

Military assistance and alliance deepening in the Nagorno-Karabakh wars: The Türkiye-Azerbaijan case

Ahmet Ateş^a 

Hamit Kılıç^b 

^a Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Iğdır University, 76000, Iğdır/TÜRKİYE.

^b Graduate Student, Institute of Graduate Studies, Iğdır University, 76000, Iğdır/TÜRKİYE.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh wars, emphasizing the role of military aid in alliance formation. While prior literature often isolates military or economic aspects, this article adopts a comprehensive approach, tracing the transformation of bilateral ties across three distinct phases: diplomacy, interwar military assistance, and institutionalized cooperation following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Using process-tracing methodology, the research identifies causal mechanisms linking Türkiye’s military aid to Azerbaijan’s capacity-building and eventual battlefield success. Findings suggest that Türkiye’s provision of training, financial assistance, and advanced weaponry substantially strengthened Azerbaijan’s armed forces, enabling their decisive victory in 2020. At the same time, this deepened alliance illustrates the dual nature of military aid – facilitating security partnerships while creating potential risks of over-dependence. The study contributes to the broader literature on military assistance and alliance politics by highlighting how shared identity and geopolitical calculations interact with material support to shape long-term strategic partnerships. It further argues that Turkish involvement not only enhanced Azerbaijan’s defense capabilities but also altered regional balances by constraining Armenia and mitigating Russian influence in the South Caucasus.

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Introduction

This article addresses how sustained external assistance shapes the formation and institutionalization of alliances in a shifting, partly de-Westernizing security environment. In this manner, this study examines Turkish-Azerbaijani relations in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh wars. Particularly, we aim to trace the mechanisms through which Turkish assistance affected alliance formation and wartime effectiveness in Türkiye-Azerbaijan dyad. The article is driven by two main research questions: 1) What is the impact of military aid in alliance formation? and in that regard, 2) Did Turkish-Azerbaijani military

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR Ahmet Ateş, Iğdır University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, 76000, Iğdır/TÜRKİYE. Email: ahmet.ates@igdir.edu.tr

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relations have an impact on the outcome of the First and Second Nagorno-Karabakh Wars? Therefore, the primary objective of this research is analyzing Turkish-Azerbaijani military relations between 1994 and 2024.

Acknowledging a three-decade time frame is challenging to examine due to time and space limitations, we chose to utilize the process-tracing method in this research. As Falletti (2006) and Collier (2011) suggest, process-tracing is a qualitative research method to elucidate causal mechanisms behind historical events and processes. In this context, we identified the change to be explained, established evidence for the change and then documented processes leading to change. In other words, we contend that Turkish-Azerbaijani relations have undergone transformation on at least three occasions over the past thirty years (identifying the change), and these changes were a result of several factors: the independence of Azerbaijan, the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (establishing evidence for the change) and Türkiye's military aid to Azerbaijan played an important role in these transformations (documenting processes leading to change).

Reliable data is essential to demonstrate the causal mechanisms in the process. Consequently, in addition to relevant literature, we gathered extensive first-hand data from open sources, including statements from leaders of the two countries, publications from the Gendarmerie of Türkiye and the War Academy of Türkiye, legislative actions of both nations (Turkish Official Gazette and the records of the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan) and the Minute Books of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT).

Upon research, the findings suggest that Turkish military aid played a significant role in Azerbaijan's military buildup in the last two decades and more importantly in the victory of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Even though Türkiye engaged in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict diplomatically, it eventually trained and equipped Azerbaijani army. Therefore, as the literature suggests, Turkish military aid to Azerbaijan stems from a shared identity and perceived threats and it also poses a possible risk of over-dependence for Azerbaijan. In other words, military aid played a vital role in alliance formation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan and contributed to the geopolitical balance in the region. It is also important to note that at the same time, we acknowledge evolving geopolitical alignments in the South Caucasus during the 2010s and 2020s and therefore avoid essentializing any single patron-client dyad in the region; where relevant, we note shifts in Armenia's external orientation under Pashinyan alongside Russia's changing role.

The remainder of the article is as follows. We first present a brief theoretical framework and research design. Second, we assess the relevant literature. Third, we succinctly assess the time period between Azerbaijan's independence and the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and examine the period of diplomatic endeavors and illustrate Türkiye's diplomatic efforts concerning the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. Fourth, we examine the interwar period and Türkiye's financial military initiatives to enhance Azerbaijan's military capacity. Fifth, we assess Turkish-Azerbaijani ties during the Second Karabakh War. Last, we evaluate hypotheses against rival explanations and conclude with theoretical implications and limitations.

Theoretical framework, research design and methodology

We situate the study at the nexus of alliance politics and assistance literature. Realist perspectives expect external assistance to alter the cost-benefit calculus of alignment (Walt, 1987; Mearsheimer, 2001; Marston, 2024); neorealist perspectives view external assistance as a strategic resource that shifts the distribution of power, incentivizing alignment and intensifying security competition (Hajimineh & Falahati, 2025, p.9); alliance-formation accounts emphasize how material aid, standardization, and repeated interactions generate institutional lock-in (Retter et al., 2021); dependence theories warn of path dependence and reduced strategic autonomy (Pierson, 2000; Dreher, 2024; Heidland, 2025). From this, we specify an aid-to-alliance mechanism: (i) material inputs (training, finance, equipment) → (ii) capability and doctrine change (NATO standardization) → (iii) interoperability and recurrent exercises → (iv) institutionalization (formal committees, declarations) → (v) wartime effectiveness; with potential side-mechanism of over-dependence (logistics/training path dependence). This framework generates distinct, testable traces for process-tracing.

Methodologically, we use process tracing to identify observable implications at each step of the mechanism. We pre-specify test types (hoop, smoking-gun, straw-in-the-wind, double-decisive) and map them to documentary sources: Official Gazette issues and page numbers, TGNA minutes and dates, service-level memoranda, training protocols, and post-2020 institutional documents (e.g., Shusha Declaration). A test “passes” when predicted traces are present in the correct sequence (chronological congruence) and attributable to the posited mechanism (source congruence); “smoking-gun” requires a strong link (e.g., directives explicitly tying Turkish training to doctrine change). “Double-decisive” would require simultaneously confirming our mechanism and excluding rivals (rare with open-source data).

