

HIGHLIGHT OF JOURNAL

The Impact of Russia-Armenia Military-Technical Cooperation
on the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict, 1992-2020
Agil Rustamzade



CAUCASUS

STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES

Volume 3 • Issue 1 • Summer 2022

Towards Sustainable Peace and Cooperation

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in the South Caucasus

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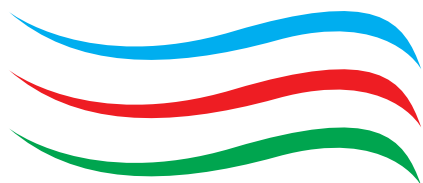
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"Russia and the World in the Putin Era:
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Editor's Note

The current issue of the Caucasus Strategic Perspectives (CSP) journal entitled “*Towards Sustainable Peace and Cooperation*” is dedicated to the challenges and opportunities emerging in the South Caucasus region 2 years after the end of the 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 with focus on security and political matters.

The CSP's new issue includes 1 report, 6 articles, 1 commentary and 1 book review. In the framework of post-war cooperation situation, the CSP's current authors analysed the EU's increasing role towards the region, Turkey-Armenia normalization process, Russia-Armenia military-technical cooperation, Armenia's anti-mine obligations under international law, activities of Russia's peacekeeping forces, as well as foreign policy of Azerbaijan in the light of ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, etc.

Agil Rustamzade's report of “*The Impact of Russia–Armenia Military-Technical Cooperation on the Armenia–Azerbaijan Conflict, 1992–2020*” examines the details of the Russia-Armenia military-technical cooperation (MTC) in different periods of Armenia's political leadership, including both during the first and second Karabakh wars, this article examines the cause-and-effects of the relationship between Russia-Armenia MTC and [former] Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

The new issue's *Articles Section* starts with **Esmira Jafarova's** article of “*The Long Road to Peace in the South Caucasus*” which highlights current works on the Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization process and the signing of a peace treaty, demilitarization and demining, reconstruction of the liberated territories, connectivity, and humanitarian issues, and define the challenges remaining ahead.

Richard Weitz's article of “*The Collective Security Treaty Organization Before and After the Ukraine War: Some Implications for the South Caucasus*” analyses the CSTO's evolving role in meeting the demands of its members, as well as its selective disengagements from the conflicts in the Russia's immediate neighbourhood.

Rovshan Ibrahimov's article of "*Azerbaijan as a factor in the formation of relations between Türkiye and Armenia*" provides an analysis of the central role of Azerbaijan in the evolution of the relations between Türkiye and Armenia in the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War and narrates the historical background of the development of the Armenia-Türkiye relations.

Vasif Huseynov's article of "*The Russia-Ukraine War: Perspective of Azerbaijan*" focused primarily on the policy responses of Azerbaijan vis-à-vis the Russia-Ukraine War and argues that, although Baku continued to take a vigilant stance in the West-Russia standoff and sought not to provoke a negative reaction towards itself, it provided tangible support to Ukraine and declared support for the country's territorial integrity.

Nina Miholjcic's article of "*Role of Russia's Peacekeeping Missions in its Foreign Policy toward the South Caucasus*" which argues that due to the distinctiveness of Russia's peacekeeping concept that has been used as one of the country's foreign policy instruments in its near neighbourhood, Russian peacekeepers have been more focused on a presence per se, rather than on preventing tension or maintaining stability in the areas of deployment. The article further elaborates the possible military challenges that the presence of Russia's peacekeepers may pose in the deployment zones and beyond.

Vusal Guliyev's article of "*Azerbaijan's Digitalization Efforts, Revitalization of the Liberated Territories, and Role of China's Huawei*" sheds light on the effectiveness of these innovative policies and assesses whether the adoption of advanced digital solutions will enable achieving the sustainable socio-economic growth of Azerbaijan's liberated territories.

The new issue's **Commentaries Section** includes **Najiba Mustafayeva's** commentary of "*Armenia's Obligations under International Law in the Area of Mine Action*" which stresses Armenia's constant refusal to submit the remaining maps of mined areas located within Azerbaijan's liberated territories, as well as the deliberate planting of landmines in these territories even after the end of the war, is in violation of its international anti-mine obligations. This has resulted, by the fact itself, in war crimes and crimes against

humanity that raise the issue of Armenia's responsibility under international law for their perpetration.

The new issue's *Book Review Series* includes comprehensive review of the book titled "Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy" (co-edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova) by Naghi Ahmadov.

Finally, on behalf of the CSP team, we hope this issue provides food for thought and contributes to and enriches the discussion on subject-matter issue.

Sincerely
Farid Shafiyev
Editor-in-Chief of CSP Journal

The Impact of Russia-Armenia Military-Technical Cooperation on the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict, 1992-2020

Agil Rustamzade^{*}

This report examines the cause-and-effect of the relationship between the Russia-Armenia military-technical cooperation (MTC) and the [former] Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict by clarifying the details of Russia-Armenia MTC in different periods of Armenia's political leadership, including during both the First and Second Karabakh wars. The report was prepared through an analysis of media sources from Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia, as well as reports from international specialized resources and authors's personal interviews. The present study is divided into three parts, considering the extent of influence of Russia-Armenia MTC on various eras of the [former] Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in three periods: from 1992 to 1999 (including the hottest phase of the First Karabakh War, 1992–1994); from 2000 to 2015; and from 2016 to 2020.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, military cooperation, Second Karabakh War



^{*} **Agil Rustamzade** is a military expert on weapons systems and a retired officer of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan

Introduction

MTC between Russia and Armenia is based on closely allied arrangements codified with both multilateral and bilateral partnership through more than 200 treaties and agreements. That is, their MTC developed on a bilateral basis, as well as within the framework of regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The parties collaborate in several areas, including providing Armenia with comprehensive military training support; the development and provision of weaponry and military equipment (WME); and cooperation in increasing the combat capability of the Russia-Armenia joint group of forces stationed in Armenia.

In addition to transferring an unprecedented volume of military-technical assistance to Armenia, Russia also engaged in the protection of this country's borders. In general, their MTC grew dynamically throughout the period under review and WME supply to Armenia was carried out through the channels of: (a) free-of-charge WME transfer through bilateral military-technical assistance; (b) free-of-charge WME for joint use in the joint air defence (AD) system with Russia; (c) transfer of WME as part of the CIS's military assistance; (d) credit-based supply of WME by Russia; and (e) WME procurement using Armenia's own military budget.

The period from 1992 to 1999

To fully comprehend the impact of Russia-Armenia MTC on the [former] Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, it is necessary to understand the roots of the two countries' war. The establishment of the 'Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast' (NKAO) within and as part of the Azerbaijan SSR by the Soviet leadership, followed by the relocation of Armenians to this region, predetermined the conflict's onset. In 1987, the nationalist forces in Armenia fomented separatism in the NKAO, which led to ethnic tension with the connivance of the USSR's political leadership. In the early 1990s, the USSR's Minister of Internal Affairs ordered the seizure of service firearms from law-enforcement organizations and hunting rifles from the population in Azerbaijan, though such actions were not carried out in either Armenia or the

former NKAO of Azerbaijan. As a result of this policy, Armenia was granted a significant advantage in the development of its armed forces, numbering up to 30,000 personnel, which it deployed in the autumn of 1991 to Azerbaijan's former NKAO.¹

In general, this period coincides with the start and rapid expansion of Russia-Armenia MTC, as well as the hottest phase of the First Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan (1992–1994). The cases of weapons transfers from Russia to Armenia, and the participation of military units from Russia (not officially directed by the then Russian leadership) in the hostilities in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region from the beginning of 1991 to the middle of 1992, went far beyond normal MTC and had a significant impact on the course and outcome of the war in favour of Armenia. Around the same period, 180 soldiers, including 22 officers, deserted and joined the military forces of Armenia.²

Armenia received a large amount of WME and ammunition from the Russian army's warehouses stationed on Armenian territory until mid-1992; this included 2,000–3,000 AK-74 assault rifles and ammunition, 25 tanks, 87 infantry fighting vehicles (IFV), 28 armoured personnel carriers (APC), and 45 artillery and mortar systems during the evacuation of the 366th Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment's soldiers from the city of Khankendi in March 1992.³

After the Soviet Union dissolved, its military property was distributed unequally in the South Caucasus, where Armenia acquired most of the WME, including through the unofficial transmission of warehouses containing food, clothing, ammunition, and fuel⁴, as well as the military property of 15th and 164th divisions of the 7th Army of the former USSR, including 167 tanks, 442 armoured fighting vehicles (AFV), 259 canons, and 500 ammunition wagons, in accordance with the Agreement Between Russia and Armenia on the Conditions and Terms for the Transfer of WME to Armenia of Formations and Units of the

1 Hasanov, A. "Armyano-Azerbaycanskiy Nagorno-Karabaxskiy Konflikt", *Preslib. az*, p.55, available at: <http://files.preslib.az/projects/azerbaijan/rus/gl7.pdf> (accessed: December 15, 2020).

2 Retaildive.com, *Armenian lie and information war. Karabakh TV want justice*, September 13, 2018, available at: <https://www.retaildive.com/press-release/20180913-armenian-lie-and-information-war-karabakh-tv-want-justice/> (accessed: June 3, 2022)

3 Turan.az, *Kak my teryali Khodzhaly*, February 26, 2020, available at: https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2020/2/free/Want_to_Say/ru/87568.htm/001 (accessed: June 3, 2022)

4 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

Armed Forces of Russia Stationed in Armenia, dated 6 July 1992. Although not specified in that agreement, the 96th AD Missile Brigade stationed in Armenia and hosting S-300 AD systems, 13 Mi-24 combat helicopters, and 8 Mi-8 transport helicopters were also transferred to this country.⁵ The assets of military infrastructure and WME of the State Security Committee (KGB) of the USSR's border detachments, the internal forces of the USSR's Ministry of Internal Affairs stationed in Armenia, as well as those of the KGB's Hadrut border detachment, stationed in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region, were also handed over to Armenia.⁶

However, Russia and Armenia not only synchronized their MTC; Russia also supported Armenia in its war against Azerbaijan through

However, Russia and Armenia not only synchronized their MTC; Russia also supported Armenia in its war against Azerbaijan through military assistance, intelligence gathering, etc.

military assistance, intelligence gathering, etc. Further support was provided through the reconnaissance and sabotage activities in Azerbaijan of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the Ministry of Defence of Russia and the provision of logistics, training, and recruitment of professionals for Armenia's armed forces.⁷ Judging by the statements of the then head of the [former] Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan, Namik Abbasov, the scale of

the GRU's espionage activities at that time in Azerbaijan was extremely large. By using intelligence agents and technical means of intelligence gathering, the GRU obtained and transmitted information about the army of Azerbaijan to Armenia during the hostilities. The GRU also took actions to discredit mid-level commanders and the entire military-political leadership of Azerbaijan in order to destabilize the situation in the country.⁸

Russia's 336th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment's involvement in committing the Khojaly genocide together with the Armed Forces of Armenia is particularly noteworthy. Criminal negligence and lack

5 Aliyev, E.T., "Mezhdunarodnyy Kontrol Nad Obychnymi Vooruzheniyami I Nekontroliruyemoye Oruzhiye, Azerbaydzhan – Nagornyy Karabakh – Armeniya", Arms Control, 2006, available at: <https://www.armscontrol.ru/pubs/eta-az-nk-ar-061121.pdf>

6 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

7 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

8 Mustafayev, R. "Azerbaydzhan raspletayet agenturnuyu set GRU", *Kommersant*, December 7, 2006, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/728183> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

of control by the higher command led to this unit's participation in the capture of the town of Khojaly in Azerbaijan and the killing of most of its civilian residents.⁹ There have been several reports of Russian officers, tank crews, and scouts being captured while fighting alongside the army of Armenia. There is also a huge amount of evidence of this in the form of

Moreover, Azerbaijan also introduced a five-point proposal in March 2022 that would serve as a foundation for such a future peace treaty.

images and film, as well as several interviews with eyewitnesses to and participants in the hostilities.¹⁰ For instance, Russian military journalist Alexander Nevzorov discussed the participation of a paratrooper unit of the Pskov oblast of the Russian Federation in combats in Kalbajar direction in March 1993.¹¹

On a daily basis, the army of Armenia received spare parts and rear-service support from Russian warehouses and were trained in Russian military bases. The deployment of a multi-layered AD system in Karabakh region was one of the results of the WME transfer, as was the involvement of Russian specialists in training Armenian officers. This factor increased the aircraft losses of Azerbaijan at that time. From 1992 to 1994, 66 Il-76 and 2 An-12 flights transported more than 1,300 tons of armaments and 4 Su-25 attack aircraft from the Mozdok airfield of Russia to Yerevan.¹² In 1994, Russia also delivered the Tunguska anti-aircraft missile and cannon system to boost the AD capability of Armenia's armed forces in Azerbaijan's formerly occupied territories.

