

U.S. Foreign Policy towards Azerbaijan: From “Alliance” to “Strategic Partnership”

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Abstract

U.S.-Azerbaijani relations are not limited to mutual interests between two countries. They have not only effected partnerships among other regional powers in the Caucasus, but also have been strongly influenced by them. In the post-Soviet era, Western concerns on limiting the influences of Russia and Iran in the region and guaranteeing Europe's energy security have made Azerbaijan a strategic ally for the West. Despite its importance for the West, Azerbaijan did not received necessary support from its new allies in a vital issue such as Nagorno Karabakh. As a result, Azeris have resorted to use the energy card to strengthen their hands in their quest to recover Karabakh region. This study aims to explain the current circumstances in US-Azerbaijani relations which are far away from their initial state.

Key Words: Strategic Partnership, Nagorno Karabakh, Caspian Energy, Russia, Iran, Armenia, USA-Azerbaijan Relations.

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Introduction

On December 25th, 1991, the U.S. recognized concurrently the twelve former Soviet states including Azerbaijan and Armenia after the collapse of U.S.S.R.¹ Established around the goal of mutual interest and threat, The U.S.- Azerbaijan relations gained acceleration during Bill Clinton's and George W. Bush's presidencies, but started to display a problematic character during Barack Obama's presidency. Today, it can be observed that the relations between the two countries have been passing through a strained period. While each country goes along with the idea of not seeing a single dominating power in the region and restraining the power of Iran, they drift apart on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh issues. In the first part of this study, the political base of the existence of the relations between the two countries on the grounds of the regional policy of the U.S.A. will be set forth. In the second part, the economic side of the relations and especially Azerbaijani fossil fuels that form the basis for those relations will be probed chronologically. In the third part, the progress of the relations and the problematic areas will be explored while some projections will be made for the future of the relations.

U.S. - Azerbaijan Political Relations

It is clear that the priority of America's Caspian region policy after 1991 was given to its political concerns. Replacement of economic interests with political concerns came only after 1995.² The Caspian policy of the U.S.A, apart from general Caucasian policy, comprises of two major components related to Iran and Russia: The first is sustaining the embargo against Iran, which Bill Clinton had taken over in 1992 from George Bush, and the second, preventing Russia being the dominant power in the region³

U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Region:

Azerbaijan's role in America's policy towards the region was not merely containment of Russia. It was also important in terms of President Bill Clinton's "dual containment"⁴ policy which required implementation of the act prohibiting American companies to invest in Iran, in 1995⁵, and 1996 "Iran-Libya Act" which imposed sanctions against Iran and Libya.⁶ U.S. was apt to support the oil pipe lines from the Caspian Region to the West which bypass Iran and Russia. Russia's leadership in controlling the major energy sources concerned U.S. in terms of energy security.⁷ Furthermore, the policy, that promotes Caspian Region in comparison to the Persian Gulf Region, argues that this would serve better to American interests.⁸ Naturally, America's policy of isolating Iran would yield to Iran's approach to Russia.⁹ Deputy Counselor of the National Security Council Sandy Berger listed the interests of the U.S.A as follows:

1. Strengthening the security of regional countries, foremost Azerbaijan
2. Promoting the policies of the regional countries to merge with the West and assist the cooperation between Turkey and regional countries
3. Diversification of energy sources, therefore lessen the dependency of the world to the Gulf
4. Keep Iran out of economic opportunities in the region
5. Improve American interests in the region, to ensure this, secure the investments in energy sector be under the control of Western companies; so that, prevent Iran and Russia be active in the region.¹⁰

It is obvious that, in the focus of America's politics was Azerbaijan while Russia and Iran were at the target and; that strategy was highly approved by Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the U.S. adopted a careful political attitude in the regional policy until 1997 because of the Russian factor. Consequently, Russia's failure against Chechen uprising, and increasing investments of American companies in the region have led the U.S. to revise its policy. While Azerbaijan was becoming the most important country in the region, the determining factors of that policy after 1997 were of economic origin.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy towards the U.S.; From Alliance to Strategic Partnership

Azerbaijan - U.S. relations are in such a position that influences Iran-Armenia, Armenia-Russia relations whereas it is under the influence of the U.S.-Armenia relations. Dual relations between the two countries have two legs: The first one is Congress leg, that has never contributed to the improvement of the relations: the second, administration leg, which displayed some advance during Bill Clinton's time when Azerbaijan declared its independence. The first conflict in the relations arose when Congress has passed "Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act" in December, 1992 as a result of the activities of Armenian Lobby, just one year after the relations had started.¹¹ The act prohibited any kind of aid involving humanitarian ones, unless Azerbaijan puts human rights into effect in terms of international standards, proclaims ceasefire and revokes the blockade.¹²