Hypotheses

We argue that Turkish-Azerbaijani military cooperation is a result of a multi-step process over the past three decades and the main driver of this relationship is the Nagorno-Karabakh wars. Moreover, the Azerbaijani victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war is a result of Turkish military assistance over years. However, the Turkish-Azerbaijani military relations also pose a risk of over-dependence for Azerbaijan. In order to test our arguments, we provide three hypotheses:

H_{1a} (Sequenced transformation): Sustained Turkish assistance (training, standardization and procurement) moved relations from cultural affinity to an institutionalized security partnership in three phases (diplomacy → training/finance → institutionalized military cooperation).

H_{1b} (Institutionalization): Recurrent exercises and formal bodies (e.g., high-level committees, post-2020 agreements) embedded cooperation beyond ad-hoc coordination.

H₂ (Determinants of Azerbaijan’s Victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War): Turkish aid (training, equipment, operational collaboration) was a major contributing factor to Azerbaijan’s victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

H₃ (Over-dependence risk): Military aid deepens capability but risks Azerbaijani over-reliance on Türkiye, via mechanisms of path dependence in training, logistics, maintenance, and doctrine that may constrain strategic autonomy.

Literature review

Military aid constitutes an important aspect of international politics particularly for its potential to affect not only the recipient states' internal dynamics but also regional geopolitics. Therefore, the literature on military aid usually intertwines with foreign assistance, human rights, counterterrorism and domestic politics. A group of studies in the literature focus on the reverberations of military aid as a part of foreign assistance. Collier and Hoeffler (2002), Ree and Nilllesen (2009) and Tahir (2008) argue that military aid increases the military spending of the recipient state, exacerbates domestic rivalries and increases the risk of civil war. Other studies address the consequences of military aid regarding human rights. Bell et al. (2016), Omelicheva et al. (2017) and Sullivan (2023) argue that even though promoting human rights is an expected outcome in military aid, it usually has detrimental effects on the human rights conditions in the recipient state. Analyses of studies concentrating on the counterterrorism aspect of military aid are also contradictory. Shahzad et al. (2019) and Azam and Thelen (2019) contend that while some of the military aid helped mitigate terrorism, others played a role in exacerbating the conflict.

Last but more importantly, several studies focus on military aid and alliance formation which often influence regional and international politics. Morrow (2000) and Sarjito (2024) examine military aid and contend that while military aid increases the security of the recipient state, it also leads to over-reliance on an external actor. Further, Fuhrman and Sechser (2014) and Vobolevicius and Gerazimaite (2015) assert that military aid led to changes in states' perceptions of one another over time. Moreover, some of the research addresses the dynamics of military aid and alliance formation. Benson and Clinton (2016) and Cao et al. (2023) argue that scope, depth, military capacity and common threats are instrumental in alliance formation and military aid. Moreover, Durrani (2023) and Korolev and Portyakov (2018) show that this was the case in China's military aid to Pakistan and US' aid to India, respectively.

Another case for examining military aid's impact on alliance formation is Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. The relationship between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan¹ is marked by profound historical, cultural, and political connections that have developed over the years, especially regarding strategic collaboration across military and economic spheres. Türkiye was the first nation to acknowledge Azerbaijan's independence after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' (USSR) breakup in 1991, initiating a strong bilateral relationship (Kayani, 2023). This fundamental acknowledgment has resulted in considerable political and economic engagements, frequently contextualized by a common identity, reinforced by linguistic and cultural ties (Mikail et al., 2019). The interdependence of the two countries is sometimes articulated through the phrase "one nation, two states" highlighting the profundity of their alliance. Relevant literature examines Turkish-Azerbaijani relations from different perspectives such as military cooperation (Golmohammadi & Markedonov, 2024), economic relations (Vidadili et.al, 2017) and public opinion (Kurt & Tüysüzöğlu, 2022; Sarıgil, 2013). Nonetheless, a comprehensive examination that includes the historical context of Turkish-Azerbaijani ties and the steps of alliance formation is lacking. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap in literature.

¹ In the following sections of the article, they will be referred as "Türkiye" and "Azerbaijan."

We argue that Turkish-Azerbaijani military cooperation is a result of a multi-step process and the current relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan are the outcome of a three-phase process. The primary trigger of this process is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The initial phase of the procedure is referred to as the era of diplomatic endeavors. This timeframe encompasses the relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. Throughout this period, despite the prevalent historical and cultural connections, Türkiye engaged with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict diplomatically. Conceptually, this diplomatic engagement created political space and legitimacy for subsequent military cooperation by establishing recognition, initial agreements, and channels for later training/standardization. The second phase is designated as the interwar period. Between the First and Second Nagorno-Karabakh Wars, Türkiye prioritized military financial aid and commenced a transfer of capacities to the Azerbaijani military. Officer education, NATO standardization, and procurement choices in this era generated path-dependent interoperability. The final era is referred to as the Second Karabakh War and aftermath. During this period, military relations between the two nations were prioritized and institutionalized. Post-2020 mechanisms (e.g., Shusha Declaration) embed earlier assistance within a broader strategic partnership. In summary, military assistance facilitated an alliance between the two nations, with Türkiye, as a NATO member, augmenting Azerbaijan's capabilities against adversaries in the region, so maintaining geopolitical balance in the region.

The era of diplomatic endeavors

Despite spanning nearly three years (1991-1994), Turkish-Azerbaijani relations fluctuated due to political instability in Azerbaijan. During this period, Azerbaijan was led by three presidents: Muttalibov, Elchibey, and Aliyev, each implementing distinct foreign policy strategies.²

During the Muttalibov administration between October 1991 and June 1992, two significant milestones influenced bilateral relations: diplomatic recognition and presidential visits. Although pursuing different strategies, subsequent presidents followed a broadly similar pattern. After gaining independence from the USSR on October 18, 1991, Türkiye was the first nation to extend diplomatic recognition to Azerbaijan on November 9, 1991 (Çetinkaya, 2020, p. 2). The Turkish Consulate, inaugurated on May 25, 1991, was elevated to ambassador status on January 14, 1992 (Bilgin, 2016, pp. 147-148).