According to the report of General Lev Rokhlin, chairman of the Russian State Duma's Defence Committee, published on 2 May 1997, as well as documents from the Russian Center for Analysis of Strategies and

9 Abushov, K. "Regional level of conflict dynamics in the South Caucasus: Russia's policies towards the ethno-territorial conflicts (1991-2008)", Phd Thesis, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, available at: <https://d-nb.info/1010267027/34> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

10 Gazeta.ru, 'Iz glaz torchali okurki': kto vinoven v Xodjalinskoy tragedii, February 26, 2020, available at: <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2020/02/24/12974581.shtml> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

11 Vestnik Kavkaza, V khode pervoy karabakhskoy voyny za armyan voyevali nanyatyey imi pskovskiyey desantniki, December 12, 2020, available at: <https://vestnikavkaza.ru/analytics/nevzorov-v-hode-pervoy-karabahskoj-vojny-za-arman-voevali-nanatyey-imi-pskovskie-desantniki.html> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

12 Armiya.az, Rossiyskiy general, 'vzorvavshiy' s azerbaydzhanskimi voyennymi 'Armyangeyt', July 3, 2018, available at: <http://armiya.az/ru/news/134585/Российский-генерал,-«взорвавший»-с-азербайджанскими-военными-«Армянгейт»> (accessed: June 3, 2022)

Technologies (2018)¹³, Russia transferred large batches of free WME for the Armed Forces of Armenia on a regular basis during the years 1993–1996.¹⁴ The outcomes of this report lead to the conclusion that the Russian Federation violated UN General Assembly resolutions 51/47B (8 January 1997) and 51/45F (January 10, 1997) on disarmament and illicit transfer of conventional arms, as well as its obligations under the Missile Technology Control Regime. The report revealed that Armenia received:

- In 1994: 64,200 tons of service fuel; 15,977 items of communications equipment and radio stations; 41,003 km of field cable; and 25 T-72 tanks, accompanied by spare parts from Russia's military base in Gyumri, Armenia, and other spares supplied by military transport aircraft from Russia's Kubinka and Kamenka (Penza) airfields.
- In 1996: an additional 4 tanks from Russia's former military base in Vaziani, Georgia; another 4 tanks and 33 IFVs from the former 142nd Tank Repair Plant in Tbilisi, Georgia; 1 tank from Gyumri base; 17 BMP-2s from Russia's former military base in Batumi, Georgia; another batch of 50 T-72 tanks and associated weaponry and spare parts; 36 D-30 howitzers; 18 D-20 howitzers; 18 D-1 howitzers; 18 Grad multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS); 40 Igla anti-aircraft missile systems and 200 missiles for them; and 12,600 artillery shells, including 1440 rockets for the Grad systems.
- In 1995–1996: 31 An-24 and 13 Il-76 cargo aircraft were transferred from Russia's Jasmine (Akhtubinsk) airfield to the Zvartnots airfield of Armenia.
- At various times: 8 R-17 Elbrus operational–tactical complexes and 32 ballistic missiles for them (300 km range); 27 Krug-M-1 medium-range AD systems and 349 missiles for them; 40 guided missiles for the Osa-AK short-range anti-aircraft missile system; 84 T-72 tanks of various modifications; 50 BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles; 72 towed artillery pieces of various calibres; 18 Grad

13 Makienko, K.V., “V ozhidanii buri: yuzhnyy kavkaz”, *Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies*, available at: <http://cast.ru/upload/iblock/b0a/b0a00906a408158d431afb51cdee7440.pdf> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

14 *Armiya.az, Rossiyskiy general, ‘vzorvavshiy’ s azerbaydzhanskimi voyennymi ‘Armyangeyt’*, op.cit.; Nikushkin, A., “Genshtab Bez Tayn (glava 24) Rokhlin i ‘armyangeyt’”, 2016, available at: <https://nikitushkin.wordpress.com/2012/01/16/генштаб-без-тайн-глава-24-рохлин-и-армян/> (accessed: June 3, 2022)

MLRS; 26 mortars; 40 Igla portable anti-aircraft missile systems and 200 missiles for them; 20 SPG-9 and AGS-17 mounted grenade launchers; 306 machine guns; 7,910 rifles; 1,847 pistols; 489,000 artillery shells; 478,500 rounds for BMP-2; 945 anti-tank guided missiles of various types; 345,800 hand grenades; and 227,000,000 small-arms rounds.

An-124 and Il-76 military transport aircraft made 139 flights for the transportation of supplies. Moreover, 5 Il-76 aircraft transferred 85 tons of spare parts from the Chkalovsky airfield of Russia. This was in addition to various machinery, materials, transport vehicles, radio equipment (including satellite communication systems), communications kits, radar stations, batteries of various types, spare parts for tanks, guns, IFVs, etc.

On 16 March 1995, an intergovernmental agreement was signed to establish the 102nd Military Base of Russia in the Armenian city of Gyumri. This agreement also covered the reform and strengthening of the capabilities of and supply for this military base. For this purpose, the 3624th Air Base in Erebuni, located near to the capital, Yerevan, was incorporated into the 102nd Base in May 1996.¹⁵ Armenia also started to cooperate with Russia for the training of its military officers and specialists in Russia's military colleges and academies, as well as in Armenia itself. Moreover, the armed forces of Armenia increased their combined combat drills with Russia.¹⁶

On 29 August 1997, the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance that consolidated the mechanisms for exercising the right to collective self-defence, ensuring mutual security, providing military assistance, and eliminating threats. The treaty included provisions for joint border protection, joint security, expanding national armed forces' interactions, and military-technical cooperation.¹⁷

15 European Parliament, "Russian military presence in the Eastern Partnership Countries", Workshop Paper, 2016, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/108547/Russia%20military%20in%20EaP_Workshop.pdf (accessed: June 1, 2022)

16 Kommersant, *Itogi vizita Pavla Gracheva v Zakavkazye*, March 25, 1993, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/105115> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

17 UN Digital Library, "Letter dated 97/09/09 from the representatives of Armenia and the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General", August 1997, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/243780?ln=en> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

Only after the visit of Azerbaijan's then-President, Heydar Aliyev, to Moscow in mid-1997 was the economic blockade of Russia against Azerbaijan lifted and political relations normalized. Until 2000, there were no further noteworthy developments in Russia-Armenia MTC. Nevertheless, the armed forces of Armenia were the best supplied in the South Caucasus at that time.

The period from 2000 to 2015

This period was characterized by the dynamic development of MTC and attempts towards increasing Armenia's military potential to balance Azerbaijan's expanding military capacity. However, given the 'frozen' nature of the conflict, marked by the absence of large-scale confrontations, the influence of this cooperation on Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict was not substantial.

In the meantime, Russian-Armenian MTC continued, and military exercises to increase interaction between Russian forces (land, air, and air-defence) in Armenia and the Armed Forces of Armenia took place on a regular basis. Within the CSTO framework, military servicemen of Armenia were trained in Russian military educational institutions free of charge from 2005.

From 2001, the air-defence forces of Armenia and the aviation group and the anti-aircraft missile regiment of Russia's military conducted joint combat drills. This gave the armed forces of Armenia a significant opportunity to save its financial resources, as anti-aircraft missile systems and fighter aircraft are expensive types of WME. Russia delivered to Armenia one Mi-24P combat helicopter in 2002 (and later, in 2011, two Mi-24P); five Mi-8MT and two Mi-8IV(Mi-9) military transport helicopters in 2003; and two Il-76M military transport aircraft in 2004.¹⁸

Moreover, in 2008, Armenia received a wide range of WME free of charge from the 102nd Military Base of Russia in Gyumri. The list included: T-72 tanks (21), BMP-2s (27), armoured personnel carriers 70/80 (12), BREM-2s (5), ZSU 23-4 Shilka (4), BM-37 mortars, BM-

¹⁸ Armyrecognition.com, *Analysis: Armenian-Azeri fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh*, April 4, 2016, available at: https://www.armyrecognition.com/armies_in_the_world_analysis_focus/analysis_armenian-azeri_fighting_in_nagorno-karabakh_tass_5040416.html (accessed: June 1, 2022)

21 Grad MLRS (9), Akasia self-propelled canon (16), Gvozdika self-propelled howitzers (14), MT-12 Rapira 100-mm canons (5), as well as machine guns, grenade launchers, and various ammunition, including rockets. Russia also transferred WME to Armenia from its bases stationed in Georgia between 2005 and 2007. Armenia received three divisions of the S-300PT AD system in 2007, most likely from these bases in Georgia.¹⁹

In 2010, Armenia signed a protocol with Russia on the extension of the presence of the 102nd Military Base for the next 49 years (until 2044). And, although the transfer of two battalions of S-300PS AD systems and 144 5V55U missiles for S300 systems to Armenia in 2009–2010 was presented as a sale²⁰, Yerevan could not afford such a large purchase using its own funds. In 2009–2010, an undefined number of Gaz-3308 military trucks and six Tiger armoured vehicles were also delivered to Armenia, followed, in 2011–2014, by 200 military trucks.²¹

In August 2012, Armenia received another donation of WME from Russian bases in the country that included: T-72 battle tanks; BMP-2 AFVs; R-149 command and staff vehicles based on the BTR-80; Akasia 2S3 self-propelled artillery; Giyatsint-B canon; 122-, 240-, and 300-mm rockets; 100-, 122-, and 152-mm artillery shells; 125-mm artillery shells for tanks; 5V55 anti-aircraft guided missiles for the S-300 complex; S-5 and S-8 unguided missiles; R-60M and Kh-25ML guided air missiles.²²

Since Armenia did not have enough financial resources to balance Azerbaijan's increasing military power, official Yerevan signed another MTC agreement with Russia in 2013 to purchase relatively cheaper military products.²³ According to the UN Register of Conventional Arms, Russia delivered the following WME to Armenia in 2013: 35

19 Mikhaylov, V. "Oruzheynnyy skandal nakanune referendum", *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, January 30, 2009, available at: https://nvo.ng.ru/armament/2009-01-30/11_scandal.html (accessed: June 1, 2022)

20 Armyrecognition.com, Analysis: Armenian-Azeri fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh, *op.cit.*

21 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

22 Agregator, *Besplatnoye oruzhiye dlya Armenii – Spisok*, September 25, 2020, available at: <https://aqreqator.az/az/politika/1026582> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

23 Aleksandrov, M. "Military-technical cooperation between Russia and Armenia is gaining momentum", *Noev Kocheg*, 2014, available at: <https://noev-kovcheg.ru/mag/2014-02/4297.html> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

T-72 tanks; 110 BTR-80/82 AFVs; 50 launchers for Fagot anti-tank missiles and 200 missiles for them.²⁴

In addition, 50 BMP-2 AFVs were repaired during the same period. However, deliveries of 4 Tochka-U tactical-operative missile systems and a Kasta 2E2 radar system in 2013 were not listed in that registry.²⁵

Moreover, the KAMAZ-Armenia Service Centre, which is a subsidiary of Russia's Kamaz factory, was opened in Yerevan in 2013.²⁶ In 2013, the Russian AFM SERVICE company supplied a batch of Ptero-E5 UAVs to Armenia, and then provided technical support to organize serial production of a modified version of the X-55 UAVs (Armi-55) in Armenia.²⁷ In 2015, Russia also completed a contract with Armenia to upgrade the S-125 AD system to the Pechora-2M level and supplied two BM-30 Smerch MLRS.²⁸

Armenia's attempts at creating an imbalance through its MTC with Russia were balanced by the intensification of Azerbaijan-Russia MTC from 2007. The period under analysis also featured improved interstate relations between Azerbaijan and Russia compared with those in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, policymakers in Moscow believed that instability in Azerbaijan might also negatively affect the situation in Russia's southern provinces (the North Caucasus), especially at a time when Russia was conducting a military operation in Chechnya. There was also a shift in Russia's policy toward Azerbaijan. This was conditioned by two main factors: (1) the Russian military-industrial

24 Grigoryan, G. "Osnovnyye etapy rossiysko-armyanskikh voyenno-politicheskikh vzaimootnosheniy v postsovetSKIY period", September 2018, p.88, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327884114_Osnovnyye_etapy_rossijsko-armyanskikh_voyenno-politicheskikh_vzaimootnosheniy_v_postsovetSKIY (accessed: June 1, 2022)

25 Poliqon, *Armenia's open and secret arms trade: regional threats are increasing* (translation from Azerbaijani), available at: <https://poliqon.az/ermenistanin-aciq-vegizli-silah-alveri-regional-tehdidler-artir/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

26 Zainetdinov, V. "MKV·ES ODKB osoboye vnimaniye udelyayet roli standartizatsii oboronnoy produktsii v obespechenii konkurentosposobnosti voyennoy promyshlennosti i sozdaniyu Mezhdunarodstvennoy sistemy katalogizatsii predmetov snabzheniya vooruzhennykh sil", Official website of CSTO, October 4, 2013, available at: https://odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/mkves_odkb_osoboe_vnimanie_udelyayet roli_standartizatsii_oboronnoy_produktsii_v_obespechenii_konkure/ (accessed: June 1, 2022)

27 Hasanov, A., "Armyanskiye voyennyye skazki: ot sozdateley mifa ob 'Armenikume'", *Armia.az*, April 3, 2018, available at: <http://armia.az/ru/news/130567> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

28 Tass.ru, *Armeniya poluchila ot Rossii vooruzheniye na \$200 mln*, July 22, 2018, available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/5394196> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

complex was seeking new sales markets, and (2) the supply of any type of weapon to Azerbaijan enabled Russia to manipulate Armenia more. Purchases of modern weapons by Azerbaijan forced the leadership of Armenia to augment its military imports from Russia. Armenia, however, had limited financial resources, and even the sale of WME to Armenia at domestic Russian prices was insufficient to make up for the imbalance in military-technical equipment.