U.S. - Azerbaijan Political Relations

Azerbaijan lost some parts of its homeland in addition to Nagorno Karabakh in 1992; while Armenia was the second country on America's list of foreign aid program in terms of "Aid Per Capita" among the former Soviet states.¹³ Therefore, Azerbaijan did not want to limit its foreign relations just with the U.S. In fact, Azerbaijan's integration process into the West had already started in 1992, joining in North Atlantic Treaty Organization just after it had gained independence; and was followed by the participation of NATO's programme, called "Partnership for Peace " in 1994. NATO's Secretary General Javier Solana's visit to Baku in 1997 accelerated the relations between the Organization and Azerbaijan. In 2002, Heydar Aliyev participated in the Prague Summit of NATO and in his address there, he emphasized once more how much importance his country attached to improve the relations with the West and the Organization. NATO Secretary General Jap de Hoop Scheffer, in his speech at NATO's Istanbul Summit, implicitly referred to Azerbaijan when he said that they had to improve the relations between "their partners in Caucasia." ¹⁴

Azerbaijan, which was strategically significant in U.S foreign policy during the first five years of the dual relations, maintained its significance after 1997 owing to its crucial position in energy security and its potential for reducing the West's dependency on Russia for energy needs. On the other hand, U.S. Department of State's requisition to repeal the sanctions against Azerbaijan, because American companies would benefit from it, was declined by the Congress.¹⁵

In the aftermath of September, 11th. 2001, on a presidential requisition, the Congress authorized the president to waive "Section 907", which had prohibited American aid to Azerbaijan; but that authority would be used on the condition that the President made sure that Azerbaijan supports anti-terror operations of the U.S. It also required not to be used for offensive purposes against Armenia, and not to influence peace talks about Nagorno Karabakh. In addition, that resolution could be enlarged annually after 60 day's practice provided that, the President should report the Congress about the impact of the aid on Azerbaijan-Armenia peace talks and the composure of the relations between the two countries.¹⁶ President Bush soon affirmed the resolution which postponed the implementation of the act. ¹⁷As pointed out above, the Congress' vigilance about Armenia remained even when U.S felt itself most insecure, and by no means it would allow any supplies that might be used against Armenia, would be consigned to Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Azerbaijan stood by the U.S as a sound ally in the aftermath of "September 11" attacks and opened its airspace for "Operation

Enduring Freedom." After the Congress' resolution, a series of military agreements have been sealed. Subsequent to Heydar Aliyev's visit to Washington, Azerbaijan gave support to America with a symbolic force of 150 soldiers in Iraq¹⁸; thus, it became the first Muslim country to support the U.S. in the invasion of Iraq. Unfortunately, that positive atmosphere in the relations did not last long, and new problems arose.¹⁹ The 9/11 attacks caused a shift in U.S. policy of Russia. Whereas U.S.A does not accept the Russian authority on Caspian energy sources, a country like Russia providing stability in the region was favorable with regards to American interests²⁰

Nagorno Karabakh Issue in Dual Relations

Nagorno Karabakh Issue had emerged when thousands of Armenians demanded autonomy at a demonstration in Yerevan in February, 1998. That demand was rejected by Moscow. Armenian forces took control of the enclave soon after Russian troops had withdrawn from Karabakh in 1991. Thereupon, Armenia declared independence in December, 1991. Azerbaijan objected the situation immediately; so, a war that would end up by a ceasefire in May, 1994, had broken out between the two countries. The U.S. policy of Nagorno Karabakh has developed against Azerbaijan from the very beginning, and displayed a double-headed character. "Section 907" was put into effect in October 1992, due to Congress' domestic political considerations. On the other hand, Michigan Senator David Bonior's legislative bill, dated February 1993 with number 86 to censure Azerbaijan for its blockade strategy, and invite it to work for a peaceful solution to the problem was rejected. In early 1994, an Indiana member of the Congress, Lee Hamilton's bill to repeal the aid ban on Azerbaijan, was objected by New Hampshire member Dick Swett indicating that; unless, Azerbaijan puts an end to the invasion of Nagorno Karabakh and changes its offensive attitude against Armenia, the ban shouldn't be removed. As a matter of fact, by that time whole Nagorno Karabakh and 20% of Azeri territory was under Armenian invasion. These incidents reveal how the Congress dealt with the issue.

U.S. administration provided some \$25 million humanitarian aid to NGO's to compensate that partial attitude. At the political level, the White House condemned Armenia for its assault on defenseless Azeri town Agdam.²¹ Nevertheless, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and the Assistant Secretary Strobe Talbott avoided condemning Armenia while cautiously blaming paramilitary Armenian troops.²² The U.S.A officially condemned Armenia without taking any action on the issue but supported it with aid program, while laying an embargo on Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact, The White House did take a step on behalf of Armenia.²³

Surprisingly, Russia also, by that time, took the Armenian side because of different concerns. The Soviet administration helped the Nagorno Karabakh problem to grow worse; because it was planning to incorporate Azerbaijan into Commonwealth of Independent States for fear that outside powers should take effect in the region. Russia did not take any steps for Azerbaijan, on the contrary, it impeded Turkey's prospective steps.²⁴ It can be noted that the E.U.'s policy did not favor Azerbaijan in the Nagorno Karabakh Issue. The European Parliament took a decision on the case in January, 21, 1993, allegedly arguing that Azerbaijan's blockade policy had induced an energy crisis; therefore, Armenia was forced to go to war and that "merciless" blockade strategy was illegal in terms of international law.²⁵