In the spring of 1991, then Turkish President Turgut Özal visited Azerbaijan, for the first time in history. Özal, received with considerable enthusiasm, adopted a resolute position regarding the construction of the Sederen Bridge, intended to connect Azerbaijan and Türkiye, and the bridge was subsequently built (Özdemir, 2018, pp. 4-7). On January 25, 1992, Muttalibov, the then President of Azerbaijan, visited Türkiye, where he addressed a question at a press conference, marking the first discussion of the military aspect of official relations between the two countries (Atmaca, 1999, p. 20). This visit was deemed the initial step in advancing military and security cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye;

² It is important to note that İlham Aliyev's ascent to the presidency in 2003, following his period as prime minister and after Heydar Aliyev's tenure, marked the consolidation of a balancing strategy that initially sought equilibrium among Russia, Türkiye, and the West before tilting toward deeper cooperation with Türkiye in security matters.

nevertheless, the pro-Russian strategy implemented during the Muttalibov regime delayed progress in this area (Zengin, 2022, p. 413).

The Khojaly Massacre on February 26, 1992, marked a pivotal moment in the relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan; despite the significance of Türkiye's military backing for Azerbaijan, it was unable to deliver adequate military assistance during this time. Also, despite the setback in Nagorno-Karabakh diminishing Muttalibov's influence, the Supreme Soviet resolved to maintain his presidency. However, on the morning of March 5, 1992, amidst the ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan assembled for an extraordinary session in Baku. Following a two-day siege of the Supreme Soviet building and the presidential palace, the government underwent a transformation (Command of the Military Academies, 1993, p. 2). On March 6, 1992, President Muttalibov resigned, resulting in a reduction of political tension in Baku. During this period, it is significant to acknowledge that Azerbaijan lacked a formal army due to Muttalibov's unwillingness. The conflict in Karabakh involved the Popular Fronts; nevertheless, insufficient financial backing resulted in inadequate weaponry, leaving the fate of Karabakh to its inhabitants (Minute Books of the GNAT, 1993, p. 21).

Following Ayaz Muttalibov, whose profile aligned with Soviet Russia's goals yet remained disconnected from the populace, Ebulfez Elchibey, elected president in June 1992, pivoted towards Türkiye, considering strategic priorities (Mardanov, 2013). During this time of favorable relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, it was observed that the Russian Federation continued to safeguard Azerbaijan's borders under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Treaty. Additionally, the Popular Front's calls for the formation of a military in Azerbaijan persisted, despite the existing limitations to rural and urban police, referred to as militia and traffic officers, for internal security (Minute Books of the GNAT, 1993, p. 21).

On September 6, 1991, Azerbaijan founded the Ministry of Defense but did not promptly initiate the construction of a national army; initially, the Azerbaijan Popular Front and volunteers sufficed. In August 1992, Ebulfez Elchibey commenced efforts to establish a national army, declaring that fifty percent of the Azerbaijani national army would comprise volunteers and the remaining fifty percent conscripts (Command of the Military Academies, 1993b, p.2). In addition to the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborliness signed on January 24, 1992, between November 1-5, 1992, 15 political documents were executed coinciding with the official inauguration of the Azerbaijani Embassy during Ebulfez Elchibey's inaugural visit to Türkiye (Minute Books of the GNAT, 1992, p.470). The most significant of these agreements was the Cooperation and Solidarity Agreement (Command of the Military Academies, 1993b, p. 25). Azerbaijan and Türkiye initially executed a five-year Military Training Cooperation Agreement on August 11, 1992, which was subsequently adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly and published in the Official Gazette on April 21, 1993 (Official Gazette, 1993, p. 1). Since 1994, military personnel in Azerbaijan have received training at the institutes of the Gendarmerie General Command (2002, p. 488) as stipulated by the 1992 agreement. This agreement, crucial for the construction of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, facilitated the formation and training of a regular army in Azerbaijan by the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), despite the lack of vital support in the subsequent years.

In April 1993, following the capture of the Kelbajar region by Armenian forces, which established a second land corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, President

Turgut Özal addressed the Azerbaijani Parliament during his visit to Azerbaijan. He underscored the enduring solidarity between the Azerbaijani nation and government and Türkiye, asserting that Russia was backing the Karabakh Armenians, and Türkiye would enhance military relations with Azerbaijan, including the provision of armaments (Özdemir, 2018, p. 13; Cornell, 1998, p. 65). Turgut Özal also asserted in discussions with high-ranking officials that a draft accord on joint defense collaboration between Türkiye and Azerbaijan was still in the preparatory and signature phases. A clandestine accord was executed between Azerbaijan and Türkiye for collaboration in intelligence matters (Veliyev, 2020a, p. 176).

In June 1993, Suret Huseynov, concurrently the Commander of the Armed Forces, orchestrated a coup against Elchibey, precipitating a significant transformation that would shape Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policies. Subsequent to the coup attempt, Heydar Aliyev, the Speaker of the Nakhchivan Parliament, was summoned to Baku and designated as the deputy head of state; following Elchibey's relocation to Nakhchivan, the authority of the head of state was conferred onto Heydar Aliyev. Heydar Aliyev's policy of balancing during his initial term resulted in a temporary instability in the relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. His decision to rejoin the CIS and disregard numerous agreements established between Elchibey and Türkiye raised Türkiye's suspicions; however, his subsequent articulation of the concept "one nation, two states" ultimately demonstrated that these suspicions were unwarranted (Cornell, 1998, p. 62; Aydın, 2018, p. 41).

Indeed, following Muttalibov's diplomatic engagement with Russia and Elchibey's diplomatic efforts towards the West and Türkiye, the period of balanced policy commenced under Aliyev. Aliyev's strategy of balance between the West and Russia, coupled with Russia's establishment of military bases in Georgia and Armenia, its backing during the ongoing conflicts with Armenians, and its antagonistic stance towards Azerbaijan's energy policy, compelled Aliyev to forsake the policy of balance and align more closely with the West (Veliyev, 2020b).³

The Aliyev era marked a significant acceleration in the development of military relations. On February 9, 1994, subsequent to the signing of the Protocol on the Establishment of Working Groups for the Regulation of Border Related Issues, Türkiye and Azerbaijan executed an agreement on the Resolution of Border Incidents and Disputes on May 5, 1997. This was accompanied by a protocol governing the operations of military and civilian vehicles within a ten-kilometer zone between the two nations, as well as a joint declaration aimed at enhancing strategic cooperation (Yüce, 2016).

