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GLOBAL POWER

INTERESTS AND AZERBAIJAN'S STRATEGY IN RESOLVING THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT (1992-2012)

LOS INTERESES DE LAS POTENCIAS GLOBALES Y LA ESTRATEGIA DE AZERBAIYÁN PARA RESOLVER EL CONFLICTO DE NAGORNO-KARABAJ (1992-2012)

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ABSTRACT

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict offers important insights into the interaction between regional and global powers, the limitations and strengths of international mediation, and the role of military action in resolving long-standing disputes. It serves as a valuable case study on how a nation can leverage its geopolitical position, natural resources, and diplomatic ties to navigate territorial challenges and strengthen its position in the globalized world. This study seeks to examine the position of the main actors in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and how the search for multiple interests of global powers, sometimes not aligned with the parties in dispute can stagnate a conflict. It is highlighted how Azerbaijan's state independence led to a multi-vector foreign policy, taking into account national interests, and how this contributed to the expansion and growth of the country's position in the South Caucasus region, with a particular focus on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As main findings we can highlight that 1) the creation of mechanisms to restore the country's territorial integrity was a crucial point in Azerbaijan's state policy, 2) the state paid special attention to the development of political and economic ties, as well as military-technical cooperation with several countries to achieve its goals, 3) the resolution of the conflict, particularly after the 44-day Patriotic War, allowed Azerbaijan to experience rapid political and economic growth and 4) Azerbaijan's post-war focus on reconstruction and regional integration demonstrates the importance of post-conflict reconstruction and the transformation of previously disputed territories into zones of cooperation and progress.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Political and economic conflict.

RESUMEN

El conflicto de Nagorno-Karabaj ofrece importantes perspectivas sobre la interacción entre las potencias regionales y globales, las limitaciones y fortalezas de la mediación internacional y el papel de la acción militar en la resolución de disputas de larga data. Sirve como un valioso estudio de caso sobre cómo una nación puede aprovechar su posición geopolítica, sus recursos naturales y sus vínculos diplomáticos para sortear los desafíos territoriales y fortalecer su posición en el mundo globalizado. Este estudio busca examinar la posición de los principales actores en el conflicto de Nagorno-Karabaj y cómo la búsqueda de múltiples intereses de las potencias globales, a veces no alineados con las partes en disputa, puede estancar un conflicto. Se destaca cómo la independencia estatal de Azerbaiyán condujo a una política exterior multidimensional, que tuvo en cuenta los intereses nacionales, y cómo esto contribuyó a la expansión y el crecimiento de la posición del país en la región del Cáucaso Sur, con especial atención a la resolución del conflicto de Nagorno-Karabaj. Como principales hallazgos se puede destacar que 1) la creación de mecanismos para restaurar la integridad territorial del país fue un punto crucial en la política estatal de Azerbaiyán, 2) el Estado prestó especial atención al desarrollo de los lazos políticos y económicos, así como a la cooperación técnico-militar con varios países para lograr sus objetivos, 3) la resolución del conflicto, particularmente después de la Guerra Patriótica de 44 días, permitió a Azerbaiyán experimentar un rápido crecimiento político y económico y 4) el enfoque de posguerra de

Azerbaiyán en la reconstrucción y la integración regional demuestra la importancia de la reconstrucción posterior al conflicto y la transformación de territorios previamente disputados en zonas de cooperación y progreso.

Palabras clave: Azerbaiyán, Nagorno-Karabaj, Conflicto político y económico.

INTRODUCTION

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a chronic ethnic and territorial conflict that involves, to the first degree, Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh—a region in the South Caucasus. From 1988 to 1994, following the break-up of the Soviet Union, it developed into an open war with considerable territorial consequences. When hostilities closed in 1994, Armenian forces-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and a number of surrounding districts, having displaced hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis (Hoch, 2020). A fragile ceasefire was imposed, but it did not resolve the conflict; sporadic clashes occurred ever since. This saw a major escalation in 2020 during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, where there were significant gains of territory from Azerbaijan that changed the balance of power in the region. The war eventually ended with a Russian-brokered ceasefire, but tensions remained high, and the situation unstable. The legacies of empires, especially decisions made in the Soviet era, made it further complicated because, in this conflict, enduring grievances and nationalist sentiments are stirred on both sides. By 2023, the demographics of the region had changed significantly, where once Nagorno-Karabakh was predominantly Armenian; that has been changed recently. More serious issues of national identity, territorial sovereignty, and ethnic struggle in the post-Soviet landscape show this conflict to be one of the most complex and longest-running in the region (Uzer, 2024).