The U.S policy of Nagorno Karabakh has so far been in line with the solution strategies of the Minsk Group, which was formed to solve Nagorno Karabakh conflict within OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), in 1992. The organization consisted of delegates from Azerbaijan, Armenia, the U.S.A, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Check Republic, Turkey and Belarus.²⁶ America's approach to the issue was, as Madeleine Albright the Secretary of State of the time had emphasized, approving, even supporting Russia's leadership. Former negotiator of the U.S. at OSCE, Ambassador John Maresca stated that they went along with Russia in Nagorno Karabakh case; but, Russia was apt to strengthen its involvement by revising its policies towards the region and keeping the U.S and Turkey out. In addition, the Russian Administration demanded some share at Azerbaijani fossil fuels, and in order to ensure that plan, Russia threatened Azerbaijan to take Armenian side in the conflict. In fact, there were already some Russian troops in Armenia.²⁷ U.S. was

not willing to revise its policies towards Armenia despite that situation. The Ambassador's explanations, the first president of Azerbaijan Ebulfeyz Elchibey's excluding Russia and Iran from the consortium, that was formed to operate Azerbaijani oil; Armenia's dominance in the battle and Suret Huseynof's overthrowing the elected president in Gence with leftover Soviet weapons were all interesting incidents. Likewise, it is inexplicable when Heydar Aliyev took office, why he decreased TPAO's (Turkish Petroleum Corporation) share in the consortium whereas allocating a 10 % share to Russian company, Lukoil.

As for foreign relations, Azerbaijan needed to follow a stable but, pragmatic policy because of its geopolitically problematic position. Elmar Mammadyarov explained that policy as being on good terms with any country and getting active in pursuing self interests all the time. That policy was followed on economic, political and military fields so as to maintain the gain - loss balance.²⁸ Azerbaijan's primary objective in its foreign policy was liberating Karabakh and eliminating Armenian threat after all. The only means to reach that goal was its fossil fuel sources. Secondly, it aimed for being active in international relations and taking a stand as a regional power in South Caucasian politics. Consequently, that strategy would result in promoting the relations first with the U.S. , then with E.U and reduce Iran's influence in the region.

Azerbaijan would use the resources from oil pipelines out of Russian controlled territories for adequate armament in case of a prospective warfare on Nagorno Karabakh.²⁹ In fact, that war outbreaked between 1991 and 1993 and it cost Azerbaijan a loss of not only 20% of its territory, but also seven enclaves around Nagorno Karabakh. As a result, Nagorno Karabakh declared independence even though this was not recognized by any country. Armenia did not recognize Nagorno Karabakh and rejected to retreat from Azeri territories. On the other hand, Azerbaijan stipulated Armenia to retreat from all the places it had occupied.³⁰

The U.S. undertook a limited mission within the Minsk Group for the settlement of the problem. Although it was declared that some progress had been made at the meetings at Key West Florida in 2001 with the participation of the three co-chairs of the Minsk Group, Secretary of State of the time Colin Powel, Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, no tangible result was acquired.³¹ In 1997, although a proposal by the Minsk Group which stipulated Armenia to retreat from seven Azeri enclaves and initiate subsequent negotiations on Nagorno Karabakh's recent status was acknowledged by Azerbaijan and with some reservations by Armenia, it failed by the of Nagorno Karabakh. It was Armenian President Levon Ter Petrosyan who acknowledged that proposal in February, 1998; but he had to resign later on.³² The plan developed by foreign affairs specialist Robert Gole, was on the agenda of the meetings held between 1991-2001 between Robert Kocharian and Heydar Aliyev, also failed.³³ At that time, Azerbaijan was seeking for support on Nagorno Karabakh issue by taking part in all international organizations. Russia was maintaining the current status ensuring Armenia's security whereas it was selling weapons to Azerbaijan. OSCE Minsk Group's peace plan was as follows: Mountainous Karabakh's territorial integrity and *de facto* independence would be preserved, the Lachin Corridor between Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh would be opened; but in return, Armenia should withdraw from all the territories it had invaded. OSCE peacekeeping forces would maintain the implementation of the treaty. Whereas the U.S did not approve Iran's advancement of its relations with Armenia, it was encouraging Turkey to do so.³⁴

On the website of U.S. Department of State, it was emphasised that America supported the efforts of Minsk Group to settle the issue through negotiations. The U.S. acknowledged that Nagorno Karabakh belongs to Azerbaijan; therefore, it was providing humanitarian aid to some 100.000 local Azeris who fled their homes and lived in mountains just because they had not recognised Nagorno Karabakh to be a state. The three co-chairs and officials of Azerbaijan and Armenia came to a resolution about the settlement of the conflict around "Basic Principles" after a heavy diplomatic process in Prague. That resolution is called "Prague Process"³⁵. At an OSCE meeting in Madrid in 2007, the resolutions of the "Prague Process" were submitted; because, all of the three countries see the settlement of the problem within that process.³⁶