During this period, Türkiye ensured that the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict was brought to international organizations for a peaceful resolution and contributed to the formation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group by making efforts to make the Armenian occupation and Khojaly massacre visible on national and international platforms (Çevikel, 2023, p. 161). At the same time, Türkiye tried to get the USA and European countries to take a position in favor of Azerbaijan. Although in 1992 the U.S. government accused Azerbaijan of embargoing and using armed force against Armenia and banned U.S. aid to Azerbaijan through a Section 907 resolution, Bill

³ İlham Aliyev's presidency from 2003 institutionalized this orientation through deepening ties with Türkiye across defense, energy, and diplomacy, while navigating changing regional alignments.

Clinton lifted the Section 907 sanctions and preferred to pursue a balanced policy between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Türkiye tried to stop the Armenian massacre through the UN and OSCE and even raised the issue of organizing a military operation to deter Armenia. However, the efforts of international organizations and Türkiye failed to stop it (Kasım, 2002). In addition, the agreement with Armenia on the sale and purchase of electricity was canceled and Suleyman Demirel even told the Washington Post that the military option was on the table (Aydın, 2005, p. 120). In 1993, after the Armenian occupation of Kalbajar, Türkiye both stopped reciprocal air flights to Armenia and closed its border with Armenia. It was decided that the borders would remain closed until a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was achieved (Veliyev, 2012, p. 27).

Since 1992, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has evolved into an international issue. On January 30, 1992, Azerbaijan joined the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and ratified an accession treaty at the CSCE summit in Helsinki in July 1992. On March 24, 1992, the Council of Foreign Ministers resolved to host a special peace conference to attain a conclusive resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The conference in Minsk is expected to be attended by the conflicting nations, Azerbaijan and Armenia, together with regional heavyweights Russia and Türkiye, and additional participants including France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the United States (Hasanov, 2013, p. 312). Armenia's assault on Shusha and Lachin in May 1992 significantly impeded the progress of the Minsk Conference, while Armenia's uncooperative stance and the divergent perspectives of other nations about the issue contributed to the extension of the peace process. Russia, specifically, endorsed the Minsk Group while opposing the active participation of international organizations and other nations in the peace process.

In response to the escalation of Armenia's assaults on Kalbajar, Azerbaijani President Elchibey solicited assistance from Türkiye, urging the nation to deploy all its resources, including military intervention. Nonetheless, Türkiye, Armenia, and Russia did not achieve a comparable accord; Initially, during this timeframe, a policy consistent with Western approaches towards Russia was being implemented, particularly as the United States aimed to avoid escalating tensions to bolster pro-Western factions within Russia. Additionally, any military accord with Azerbaijan could be construed as a provocation towards Russia. Thirdly, Türkiye ought to refrain from employing force unless it faces a direct armed assault, a principle established since the time of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; fourthly, as a NATO member, Türkiye should engage in consultations with NATO over military collaboration matters; the sanctions imposed during the Cyprus Peace Operation in 1974 hindered the acceptance of Elchibey's proposal (Veliyev, 2020a, pp. 176-177). Despite Türkiye's rejection of Azerbaijan's request, the imposition of an embargo on Armenia and the deployment of Turkish Air Force fighter jets near the Armenian border indicated Türkiye's alignment with Azerbaijan and its intention to serve as a deterrent against Armenia's aggression towards Nagorno-Karabakh (Alkan & Mehdizadehyoushanlouei, 2023).

In February 1994, Aliyev traveled to Türkiye. After this visit, Türkiye implemented the sanction against Armenia. The decision was that Türkiye will maintain a closed border with Armenia (Salmanlı, 2007, p. 56). Due to the endeavors of bilateral and multilateral meetings with Heads of State and delegations, together with effective communications with the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, a ceasefire was established on May 12, 1994, and negotiations

persisted under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group (Hasanov, 2013, p. 313). Analytically, this establishes a baseline: in this phase Türkiye prioritized diplomacy and international fora, which later facilitated acceptance and channels for deeper military cooperation.

In summary, Azerbaijan implemented three distinct foreign policy orientations during this period. Muttalibov adopted a pro-Russian foreign policy, but Elchibey favored a pro-Turkish stance. Ultimately, Aliyev endeavored to equilibrate Azerbaijani foreign policy between Russia, Türkiye and the West. Amid the inconsistency of Azerbaijani foreign policy, Türkiye did not emphasize military assistance to Azerbaijan. Instead, it opted to address the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through diplomatic means. This clarifies the diplomatic phase as a substantive step in the process: recognition and early agreements created the political groundwork for later training, standardization, and institutionalization.

Interwar period

The military relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan during the period from late 1994 to 2020 were shaped by Türkiye's twofold policy. From the end of 1994 until 2005, Türkiye sought to enhance the Azerbaijani military via training and military financial assistance. From 2005 to 2020, Türkiye contributed to the augmentation of Azerbaijan's national defense capacity by facilitating military equipment sales and joint production, subsequent to the strengthening of the Azerbaijani army's capabilities. In conjunction with this dual policy, Türkiye also promoted the integration of Azerbaijani army into NATO and took a mediating position between the Azerbaijani army and NATO. Consequently, in contrast to the initial conflict, Azerbaijan achieved a decisive victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020. Analytically, we emphasize the mechanism: specific forms of aid (officer training, NATO standardization, co-production) produced durable changes in capability and interoperability that became operationally salient by 2020.

Military training

Türkiye provided various military training programs to Azerbaijan to augment its capabilities. The process was systematically institutionalized through a series of bilateral treaties and reciprocal meetings between Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

Although the Turkish Army agreed to implement a training program for a limited number of Azerbaijani military officers in Türkiye as stipulated in the 1992 Military Cooperation Agreement, this initiative was executed and expanded in 1994 following the ratification of the 1994 Security and Cooperation Agreement established between the Ministries of Internal Affairs of both countries. As a result of the agreement, Turkish Gendarmerie General Command (2002, p. 488) was officially tasked to assist the Azerbaijani Internal Security Organization (*Dahili Koşunlar Teşkilatı*).