On the other hand, the OSCE Minsk Group, established in 1992 by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, today the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was tasked with the main objective of promoting a peaceful resolution of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Minsk Group is the primary mediating body in the conflict, guiding the Minsk Process with the objective of promoting dialogue and negotiations between the opposing parties. The group has taken an important role in the agreements of a ceasefire and initiatives for peace, though its efficiency has been in question, especially in the moments when violence is renewed (Boban & Blazevi, 2023). It consists of three major countries, namely France, Russia, and the United States of America, all as co-chairs, working in coordination with

one another to broker talks and put forward proposals aimed at bringing about peace. This has been a cooperative undertaking almost three decades in existence, but the role and its impact have changed with the evolving geopolitical conditions. For all its centrality, however, the Minsk Group earns criticism for being out of touch and inept to adjust to the changing realities of the conflict. Some political analysts say its peacemaking endeavors have not kept pace with developments in the field. The seesawing fortunes of regional players like Russia and Turkey further complicated the Minsk Group's mediating role and called into question its future relevance. In that respect, the OSCE Minsk Group remains a leading actor in the peace process of Nagorno-Karabakh but is increasingly challenged by the geopolitical changes taking place (Yuksel & Yuce, 2022).

The problem and complexity of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute transcends a mere territorial disagreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan since it embodies a complex web of international interests and power dynamics (Gasparyan, 2019). Turkey, leveraging cultural connections, backs Azerbaijan as part of its strategy to enhance its regional influence. Russia maintained a delicate balance, mediating while preserving its dominance by keeping the conflict unresolved, thus preventing the involved nations from aligning with Western powers. Iran, sharing borders with both countries, maintained apprehensive about regional stability and the potential impact on its Azerbaijani minority. On the other hand, Western nations, particularly the United States and European countries, view the region through the lens of energy security and strategic positioning, though their influence is constrained by Russia's predominant role. This multifaceted struggle reflects the intricate interplay of global and regional powers, each maneuvering to advance their interests within the volatile landscape of the South Caucasus.

Thus, the objective of this paper is to make a brief analysis of the position of the main regional actors, as well as global powers in this conflict. We give a snapshot of how the search for multiple interests, sometimes not aligned with the parties in dispute, can stagnate a conflict.

DEVELOPMENT

In January 1997, Azerbaijani peacekeeping forces were created. In the same year, a representative office of Azerbaijan was opened at NATO headquarters in Brussels, and Baku joined the NATO program Planning and Analysis Process (Aliyeva-Mamedova, 2017, p. 107). The process accelerated military-technical cooperation between the two countries. According to Pentagon reports to Congress obtained and published by the Security Assistance

Monitor (SAM), a watchdog agency in Washington, the US Department of Defense between 2000 and 2020 allocated \$418 million in security assistance to the armed forces and security forces of Azerbaijan. The border and customs services of Azerbaijan were allocated \$58.6 million in 2018 (Krivushin, 2023, p. 6). Türkiye, as one of the main arms exporters to Azerbaijan, supplied unmanned aerial vehicles. Between 2009 and 2019, Azerbaijan spent \$20 billion on military needs. In 2010, the presidents of Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed an agreement on military cooperation (Avatkov & Kasyanenko, 2021).

Of course, the strategic ties between Azerbaijan and Türkiye met the interests of the United States, since through the prism of rapprochement between the two states, the United States tried to oust Russia from the South Caucasus region, thereby strengthening its role in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Other leading countries also tried to achieve the assertion of their interests in the process of military-technical cooperation between Azerbaijan and certain countries. The level of Azerbaijani-Pakistani cooperation in the military sphere increased every year, reaching its peak in 2006. The development of bilateral Azerbaijani-Pakistani relations in the military field strengthened not only military but also political ties between the two states (Niyazov, 2011).

Azerbaijan was interested in military-technical cooperation with Belarus, primarily for the modernization of the air defense system. It cannot be discounted that the modernization of Azerbaijan's air defense took place more actively with the help of Russia and the United States. As Iran and Türkiye were paying special attention to the Palestinian issue, Israel needed to reconsider its approaches to foreign policy and cooperation with states. States in the post-Soviet space were considered by the Israeli leadership as new objects for spreading their influence. In this direction of their policy, it was necessary to establish strong economic, political, and military relations with moderate Muslims, among whom Azerbaijan was in first place. In subsequent years, the development of Azerbaijani-Israeli relations met the interests of the United States. Through these connections, official Washington wanted to weaken the Russian-Iranian presence in the South Caucasus, diminish the participation of Russia, Iran, and Türkiye in the Syrian conflict, and confront China.

Among the Arab states, Jordan became another country that had military-technical ties with Azerbaijan (Niyazi, 2012). It is important to note that the political environment of the region showed that, based on the ongoing negotiation processes, a positive outcome in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should not have been expected. Every year, the co-chairing countries' interests and reluctance

to contribute to the conflict resolution process within the framework of the norms and principles of international law became more and more evident. In this case, Azerbaijan had no choice but to rely on its strength to restore the territorial integrity of the country.

The political interests of many countries in the regions of the South Caucasus also created problems and confrontations with Minsk Group co-chairing countries in the process of resolving the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh. Türkiye's interest in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of the norms and principles of international law was notorious. During the war years, official Ankara almost always criticized the OSCE Minsk Group for its unsuccessful activities, and, taking an objective position, sought to change the format of the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations and take the right place as a mediator in resolving the conflict. Azerbaijan and Türkiye have been expanding their relations in all areas all these years. The commonality of religion, culture, language, and centuries-old traditions has led to a strong attraction between the two countries, creating unique fraternal relations that have no analogs on the world political stage at the present stage. The 44-day Patriotic War showed the objective position of Türkiye, the main goal of whose foreign policy was to establish stability in all Muslim states, including fraternal Azerbaijan (Aliyeva-Mamedova, 2021, p. 109).