The Secretary of State of the term Hilary Clinton visited Baku on July 4, 2010. In her remark at the visit she said: "The United States cannot resolve the conflicts in this region [Nagorno-Karabakh]

but we can be a partner and a supporter and an advocate for those resolutions.”³⁷ That statement is important in terms of reflecting the U.S.’s stance in Nagorno Karabakh conflict. On the other hand, Washington has not imposed any sanctions on Armenia to change the ongoing status of Nagorno Karabakh, which is identified as "invaded territories"; on the contrary some sanctions are placed on Azerbaijan. The Minsk Group assembled to discuss Nagorno Karabakh case on June, 11, 2001. At the meeting U.S representative Ambassador Carey Cavanaugh said that "no-peace, no-war' situation is dangerously fragile. From that point of view, since a status shift in the region could only be through negotiations, the question is; why should Armenia put an end to the invasion unless any external pressure forces it to sit at the table ³⁸.Another interesting matter is about the resolutions that U.N. Security Council took during the ongoing war between Azerbaijan and Armenia .Whereas one of the three common points in those resolutions (No: 822, 853,874 and 884 respectively) was on lifting the occupation, the Council avoided applying sanctions or deploying forces on Armenia. That is the basic cause of why Yerevan did not take any steps on the issue.³⁹ In June, 2014, the head delegates of the Minsk Group co-chair countries; the U.S., Russia and France, with a joint statement suggested the parties be imperturbable, facilitate further talks and avoid arms race. Accordingly, they set a ground for the legitimacy of the *de facto* status.⁴⁰

Azerbaijani Fossil Sources and U.S.A. Politics of Caspian Energy

The first foreign investment on Azerbaijani fossil resources was made by the British Oil Company Remco in 1989, before the dissolution of the U.S.S.R .Steve Ramp, CEO of Remco made an agreement on running the oil in the fields in the south-east of the Caspian Sea; Gunesli, Azeri, Kepez and Cirag with the Azerneft Company which had remained from former-Soviet period. (Later on, the company would develop into a state oil company which was established by Azerbaijani President Ebufeyz Elchibey and take the trade name SOCAR)⁴¹ Subsequent to the Ramp Agreement negotiations would be held, in particular with the British Petroleum (BP) in order to form a consortium. In 1992, it was decided to cooperate with Pennzoil to run the oil in Gunesli Field; so, the story of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline has been set.⁴² The agreement corresponded to an amount of eight billion dollars by the values of 1994. American companies had great shares by that agreement defined as "Deal of the Century".17 % Amoco, 9.8 % Pennzoil and 2.4 % Mc. Dermott.⁴³ Other shareholders of the consortium were BP and Statoil from Europe, TPAO from Turkey, Lukoil from Russia and Delta Oil from Saudi Arabia.⁴⁴

The agreement provided the transport of Azeri oil to Europe via Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, but it was complicated in two aspects: The first was the cost of the pipeline and the amount of the oil to transport; the second, Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev' s reluctance about the deal. The problems were resolved by Bill Clinton in 1999 summit of OSCE in Istanbul. Suleyman Demirel, Heydar Aliyev and Edward Sevardnaze together agreed on a resolution to operate BTC oil pipeline by the efforts of President Clinton. The president of Kazakhstan Nur Sultan Nazarbayev also attended the talks and promised to transport the oil from Kasghedan District via BTC. Russia's making terms with Kazakhstan on operating Caspian Oil in 1998 helped the U.S develop a policy smoothly.⁴⁵

Vladimir Putin entered into a similar agreement with Azerbaijan beginning of 2001. When Russia's agreement with Azerbaijan was drawing the reaction of Iran, Russia took a stand by Azerbaijan against Iran⁴⁶ Having been left alone, Iran's attempt to twist Azerbaijan's arm to step back resorting to military operations also failed with the intervention of the U.S.A and Turkey. Thus; Azerbaijan's *de facto* status was ratified by Iran as well.⁴⁷

U.S. Policy of Caspian Energy

In July, 1998, Assistant Secretary of State Strobe Tallbot declared that, Caucasia and Middle Asia, formerly defined "a region of interest", now became "a region of responsibility".⁴⁸ Shortly after that

declaration, Caucasia region was taken into the responsibility of the U.S. Commandership of Europe.⁴⁹ The energy sources of the region are important for the U.S with regards to lessen the dependency to the Middle East. American Assistant Secretary of Energy Robert Gee, in his statement at Foreign Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate, pointed out that, by the activation of Caspian project, there would be diversity at the procurement of energy and added that, as regards to planning 2020, global dependency to the Persian Gulf would continue; but, the Caspian oil might partly lessen it.⁵⁰