In June 1997, three years after the initiation of the military training program, a military group from Azerbaijan visited the headquarters of the General Command of Gendarmerie. The General Command of Gendarmerie of Türkiye subsequently undertook a reciprocal visit to the Azerbaijan Internal Security Organization. Following these visits, a protocol was signed in Baku on October 31, 1997, between the parties, stipulating that the personnel of the General Command of Gendarmerie would provide training, education, and logistical support to the personnel of the Azerbaijan Internal Security Organization. Following the

ratification of protocols, a Turkish Gendarmerie Training Team was formed and dispatched to Baku on November 28, 1997, for further training.

In June 1998, Azerbaijan founded a modern military academy in Gala (Gendarmerie General Command, 2002, p. 489). Turkish commanders facilitated the implementation of a Western curriculum at the Land, Air, and Naval War Schools, resulting in the dissolution of the Soviet education system that had been in use from 1992 to 1997 (Kasapoğlu, 2017). Within the officer-training program, Turkish Gendarmerie units provided training for *gizirs* (non-commissioned officers) and *mahes* (specialist sergeants) within Gala. During the initial two years of the program, 1559 Azerbaijani military personnel received training at the Gala military academy, while 406 individuals from the Azerbaijan Internal Security Command also traveled to Türkiye for training (Arıkan and Hayal, 2015, p. 60). As part of the training programs, additional military personnel were dispatched from Azerbaijan specifically for the “Gendarmerie Officer Basics, Gendarmerie Commando, Sniper Training, Communication Course, Leadership, and Intelligence Training” courses (Novruzov, 2019, p. 46).

1999 marked another significant milestone in Turkish-Azerbaijani military relations. Through the newly established Agreement on Deepening Strategic Cooperation, both nations pledged to jointly uphold each other’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity (Karabulut, 2022, p. 20). Consequently, military training programs were intensified. Additionally, pursuant to another protocol between both parties, an Azerbaijani military team underwent a peacekeeping training in Türkiye and participated in the Kosovo Force (KFOR) of NATO under the Turkish direction (Veliyev, 2020, p. 186).

In the first two months of 2000, reciprocal visits between the two countries initiated a new phase for deepening the military training program (Cafersoy & Aslanlı, 2001, p. 155). As a result, the 2001 Agreement on Training, Technical and Scientific Cooperation in the Military Domain between Türkiye and Azerbaijan was signed. Under this agreement, Türkiye not only established a branch of military school in the Nakhchivan region but also provided 80 military vehicles and a number of construction equipment to the Nakhchivan 5th Corps Command (Aslanlı, 2011).

From 2001 to 2008, the Turkish Army, through an extensive military training program, solidified the combat capabilities of the Azerbaijani Land Forces and Internal Security Organization. Afterwards, it focuses on enhancing the Azerbaijani Air Forces. Following the approval of a protocol between the Turkish General Staff and the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2008, units of Turkish Air Force started providing education and assistance in the Azerbaijan Ali Harbi Aeronautical School (Official Gazette, 2019).

The progress in Turkish-Azerbaijani military training program led to a reorganization of Azerbaijani military education system. By directive number 1358, signed by President İlham Aliyev of Azerbaijan on February 25, 2011, the Gala Training Center was reconstituted as the Internal Warfare Command High Warfare School (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2011). Following the inauguration of the High Warfare School, military training persisted between Türkiye and Azerbaijan (Arıkan & Hayal, 2015, p. 61).

Military financial aid

Turkish military financial aid followed a similar pattern with military training programs. Until 2005, the Türkiye extended military financial assistance to Azerbaijan, a process that

was subsequently institutionalized over time through bilateral treaties and reciprocal meetings.

In July 1999, the first military financial aid agreement was reached between the two nations. Pursuant to the agreement, Türkiye allocated US\$ 3,450,000 in military financial assistance to Azerbaijan. It is important to note that of this total, \$165,000 was transmitted directly in cash, while the remainder was provided as goods and services (Veliyev, 2020, p.186). Also, in order to improve the capabilities of the Azerbaijani navy in the Caspian Sea, several types of attack boats were also donated (Ekşi, 2009, p. 102).

In May 2000, the second military assistance agreement between Azerbaijan and Türkiye was signed in Baku. Türkiye has committed to providing Azerbaijan \$3,100,000 in aid over a decade, as stipulated in the deal. Out of this aid, 240,000 dollars was disbursed in cash, while the remainder was allocated as goods and services. The funds were also allocated to facilitate participation in the courses held under the NATO's the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and to reimburse the travel expenses of Turkish officials traveling from Türkiye to Azerbaijan for training (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2000a). Furthermore, after reciprocal meetings between the parties, Türkiye also donated two TCG AB-34 assault boats to Azerbaijan (Cafersoy & Aslanlı, 2001, p. 42).

In 2001, following a series of meetings between the Turkish General Staff and the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan, the Reciprocal Military Assistance and the Agreement on Financial Assistance between the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan and the Turkish General Staff were signed. As a result, Türkiye donated another \$3,000,000 of military aid to Azerbaijani Armed Forces (Cafersoy & Aslanlı, 2001, p. 42).

In June 2003, the fourth military agreement between two nations was signed and Türkiye allocated \$3,000,000 in military financial aid to finance the expenses of military personnel from the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan for training in Türkiye under the PfP framework (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2003; Musayev, 2011, p. 126).

Last, in June 2004, Azerbaijan and Türkiye executed another military financial assistance agreement in Ankara. Under the terms of the deal, Türkiye started to provide supplies, services, and financial assistance to Azerbaijani army totaling roughly \$2,222,000 (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2004). Across these instruments, the causal channel is that stable financing underwrote personnel training and participation in NATO-linked programs, accelerating standardization.