In order to reduce Armenia's deficit, in 2015, Russia offered a loan in the amount of US\$200 million for the supply of new WME. The loan was given for a period of 13 years with payments beginning in 2018 at an interest rate of 3% annually.²⁹ As part of this loan package, Armenia would receive 9K58 Smerch MLRS with ammunition; Igla-S and Verba MANPADS; TOS-1A Solntsepyok heavy flame-thrower systems; Konkurs-M and Kornet-E anti-tank missile systems; Tiger armoured vehicles; Dragunov sniper rifles, and Avtobaza-M mobile electronic intelligence complex.³⁰ In addition, Armenia ordered RPG-26 grenade launchers as well as communications and engineering equipment, spare parts, and scopes for tanks and trucks.³¹ Armenia received part of the WME listed above at the beginning of 2016, but the April fighting with Azerbaijan in that year affected not only this transaction, but also the entire Russia-Armenia MTC arrangement in general.

The period from 2016 to 2020

The period under study coincides with the attempts of the Russia-Armenia MTC to adapt to Azerbaijan's developing military-technological superiority. Given that there were two wars during this period (one short-term and one full-fledged), the impact of this MTC on the former Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict needs a separate evaluation for each period. There are two aspects of MTC's effect on this entire period:

29 Eurasia Daily, *A US\$200-million loan: What weapons will Armenia buy from Russia?*, July 2, 2015, available at: <https://eadaily.com/en/news/2015/07/02/a-us200-million-loan-what-weapons-will-armenia-buy-from-russia> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

30 Martirosyan, A. "Armeniya vydelila 214 mln rubley v kachestve predoplaty po oboronnomu kreditu ot Rossii", *Kavkazskiy uzel*, September 30, 2016, available at: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/290176/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

31 Mehdiyev, M. "President Aliyev Calls on Russia to Refrain from Arming Armenia", *Caspian News*, August 18, 2021, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/president-aliyev-calls-on-russia-to-refrain-from-arming-armenia-2021-8-18-0/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

(1) Armenia's army personnel were primarily trained by and educated in Russia, and (2) they fought using Russian-made armaments.

On April 2, 2016, a brief, high-intensity conflict, known as the 'April War', took place between the armed forces of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the former conflict zone (the occupied territories). Given that the active engagements occurred only on the first two days of the fighting, and the sides exchanged artillery strikes on following days, there was no large-scale influence of Russia–Armenia MTC during the April War. However, Russia's military-political pressure during the April War became obvious, with its forces from the 102nd Base and Russia's South-Eastern Military District (deployed to polygons in Daghestan) put on high alert.³² Armenia's army, which was repelled from a small part of the territories they previously occupied during the April War, drew some conclusions in terms of the military-technological gap vis-a-vis Azerbaijan's army. Armenia, therefore, decided to increase budget expenditure on defence. Armenia obtained the most up-to-date weaponry systems in the following years, including a variety of electronic warfare (EW) systems.³³

Table 1: The Armenian budget for the defence sector, 2016–2020

Year	Amount allocated in million US\$	Percentage change from previous year
2016	430	+3%
2017	443	+3.5%
2018	518	+16.9%
2019	647	+24.9%
2020	625	–3.5%

In 2016, Moscow and Yerevan established the Joint Group of Forces of Russia and Armenia in the Caucasus region of collective security. The group comprised the 5th Army Corps of Armenia and military units (or personnel) of Russia's 102nd Military Base in Gyumri. The main tasks of the joint group of forces were to be timely detection and reflection

32 Lurer.com, *Rossiia nachala voyennyye ucheniye na granitse s Azerbaydzhanom - v Dagestane*, April 5, 2016, available at: <https://lurer.com/?p=218728&l=ru> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

33 Nersisyan, L., "Armeniya poluchila ot Rossii 'Iskander': Azerbaydzhan mozhet zabyt pro Karabakh", *Regnum*, September 17, 2016, available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/2180732.html> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

of an armed attack against either country; covering the land part of both countries' state borders within established limits of responsibility; protecting Russia's and Armenia's state borders in the airspace; as well as the participation of troops and utilization of critical infrastructure to ensure effective AD.³⁴

The former President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, stated in an interview that, “between 2010 to 2018, Russia supplied Armenia with free military-technical support in the amount of 50 thousand tons.”³⁵ Thus, in the first quarter of 2016, Russian enterprises began modernizing Armenia's T-72 tanks. Meanwhile, Armenia received the following WME in 2016: 44 BM-30 Smerch MLRS; 6 Tiger armoured vehicles; 1 T-90S tank as a prize of “Tank Biathlon 2014”; 4 Iskander-E operational-tactical missile systems; 200 Igla AD systems; Undefined numbers of Buk-M1-2 AD systems, portable Infauna, and R-325U EW systems.³⁶

According to the UN Register of Conventional Arms, Russia transferred 300 pieces of Igla-S and Verba portable AD systems, as well as 6 TOS-1A Solntsepek and 100 pieces of Kornet anti-tank missile systems, and 1 Nebo-M radar station to Armenia between December 2016 and January 2017.³⁷ However, the submission of national reports to this UN Register of Conventional Arms is voluntary and, therefore, most WME deliveries to Armenia were undocumented or unreported by the Government of Armenia.

In 2017, Russia allocated a new loan of \$100 million in order to expand the volume of WME shipments. According to the loan agreement, Armenia received credit with a 3% annual interest rate for a 15-year

34 Interfax.ru, *Armeniya ratifitsirovala soglasheniye s RF ob obyedinennoy gruppirovke voysk*, October 5, 2017, available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/581847> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

35 Sputnik Armenia, *Rossiya besplatno peredala Armenii boleye 50 000 tonn vooruzheniy v 2010-2018gg*, August 19, 2020, available at: <https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/politics/20200819/24158615/Rossiya-besplatno-peredala-Armenii-bolee-50-000-tonn-vooruzheniy-v-2010-2018gg---Sargsyan.html> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

36 Eurasia Daily, *Armeniya obkhodit Azerbaydzhan na oruzheynom virazhe: Su-30 menyayut balans sil*, December 30, 2019, available at: <https://easdaily.com/ru/news/2019/12/30/armeniya-obkhodit-azerbaydzhan-na-ruzheynom-virazhe-su-30-menyayut-balans-sil> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

37 Rusarminfo.ru, *Rossiya predostavila OON dannyye o postavkakh oruzhiya Armenii i Azerbaydzhanu*, June 13, 2017, available at: <https://rusarminfo.ru/2017/06/13/rossiya-predostavila-oon-dannyye-o-postavkax-ruzhiya-armenii-i-azerbajdzhanu/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

term and had to use these funds between 2018 and 2022.³⁸ Within the framework of this loan agreement, Russia delivered an undefined number of UAZ-Cargo and UAZ-432 military vehicles to Armenia between 2017 and 2020, and 2 Repellent EW systems to counter UAVs in 2017–2018.³⁹

Albeit the post-‘Velvet Revolution’ (April 2018) period in Armenia raised certain political tensions between the new political leadership of Armenia and the Russian Federation, it did not affect the degree of MTC between the two countries. Thus, in August 2018, Armenia’s Royalsys Engineering Ltd. and Russia’s Kalashnikov signed an agreement for the licensed production of the AK-103 assault rifle in Armenia, and production started in July 2020. In addition, this joint company began producing optical-electronic devices, thermal night sights, and five different-calibre cartridges.⁴⁰

In 2018, Russia transferred to Armenia a Kasta-2-1 mobile radar station, an Aistenok portable radar station, and an Avtobaza-M electronic intelligence complex, as well as Ural and Kamaz military trucks, engineering equipment, and guided missiles for the Smerch MLRS. In 2019, Armenia bought from Russia 4 Su-30SM heavy fighters and 4 Tor-2MKM AD systems and 50 9M338 missiles for them.⁴¹ Remarkably, following the delivery of these fighter jets, Russia offered Azerbaijan the opportunity to purchase Su-35SM and MiG-35 jets.⁴²

According to a five-year report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released on 9 March 2020, Russian

38 Eurasia Daily, *Minoborony Armenii: Zakupili mnogo oruzhiya, chto konkretno — voyennaya tayna*, December 6, 2019, available at: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2019/12/06/minoborony-armenii-zakupili-mnogo-oruzhiya-chto-konkretno-voennaya-tayna> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

39 Petrosyan, T. “Voyennyye obozrevateli nazvali problemy Armenii v sfere vooruzheniy”, *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, April 1, 2018, available at: <https://kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/318570/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

40 The Firearms Blog, *Armenia to Start Licensed Manufacturing of AK-12 and AK-15 Rifles*, August 27, 2018, available at: <https://www.thefirearmblog.com/blog/2018/08/27/armenia-to-start-licensed-manufacturing-of-ak-12-and-ak-15-rifles/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

41 Azatutyun.am, *Armenian Military To Get More Russian Warplanes, January 28, 2020*, available at: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30402222.html> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

42 Mehdiyev, M. “Azerbaijan in Talks to Buy Next-Generation Military Aircraft From Russia”, *Caspian News*, April 12, 2020, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-in-talks-to-buy-next-generation-military-aircraft-from-russia-2020-4-10-54/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

armaments accounted for 94% of all weapons in Armenia between 2015 and 2019.⁴³ During a visit of the Defence Minister of Russia, Sergei Shoigu, to Armenia in October 2019, an agreement was reached to improve the combat capacity of the 102nd Military Base by delivering new types of weapons. Parallel to this, a cooperation plan for 2020 was signed, which allowed for further joint exercises involving all types of armament and equipment.⁴⁴

The year 2020 was a busy one for Russia-Armenia MTC because of the two military escalations, therefore it is relevant to perform an analysis of these events under three sub-periods, including the time preceding the escalations.

From 1 January to 10 July 2020

In 2020, the supply of 1,343 military trucks and 33 units of engineering equipment to Armenia that had started in 2018 was also completed by Russia. Some of the items, particularly 1,000 automobiles and items of automobile equipment, were delivered to Armenia through an alternative logistics path from Russia between 2018 and 2020. This involved shipping via the Volga River, across the Caspian Sea to Iran's Caspian ports, and then by road to Armenia across the Iran–Armenia border.⁴⁵

From 11 July to 26 September 2020

From 12 to 16 July 2020, border clashes occurred between the armed forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan on the latter's north-western state border in the direction of its Tovuz district. This further four days of fighting was, however, limited to a small portion of the border and mainly involved rocket and artillery exchanges. Moreover, Armenia also allegedly used EW equipment to challenge the performance of Azerbaijan's UAVs.⁴⁶ Russia's military-political leadership made

43 Abay, E. G., "Russia provides 94% of Armenia's weapons in 5 years", *Anadolu Agency*, October 29, 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-provides-94-of-armenia-s-weapons-in-5-years/2023969> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

44 Azatutyun.am, *Russia To Beef Up Military Presence In Armenia*, December 24, 2019, available at: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30342769.html> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

45 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

46 Azatutyun.am, *Armenia Demonstrates 'Azeri Drones Shot Down In Border Clashes'*, July, 21, 2020, available at: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30739643.html> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

regular demands for an end to hostilities, meanwhile announcing unexpected and unscheduled drills in its Southern Military District.⁴⁷ Armenia's vulnerability to Azerbaijan's loitering munitions and drones purchased from Israel was an underlined factor in this fighting.⁴⁸

The volume of WME delivery to Armenia, particularly EW systems, increased dramatically after the July fighting.