The most significant step the U.S. took to highlight the economic importance of Azerbaijan is Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. Even though that route was not cost effective with regards to transportation fee and construction expenditure, it was indisputably the unique line; because, it was out of Russian controlled territories, was crossing through the allied countries; Iran was kept out and it would decrease the dependence to Russia. Moreover, the line did not contradict Azeri intent to advance the cooperation with the West. On the contrary, it was a significant step to realise that intent. The paper, issued in 2002, on National Security Strategy of the U.S.A, Caspian Region was underlined to be of high importance with regards to energy safety and diversifying energy sources.⁵¹ The U.S.A regarded Russia as a rival, at the same time, a partner in drilling, running and transporting fossil fuels.⁵²

U.S. policy towards Russia looked strained again after the second term of George W. Bush's presidency. This was originated from the belief that Russia intended to be a monopoly on energy supplies. Although Russian President Vladimir Putin remarked that he would rather Mr. Bush elected the president, at the meeting of Baltic leaders, held in Lithuania's capital Vilnius in early May, 2006, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney criticized Russia on energy politics and blame Russians for blackmailing and threatening Europe on that matter.⁵³ The European Union's prediction for an increase in oil import from 76 % in 2004 to 94% in 2030, as to natural gas import, from 49 % to 89 % for the same period set forth that the E.U. needed to ensure a diversity in oil supply. Accordingly, oil from the Caspian Sea and the Central Asia was crucial for the E.U.⁵⁴ Yet, after September 11, 2001, U.S. policy towards the region that mainly focused on energy sources since 1997 had been revised, and a new policy has been developed on the basis of cooperation with Russia. Still, Russia's monopoly of energy worried the U.S; therefore, Washington kept on promoting the oil pipeline routes out of Russian controlled territories; but, this was overshadowed by democratic problems in Azerbaijan especially during Barack Obama's presidency.

Problem Based Relations of The U.S.A. – Azerbaijan

The origin of the problems in the U.S.-Azerbaijan relations can be traced back to 2005, when U.S. attitude in the Azerbaijani Parliamentary Elections was less than welcomed in Baku. In 2008, the shut down of Voice of America's Baku office was added to the troubles which emerged by the allegations that Baku office of the National Democratic Institute supported the youth organizations which try to overthrow the regime. Regression in dual relations had already occurred by late Bush term on human rights issues with the criticism of the Congress; yet, it was not regarded as a problem by the administrative circles.⁵⁵ The real trouble occurred during Barack Obama's term when the Congress impeded the appointment of an envoy to Baku. The contribution of the U.S to "Football Diplomacy" between Turkey and Armenia, which was initiated in 2008; and above all, the strong, inculpatory reaction of Azeris to Washington's support to the Oslo Consensus, reached between Turkey and Armenia, accelerated the deterioration of the relations.⁵⁶ Baku thought that Obama administration was behind that protocol. Aliyev administration would respond it entering into a natural gas agreement with Russia.⁵⁷

Dispute went on with nonconformity in consortium rates of the Nabucco Project, designation of the natural gas price sold to Turkey and Baku's response to the U.S. and Turkey.⁵⁸ Ilham Aliyev reacted to Washington with his harsh words. His words had a threatening tone with regards to American interests. Mr. Aliyev was asking how one country can protect the interests of the other which acts against itself.⁵⁹ Just two days after that statement, in the Nuclear Security Summit held between April 12 and 13, the U.S. did not include Azerbaijan among the participants while inviting Georgia and Armenia. Shortly after that anti-American opinions started to appear on the Azeri media. President

Aliyev, in a briefing to *Reuters* on the issue after a fortnight, stated that they might review their relations with the U.S.

Novruz Mammadov, the head of foreign relations department of the Aliyev administration asserted in his statement to *Radio Free Europe* that U.S. foreign policy had increasingly become pro-Armenian. Azeri Foreign Ministry declared on April 19 that they took kindly Iran's offer to mediate on Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The following day, Azerbaijan announced that it had bowed out of the scheduled military exercise with the U.S.⁶⁰ The Americans made a move to compensate the harm caused by the Oslo Process on U.S.- Azerbaijan relations. First, the Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited Baku in 2010. The aim of Mr. Gates' visit was to deliver President Obama's message to Baku emphasizing the importance attributed to the dual relations. This was followed by Hilary Clinton's visit to Baku a month later. Finally, President Aliyev, who had been in New York to attend the annual inauguration of the U.N., met with President Obama to ease the tensions.⁶¹

Department of State's criticisms on the impurity of the 2010 elections in Azerbaijan and concerns about the security of ballot boxes were objected by Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry putting forward the OSCE observers' report on fairness of the elections.⁶² It was quite interesting that while the president and the two secretaries of the U.S were having talks with their Azeri counterparts on compensating the damage of the Football Diplomacy on the relations, American allegations on injustice of the elections were continuing.⁶³

When the opposition in Azerbaijan started to protest the elections claiming that they were rigged, the Azeri administration shut down the America based National Democratic Institute on March 7, 2011. However, the institute was reopened one year later. Ministry of Justice announced that NGOs would only be permitted to operate if they respect Azerbaijan's national and religious assets. They should not propagate on politics and religion, and not operate in Nagorno Karabakh. The planned protest of the opposition groups called "Great People's Day" had been repressed before it was put into action, a great number of arrests were made. The ongoing mass protests through April would turn into terrorist activities in April-May period; and Al-Qaeda's Azerbaijani Branch "Forest Brothers" committed the first bombing attack which caused casualties among the Azerbaijani security forces.⁶⁴