Military equipment sales and joint production

After 2005, Türkiye and Azerbaijan started to improve Azerbaijani defense sector and diminish reliance on foreign entities. However, 2005 is the second step of this process in which both Azerbaijani defense sector and bilateral relations on military equipment production/sales was institutionalized. The process began in 2000 with the Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement between Türkiye and Azerbaijan (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2000b) and a protocol between Azerbaijan's "the Special State Committee for Machine Engineering and Conversion under the Ministry of Defense (HMKK)", which oversees the nation's military industrial facilities, and Türkiye's "The Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKEK)" which is one of the leading institutions in Türkiye regarding military equipment production. These two agreements not only provided a legal framework for defense cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan

but also MKEK was tasked to provide comprehensive support for the advancement of Azerbaijan's military industry (Musayev, 2011, p. 126).

In 2003, two more protocols were signed to further the collaboration between the parties. On the one hand, in August 2003, a protocol concerning the exchange of military expertise and the refurbishment of military factories and workshops, aimed at supporting the Border Troops of Azerbaijan through training, goods, and technical provisions for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Türkiye was signed (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2004). On the other hand, in September 2003, another "protocol of intent" was signed between Türkiye's ROKETSAN, a leading Turkish firm on missile technology, and Azerbaijan's HMKK (Musayev, 2011, p. 126).

The second step of developing Azerbaijan's military industry began in 2005 after the foundation of the Ministry of Defense Industry of Azerbaijan (MODIAR) to bolster the nation's defense capabilities and reduce dependence on foreign entities. The Ministry of Defense Industry has enabled advantageous progress in military collaboration with Türkiye. These favorable relations can be seen in Azerbaijan's Minister of National Defense Yaver Jamalov's visit, right after the foundation of the institution, to Türkiye to tour Turkish manufacturing sites (Musayev, 2011, p. 126).

In 2006, pursuant to protocols, Azerbaijan acquired military equipment from Türkiye worth around \$5,000,000 (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2011). More importantly, mutual agreements have enabled Turkish Armed Forces to further enhance bilateral collaboration through a logistics center and support for Azerbaijan's defense industry.

In March 2008, Türkiye's MKEK and Azerbaijan's MODIAR signed another protocol to establish a production line for ammunition at a factory to be built in Azerbaijan, which was completed and began production in July 2008. Likewise, another protocol was signed between Türkiye's ASELSAN, a leading institution in military communication technologies, and MODIAR for Türkiye to supply squad radios and assorted equipment worth \$3,000,000 to Azerbaijan (Hürriyet, 2008). This protocol also allowed ASELSAN to intensify its operations in Azerbaijan and initiate collaborative manufacture of military equipment, national tank manufacturing and the development of new weapon models (Yüce, 2020, p. 153).

In 2009, Azerbaijan purchased 107 and 122 mm multi-barreled rocket launcher systems from Türkiye (Özalp, 2015, p. 123). Azerbaijan also received an invitation to the international defense industry expo (IDEAS) in Pakistan and displayed its products at the Turkish exhibits (Yüce, 2020, p. 153).

In 2010, the total volume of arm sales between two countries dramatically increased. Azerbaijan purchased ammunition (\$1,150,000) from MKEK, missiles from ROKETSAN (\$240,000,000) and armored vehicles from OTOKAR, a leading military vehicle firm (\$23,000,000), and total amount of sales was more than \$300,000,000 (Yüce, 2020, p. 153; Özalp, 2015, p. 124; Göksedef, 2020). Also, MKEK, OTOKAR and ASELSAN signed several memorandum and protocols with the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan's for joint manufacture of ammunition, military technical goods and artillery missiles.

In 2011, arm sales not only increased but also became institutionalized. On the one hand, Türkiye exported \$500,000,000 worth of military equipment to Azerbaijan (Aslanlı, 2011; Yüce, 2020; Göksedef, 2020). On the other hand, the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Committee of Türkiye and Azerbaijan was initiated, resulting in the signing of an additional

twenty collaboration agreements during the inauguration of the Committee (Sariahmetoğlu & Yeşilot, 2017, p. 30; Milliyet, 2017; Minute Books of the GNAT, 2011, pp. 4-8). In the following years, the extent of weaponry sales between the two countries markedly increased. Particularly after 2010, joint manufacturing projects were launched and progressively developed. In that manner, co-production and procurement lock-in increased interoperability and created partial dependence in logistics and maintenance.

Relations with NATO

During the interwar period, Türkiye not only advanced Azerbaijan's army and defense sector through military training programs and arm sales but also played a key role in the introduction of Azerbaijani army to NATO. As a result of the efforts of Türkiye, Azerbaijan included the NATO's the Partnership for Peace initiative in 1994 (Zengin, 2022, p. 416). However, Azerbaijan-NATO relations were significantly improved in the interwar period due to the upgrading of Azerbaijan's army doctrine, training and equipment to align with NATO standards, facilitated by the Turkish Army, which acted as a mediator in this process. These steps link assistance to doctrine change and, ultimately, to wartime command-and-control effectiveness.

In summary, between the First and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh Wars, Türkiye assisted Azerbaijan in building a modern, well-trained military equipped with reliable armaments through military aid – training, financial aid and arms sales. Given that the Soviet-doctrinated, undisciplined, inadequately trained and equipped Azerbaijani army was a primary factor in the defeat of the first war, Türkiye developed and enhanced the Azerbaijani army's combat capabilities, focusing on modern requirements, discipline, rigorous training and proper equipment during this period. Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that the enhancements in the Azerbaijani army by Türkiye throughout this period are a major contributing factor in Azerbaijan's triumph in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

The second Nagorno-Karabakh war and aftermath

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh war began on 27 September 2020, lasted 44 days, and resulted in a decisive Azerbaijani victory. Through the war, Azerbaijan managed to liberate territories under the Armenian occupation for the last three decades (İbrahimov & Öztarsu, 2022, p. 595). It is equally important that Azerbaijani army significantly diminished the combat capability of the Armenian army during the conflict (Grigoryan, 2024, p. 372; Yılmaz, 2024, p. 5). Despite Russia's mediation efforts following the conflict to mitigate Armenia's territorial losses, Azerbaijan asserted control over the Karabakh region by 2023 (Grigoryan, 2024, p. 372).