The volume of WME delivery to Armenia, particularly EW systems, increased dramatically after the July fighting. In the short period from 17 July to 26 September, Russian military cargo aircraft alone delivered about 1,000 tons of military goods to Armenia. Although Russia justified the nature of the flights as being for the transportation of conscripts and the delivery of building materials for its military base in Gyumri (Armenia)⁴⁹, these cargo flights actually transported the Repellent EW systems, Nebo-M radar station, and Avtobaza-M electronic intelligence systems.⁵⁰ Apart from the supply of WME, the period after the July 2020 clashes was marked by joint Russia-Armenia tactical exercises, in which 70% of the Russian base's military personnel were involved and that simulated various scenarios such as joint drone counteraction drills and landing forces behind enemy lines.⁵¹ In August 2020, the Defence Ministry of Armenia and the United Aircraft Corporation of Russia signed a deal for the modernization and repair of Su-25 attack aircraft.⁵²

From 27 September to 10 November 2020

The Second Karabakh War (aka the 44-Day War) began on 27 September

47 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

48 Frantzman, S. "Drones play key role in Azerbaijan-Armenia clashes", *Drone Wars: The book*, July 19, 2020, available at: <https://dronewars2021.com/2020/07/19/drones-play-key-role-in-azerbaijan-armenia-clashes/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

49 Jafarova, E., "Russian military shipments to Armenia – a dangerous escalation?", *Euractiv*, August 31, 2020, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/opinion/russian-military-shipments-to-armenia-a-dangerous-escalation/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

50 Ostapenko, Y. and Agayeva, S., "Moskva postavlyayet oruzhiye v Armeniyu v razgar boyev: ne povod li zadumat'sya nad smenoy posrednikov?", *1news.az*, August 14, 2020, available at: <https://1news.az/news/20200814050105632-Moskva-postavlyayet-oruzhie-v-Armeniyu-v-razgar-boev-ne-povod-li-zadumatsya-nad-smenoi> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

51 Tass.ru, *Russian, Armenian military begin joint exercise Kavkaz-2020 in Armenia*, September 21, 2020, available at: <https://tass.com/defense/1203085> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

52 Arka.am, *Armenia signs contract with Russia to repair and modernize its Su-25 strike aircraft*, August 24 2020, available at: https://arka.am/en/news/society/armenia_signs_contract_with_russia_to_repair_and_modernize_its_su_25_strike_aircraft/ (accessed: June 1, 2022)

2020 and ended with the liberation of most of Azerbaijan's territories from the occupation of Armenia, as well as Armenia's capitulation on the night of 9–10 November 2020 following the signing of the Trilateral Statement between the state leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia.⁵³

During the war, Russia supported its ally Armenia through: *(1) Regular provision of arms and ammunition for Armenia's military forces, including*⁵⁴:

- Delivery of military cargoes to Armenia by aircraft of the Military Transport Aviation Command of Russia (7 flights were recorded);
- Transfer of weapons and ammunition from the warehouses of the 102nd Military Base of Russia in Armenia;
- Supply of military supplies delivered by military and civilian aircraft of Armenia from Minvody airport in Russia (more than 20 flights were recorded).⁵⁵

The resupply of ammunition by Russia influenced the firepower of Armenia's army during the 44-Day War. For instance, most of the rockets and missiles previously supplied by Russia to Armenia did not explode during in the missile attacks on Azerbaijan's cities of Mingachevir and Ganja on 4 and 5 October 2020.⁵⁶ However, during the bombardment of Azerbaijan's city of Barda on 27–28 October 2020, all 10 rockets fired detonated.⁵⁷ That is to say, the missiles used until mid-October were expired stock, and only after the delivery of new missiles from Russia did the situation change. This was indirectly confirmed by the criminal cases brought against weapons suppliers in

53 Kremlin.ru, *Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation*, November 10, 2020, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

54 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

55 Focus.ua, *Mineralovodskiy ekspress: vse, chto izvestno o taynoy pomoshchi Armenii so storony Rossii*, November 2, 2020, available at: <https://focus.ua/world/466410-mineralovodskiy-ekspress-vse-chto-izvestno-o-taynoy-pomoshchi-armenii-so-storony-rossii> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

56 Mejid, F., "Obstrel Gyandzhi obernulsya zhertvami sredi gorozhan", *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, October 4, 2020, available at: <https://kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/354928/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

57 Mejid, F., "Vyroslo chislo pogibshikh v rezul'tate obstrela Bardy", *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, October 28, 2020, available at: <https://kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/355855/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

Armenia after the war.⁵⁸

(2) The establishment of conditions for the Armenian lobby to export of weapons, mercenaries, and volunteers from Russia.

Various Russian Federation government bodies, in collaboration with the Armenian lobby, devised several fastest-possible-delivery schemes for the export of weapons, mercenaries, and volunteers.⁵⁹ The Armenian lobby arranged this using civil aircraft from Russian airports. Armenian businessmen purchased an Il-76 military cargo transport aircraft from Russia to smuggle the weapons in the guise of a humanitarian cargo.⁶⁰

With the support of VoMA, allegedly a military-patriotic organization functioning in Armenia, the Union of Armenians of Russia publicly recruited mercenaries and volunteers to participate in the 44-Day War on the side of Armenia by using Russian social network services.⁶¹ During the recruitment process, they prioritized people with sniper and anti-tank guided system operator skills.⁶² Video footage of numerous VoMA battalions fighting in the war was circulated on the internet. The capture of the volunteer Eduard Sergeevich Dubakov, a Russian citizen, by Azerbaijani forces is confirmation of this fact.⁶³

(3) Contribution of unofficial paramilitary units and regular forces of the Russian Federation to combat missions during the 44-Day War on the side of Armenia

There is a lot of information in the media proving the planned participation of Wagner PMC's former fighters, as confirmed by a 58 Panorama.am, 'Patron Davo' arestovan, October 1, 2021, available at: <https://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2021/10/01/Давид-Галстян-арест/2574530> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

59 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

60 Rbc.ru, Aliyev obvinil armyanskikh biznesmenov v kontranbande oruzhiya iz Rossii, October 16, 2020, available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/16/10/2020/5f89c23b9a7947d7671697c6> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

61 AIR Center, "Use of Mercenaries and Foreign Fighters by Armenia", November 2020, available at: <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/Mercenaries%20report.pdf> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

62 See website of the VoMA, available at: <https://www.voma.center/en> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

63 Turan.az, A Russian citizen was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment on charges of fighting on the side of the Armenians, July 22, 2021, available at: https://www.turan.az/cache/2021/politics_news/free/news-2021-7-free-politics_news-en-6022.htm (accessed: June 1, 2022)

survey of combatants.⁶⁴ According to an investigation, the PMC fighters dressed the uniform of the Special Forces of Armenia (Multicam) and a total of 500–600 PMC personnel are believed to have participated in the fighting. Bodies of their fighters were found after the battles for the cities of Khojavend, Aghoghlan, and Shusha, and their involvement in battles near Aghdere was also reported in the Russian media.⁶⁵

Moreover, Russian proxy militants from among SAR military personnel and Syrian Armenians were transferred to Yerevan by five aircraft from Russia's military bases in Khmeyim and the capital of Syria. This was relatively a young formation that first participated in the battles for Libya in 2020.⁶⁶ This fact is backed by numerous images and videos published in the media during the war that depicted bodies of militants who appear to be from the Middle East.⁶⁷ Russia's efforts in this regard influenced the personnel losses of Armenia during the war, as the participation of militants decreased the number of personnel casualties among the Armed Forces of Armenia.

Moreover, a group of Russian military personnel from the 102nd Military Base, as part of the unified AD system, carried out reconnaissance of part of Azerbaijan's airspace and the combat zone to assist Armenia in countering aerial assaults, allegedly, through electronic countermeasures (such as Krasukha-4 and Pole-21M EW systems).⁶⁸

After 15 October 2020, the Caspian Flotilla of Russia conducted unscheduled manoeuvres in the middle part of the Caspian sea to

64 Yapparova, L., "Sostoyaniye otchayaniya, ponimayesh? Kak dvoye armyanskikh dobrovol'tsev dve nedeli vybirali iz okruzheniya, a vsya ikh strana v eto vremya razocharovalas v Rossii", *Meduza*, November 20, 2020, available at: <https://meduza.io/feature/2020/11/20/sostoyanie-otchayaniya-ponimaesh> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

65 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

66 Öztürk, A., "Sensational facts about Russia sending Syrian and Lebanese mercenaries to Karabakh (translation from Azerbaijani)", *Report.az*, December 14, 2020, available at: <https://report.az/qarabag/rusiyenin-suriyalilivani-muzdlulari-qarabagagonderdiyine-dair-sensation-faktlar/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

67 TRT Russian, *Na storone Armenii v Karabakhe voyevali sotni siriytsev, pravozashchitniki*, December 9, 2020, available at: <https://www.trtrussian.com/novosti-azerbaydzhan/na-storone-armenii-v-karabahe-voevali-sotni-sirijcev-pravozashchitniki-3790577> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

68 Ramm, A., "Elektronnoye 'Pole' protiv dronov-ubiyts", *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, December 4, 2020, available at: https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2020-12-04/1_1120_karabakh.html (accessed: June 1, 2022)

In general, Russia-Armenia MTC should be viewed through the perspective of Russia's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus. The overall MTC between Russia and Armenia had certain impacts on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

the north of Azerbaijan's Absheron Peninsula with the involvement of four Caliber-NK cruise missile (range: up to 2,000 km) carrier ships.⁶⁹ Fighter aircraft of Russia's Aerospace Forces started conducting training flights in the north-eastern portion of the maritime border during these drills until the beginning of November, making numerous incursions into the airspace of Azerbaijan.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In general, Russia-Armenia MTC should be viewed through the perspective of Russia's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus. The overall MTC between Russia and Armenia had certain impacts on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

In addition to other factors (civil war and coup d'état in Azerbaijan; better organized military formations on the side of Armenia), Russia-Armenia MTC also contributed to Armenia's victory in the First Karabakh War. In the First Karabakh War, Armenia's military forces and a contingent of Russian troops stationed in Armenia complemented each other. Thus, the Russia-Armenia MTC became one of the key factors leading to Azerbaijan's defeat during the First Karabakh War and, consequently, to the occupation by Armenia of Azerbaijani territories.

However, due to the evolved military capability of Azerbaijan, this MTC did not help in avoiding the defeat of Armenia in the Second Karabakh War. During that war, Armenia's army suffered significant manpower and equipment losses. Russia's additional provision of ammunition and weaponry, however, enabled Armenia to cause severe personnel (civilian and military) and equipment casualties on the side of Azerbaijan. Albeit the Russia-Armenia MTC accelerated during 44-Day War, it did not significantly influence the overall pace of war or change the plans of Azerbaijan. Among all the WME given by Russia

69 Brimelow, B. "On a quiet but tense corner of Russia's border, its neighbors are gaining on it", *Business Insider*, November 10, 2021, available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/russias-neighbors-are-developing-military-capabilities-in-caspian-sea-2021-11> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

70 From Author's personal interview with Baku-based military expert

to Armenia between 1992 and 2020, apart from the Su-30SM fighters, everything, including heavy missile systems, was used during the war by the Armed Forces of Armenia.

Although Russia did not become directly involved in the 44-Day War, former Defence Minister of Armenia David Tonoyan confirmed that he “*kept in touch with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu throughout the war,*” adding that “*there were days when we talked on the phone several times a day. ... in the midst of a war, Russia tried its best to meet its allied commitments.*”⁷¹ Moreover, according to Movses Hakobyan, the former head of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Armenia, “Russia supplied Armenia with weapons ... from the very first days of the war, even before the head of Armenia contacted the President of Russia by phone.”⁷²

Despite Russia’s military-technical and material assistance to Armenia, Russia’s leadership has consistently confirmed that the Karabakh region is an internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan and has refused to intervene directly in the conflict, unlike other crisis situations in the post-Soviet area. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has constantly called for the cessation of arms supplies to the aggressor country, Armenia, and warned of the necessity of stopping attempts to modernize the Armed Forces of Armenia after their defeat in the Second Karabakh War. Owing to the difficult domestic political situation in Armenia, and the economic pressure on Russia, notably the targeted sanctions against Russia’s military-industrial complex, it is difficult to predict the medium- and long-term prospects for the development of MTC between Russia and Armenia from now on.

Given the non-transparency of Russia-Armenia MTC and the confidentiality of the procurement policy of the Defence Ministry of Armenia regarding the supply of WME, only part of the volume and range of WME supplied by Russia to Armenia has been identified by the author in this article. Also, the formerly occupied [by Armenia]

71 Mediamax.am, *Davit Tonoyan: Political melancholy looms over our people*, January 25, 2021, available at: <https://mediamax.am/en/news/interviews/41674/> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

72 Krasnaya Vesna, *Armeniya poluchala ot Rossii vooruzheniya, o kotorykh ne mogla mechat' - general*, November 19, 2020, available at: <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/6d1499f1> (accessed: June 1, 2022)

territories of Azerbaijan turned out to be a ‘gray zone’ for hiding the true extent of Armenia’s WME imports. That is, Armenia did not register the real extent of its imports of certain types of WME in its reports to international and regional organizations, that is, WME that were stored in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

The Long Road to Peace in the South Caucasus

Esmira Jafarova^{*}

The 44-day Karabakh War reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus region. Azerbaijan regained its territories and historic justice was restored. What is transpiring in the region at the moment will decide its future for many decades to come. Peace, prosperity, and inclusive development in the long-fragmented South Caucasus region may take shape through normalization of relations and proper communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The two nations of the region paid a very high price in the name of the occupational, expansionist, and irredentist policy of Armenia that disregarded international law and attempted to perpetuate the 'results' of the illegal occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan. In the context of the new reality, there are several important areas that demand a good deal of work and resource mobilization on the part of Azerbaijan, as well as bona fide cooperation on the part of Armenia. Issues in the political track, i.e., those related to the Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization process and the signing of a peace treaty, demilitarization and demining, reconstruction of the liberated territories, connectivity, and humanitarian issues, are currently the most pressing ones and require cooperation, dedication, and continuity. This piece attempts to highlight current work in these areas and define the challenges remaining ahead.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Karabakh region, Peace, Connectivity



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Introduction

After Azerbaijan liberated its territories from Armenian occupation back in fall 2020 in the aftermath of the 44-day Karabakh War, and for the first time in the region's 30-year independent history, the stakes are high for consolidating the existing, but still fragile, opportunities for peace. For this tenuous peace to take firm hold there are several tracks on which maximum cooperation and coordination of efforts are required of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Achieving lasting stability in the post-conflict South Caucasus region requires concerted efforts on the part of all stakeholders.

