters balanced and multi-dimensional relations with various international partners. For instance, the country has reinforced its strategic partnership with Türkiye, defended its national interests through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement, and played an active role in global energy and climate initiatives, such as COP29.<sup>65</sup> This foreign policy trajectory enables Azerbaijan to maintain its independence while fostering cooperation with regional and global powers based on mutual respect and collaboration. President Ilham Aliyev's independent foreign policy approach has been positively received by opposing global power blocs. Azerbaijan's equidistant stance towards major power centers, its commitment to principles of equality, mutual respect, and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as its adherence to bilateral cooperation that does not target third parties, have contributed to a favorable international perception of the country and its leadership. In this regard, the hosting of high-level military meetings between Russia and Western military officials in Baku underscores Azerbaijan's role as a neutral and reliable platform for international dialogue. The fact that Baku has hosted such meetings six times, including discussions between Russia's Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov and top U.S. and NATO military officials from 2017 to 2019, is a testament to the recognition of Azerbaijan's balanced and independent diplomacy by

<sup>63</sup> Özdemir, "The Changing State of Affairs and Turkey's Role in Nagorno Karabakh Issue," 98.

<sup>64</sup> Yalçın Sarıkaya, "İran'ın İkinci Karabağ Savaşı Tutumu: Takke Düştü Kel Göründü," *Giresun Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi* 7/1 (2021): 95.

<sup>65</sup> "Baku hosted opening ceremony of World Leaders Climate Action Summit at COP29," The Azerbaijan State News Agency, accessed 17.03.2025, [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/baku\\_hosted\\_opening\\_ceremony\\_of\\_world\\_leaders\\_climate\\_action\\_summit\\_at\\_cop29\\_video-3274064](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/baku_hosted_opening_ceremony_of_world_leaders_climate_action_summit_at_cop29_video-3274064)

global power centers. In the post-conflict period, Azerbaijan's foreign policy places significant emphasis on shaping a strategic narrative to strengthen its national identity and reinforce its international legal standing.<sup>66</sup> This approach ensures the legitimacy of Azerbaijan's position by aligning historical developments with international legal frameworks. The strategic narrative not only solidifies public perception domestically but also establishes an unquestionable foundation for Azerbaijan's status and legal claims in international forums.

The successful implementation of foreign policy is a key priority for the effective realization of national-state interests. Azerbaijan has successfully continued its balanced foreign policy diplomacy even after the war. Following the Karabakh victory, some opinions emerged within Türkiye suggesting that Azerbaijan had shifted from a balanced foreign policy to a Türkiye-oriented approach. It is natural for this to be perceived as a normal development. This can be attributed to the cultural, ancestral, and historical ties between the peoples of Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Particularly, after gaining independence, the relations between the two countries strengthened and became more comprehensive. The cultural and social ties that existed before independence expanded further into economic, diplomatic, military, and other spheres after the restoration of state sovereignty. Following the Second Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020, Türkiye's active stance in favor of Azerbaijan led to the elevation of bilateral relations to the level of a "strategic partnership." Türkiye's role in Azerbaijan's foreign policy has become even more pronounced in the post-2020 period. During the Second Karabakh War, Türkiye distinguished itself by providing Azerbaijan with significant military and diplomatic support, which was one of the key elements of Azerbaijan's victory in Karabakh. After the war, Türkiye's presence in Karabakh as a military observer and its increasing influence in the region became an important factor in Azerbaijan's efforts to maintain a balance in its relations with Russia.

The post-conflict foreign policy course also involves modernizing domestic institutions and strengthening public diplomacy. The restructuring of state institutions, the professional development of diplomatic personnel, and the alignment of international relations mechanisms with contemporary standards enhance Azerbaijan's agility and competitiveness on the global stage. Simultaneously, strategic communication efforts help expand Azerbaijan's soft power by effectively managing public relations and information flow. Furthermore, Azerbaijan plays a crucial role in reshaping regional security architecture. This process goes beyond bilateral and multilateral partnerships to encourage structural changes in regional security frameworks, contributing to a recalibrated power balance and fostering new cooperation models among neighboring states. As an additional dimension of foreign policy, Azerbaijan actively engages in cultural and academic diplomacy to promote its intellectual and cultural heritage on the global stage. This effort not only strengthens Azerbaijan's soft power but also facilitates long-term cooperation in scientific research, culture, and education, aligning with the country's