The military relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan during and after the war were influenced by two factors. Tactical collaboration during the war between the Turkish and Azerbaijani armies and the transfer of sophisticated military arms thereafter. Although difficult to substantiate definitively, Türkiye's involvement in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War is apparent in the statements of Armenian policymakers. For instance, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that at least 150 Turkish military commanders were present in Azerbaijan's headquarters during the war and these personnel played a significant role in leading the operation (Köse & Wakizaka, 2022, p. 320). Likewise,

Shushan Stepanyan of the Armenian Ministry of Defense claimed that Turkish warplanes were actively engaged in battle during the war (Köse & Wakizaka, 2022, p. 321). Azerbaijani officials also acknowledge the Turkish involvement in the war. In a speech, President İlham Aliyev explicitly articulated that a primary factor contributing to Azerbaijan's victory is Türkiye's support (Turan, 2025, p. 311). In other words, Azerbaijani army, which was trained and equipped by the Turkish army over the years, defeated the Armenian army also in collaboration with the Turkish army. Nonetheless, this did not signify the conclusion of Turkish-Azerbaijani military relations.

It is also noteworthy that neither Russia nor the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) engaged in direct belligerent intervention on behalf of Armenia during the 2020 conflict. Although Moscow played a mediating role in facilitating the ceasefire agreement, its deliberately limited military posture and the CSTO's decision not to invoke collective defense provisions enabled the hostilities to reach a swift conclusion in favor of Azerbaijan. This strategic restraint not only expedited the termination of active combat but also created additional latitude for Türkiye to provide operational support to Azerbaijan and to assume a more prominent role in shaping the post-war security architecture. Consequently, the absence of Russian/CSTO intervention indirectly reinforced the Türkiye–Azerbaijan partnership and contributed to the institutional consolidation of their bilateral alliance.

In order to maintain Azerbaijan's advantageous stance in the conflict and deter Armenia for launching further assaults on the Karabakh region again, the Turkish-Azerbaijani military relation post-war defined by two elements: joint military exercises and transfer of sophisticated military equipment, as explicitly articulated in the Shusha Declaration, signed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan in 2021. Given its centrality to institutionalization, we analyze the Shusha Declaration as a capstone: it codifies mutual assistance expectations, regularizes exercises, and embeds defense industrial cooperation—thereby locking in previous assistance within a broader strategic partnership. Also, the “Winter-2021 Türkiye-Azerbaijan Combined Joint Battalion Task Force Exercise”, “Anatolian Eagle Military Exercise” and “TurAZ Military Exercise” were conducted in the following years to stress the military cooperation between the parties and to deter regional threats (Savunmasanayist.com, 2021). More importantly, beginning in 2021, Türkiye started to train Azerbaijani personnel in unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) at both Turkish army headquarters and the BAYKAR Training Center (Özsoy, 2023, pp. 601-602). In the first year of the training program, 181 Azerbaijani military personnel were trained in Türkiye to serve as UAV pilots, mission commanders, ammunition operators and technicians (Savunmasanayist.com, 2022). By joint military exercises and training programs, Azerbaijan started to have the capabilities of customizing its defense plans to address more complex and contemporary threats (Özer, 2025, p. 23). Besides conducting joint military exercises, Türkiye started to sell sophisticated arms and military equipment to Azerbaijan such as Turkish air-launched cruise missile SOM, electronic warfare equipment, laser guidance kits and UAVs (Savunmasanayist.com, 2021a; Yılmaz, 2024). Framed within arms-trade and alliance-dependence literatures, these post-war flows also align commercial incentives with alliance maintenance, which we consider in H₃.

In summary, Türkiye began to reap benefits from its investment in this era. Following two decades of training and equipping, the Azerbaijani army, supported by the Turkish army, triumphed over the Armenian forces. Subsequently, Turkish export of sophisticated military equipment to Azerbaijan significantly increased. Thus, by leveraging the

Azerbaijani military to counteract hostile entities in the region, Türkiye simultaneously boosted its weaponry sales to Azerbaijan and various global actors, a development stemming from its triumph in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Evaluation of hypotheses and alternative explanations

After providing the evolution of Turkish-Azerbaijani military relations in the last three decades, we evaluate our hypotheses and provide alternative explanations. To summarize how the tests were applied: hoop tests verified the presence and sequencing of aid and institutionalization; smoking-gun tests sought documentary evidence linking training/standardization to changes in doctrine and wartime practices; double-decisive tests required excluding rival explanations, but these proved inconclusive due to concurrent factors. For the first two hypotheses (H_{1a} , H_{1b} and H_2) we executed hoop, smoking gun, straw and double-decisive tests. For the third hypothesis (H_3), however, we conduct hoop and smoking gun tests due to a lack of the data. The results show that military aid driven institutionalization best explains the three-phase evolution of bilateral relations (H_1). Also, military aid and collaboration were important causal contributors to the victory of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, alongside other factors (H_2). Last, the possibility of over-dependence is plausible and partially evidenced (H_3). Table 1. summarizes our findings.

Table 1. Evaluation of hypotheses and results

Hypothesis	Test	Predicted Evidence	Observed Evidence	Result
H_{1a}/H_{1b} (Alliance formation & Institutionalization)	Hoop	Chronological increase in aid + institutionalization	1992 training, 1999 pledge, 2001 agreement, post-2011 committees, steady aid flow	Supported
H_1	Smoking-gun	Policy turning points track aid not identity	Officer education reforms, NATO integration, procurement lock-in	Supported
H_1	Straw	Identity co-occurs with aid surges	Cultural affinity rhetoric overlaps with cooperation expansion	Supported
H_1	Double-decisive	Rival explanations excluded + aid uniquely predicts	Diplomacy insufficient; but Russia-balancing/energy factors co-move	Not supported
H_2 (2020 Determinants of Victory in 2020)	Hoop	Military capacity traceable to Turkish programs	Training pipeline, UAV doctrine, joint exercises	Supported
H_2	Smoking-gun	Direct wartime mechanisms linked to Turkish inputs	Trained UAV operators, doctrine, commander presence claims	Partially supported
H_2	Straw	Post-war institutionalization consistent with aid importance	Shusha Declaration, military exercises, UAV training	Supported
H_2	Double-decisive	Rule out alternatives	Armenian weaknesses, geopolitics also matter	Not supported
H_3 (Over-dependence)	Hoop	Procurement/training path-dependence visible	Turkish-centric systems & doctrine adopted	Supported
H_3	Smoking-gun	Foregone alternatives; dependence risk visible	Pattern of Turkish-centric choices; few explicit foregone cases	Partially supported