However, the three-decades-long occupation left in shambles not only a large swathe of Azerbaijan's territories, but also the two nations' trust in each other. In that regard, rebuilding mutual trust and confidence is certainly a gargantuan task alongside a no less difficult undertaking such as rebuilding the liberated territories of Azerbaijan.

This article attempts to highlight the processes relating to political, connectivity, and humanitarian issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Azerbaijan's efforts towards full demilitarization and demining; as well as the reconstruction of the liberated territories. In so doing, the issues will be grouped under three chapters and six clusters, and existing challenges as well as opportunities for peace will be given due regard.

Political Track

In the political track, things are seemingly moving in the right direction, although not without problems. In order to turn the page of enmity in view of the current new realities in the region, confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) between Azerbaijan and Armenia should be promoted. The implementation of all provisions of the 10 November 2020 Statement will be instrumental in this regard. There are several developments in the political track that are noteworthy both in terms of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and for the region in general.

Throughout the time that has elapsed since the 44-day Karabakh War, Azerbaijan has been proposing to Armenia the signing of a peace treaty.

Moreover, Azerbaijan also introduced a five-point proposal in March 2022 that would serve as a foundation for such a future peace treaty.¹ The principles of the proposal were:²

- Mutual recognition of and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of internationally recognized borders, and political independence of each other;
- Mutual confirmation of the absence of territorial claims against each other and acceptance of legally binding obligations not to raise such a claim in future;
- Obligation to refrain, in their inter-state relations, from undermining the security of each other, from threat or use of force both against political independence and territorial integrity, and acting in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the UN Charter;
- Delimitation and demarcation of the state border, and the establishment of diplomatic relations;
- Unblocking of transportation and other communications, building other communications as appropriate, and establishment of cooperation in other fields of mutual interest.

Although the abovementioned proposals were met with cold silence on the part of Armenia's leadership, later signals suggested that Armenia in fact accepted Azerbaijan's proposals.³ Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in his speech in the country's National Assembly on 13 April 2022, made several sensational statements regarding Armenia's handling of its former conflict with Azerbaijan, as well as future perspectives. More specifically, on the latter, Pashinyan noted that: "Today, the international community is again telling us to lower our bar a little bit on the status of Nagorno-

Moreover, Azerbaijan also introduced a five-point proposal in March 2022 that would serve as a foundation for such a future peace treaty.

1 AzerNews, *Azerbaijan sends five-point proposal to Armenia on normalization of relations*, March 12, 2022, available at <https://www.azernews.az/nation/190596.html> (accessed: June 14, 2022)

2 Mfa.gov.az, *Head of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Leyla Abdullayeva answers the media's question (No:117/22)*, March 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no11722> (accessed: May 18, 2022)

3 TRT World, *Aliyev: Armenia accepts Azerbaijan's proposal*, April 9, 2022, <https://www.trtworld.com/asia/aliyev-armenia-accepts-azerbaijan-s-proposal-56223> (accessed: May 18, 2022)

Karabakh,”⁴ apparently referring to the maximalist claims about the so-called ‘independence of Nagorno-Karabakh’ – a narrative that dominated in Armenia’s position over the entire course of the conflict. The message sent with this statement was a powerful one, as it testified to the growing understanding in Armenia about the necessity of normalizing relations with Azerbaijan.

However, when Armenia later initiated its own six-point proposals as a basis for the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan, it certainly caused a degree of confusion because of the persistent fluctuations in Armenia’s position. The first point of this document simply states that it is responding to Azerbaijan’s five-point proposal. Second point of the document underscores that Armenia has never had any territorial claims towards Azerbaijan and has recognized the latter’s territorial integrity by the agreement on the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) of 8 December 1991, when both states joined the organization. Moreover, fourth point says that Armenia believes that implementation of the existing agreements, specifically those of the 10 November 2020 agreement that ended the war, and the 11 January 2021 (Moscow) and 26 November 2021 (Sochi) agreements, is important.⁵

Fifth point expresses Armenia’s readiness to start negotiations on a peace treaty with Azerbaijan based on the UN Charter, International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, and Helsinki Final Act.⁶ While Armenia’s proposals thus far were regarded as ‘constructive’ by Azerbaijan, third and sixth points of the same document are deemed ‘unacceptable’ by the latter. Although third point three touches upon the questions of ‘security’, ‘rights’ and ‘status’ for the ethnic Armenian population living in Karabakh region (a.k.a. Azerbaijani citizens of Armenia origin) and Azerbaijan is ready to provide both – security and rights – to ethnic Armenians residing in Karabakh region,⁷ the parties

4 Arka News Agency, *Pashinyan: international community urges Armenia to lower the bar on Karabakh status*, April 13, 2022, available at: https://arka.am/en/news/politics/pashinyan_international_community_urges_armenia_to_lower_the_bar_on_karabakh_status/ (accessed: May 18, 2022)

5 Asbarez.com, *Yerevan Reveals Six-Point Proposal it Sent to Azerbaijan for Peace Talks*, May 18, 2022, available at: <https://asbarez.com/yerevan-reveals-six-point-proposal-it-sent-to-azerbaijan-for-peace-talks/> (accessed: May 18, 2022)

6 *Ibid.*

7 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev attended the international conference themed “South Caucasus: Development and Cooperation at ADA University*, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55909> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

have different interpretations as to the implications of ‘rights’ and ‘provision of security’ to ethnic Armenians living in this region. As also highlighted in third point of Armenia’s proposals, the latter insists on defining a ‘final status’ for Karabakh Armenians, whereas Azerbaijan has repeatedly declared that there will not be any discussion on legal status for Armenians residing in the Karabakh region. In addition, sixth point of Armenia’s proposals is also unacceptable for Azerbaijan, because it represents an attempt to revive the OSCE Minsk Group as a chief mediator, while Azerbaijan considers that the OSCE Minsk Group is already irrelevant.⁸

To make matters worse, Nikol Pashinyan, in an interview that he gave to Al-Jazeera on 14 June 2022, once again digressed from his previous statements on the issue. He specifically underscored that the conflict is still not resolved, stating that, “We hope that in the near future we will be able to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.” Once again, he faltered when it came to the issue of opening all communications, saying that “according to the trilateral statement, we have one corridor – the Lachin corridor, which links Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.”⁹

In a speech delivered at the country’s National Assembly, Nikol Pashinyan once again made an attempt to focus on the issue of ‘status’, stating that “any status that truly guarantees the security, rights and freedoms of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh must be considered a solution for us.”¹⁰ In a nutshell, he demonstrated that Armenia is still pushing the ‘status’ of Armenians living in Karabakh region, despite Azerbaijan repeatedly making clear its aversion to the idea. Following Pashinyan’s incendiary comments on the ‘status’ issue,

Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev, during his statement at the Baku Global Forum on 16 June 2022, noted: “If Armenia will demand status for Armenians in Karabakh, why shouldn’t Azerbaijanis demand status for Azerbaijanis in Western Zangezur? Because it was fully inhabited by Azerbaijanis.”

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Primeminister.am, *Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s interview to Al Jazeera*, June 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2022/06/14/Nikol-Pashinyan-interview-Al-Jazeera/> (accessed: June 19, 2022)

¹⁰ Primeminister.am, *Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s final speech at the National Assembly on the discussion of the annual report on the 2021 state budget execution of the Republic of Armenia*, June 15, 2022, available at: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2022/06/15/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech/> (accessed: June 18, 2022)

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, during his statement at the Baku Global Forum on 16 June 2022, noted: *"If Armenia will demand status for Armenians in Karabakh, why shouldn't Azerbaijanis demand status for Azerbaijanis in Western Zangezur? Because it was fully inhabited by Azerbaijanis. So, this way will lead to a deadlock"*.¹¹ Clearly, the post-conflict peace agenda requires rather delicate work and the avoidance of language that could negate the meagre progress achieved so far. The parties, especially Armenia, must do their best to this end and refrain from words and deeds that provoke a reaction from Azerbaijan.

On a more positive note, Azerbaijan and Türkiye initiated a new '3+3' format upon the end of the 44-day Karabakh War that would involve all-inclusive cooperation among the states in the South Caucasus plus Russia, Iran, and Türkiye. The first meeting of the 3+3 format took place in December 2021 in Moscow, although without the participation of Georgia which, due to its strained relation with Russia, has avoided joining the initiative. The format is still active, however, and the location of the next meeting was being discussed, with Türkiye proposed.¹² Georgia is still sceptical of joining the format, but the doors are said¹³ to be open for it to join at any stage. Although still in its nascent form, 3+3 aims to¹⁴ foster confidence-building measures, cooperation, peace, and economic development in the region. This includes Armenia–Azerbaijan and Armenia–Türkiye normalization; fighting against common threats; and, overall, keeping the handling of regional issues to the region's states themselves.

The Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization process is being accompanied by an Armenia–Türkiye normalization process, with the special representatives of the two countries having already met three times: in Moscow; on the margins of Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Türkiye (this

11 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev Attended the IX Global Baku Forum*, June 16, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/56442> (accessed: June 18, 2022)

12 Azerbaijani Vision, *Next "3+3" format meeting planned to be held in Turkey – Erdogan*, January 23, 2022, available at: <https://en.azvision.az/news/154152/next-3+3-format-meeting-planned-to-be-held-in-turkey-%E2%80%93-erdogan.html> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

13 APA News Agency, *Zakharova: "Door of 3+3 format is always open for Georgia"*, December 24, 2021, available at <https://apa.az/en/cis-countries/zakharova-door-of-33-format-is-always-open-for-georgia-364584> (accessed: June 15, 2022)

14 Turan News Agency, *First meeting of the 3+3 format to be held in Moscow on 10 December*, December 9, 2021, available at: https://turaz.az/ext/news/2021/12/free/politics_news/en/10288.htm/001 (accessed: May 30, 2022)

was the meeting between the two foreign ministers); and again in Vienna, in January, February, March, and May 2022, respectively.¹⁵ However, it was made clear by both Türkiye and Azerbaijan that the two processes will not be detached and progress on Armenia–Türkiye normalization will be contingent on the developments in regard to Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization.¹⁶

With Azerbaijan liberating its lands using politico-military means, it became clear that the OSCE Minsk Group, which had been mediating the conflict for nearly three decades to no avail, is effectively defunct.

The image of the traditional mediator in terms of Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization has recently been shifting, too. With Azerbaijan liberating its lands using politico-military means, it became clear that the OSCE Minsk Group, which had been mediating the conflict for nearly three decades to no avail, is effectively defunct. Since the 44-day Karabakh War, the Azerbaijani side has repeatedly emphasized that “the conflict is resolved”,¹⁷ which leaves the OSCE Minsk Group without its *raison d’être*. On a positive note, the Minsk Group could look for a new role for itself in post-conflict rehabilitation, facilitation of Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization, and other relevant issues relating to the post-conflict era.