2011 was a year that shook the autocratic and monarchic regimes in the Arab Middle East, it also witnessed anti-regime activities in Azerbaijan which started after 2010 Parliamentary Elections and continued through 2012 as well. Matthew Bryza, the U.S. ambassador to Baku of the term, predicated in 2011 that Azerbaijan would never experience the "Arab Spring" in his opinion.⁶⁵ The concerns about Aliyev's autocratic policies exacerbated when the Aliyev's administration passed a new act in June 2013 involving a three years sentence of confinement to those who send e-mails with insulting remarks.⁶⁶ The disagreement between the Congress and the White House on the appointment of the new ambassador to Azerbaijan also strained the relations and Baku was left without an American ambassador for a year. Finally, Matthew Bryza was appointed with the Senate's consent in 2011.⁶⁷

The Human Rights Watch Commission reported that the Aliyev's government was putting its opponents in prison through fabricated crimes in order to subdue criticisms. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Melia, who was responsible for human rights, democracy labour, gave a speech at Helsinki Commission on July 16, 2013. The title of his speech "Troubled Partnership: Growing Authoritarianism in Azerbaijan" gave enough reason for the Azeri administration to deny him entry to Azerbaijan to watch the preparations for the presidency elections in September 2013.⁶⁸ In Washington's administrative circles, it is articulated that the U.S.A. is trying to equilibrate between considering Azerbaijan as a "strategic partner" in cooperating against terrorism and energy security issues, and the importance it attaches to the transformation of the country into a democratic framework.⁶⁹

The disagreement between the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Richard Morningstar and Azeri Defense Minister Safar Abiyev on the 2013 presidential elections added to the troubles between two countries. The Ambassador's "recommendations" for the 2013 elections immediately met by Mr. Abiyev's accusations. However, the content of the discussion were denied by both Washington and the U.S. embassy in Baku. It has been argued that the reaction of Azeri government to the visit of Cemil Hasanlı, a sworn opponent to Mr. Aliyev's regime, to Washington was behind the tension.⁷⁰ State Department spokeswoman Maria Harf voiced concerns about the Aliyev's administration's attitude

towards NGO's and the prosecution of the opposition in Azerbaijan. She said that there were some serious irregularities in the ballots, the records, and the polls during the election. Her words were put to the website of the Baku Embassy of the U.S. That point of view might be read as Azerbaijan has lost its significance, although once it was identified by Mr. Bush, to be the best ally of the U.S. in the Caucasians.⁷¹

Despite the OSCE observers' report about the injustice and irregularities in the elections, two former members of the U.S. House of Representatives asserted that it was a righteous election on the contrary. Ministers from the European Parliament also reported that the election was held peacefully and justly.⁷² In consequence of the tension created by the presidential election process in the U.S.A.-Azerbaijan relations, Baku started to buy weapons from Russia. The situation worried Armenia and Washington's response to it came soon: An agreement of 180 million dollar aid to be used for Voroton Hydroelectric Plant in Armenia was signed on November 23, 2013. That agreement would go down in history to be America's greatest amount of aid to Armenia at one time. John Heffern, U.S. ambassador to Yerevan, commented on the signing ceremony that Armenia-U.S. relations were developing into a much more mature form from the give-take mode.⁷³ For the moment, America's second largest embassy after Bagdad is in Armenia that has not any natural resources. Naturally this was welcomed by most Armenians. It is meaningful how important that country is for the U.S. with regards to its strategic location.⁷⁴

Russian Factor in U.S.A.-Azeri-Armenia Relations

The problems between Azerbaijan and U.S. reflected asymmetrically on Russia-Azerbaijan relations. Obviously, its current relations with Russia do not satisfy Azerbaijan. Russia supported Armenia to equilibrate Azerbaijan's approach to the U.S. That caused troubles in Azerbaijan-Russia relations. In addition to Russia's large scale military aid to Armenia, Georgia also dispatched military supplies to Armenia respectively in 2000, 2005 and 2007 that could be interpreted as Russia's indirect support to Armenia on Nagorno Karabakh conflict.⁷⁵ Russia also withdrew its military elements from Azerbaijan except for Kabala Radar Base containing 1500 soldiers. Thus, Azerbaijan became the first former U.S.S.R republic from which Russia decided to withdraw its troops. The last deal on Kabala Base was stamped in 2002 for a ten-year term. At the end of that term in 2012, Azerbaijan announced that it raised the annual rent for the base from 7 million to 300 million dollars. In return, Russia declared that they had given up the base, and set up a new one to perform the same task in Caucasia.