It is also important to consider alternative explanations on the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance formation in the last three decades and the result of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (Table 2). Alternative explanations may focus on shared identity, geopolitical balancing, Azerbaijani's military reforms and Armenia's military weakness. Some may argue that Turkish-Azerbaijani relations were bound to deepen regardless of military aid because of shared identity. Nevertheless, though identity rhetoric is evident throughout, it did not institutionalize military cooperation during the 1990s. Formal agreements, procurement decisions, and training pipelines only followed after Türkiye provided a program of systematic military assistance. Identity thus operated as a permissive condition, not a proximate cause. Another alternative explanation would argue that Azerbaijan aligned with Turkey mainly to counterbalance Russian influence and Armenian military advantage. However, even though balancing motives existed, their effectiveness hinged on Turkish material support. Without sustained military aid, Baku's balancing options would have remained rhetorical. Russian constraints during the first war, combined with NATO/Turkish hesitation, illustrate that balancing without aid did not produce alliance-level outcomes.

Table 2. Evaluation of alternative explanations

Alternative Explanation	Hoop Test	Smoking-Gun Test	Double-Decisive Test	Process-Tracing Conclusion
Shared Identity	Not supported – no institutionalization before aid; identity permissive but not proximate cause	No smoking-gun documents attributing alliance to identity alone	Not supported – identity cannot exclude aid mechanism	Permissive condition only – insufficient to explain timing of alliance formation
Geopolitical Balancing	Partially supported – balancing motive visible, but alliance steps follow aid flows	Not supported – timing/content of agreements correlate with aid, not just Russian/Armenian pressure	Not supported – cannot uniquely predict alliance institutionalization	Contextual driver – reinforces but does not substitute for aid mechanism
Autonomous Azerbaijani Reform	Not supported – doctrinal/NATO reforms mediated by Turkish programs	Not supported – no evidence of independent reform plan preceding Turkish involvement	N/A – aid is sole observable driver of doctrinal change	Not supported – reforms co-produced with Turkish actors, not autonomous
Armenian Military Weakness	Not supported – capacity mattered (UAV ops, doctrine traced to Turkish training)	Not supported – no authoritative sources credit victory solely to Armenian collapse	N/A – cannot exclude Turkish contribution to victory	Rejected as primary cause – Armenian weakness complementary, not sufficient

It is also possible to contend that Azerbaijan would have modernized and professionalized its armed forces regardless, drawing on multiple partners and domestic resources. While Baku invested heavily in reform, many of the key institutional and doctrinal shifts were mediated by Turkish training and NATO-standardization support. Turkish channels were disproportionately influential in shaping education, doctrine, and interoperability. Last, some might assert that Azerbaijan's victory in 2020 owed more to Armenian deficiencies than to Turkish assistance. Armenian readiness and procurement

gaps were certainly important. Yet these weaknesses alone cannot explain Azerbaijan's capacity to conduct coordinated UAV-led strikes and combined-arms operations – capabilities that were cultivated through long-term Turkish assistance.

In summary, even though alternative explanations illuminate complementary conditions, they fall short of providing proximate causal accounts. Turkish military aid consistently aligns with turning points in alliance formation and battlefield performance, passing stronger tests than alternatives. Where double-decisive tests remained inconclusive, we note the data limitations and concurrent movement of rival mechanisms, inviting further archival or elite-interview research.

Conclusion

The Nagorno-Karabakh war has multiple effects not only for Azerbaijan and Armenia but also for Türkiye and Russia. On the one hand, it profoundly influences the foreign and national security policies of Azerbaijan and Armenia. On the other hand, it has fostered the consolidation of alliances, aligning Azerbaijan more closely with Türkiye and Armenia with Russia. Therefore, it is safe to say that the conflict is a primary trigger of the improvement in Turkish-Azerbaijani relations.

Nonetheless, despite strong cultural and linguistic ties, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations were not consistently stable following Azerbaijan's independence. From independence to the end of the first war, the bilateral relations between these two nations were influenced by Azerbaijan's internal political dynamics, its deficiency in military power and Türkiye's hesitance to engage militarily in the war. Subsequent to the first war, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations steadily advanced owing to Türkiye's efforts to strengthen the Azerbaijani military via military financial assistance, military training programs, and arms sales. As a result, Azerbaijan triumphed against the Armenian army in the second war, leading to a more structured framework for Turkish-Azerbaijani military relations.

In this manner, Turkish-Azerbaijani military relations from 1994 to 2024 offers at least, two significant theoretical contributions. First, a comprehensive examination of the bilateral relations of Türkiye and Azerbaijan presents a case for alliance formation through military aid. In other words, Türkiye's military aid to Azerbaijan is the primary factor underlying the existing partnership between the two countries. Second, this study further emphasizes that military aid impacts not only the source and the recipient states but also extends beyond them. Put differently, Türkiye's military aid not only strengthened the Azerbaijani army and deterred further Armenian aggression, but it also mitigated Russia's influence in the region. In this manner, we advise that further studies should focus on this dual impact.

Last, it is also crucial to address the limitations of the study. Our inferences rest on documentary and open-source traces; elite interviews and archival access could adjudicate contested operational claims and clarify institutional decision rules. The findings are most robust on institutionalization and capability transformation; they are more tentative on over-dependence mechanisms and on the magnitude of operational collaboration during the 2020 conflict.

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Notes on contributors

Ahmet Ateş, Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Delaware (2020), is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Iğdır University, Turkey. His research primarily focuses on intelligence and national security studies.

Hamit Kılıç is a graduate student at the Institute of Graduate Studies, Iğdır University, Turkey. His research centers on Caucasian studies.

ORCID

Ahmet Ateş  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5184-7701>

Hamit Kılıç  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8376-3888>

Author contributions

Conceptualization: Ahmet Ateş

Data curation: Hamit Kılıç

Methodology: Ahmet Ateş

Supervision: Ahmet Ateş

Writing – Original Draft: Ahmet Ateş & Hamit Kılıç

Writing – Review & Editing: Ahmet Ateş & Hamit Kılıç

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