The European Union steps up

Another interesting development in this regard is the increased activism by the European Union (EU) to facilitate the process of normalization between the parties. Historically, the EU has mostly remained on the back burner in matters relating to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus, having left the initiative mostly to Russia to mediate between the parties in the most critical period of the [former] conflict. Although the former mediator of that conflict was the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair institute that comprised France and the United States alongside the Russian Federation, the tacit acknowledgement of the latter’s leading

15 Anadoly Agency, *Turkish, Armenian special representatives to hold 3rd meeting on May 3*, April 28, 2022, available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-armenian-special-representatives-to-hold-3rd-meeting-on-may-3/2575715> (accessed: June 19, 2022)

16 Daily Sabah, *Azerbaijan fully supports normalization of Turkey-Armenia ties: FM*, March 6, 2022, available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/azerbaijan-fully-supports-normalization-of-turkey-armenia-ties-fm> (accessed: June 17, 2022)

17 AzerTac, *President Ilham Aliyev: Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was resolved by military-political means*, December 4, 2020, available at https://azertag.az/en/xeber/President_Ilham_Aliyev_Armenia_Azerbaijan_Nagorno_Karabakh_conflict_was_resolved_by_military_political_means-1658185 (accessed: June 17, 2022)

role in regional affairs in the South Caucasus has always been present. This became apparent when Russia once again took the lead to mediate the signing of the 10 November 2020 Statement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

However, a new trend is emerging with EU attempting to raise its profile in the normalization of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations. After the meeting between Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders held in Sochi on 26 November 2021, the EU has demonstrated increased interest in the facilitation of normalization between the two countries, although the decisions taken by the EU mediation team mostly build on existing agreements, including those agreed in November 2020, on 11 January 2021, and in November 2021 in Sochi. In this connection, the meeting that took place in Brussels on 14 December 2021 delivered important outcomes, including those relating to the opening of economic communications, delimitation and demarcation of the state border, demining, and humanitarian issues.¹⁸

The meeting on 6 April 2022 in Brussels further emphasized the importance of the above issues, but this time taking matters one step forward. It was agreed to convene a Joint Border Commission by the end of April 2022. This will be in charge of the delimitation of the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, progress was also made in the facilitation of signing a peace treaty between the two countries. In this regard, the final Statement of European Council President Charles Michel following the 6 April Brussels meeting reflects the agreement to instruct the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both countries to work on the preparation of a future peace treaty.¹⁹ Later, on 11 April 2022, the first ever official direct telephone contact happened between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia. The two ministers had an opportunity to discuss matters

18 European Council, “Statement of President Charles Michel following the trilateral meeting with President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan”, December 15, 2021, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/12/14/statement-of-president-charles-michel-following-the-trilateral-meeting-with-president-ilham-aliyev-and-prime-minister-nikol-pashinyan/> (accessed: May 20, 2022)

19 European Council, “Statement of European Council President Charles Michel following the Second Trilateral Meeting with President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan”, April 6, 2022, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/04/06/statement-of-european-council-president-charles-michel-following-the-second-trilateral-meeting-with-president-ilham-aliyev-and-prime-minister-nikol-pashinyan/> (accessed: May 20, 2022)

related to the preparation of a future peace treaty, the convening of the Joint Border Commission, and humanitarian issues.²⁰ Another landmark achievement in this regard was Azerbaijan clarifying the locations of two checkpoints on the border with Armenia adjoining Qubadli district (Eyvazli village) and Zangilan district (Qazanchi village).²¹

The most recent round of talks in Brussels with EU mediation took place on 22 May 2022 and also delivered important outcomes related to the post-conflict agenda between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Namely, the parties agreed to further work towards progress on border issues, connectivity, and signing the peace agreement. Moreover, the EU also pledged to “take forward with both parties the work of the Economic Advisory Group, which seeks to advance economic development for the benefit of both countries and their populations.”²²

However, Azerbaijan is unhappy with the changing narrative and mood of Armenia’s leadership when it comes to the implementation of the agreements reached so far, in particular the 10 November 2020 and 11 January 2021 Moscow agreements. Official Baku considers this as an attempt to sabotage the post-conflict peace agenda and kick the can down the road. Recurring opposition protests in Armenia against making peace with Azerbaijan certainly add more difficulty to the advancement of peace agenda, thus making the reactions of the Government of Armenia unpredictable. For instance, despite the agreements reached in April 2022 in Brussels under the EU’s mediation about the commencement of the Joint Border Commission by the end of April, the Azerbaijani side

However, Azerbaijan is unhappy with the changing narrative and mood of Armenia’s leadership when it comes to the implementation of the agreements reached so far, in particular the 10 November 2020 and 11 January 2021 Moscow agreements.

20 Mfa.gov.az, *Information of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on telephone conversation of Minister Jeyhun Bayramov with Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan*, Press Release, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no17422> (accessed: May 20, 2022)

21 Nk.gov.az, *On amendments to the “Number of checkpoints and the list of territories and their location” approved by the Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, No. 256, dated September 10, 2021, May 5, 2022, available at: <https://nk.gov.az/az/document/6111/> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

22 European Council, “Press statement by President Michel of the European Council following a trilateral meeting with President Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia”, May 23, 2022, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/05/23/press-statement-by-president-michel-of-the-european-council-following-a-trilateral-meeting-with-president-aliyev-of-azerbaijan-and-prime-minister-pashinyan-of-armenia/> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

reported that Armenia refused to join the meetings on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border that were planned for the end of April and mid-May. Azerbaijan even reported completing the composition of its delegation to participate in the discussions.²³

Hopes still exist that, after the next, third round of talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan with EU mediation, things may develop at a quicker pace in terms of both the border delimitation and demarcation process and the signing of a peace treaty. The recent decrees of both President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the establishment of the relevant commissions on the delimitation of the state border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia²⁴ on 23 May 2022, the day after the third round of talks in Brussels, could be a harbinger of things finally moving in the right direction. On 24 May 2022, the first meeting of the Border Commission took place with the participation of the Deputy Prime Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Shahin Mustafayev and Mher Grigoryan respectively, along the Armenia–Azerbaijan inter-state border.²⁵

The little progress that is made on the political track is, however, often challenged by the persistent revanchist forces in Armenia, who seek to challenge the existing post-44-day Karabakh War reality by regularly taking their dissatisfaction to the streets. Armenia is reported to have conducted mass arrests during one recent protest, which demanded Prime Minister Pashinyan’s resignation over the latter’s position in favour of signing a peace treaty with Azerbaijan.²⁶

23 “The first meeting on the border was proposed by the Armenian Foreign Ministry. Azerbaijan accepted the offer and we were ready to send a delegation. However, on the last day - April 29, Armenia canceled the already agreed meeting”, Official Twitter Account of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, May 19, 2022, available at: <https://twitter.com/azpresident/status/1527298424294428674> (accessed: May 20, 2022)

24 Azertag.az, *State Commission on delimitation of state border between Azerbaijan and Armenia established*, May 23, 2022, available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/State_Commission_on_delimitation_of_state_border_between_Azerbaijan_and_Armenia_established__ORDER-2147375 (accessed: May 30, 2022); News.az, *Armenian PM signs decree regarding establishment of commission on delimitation with Azerbaijan*, May 23, 2022, available at: <https://news.az/news/pashinyan-signs-decree-regarding-establishment-of-commission-on-delimitation-with-azerbaijan> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

25 APA News Agency, *First meeting of Commission on Azerbaijan-Armenia delimitation held at the border*, May 24, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/first-meeting-of-commission-on-azerbaijan-armenia-delimitation-held-at-the-border-376868> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

26 Al-Jazeera, *Armenia detains 180 protesters demanding PM’s resignation*, May 2, 2022,

Russia remains an influential mediator

The geopolitical aspects of the EU's new-found activism in the Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization process should not be overlooked. As noted above, traditionally the South Caucasus region has been regarded as Russia's 'near abroad' by both the Russian Federation and external players, which mostly explains the latter's heretofore somewhat detached approach to the security problems in region. The same goes for the decades-long animosity between Armenia and Azerbaijan whereby, despite the existence of the OSCE Minsk Group to mediate the negotiations on the resolution of [former] Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, Russia became almost the chief mediator between the two warring parties. Both the ceasefire that ended the war in 1994 and the trilateral statement that terminated all hostilities in November 2020 were negotiated by Russia, and attempts to compartmentalize the post-conflict peace agenda are also present.

The first follow-up meeting between Armenia and Azerbaijan happened on 11 January 2021 in Moscow, where important agreements on border issues and the opening of communications were reached through the second trilateral statement. Later, a meeting took place in Sochi on 26 November 2021, which also tasked the parties through a third trilateral statement with furthering the post-conflict agenda in terms of the implementation of existing agreements, the establishment of a border delimitation and demarcation commission, etc.

With the EU actively taking over Russia's leading role and three rounds of meetings already having taken place in Brussels, it is understandable that a certain degree of jealousy may be present in Russia's perception of the increased EU role in the post-conflict agenda. In the final statement of the meeting that took place between Nikol Pashinyan and President of Russia Vladimir Putin on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states, on 19 April 2022, it was stated that *"The parties agreed to expedite the creation of a bilateral commission on delimitation and*

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*security issues around the Armenian–Azerbaijani border in accordance with existing tripartite agreements dated November 26, 2021, with the Russian Federation providing advisory assistance at the parties’ request.”*²⁷ The last part of this sentence indicates that there is a degree of commotion in Russia’s perception regarding the EU’s rising profile in the post-conflict agenda.

For example, Russia’s Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, complained that Russia had been excluded from the Minsk Group, which is co-chaired by the United States, France, and Russia. A spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, also lambasted the EU for what she described as “the shameless attempts of Brussels to appropriate” the previous agreements that were reached between the parties with Russia’s facilitation.²⁸ Nonetheless, it seems that, despite apparent discontent with the EU’s increasing role in the facilitation of the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with Russia’s own priorities being mostly focused in Ukraine at the moment, the EU will likely preserve its lead in the post-conflict agenda in the South Caucasus.

Full demilitarization, demining and reconstruction efforts

Full implementation of the 10 November 2020 Statement is absolutely necessary for the elimination of any chances of future war in the region. Unfortunately, both Azerbaijan and Armenia know the horrors of war in reality, not by hearsay. If there is one thing that everyone, including Armenia, has to learn from the 44-day Karabakh War, it is that forceful occupation of the internationally recognized territories of sovereign states, attempts to violate the inviolability of state borders, policies aimed at ethnic cleansing, and other unlawful policies do not stand a chance of survival.

However, it was very unfortunate that Azerbaijan had to enforce through military means the observance of international norms and principles, as well as the relevant UN Security Council resolutions reaffirming

²⁷ Caucasus Watch, *Pashinyan met with Putin in Moscow*, April 20, 2022, available at: <https://caucasuswatch.de/news/5239.html> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

²⁸ Isayev, H. et al, “EU emerges as major player in Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations”, *Eurasianet*, May 25, 2022, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/eu-emerges-as-major-player-in-armenia-azerbaijan-negotiations> (accessed: June 19, 2022)

Azerbaijan's territorial integrity (822, 853, 874, 884). It is therefore very important that the existing agreements that ended the war between the two nations are fully observed, including the Article 4 of the 10 November 2020 Statement, which calls for the complete withdrawal of all remaining armed forces of Armenia from the liberated Azerbaijani territories. The statement specifies in this regard: "*The peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation shall be deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces*".²⁹ Lamentably, setbacks still remain vis-à-vis this clause of the trilateral November Statement, and the onus in this regard lies with Armenia proper and the peacekeepers of Russia, who must ensure that no armed Armenian forces remain in Azerbaijan's territory.

There is still an issue relating to the danger posed by landmines in Azerbaijan. It is reported that the liberated areas of Azerbaijan's territories are among the most contaminated in the world. In liberated Aghdam alone, which was described by many as the 'Hiroshima of the Caucasus' due to the massive destruction of the district by Armenia during the years of occupation, 97,000 landmines³⁰ were reported to have been found. The problem with mine contamination in Azerbaijan's liberated territories is not only confined to its magnitude.

After persistent appeals by Azerbaijan, with the mediation of international actors such as the OSCE, the USA, the Russian Federation, the EU, and Georgia, Armenia, in exchange for Azerbaijan returning Armenian detainees, finally released the minefield maps to Azerbaijan, despite previously denying their existence. Nonetheless, much to chagrin of Azerbaijani side, the accuracy of those minefield maps was found to be only 25%.³¹ This still certainly does not include the massive mining process conducted

In liberated Aghdam alone, which was described by many as the 'Hiroshima of the Caucasus' due to the massive destruction of the district by Armenia during the years of occupation, 97,000 landmines were reported to have been found.

29 President.az, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation*, November 10, 2020, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923> (accessed: June 17, 2022)

30 Trend News Agency, *Aside from Aghdam, there are hundreds of thousands of mines in other districts - Azerbaijani president*, June 23, 2021, available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3444459.html> (accessed: June 14, 2022)

31 Karimli, I. "President Aliyev Blames Armenia for Providing Inaccurate Minefield Maps", *Caspian News*, August 16, 2021, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/president-aliyev-blames-armenia-for-providing-inaccurate-minefield-maps-2021-8-16-0/>, (accessed: May 30, 2022)

by some retreating units of the armed forces of Armenia, who have confessed to embarking on such activity near the Lachin and Kalbajar districts.³² Obviously, one cannot hope to have properly charted minefield maps in such instances of random and purposeful landmine contamination done in haste and for inflicting maximum damage.

The Azerbaijani National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) has projected that, despite the intensity of the work done by Azerbaijan, the clearance of some areas may take up to a decade.³³ Demining work is very time and resource consuming, and Azerbaijan is bent on clearing the liberated areas as soon as possible. Assistance from the international community in this regard is welcome and highly necessary. Although some countries have extended a helping hand, for example, the UK contributing over AZN 1 million (£500,000) to Azerbaijan's recovery efforts and demining activities;³⁴ France also announcing a donation

Reports suggest that, since the end of hostilities in the fall of 2020, over 200 military personnel and civilians have been killed or maimed as a result of mine explosions.

of 400,000 euros³⁵ to mine clearance; and the United States Marshall Legacy institute donating dozens of mine detection dogs to Azerbaijan,³⁶ the burden of the landmine contamination problem unfortunately lies entirely on Azerbaijan.