Vladimir Putin visited Baku in August, 2013 with a large delegation consisted of ministers and businessmen. At his visit he defined Azerbaijan as a long-term, conventional and reliable "strategic partner". The similarity between Mr. Putin's and John John Kerry's definitions clarifies the point where U.S.-Azerbaijan and Russia-Azerbaijan relations are. Mr. Putin also pointed out that, some 500 Russian businessmen had connections with Azerbaijan while some one million Azeri workers worked in Russia. He added that, in defense issues, Azerbaijan and Russia signed an arms deal worth four million dollars. During the talks, another decision about the security of the Caspian Sea was made: The two countries would cooperate on protecting the Caspian region; which can be interpreted as a move by Azerbaijan to substitute the U.S. with Russia on security issues.⁷⁶

Russia was planning to gather former Soviet states under its own umbrella through various organizations; so that, it would maintain its power in the region. One of the organizations that was established for that purpose is Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Whereas Armenia became one of the members, Azerbaijan has been kept out; but security policies involving that country are often on the agenda of the discussion. The other members of the organization are; Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. As elucidated on its website, the objective of the organization is cooperation among the members on defense issues, which stipulated giving any kind of support to any member country including the military ones, in case of an offence.⁷⁷ CSTO Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha, in his explanation on the effects of the military agreement between his country and Azerbaijan over Caucasia, Armenia and Azeri-Russian organisations, highlighted that Russia's military existence is a guarantee for Armenia. After Mr. Putin's visit to Azerbaijan, Russian Security Council

Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, visited Yerevan and gave a significant statement there on June 25 2013. In his statement he said that large number of troops had been deployed in the district to guarantee Armenia's security. It is hard to explain why Russia incorporated Armenia's border security into its own while it was selling weapons to Azerbaijan.

In 2002, Russia had a regiment of 3300 soldiers consisted of a ranger infantry and an airborne infantry at its Armenia base. During Russian president of the term Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Yerevan in 2010, an agreement was reached to enlarge the operating time of the base until 2044. Russia also announced that it would strengthen Armenia's defense by supplying new weapons. Despite the fact that, on his visit to Baku the same year in September, Mr. Medvedev stated that the military agreement they had signed with Armenia was not against Azerbaijan; Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan declared that in case of a prospective battle with Azerbaijan they rely on their allies in the CSTO.⁷⁸ Russia's resolution to sell weapons to Azerbaijan worried Armenia; but its former ambassador to Yerevan and the Caspian Sea Region Project Director at Caspian Cooperation Institute Vyacheslav Kovalenko stated that, the sale of weapons did not mean a shift in their Armenia Policy. Mr. Kovalenko also added that, they are always ready to defend Armenia as a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation; and in case Russia does not sell weapons to Azerbaijan, Israel or any other country would not hesitate to do so.⁷⁹ Russia wanted to maintain its mediating role to establish peace in Karabakh conflict. On the other hand, Moscow has persuaded Armenia to join the Custom's Union in order to counterbalance its policy. Amanda Paul, policy analyst at the European Policy Centre stated that Armenia wanted to integrate with the Union because it was fully dependent to Russia militarily and economically. But, it also meant Russia might meddle in Armenia's foreign policy.⁸⁰

According to Sargsyan's explanations, their strategic partnership with Russia is the core of Armenia's security. Accordingly, it is reported on the CSTO's website that the organization is basically a defense organization and military force could only be used in case of an attack against its members. Then, a news on a Russian paper in January 2013 reported that Russia reinforced its military presence in Armenia against Azerbaijan, and in Iran against Israel in case of a possible attack on any of them. That view was confirmed by a Russian general's remarks. He said that his country would stand by Armenia politically and militarily against a prospective attack by Azerbaijan.⁸¹ It is clear that both U.S. and Russia has followed multifaceted policies towards Azerbaijan and Armenia. While U.S. insured Armenia's security against Azerbaijan, it was regarding Azerbaijan as a good ally and getting an air-corridor in Azerbaijan to transport its troops to Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks. Similarly, Russia posed as a protector of Armenia while selling weapons to Azerbaijan. Russia's new Azerbaijan policy is an example to "carrot and stick approach" which is often followed in international relations. It must be taken into consideration that what encourages Russia to follow such a policy is the point where U.S.-Azerbaijan relations have come.

Conclusion

From the American point of view, the relations with Azerbaijan were established on two bases: the need to secure its energy supplies, and to have a reliable ally at a troubled region. Azerbaijan tried to meet the expectations of U.S. via Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline within Nabucco (Western Corridor) project, TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline) and TANAP* (Trans Anatolian Pipeline) projects for transmitting the energy from Shahdeniz. The West is dependent on Russia for its energy needs while other sources were under Iran's control; therefore Azerbaijan is still the most reliable country for the U.S. in the region. During Barack Obama's term, criticisms, which have often been a matter of discussion on Heydar Aliyev's authoritarian administration are partly justifiable. Yet Washington's close relations with the monarchic regimes in the Middle East raises questions about the U.S.'s real intent. Taking all these into consideration, the contradiction in the U.S. policy on Caucasia can clearly be discerned. As for the second base of the relations "strategic partnership," Azerbaijan provided America full support in Afghanistan and Iraq as reported on the Wikileaks documents. Even, when NATO members refused to give military support to the U.S, Baku partook in both of the operations by opening its air space and sending some troops.⁸² Then again, as underlined on the same documents,

Azerbaijan's representation in Washington is quite weak, in addition to lack of any direct lobbying in the Congress while Armenia and even Georgia are heavily involved in it.⁸³ Even if Azerbaijan conducts some lobbying activities through Jewish Lobby and liberals, it is not efficient.