Along with the USA in the 90s of the 20th centuries, China became another country that sought to secure its political benefits in the South Caucasus. Additionally, Iran, not without political and economic interests, sought to establish Islamic trends in the newly formed states. Over the years of cooperation of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh, each of the parties (Russia, France, USA) had its interests. Russia did not want to deteriorate relations with either Armenia or Azerbaijan; it also wanted increased influence in the South Caucasus region. The European Union and the United States also did everything possible to strengthen their positions in the South Caucasus. Subsequently, correct oil diplomacy comprehensively helped the young state to strengthen the implementation of its deliberate policies to fundamentally update the political and economic situation in the South Caucasus region, thereby successfully creating, along with political ones, new economic realities.

Before the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the problem occupied a special place in Pakistan's foreign policy. Pursuing an objective policy regarding the resolution of the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh, the leadership of Pakistan has always defended the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It is impossible

not to mention the military-technical cooperation between Azerbaijan and Pakistan. In May 2003, the two states signed an agreement on military cooperation. In 2010, the Pakistani Defense Minister visited Azerbaijan for the first time (Vladimirovna, 2021).

The unsettlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict led to the building of close relations between official Baku and post-Soviet states, specifically with countries that faced aggressive policies (Allahverdiyev, 2017). Georgia took a neutral position regarding the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Official Tbilisi declared its desire to maintain friendly relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan and proposed holding negotiations within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group activities in Tbilisi (Avetikyan, 2020).

An important indicator of creating stability in the South Caucasus was the idea of creating a "Common Caucasian House". In 1999, at the Istanbul Summit, National Leader Heydar Aliyev spoke out against the armament of the Caucasus and put forward a project according to which the states of the South Caucasus were to sign a "Cooperation and Security Pact" to prevent foreign forces in the region, eradicate terror, and create opportunities for economic cooperation (Taghizade, 2022). Azerbaijan's ties with the Arab and entire Muslim world subsequently played a decisive role in the process of restoring the territorial integrity of the country. The far-sighted policy of National Leader Heydar Aliyev, and the continuation of this policy by President Ilham Aliyev, led to the promotion of the objective position of Azerbaijan in the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Azerbaijan also paid attention to relations with European countries. On November 14, 2006, the action plan for cooperation between the European Union and Azerbaijan came into force. The EU expressed its consent to the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by supporting the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group and using the capabilities of the UN Security Council. All this contributed to strengthening the dialogue between the EU and states interested in the political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and ensuring stability in the South Caucasus (Shabelnikova, 2012).

The occupation of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh led to the emergence of numerous problems, among which economic and environmental issues were among the first, along with migration. The conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh prevented the establishment of security in the region and negatively affected the successful development of political stability processes in the South Caucasus region. Among the co-chairing countries of the OSCE

Minsk Group, neither Russia nor the United States was satisfied with the resumption of hostilities. Maintaining political stability was beneficial to both states since both official Moscow and Washington wanted to actively use energy resources to consolidate positions in the South Caucasus region.

Thus, the creation of internal political stability, the development of democracy, a successful foreign policy, the establishment of close relations of cooperation and partnership with the leading countries of the world, the representation of Azerbaijan in various international organizations, consistent radical reforms, the development of a market economy, the creation of conditions for foreign investment in the oil industry and other economic sectors, measures, development and preservation of national values have opened up unique opportunities for the successful advancement of the people of Azerbaijan along the path of an independent democratic state (Mahmudov, 2003, p. 492). Subsequently, correct oil diplomacy comprehensively helped the young state to strengthen the implementation of its deliberate policies to fundamentally update the political and economic situation in the South Caucasus region, thereby successfully creating, along with political ones, new economic realities.

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the roles of all the actors in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is essential for understanding the future of states facing similar territorial disputes and ethnic tensions. This conflict offers important insights into how regional and global powers interact, the limitations and strengths of international mediation, and the role of military action in resolving longstanding disputes. It serves as a valuable case study for how a nation can leverage its geopolitical position, natural resources, and diplomatic ties to navigate territorial challenges and strengthen its position in the globalized world. The resolution of this conflict, particularly following the 44-day Patriotic War, enabled Azerbaijan to experience rapid political and economic growth. This highlights how a successful resolution can unlock a nation's potential, allowing it to transition from conflict to development. Azerbaijan's post-war focus on reconstruction and regional integration illustrates the significance of rebuilding after conflict and turning previously disputed territories into zones of cooperation and progress. Therefore, this transformation emphasizes the interconnected nature of security, economic development, and regional cooperation in today's global context. It also showcases how resolving a prolonged conflict can shift regional dynamics, creating new opportunities for economic growth and geopolitical reconfiguration.

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