Reports suggest that, since the end of hostilities in the fall of 2020, over 200 military personnel and civilians have been killed or maimed as a result of mine explosions. Although specialists from Türkiye are assisting Azerbaijan in the physical clearance process, more assistance from the international community

32 Turan News Agency, *Danger! Mines!*, June 10, 2021, available at: <https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2021/6/free/Interview/en/4890.htm> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

33 Mammadli, N. "Azerbaijan Neutralizes Over 15,000 Armenian Landmines in Liberated Lands", *Caspian News*, January 7, 2022, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-neutralizes-over-15000-armenian-landmines-in-liberated-lands-2022-1-6-0/> (accessed: June 17, 2022)

34 AzerNews, *Envoy: UK supports Azerbaijan in demining Karabakh*, March 4, 2022, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/190149.html#:~:text=The%20UK%20contributed%20over%20AZN,the%20UK%20embassy%20reported%20earlier> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

35 Karimli, I. "France Plans To Donate €400K to Azerbaijan's Mine Action in Karabakh Region", *Caspian News*, September 10, 2021, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/france-plans-to-donate-400k-to-azerbajians-mine-action-in-karabakh-region-2021-9-9-0/> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

36 AzerNews, *U.S. to donate 30 more mine detection dogs to Azerbaijan*, November 22, 2022, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/185939.html> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

and relevant international organizations is certainly needed.³⁷ The EU is also preparing an assistance package amounting to €2.5 million euros to Azerbaijan for demining purposes, which should be allocated through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).³⁸ Armenia, for its part, could finally demonstrate its readiness for peace by providing more accurate minefield maps.

Azerbaijan's efforts towards reconstruction in the liberated territories should be supported. About US\$1.3 billion were allocated from state budget of Azerbaijan for rebuilding the devastated infrastructure of the liberated territories.³⁹ Recently, this number was increased up to US \$1.6 billion (2.7. billion manats) for the year 2022.⁴⁰ The reconstruction works are in full swing, with some massive infrastructure already in operation, such as Fuzuli International Airport. The airports in Zangilan and Lachin districts are set for construction and all new settlements in the liberated territories will be built under the smart city/village concept. The first such pilot project has already been completed in Aghali village of Zangilan district.

Additionally, the liberated territories have been declared a green energy zone, the renewable energy potential of which is estimated to be about 9,200 megawatts of combined solar and wind energy.⁴¹ Apart from restoration of hydropower stations in the liberated territories, the government is also working towards investing in the region's solar and wind energy potential. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with BP in 2021 on building a 240-megawatt solar power plant in the Zangilan and Jabrayil districts is a clear example. Moreover, Azerbaijan is also building the Khudafarin and *Qiz Qalasi* (translated

37 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev attended the international conference themed "South Caucasus..."*, *op.cit.*

38 Trend New Agency, *EU preparing new assistance package to Azerbaijan for de-mining on liberated lands – ambassador*, May 4, 2022, available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3591069.html> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

39 AzerNews, *Azerbaijan discloses planned state budget allocations for social spending for 2022*, November 23, 2022, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/186008.html> (accessed May 30, 2022)

40 Hajiyeva, G. "Azerbaijan Allocates More Funds Towards Restoring War Torn Liberated Lands", *Caspian News*, June 20, 2022, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-allocates-more-funds-towards-restoring-war-torn-liberated-lands-2022-6-20-46/> (accessed: June 25, 2022)

41 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev attended 8th Ministerial Meeting of SGC Advisory Council*, February 4, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55362> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

as ‘Maiden Tower’) hydropower plants with a total capacity of 280 megawatts in cooperation with Iran. Work towards the integration of the energy system and electricity lines in the liberated territories with the rest of the country is also under way. On 4 June 2022, Azerbaijan’s Energy Ministry and the United Arab Emirates’ Masdar Company signed an implementation agreement in the liberated city of Shusha on the evaluation, development, and implementation of 4,000 megawatts of solar, wind, and green hydrogen projects, which will be the largest renewable energy production capacity in the region and in Azerbaijan’s history. Some of these projects will be implemented in the liberated areas, which will contribute to the development of the region under the ‘green energy zone’ concept with zero emissions.⁴²

In a negative development, it appears that some commercial organizations of foreign countries have had a role in the destruction and contamination of the natural environment in the formerly-occupied territories. One horrific example in this regard is the pollution of the transboundary Okchuchay river by Armenia with effluent containing heavy metals generated by Armenian factories over the past decade.⁴³ The Zangezur Copper Molybdenum Combine (ZCMC), which is one of two Armenian mining factories involved in this pollution, was managed by Germany’s CRONIMET Mining AG until 2019, which makes it liable for the ecological terror inflicted on Azerbaijan’s natural habitat. This is one lamentable, but certainly not the only example, of how Azerbaijan’s natural resources and ecosystem were continually abused and exploited, not only by Armenia, but also by some international organizations, during the years of occupation.⁴⁴

Similar stories could also be told about the illegal exploitation by Armenia of the Vejnali gold and other precious metal fields in the

42 [Minenergy.gov.az](https://minenergy.gov.az), *Ministry of Energy and Masdar signed the Implementation Agreements on 4 GW onshore and offshore wind and solar power projects*, June 4, 2022, available at: <https://minenergy.gov.az/en/xeberler-arxivi/energetika-nazirliyi-ve-masdar-quruda-ve-denizde-umumi-gucu-4-qvt-olan-kulek-ve-gunes-enerjisi-layiheleri-uzre-icra-muqavileleri-imzalayib> (accessed: June 17, 2022)

43 Veliyev, C. “Armenia’s ecological invasion of Azerbaijan’s Okchuchay”, *Daily Sabah*, July 29, 2022, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/armenias-ecological-invasion-of-azerbajjans-okchuchay> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

44 [Mfa.gov.az](https://mfa.gov.az), *Illegal Economic and Other Activities in The Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan*, Report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016, available at: https://mfa.gov.az/files/shares/MFA%20Report%20on%20the%20occupied%20territories_March%202016.pdf (accessed: May 30, 2022)

liberated Zangilan district during the years of occupation. Unfortunately, this case was also not without the participation of foreign citizens, including those of Armenian origin. Azerbaijan has vowed to hold all perpetrators, including foreign citizens and companies, accountable in international courts for their illegal deeds.⁴⁵

However, full-scale reconstruction of vast territories is not an easy task, and Azerbaijan is relying on its national resources to achieve this without, unfortunately, much assistance from the international community. Rebuilding territories that were strenuously exploited and looted over decades requires a king's ransom in resources, which are certainly not confined to material ones alone. There is a lot the international community can do to support Azerbaijan's work towards reconstruction.

Connectivity issues

The implementation of all provisions of the 10 November 2020 statement, in particular that concerning the opening of all communications, is also a matter of concern. Article 9 of the statement clearly states that:

All economic and transport links in the region shall be restored. The Republic of Armenia guarantees the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in order to organize an *unimpeded* movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions. Control over transport shall be exercised by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the Federal security Service (FSB) of Russia.⁴⁶

“Zangezur” is the historic Azerbaijani name for the territories through which this corridor is proposed to pass. These territories used to belong to Azerbaijan, but were, however, ceded to Armenia by Soviet Russia in the early 20th century.

This new connectivity line, quickly dubbed the ‘Zangezur Corridor’, aims to facilitate ‘unimpeded’ movement in both directions and finally end Armenia’s decades-long isolation from all regional infrastructure and connectivity projects.

45 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev received in video format Vahid Hajiyeu on his appointment as Special Representative of President in Zangilan district*, May 4, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55936> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

46 President.az, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation*, November 10, 2020, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

“Zangezur” is the historic Azerbaijani name for the territories through which this corridor is proposed to pass. These territories used to belong to Azerbaijan, but were, however, ceded to Armenia by Soviet Russia in the early 20th century.⁴⁷ Reconstruction of roads and other infrastructure in the liberated territories is in full swing and, among other projects, are the Horadiz–Aghband highway and railway, which constitute the Azerbaijani portion of the Zangezur Corridor. Some 60 out of 100 km of the railway are reported to have been completed by Azerbaijan,⁴⁸ with the remaining 40 km set to be finished in early 2023.⁴⁹

However, Armenia’s position in this regard is still unfortunately inconsistent. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has sent often contradictory signals as to whether the opening of all communications between Armenia and Azerbaijan is what Armenia wants, although Article 9 of the 10 November 2020 statement clearly defined the parties’ obligations to provide unobstructed movement upon the opening of all communications in the region. Article 9 specifies that:

All economic and transport links in the region shall be restored. The Republic of Armenia guarantees the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic in order to organize an unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions. Control over transport shall be exercised by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia.⁵⁰

In attempting to complete its own portion of the work, Azerbaijan has also complained on numerous occasions that Armenia’s tiptoeing around the issue and attempts to procrastinate create unnecessary complications. Delays on the part of Armenia in providing the geographical coordinates for the highway through the Meghri region as well as in starting the feasibility study for the construction of the railroad are all putting a wrench in the works.⁵¹

47 Niftaliyev, I. “How Azerbaijan Lost Zangezur”, *Irs.az*, available at: https://irs-az.com/sites/default/files/2021-11/Heritage_50_2021%20%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80.%2030%20-%2035.pdf (accessed: June 15, 2022)

48 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev attended the international conference themed “South Caucasus...”*, *op.cit.*

49 Ibid.

50 President.az, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation*, November 10, 2020, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

51 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev attended the international conference themed “South*

For one thing, Armenia seems to be unhappy with the use of the word ‘corridor’ which, according to their perception, grants some sort of extraterritoriality to a portion of the territory of Armenia. Azerbaijan, in contrast, believes that the word ‘corridor’ could be used interchangeably with terms such as ‘passage’, ‘route’, etc., and does not carry a specific meaning other than simply indicating the freedom of passage along the indicated route. It is also noteworthy that Armenia’s position seems to soften after each meeting mediated by the EU. For instance, if, before and between the EU-mediated meetings of the parties in Brussels, Armenia was sending very controversial messages as to the possibility of the Zangezur Corridor, in the aftermath of the agreements reached during the meetings Nikol Pashinyan announced that both a railway and highway connecting Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the wider neighbourhood may be possible.⁵² Similar positive trends were noticeable following each meeting of the parties in Brussels and, after long beating around the bush, Armenia finally agreed to holding the first meeting of the border commission along the inter-state border.

However, Azerbaijan has also made it clear that, if Armenia continues to hold the issue of the Zangezur Corridor hostage, Azerbaijan may also pursue alternatives. The signing of a memorandum of understanding with Iran about new communication links that envisages the establishment of new transport and electricity supply routes connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan via Iran and mirroring the Zangezur Corridor is a case in point.⁵³ Azerbaijan signalled that, if Armenia refuses to implement its obligations regarding Article 9 of the 10 November 2020 statement on the opening of all communications, things may well be promoted without its participation.

Humanitarian dimension

Last, but not least, the humanitarian issues must be considered. After the 44-day Karabakh War, one of the claims made by Armenia related

Caucasus... ”, op.cit.

52 ARKA News Agency, *Pashinyan: Armenia ready to reopen railway and motor roads with Azerbaijan*, March 31, 2022, available at: https://arka.am/en/news/politics/pashinyan_armenia_ready_to_reopen_railway_and_motor_roads_with_azerbaijan/ (accessed: June 15, 2022)

53 Jalilov, O. “Azerbaijan to Establish New Communication Links with Iran”, *Caspian News*, March 14, 2022, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-to-establish-new-communication-links-with-iran-2022-3-13-0/> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

to so-called Armenian ‘prisoners of war’ (PoW) that Azerbaijan is supposedly still holding. Azerbaijan, on the contrary, says that it has already returned all Armenian PoWs, and any detainees that might still be held in Azerbaijan are those who came to Azerbaijan from Armenia proper after the signing of the 10 November 2020 Statement to conduct sabotage activities and who therefore do not qualify as PoWs. So far, Azerbaijan has returned all PoWs, dozens of detainees in exchange for landmine maps, and more than 1,700 bodies of Armenian servicemen.⁵⁴

However, the situation concerning about 4,000 missing persons from Azerbaijan who disappeared during the First Karabakh War is still unknown. The fate of missing Azerbaijanis from the First Karabakh War

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was acknowledged by the EU in a statement issued by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, on 6 April 2022, in which he underscored “the need for the full and speedy resolution of all outstanding humanitarian issues, including the release of remaining detainees and comprehensively addressing the issue of missing persons.”⁵⁵ Although,

following the online summit between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan that took place on 4 February 2022 with the participation of President of the European Council Charles Michel, President of France Emmanuel Macron, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, the Armenian side announced that it had returned 147 sets of human remains to Azerbaijan,⁵⁶ it remains unclear why it took Armenia so long to return those bodies to their families. Thus, the issue of Azerbaijani missing persons is not completely resolved.

54 Azertag.az, *Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry comments on Armenian PM’s statement on return of remains of missing persons*, February 11, 2022, available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijans_Foreign_Ministry_comments_on_Armenian_PMs_statement_on_return_of_remains_of_missing_persons-2009297 (accessed: May 30, 2022)

55 European Council, “Statement of European Council President Charles Michel following the Second Trilateral Meeting with President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan”, April 6, 2022, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/04/06/statement-of-european-council-president-charles-michel-following-the-second-trilateral-meeting-with-president-ilham-aliyev-and-prime-minister-nikol-pashinyan/> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

56 AzerNews, *Official: Armenia returns 147 human remains to Azerbaijan*, February 22, 2022, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/189606.html> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

One of the most important humanitarian issues on the agenda relates to the reintegration of the Armenian population of Azerbaijan's Karabakh region into the country's socio-economic life. Azerbaijan has made it repeatedly clear that it considers the Armenian population of Karabakh region as its citizens and is ready to undertake the necessary measures to ensure their seamless integration into Azerbaijani society.⁵⁷ However, it is clear that there are both administrative-managerial and psychological challenges to the reintegration of Armenians living in the Karabakh region. Administrative-managerial issues are mostly a matter of time and, with the adoption of best policies, could be successfully completed; however, psychological issues, apart from being time-bound, also are much harder to overcome and require genuine human-level healing and national reconciliation.