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<sup>66</sup> "Müzəffər Prezident və onun xarici siyasət doktrinası," Apa Agency, accessed 17.03.2025, <https://apa.az/blog/blog-single/muzaffer-prezident-ve-onun-xarici-siyaset-doktrinası-191>

strategic interests. Moreover, comparing Azerbaijan's post-conflict foreign policy with the experiences of other nations in similar situations provides insights into its adaptive strategies and potential future developments. Such comparative analyses help forecast the evolution of Azerbaijan's diplomatic approach and identify potential risks. The effective use of digital platforms to convey strategic messages and national values to a global audience, alongside the enhancement of cybersecurity measures, is another essential component of Azerbaijan's modern diplomatic efforts. This dual approach not only strengthens Azerbaijan's public diplomacy but also safeguards its digital security. Additionally, Azerbaijan's initiatives in addressing ecological and climate issues, such as promoting green economic development, renewable energy projects, and environmental sustainability, have become an integral part of its foreign policy agenda. These initiatives contribute both to national development and to Azerbaijan's active engagement in global environmental cooperation. The mobilization of the Azerbaijani diaspora and human resources also forms a crucial aspect of the country's foreign policy in the post-conflict era. The active involvement of the diaspora in international advocacy efforts and the promotion of national values through intellectual and cultural exchanges enhance Azerbaijan's influence on the global stage. This strategy creates opportunities for deepening dialogues with foreign audiences and expanding Azerbaijan's international presence. Overall, President Ilham Aliyev's post-conflict foreign policy is not merely aimed at managing the post-war situation but is designed to ensure Azerbaijan's long-term strategic development across multiple dimensions.

It is also important to note that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev exhibited consistent and effective leadership throughout the course of the war. He gave clear, confident, and strategically articulated interviews in three languages to prominent international media outlets. By regularly addressing both domestic and international audiences via social media and official statements, Aliyev projected an image of a modern, assertive, and capable head of state. In parallel, Presidential Advisor Hikmet Hajiyev also played a visible and active role, demonstrating a professional and well-coordinated communication strategy during the conflict.<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

For more than 30 years, the Karabakh issue remained unresolved despite numerous efforts by the Republic of Azerbaijan to achieve a peaceful and secure settlement. However, during this period, Armenia failed to demonstrate a principled and constructive stance. Despite all these circumstances, Armenia continued to carry out military and diplomatic interventions on Azerbaijan's sovereign territory. Consequently, the year 2020 marked a turning point for Armenia. The developments over three decades culminated in the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War in 2020, which led to the resolution of Azerbaijan's legitimate struggle by international legal norms through military means. As a result of the war, Azerbaijan liberated the territories that had been occupied by Armenia during the First Karabakh War. Türkiye and Russia, as key regional actors in the South Caucasus, played significant and decisive roles in this process. Türkiye stood firmly by

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<sup>67</sup> Yalçın Sarıkaya, *44 Gün Savaş: Azerbaycan'ın Karabağ Zaferi* (Ankara: TASAV, 2020), 15.