Whereas the problems in the U.S.-Azerbaijan relations reflect asymmetrically on Azerbaijan-Israel and Azerbaijan-Russia relations, they reflect symmetrically on Azerbaijan-Iran relations. So far, Israel and Azerbaijan have had problems with American administration during Mr. Obama's presidency. On the other hand, they have come together on common grounds against Iran. Despite the concerns are different, their subject is common. Azerbaijan's trade volume with Israel reached to an amount of four billion dollars in 2012 while Israel provided 40% of its oil supply from Azerbaijan. Azeri Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov was the first Muslim to address the American Jewish Committee Global Forum in 2013.⁸⁴

As the troubles increased in its relations with the U.S., Azerbaijan gave the impression of a shift in its foreign policy, substituting Washington with Moscow. Baku's steps to improve its relations with Russia was taken enthusiastically by Kremlin. The first sign of this shift was Azerbaijan's reaction to "Football Diplomacy" in 2009 by signing a natural gas sale deal to Gazprom in the amount of 17.7 million cubic meter. (That amount rose to 35.4 million cubic meter after Medvedev's Baku visit in 2011.)⁸⁵ As stated above, Azerbaijan also started to buy weapons from Russia.

Symmetric reflections of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations are seen on Iran. As long as Iran's concerns about South Azerbaijan continue, a weak Azerbaijan is favorable for Iran in terms of its interests.⁸⁶ For Iran, Armenia is one of the key elements in this policy. Unless the present regional conjuncture gets changed, Iran will continue its close ties with Armenia. On the other hand, improving the relations with Azerbaijan would also fit for Iran's interests to be a regional power.⁸⁷

Azerbaijan sought to settle Nagorno Karabakh conflict through energy policies. That is, Baku was planning to use energy as a tool to get support for the settlement of the problem. So far this plan worked in several instances. Georgia started to act in accord with Azeri policies.⁸⁸ After falling away with Ankara as a result of the "Football Diplomacy", Azeris also successfully used the same strategy to convince Turkey to return to its former pro-Azeri policy. The deal, signed with Russia in 2009 on gas export might be considered within that context; because the resource of the gas in question Shahdeniz is also the natural gas field whose gas would be exported to the West via Nabucco project and recently TANAP* project, which stipulates to export Azeri natural gas to the West through Turkey. Even though Mr. Aliyev asserted that their resources were rich enough for both projects, the coincidence of timing of the deal with the football diplomacy is meaningful. Thus, Azerbaijan has responded the football diplomacy with an energy diplomacy.

The second policy Azerbaijan follows on that issue displays indications of the intent to regain the territories it had lost taking precautions including military ones even hot conflict if necessary. Azerbaijan's military expenditure in 2012 was over Armenia's total budget.⁸⁹ The import of a 1.6 billion dollar weapons from Israel in 2012⁹⁰ and some four billion dollar import from Russia in late 2013 supports the assumptions about Azeri intents. A military solution is likely to yield dangerous results for Azerbaijan when considered Russia's role as Armenia's protector as well as Iran's present policy. In such a case, regardless of the political stance of the prospective president of the U.S., it would be fallacious to expect Washington to keep impartial, let alone to support Azerbaijan. A procedure like the "football diplomacy" by which Turkey had achieved some results at Oslo Consensus might bring the settlement of the conflict. Armenia, having improved its relations with Turkey, is likely to be within Turkey's field of interest, which serves Turkey's purposes as well. The success of that policy depends on how to explain that policy to Azeris and how to refute the arguments that Turkey has followed such a policy just to put off Armenian allegations on 1915 incidents. When Iran's concern about that strategy is taken into consideration, it is clear how appropriate that policy is.⁹¹

The U.S. and, the West has avoided to intervene in the conflicts in South Caucasia, notably Nagorno Karabakh case. They have not paid enough attention to the states in the region in order to get them to restructure and reform their systems. The governmental institutions from former Soviet hierarchic system have inhibited the establishment of stable and sound institutions. Accordingly, they

have survived as potential sources of problems. The West has ignored all those structural problems, but focused only on democratization issues. Consequently, it has paved the way for a failure.⁹² It is impossible to empower the civil society where the social security system has collapsed in the ratio of 70%. A powerful civil society might be based upon a sound system only if the governmental bodies are restructured and NGOs are supported. Finally, I would like to quote Professor Stanley Weiss' words on the U.S.-Azerbaijan relations: "'Azerbaijan' literally translates to the 'Land of Fire.' In the tinderbox that is the Caspian Region and the Middle East, a stronger U.S.-Azerbaijan partnership might help assure that cooler heads prevail."⁹³

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