Azerbaijan throughout the occupation period, respecting its territorial integrity and consistently advocating this position across all international platforms. Historically, Russia closely monitored developments in the South Caucasus, a region long considered within its sphere of influence. Although Russia did not overtly side with any party, it refrained from taking effective and substantive measures toward resolving the conflict. Since the late 20th century, under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, the modernization of the Azerbaijani armed forces with Turkish assistance and alignment with NATO standards has continued into the 21st century. Through bilateral exercises, the Azerbaijani military has enhanced its operational capabilities in challenging geographic conditions, gained expertise in tactical maneuvers, and improved the effective use of military equipment. All these experiences proved to be decisive factors for Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War. Throughout the conflict, Türkiye's diplomatic support played a crucial role in securing a psychological advantage for Azerbaijan. Türkiye systematically supported Azerbaijan's just cause through official meetings, international forums, and mass media channels. Türkiye's role in the Second Karabakh War extended beyond diplomatic backing and advocacy on the international stage; as a strategic partner, it provided significant military technology and expertise to the Azerbaijani armed forces. This collaboration was instrumental in enabling Azerbaijan to implement modern combat methods and enhance operational effectiveness. Moreover, Türkiye's political will and commitment to regional stability significantly influenced the shift in the balance of power in the South Caucasus. Russia's position in the South Caucasus is complex and multifaceted, reflecting both its status as a regional power and its geopolitical interests. Over the years, Russia has employed various military, political, economic, and diplomatic tools to preserve and expand its sphere of influence in the region. However, in the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, Russia sought to maintain a balance by adopting a neutral stance, which in practice resulted in a lack of constructive influence on the peace process. For Russia, the South Caucasus represents a strategically critical region where stability is essential for safeguarding its security interests and regional influence. Therefore, Moscow has maintained its military-technical cooperation with Armenia while simultaneously seeking to preserve relations with Azerbaijan. Balancing these two parties has been a tactical approach for Russia to manage tensions and protect its interests. Conversely, Russia's passivity during the conflict and its limited involvement in meaningful peace initiatives can be interpreted as a diminishing of its influence in the region. This also indicates certain shortcomings in Moscow's position against the backdrop of Türkiye's rising influence. While Russia has endeavored to protect the interests of its traditional ally Armenia, the escalating tensions with Azerbaijan and Türkiye's active role have posed additional strategic challenges. Ultimately, Russia's position in the South Caucasus stands at the intersection of maintaining stability and engaging in competition and influence struggles. Moscow's future policy will be shaped by geopolitical changes and the actions of regional actors, and how it manages this balance will play a crucial role in the region's future development. Considering all these aspects, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations are founded not only on brotherhood and cultural ties but also on strategic and military cooperation, making them a key factor in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the region. This unity

and mutual support remain vital for ensuring peace and sustainable development in the South Caucasus. Accordingly, Türkiye's support holds significant importance for Azerbaijan not only during wartime but also in post-conflict efforts aimed at restoring stability and reconstruction in the region.

It can also be listed in articles like this:

- The Second Karabakh War significantly altered the existing geopolitical power balance in the South Caucasus and reshaped the dynamics of Moscow-Ankara relations in the region.
- Türkiye's military support and diplomatic activity provided Azerbaijan with a strategic advantage, strengthening its position as a new key actor in the region.
- Although Russia sought to preserve its traditional sphere of influence, its passive stance in resolving the conflict and balancing policies indicated a decline in its regional influence.
- Future regional stability will depend on carefully balancing the strategic interests of Russia and Türkiye alongside the security needs of Azerbaijan and Armenia.
- For sustainable peace and development in the South Caucasus, it is essential to manage Moscow-Ankara relations constructively and enhance mutual understanding.

During the Second Karabakh War, the relations between Moscow and Ankara reflected complex and multifaceted dynamics that significantly influenced the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus and the course of the conflict. Both states pursued the protection and expansion of their regional interests, often adopting differing positions that ranged from rivalry to cooperation. Russia considers the South Caucasus as its geopolitical sphere of influence, viewing stability in the region as a cornerstone of its security interests. Consequently, Moscow prioritized military-technical cooperation with Armenia and sought to strengthen its positions by deploying peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone. Conversely, Türkiye emerged as a rising power in the region, firmly supporting Azerbaijan both militarily and diplomatically, thereby seeking to expand its geopolitical influence in the South Caucasus. Throughout the war, intensive diplomatic communication was maintained between Moscow and Ankara. Notably, the phone call between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin in October 2020 was a crucial step in preventing the escalation of the conflict into a full-scale regional war. Through such dialogue, both countries endeavored to coordinate efforts to manage the conflict's intensity. Moscow-Ankara relations remain a key determinant of future stability in the South Caucasus. Türkiye continues to stand firmly with Azerbaijan as a strategic partner and regional power, while Russia seeks to maintain balanced relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan to protect its interests. This dynamic will shape the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus and play a vital role in managing potential future tensions.





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