Moreover, there are also security concerns; radical and criminal elements still remain in Azerbaijan's territories in defiance of Article 4 of the 10 November 2020 Statement. These should be removed, illegal armed groups must be demilitarized, and those who commit crimes against the civilian Azerbaijani population should be excluded from the reintegration process. This will create the necessary conditions for the rapid and effective reintegration of the Armenian residents of the Karabakh region into Azerbaijan as an ethnic minority group. Additionally, the reintegration of Armenian residents in the Karabakh region should be carried out in parallel with the repatriation of former Azerbaijani residents who fled their homes in the early 1990s. The government also has plans regarding the speedy return of Azerbaijani IDPs to the liberated territories, and relevant surveys indicating the percentages of potential returnees are conducted. As a result, as early as May 2022, the 'smart village' project built in Aghali village of Zangilan district received its first residents.⁵⁸

57 APA News Agency, *President of Azerbaijan: "We accept Armenians living in Karabakh, as our citizens"*, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/III-sector/president-of-azerbaijan-we-accept-armenians-living-in-karabakh-as-our-citizens-374820> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

58 APA News Agency, *Azerbaijani President and First Lady attended the opening ceremony on first stage of "Smart Village" project in Zangilan*, May 27, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/official-news/azerbaijani-president-and-first-lady-attended-the-opening-ceremony-on-first-stage-of-smart-village-project-in-zangilan-377134> (accessed: May 30, 2022)

Conclusion

Among the lessons learned from the 44-day Karabakh War, the most prominent is certainly the one that nullifies the perception that the forceful occupation of a sovereign state's lands may last forever. Azerbaijan's territorial integrity was recognized internationally in numerous international documents, including the four resolutions of the UN Security Council (822, 853, 874, 884). However, in blatant violation of all international norms and documents, Armenia, for nearly three decades, refused to de-occupy Azerbaijan's territories. Azerbaijan had to enforce those resolutions by itself, using its own national resources in addition to existing international instruments.

In the context of the new reality, there are number of important areas that demand a good deal of further work, resource mobilization on the part of Azerbaijan, as well as bona-fide cooperation on the part of Armenia. Issues in the political track, i.e., those relating to the Armenia–Azerbaijan normalization process; the signing of a peace treaty; demilitarization and demining; reconstruction of the liberated territories; connectivity; and humanitarian issues are currently the most pressing ones that require cooperation, dedication, and continuity. This piece has attempted to highlight relevant work on those clusters.

Azerbaijan is fully embarked on reconstruction work, demining, and is pressing for the opening of all communications and for signing a peace treaty with Armenia. Armenia's position, although often contradictory and lukewarm in the immediate aftermath of the 44-day Karabakh War, is slowly approaching the point at which common ground with Azerbaijan could finally be reached. This process in Armenia is, nevertheless, not free of hurdles, as manifested in the recurring rallies organized by revanchist groups against Pashinyan's attempts to make peace with Azerbaijan. This, however, should not throw a spanner in the works of the post-conflict agenda, as putting behind the demons of the past is the only way to realize the future.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization Before and After the Ukraine War: Some Implications for the South Caucasus

Richard Weitz*

Until recently, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was a marginal actor in responding to major security crises in the former Soviet space. Despite receiving multiple requests for support from member governments, the CSTO did not use these opportunities to send military forces under its auspices, reflecting Russia's preference to employ other means for managing these crises. The members resisted proposals to undertake major roles during the conflicts and crises in Afghanistan, Syria, and Kyrgyzstan. They also declined to intervene in the fighting between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Furthermore, the article particularly highlights that the CSTO members rejected repeated Armenian demands for the organization's support in its conflicts with non-CSTO member Azerbaijan. The CSTO did break with precedent when it sent peacekeeping forces to Kazakhstan in January 2022 to assist the government to suppress violent domestic disturbances, but this intervention, supported by all the member governments, occurred due to a unique set of circumstance that may not soon recur. This paper also argues that despite the speculation abounds about a possible CSTO role in the Ukraine War, thus far, the organization has remained disengaged from the conflict, which Russia is waging on its own without foreign military assistance.

Keywords: CSTO, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine



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Introduction

The South Caucasus lacks a holistic regional security architecture. Despite concerns about Moscow's influence in the region, NATO and the EU have also curtailed their partnership programmes in the region. Only Armenia belongs to the CSTO, while Azerbaijan and Georgia have distanced themselves from such Moscow-dominated structures, which also include the Eurasian Economic Union. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has only recently engaged in the region. For the next few years, the international politics of the South Caucasus will remain dominated by bilateral and trilateral initiatives involving one or two of the South Caucasus republics with another country. For example, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have attained considerable economic and security cooperation, especially in the energy and transportation sectors, thereby enhancing their collective autonomy, prosperity, and security.¹ Even so, Russia's regional military pre-eminence ensures that Moscow can constrain the influence of these alignments and other

Even so, Russia's regional military pre-eminence ensures that Moscow can constrain the influence of these alignments and other multilateral structures while manipulating many potential instruments to advance its interests in the region.

multilateral structures while manipulating many potential instruments to advance its interests in the region. Though the CSTO is an available tool, Russia typically prefers to employ the unilateral means that have been unfortunately highly visible in the Kremlin's recent efforts to suppress Ukraine.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the history and structure of the CSTO. The Organization has developed substantially during

the past two decades, but remains dominated by Russia, which is the most militarily capable member and provides the greatest defence contribution. Rather than resolve tensions between CSTO members, Moscow has seemed to prefer to exploit them to advance its own interests. Partly for this reason, the second section notes how the CSTO has repeatedly eschewed direct involvement in conflicts within and between its members. Of note, despite Armenia's close ties with Russia and strong commitment to the CSTO, the other members have declined to support Armenia's territorial claims regarding Azerbaijan's territory. The next section discusses how the CSTO broke with precedent in January 2022 and deployed military forces in Kazakhstan to help

1 Weitz, R. "Trilateral Cooperation between Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia: A View from America", *Baku Dialogues*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring 2021), 124–136.

suppress domestic violence, but adds that it is unclear if the CSTO will send military forces to support other member governments facing internal unrest. The final section reviews discussions about the CSTO playing some role in Ukraine, perhaps in enforcing a peace settlement in the Donbas, but emphasizes how the member governments have not backed such proposals.

Background

In October 2002, several former Soviet republics signed a Charter creating the Collective Security Treaty Organization.² The Organization's purpose was to build on the mutual defence pledges contained in the Collective Security Treaty, signed in Tashkent in May 1992, to foster more institutionalized military cooperation.³ The CSTO's full members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. Uzbekistan was a member for a few years, from 1994–1999 and 2006–2012, but was not very active even then.

The CSTO has developed several permanent decision-making and advisory bodies. The Collective Security Council, comprising the heads of member states, is the highest decision-making body. The Permanent Council, supported by the organization's secretariat, coordinates CSTO activities between sessions of the Collective Security Council. It is led by the CSTO Secretary General who, during a three-year term, is the organization's highest administrative official. The major inter-ministerial bodies are the Council of Ministers of Defence, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils. The CSTO joint staff, located in Moscow, supports the main CSTO Collective Forces, which includes the Russia-Armenia and Russia-Belarus groups of forces, whose area of responsibility are, respectively, the Caucasus and East European regions. The Collective Rapid Deployment Force in the Central Asian region, comprising some 5,000 troops, has lead responsibility for the southern area.⁴

2 Kremlin.ru, *Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, October 6, 2002, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3506> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

3 Odkb-csto.org, *Collective Security Treaty*, May 15, 1992, available at: https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/ (accessed: June 10, 2022).

4 Odkb-csto.org, *From the Treaty to the Organization*, Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2022, available at: <https://en.odkb-csto.org/25years/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

In practice, the CSTO remained essentially a paper shell in its first decade. Its original military purpose was to counter external aggression against its members by mobilizing national forces under joint command, but no such WWII-style collective defence scenario arose. Instead, internal instability, transnational threats, and other lower-level challenges have represented the main issues for members' security. The CSTO spent its second decade strengthening its capacity to respond to such lower-level transnational threats by enhancing its training, doctrine, and exercises for peacekeeping, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, emergency response, and countering narcotics trafficking.⁵ In particular, in 2009, the Organization formed its Collective Rapid Reaction Force, consisting mostly of elite units kept on a higher state of readiness than most other units.⁶ Further, the CSTO established a Crisis Response Center to share data regarding urgent threats.⁷ It also launched 'Operation Proxy', in which the intelligence organizations of the CSTO states cooperated against non-state cyber threats, and 'Operation Nelegal' to counter illegal migration.

The CSTO has developed formal ties with the United Nations (UN), but NATO has rejected offers of cooperation. The United States and other NATO members have been concerned that such collaboration would help legitimize Moscow's predominant role in the former Soviet space. The Russian Federation has always been the most important and influential CSTO member. The Russian military provides the most combat forces to the CSTO units and exercises. Additionally, leading CSTO command structures are either based in Moscow or led by Russian citizens. Furthermore, only Russia possesses the foreign military bases within the territories of some of its CSTO allies and the robust power projection capabilities required to render immediate military assistance to other member states. To make the CSTO attractive to partners, Russia has provided personnel from other members with

The Russian Federation has always been the most important and influential CSTO member. The Russian military provides the most combat forces to the CSTO units and exercises.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Odkb-csto.org, *The Collective Rapid Reaction Force, the CSTO RRF, turns 10 years old*, February 4, 2019, available at: https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/reagirovanie2019/#loaded (accessed: June 10, 2022).

⁷ Rferl.org, *CSTO Leaders Agree To Set Up Crisis Response Center*, October 14, 2016, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/csto-summit-crisis-response-center-armenia-russia-kazakhstan/28053760.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

subsidized education and training opportunities at Russian military institutions. Moscow also subsidizes other CSTO members' purchases of Russian weapons.

Even so, the other member states have declined to back some of Russia's most controversial national security policies, including Russia's military occupation of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali) regions in 2008, Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and Russia's subsequent military intervention in the eastern parts of Ukraine. One reason for other members' aversion to fully following Moscow's line is that, though the issue of territorial conflicts among member states falls outside the Organization's mandate and CSTO mediation in a dispute can occur only with the explicit consent of the conflicting parties, Moscow has repeatedly manipulated tensions among former Soviet republics to exert influence over them. For example, Russia has long been Armenia's main weapons supplier but also sold some military equipment to Azerbaijan in order to leverage the tensions between these two countries.

CSTO constrained before 2022

Though CSTO governments agree on the Organization's responsibility to defend members from external dangers, CSTO leaders and scholars of the organization have constantly debated whether the CSTO can, like the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, render emergency assistance to member states threatened by internal matters. Article 5 of the CSTO's Charter requires "non-interference in matters falling within the national jurisdiction of the member States."⁸ Yet, leaders of the CSTO and its member governments have repeatedly referenced concerns about threats within member countries warranting a CSTO role due to their having regional security implications.⁹ In particular, representatives of Russia have constantly warned about the danger of

Nonetheless, Russia has often preferred to manage these crisis issues through direct engagement with the countries in conflict, thus minimizing the role of other states and institutions, including the CSTO and its members.

8 Kremlin.ru, *Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, October 6, 2002, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3506> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

9 Weitz, R. "Assessing the Collective Security Treaty Organization: Capabilities and Vulnerabilities", Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, 2018, available at: <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3661.pdf> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Western-backed ‘colour revolutions’, under the guise of promoting democracy, to the security of CSTO governments.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Russia has often preferred to manage these crisis issues through direct engagement with the countries in conflict, thus minimizing the role of other states and institutions, including the CSTO and its members. Before the January 2022 riots in Kazakhstan, the CSTO repeatedly declined potential opportunities to neutralize conflicts within member countries, such as the periodic forceful changes of government in Kyrgyzstan, or between members, such as the border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In June 2010, the Organization rejected a Kyrgyz government request that the CSTO send military police to help end the bloody riots between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan, which led tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbeks to flee into Uzbekistan and elevated the danger of military intervention by Uzbekistan, after the other members and the CSTO leadership affirmed that the Organization did not have a legal basis to dispatch peacekeepers to suppress such an internal conflict.¹¹ Then Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, stated that, “only in the case of a foreign intrusion and an attempt to externally seize power can we state that there is an attack against the CSTO.”¹² Importantly, Uzbekistan’s then President, Islam Karimov, who opposed CSTO or Russian intervention in the Kyrgyz situation, made clear that the military forces of Uzbekistan would refrain from intervening to protect ethnic Uzbeks on Kyrgyzstan territory.¹³ When Kyrgyzstan experienced political riots again in October 2020, leading to the forced resignation

10 The Moscow Times, *Russia-Led Military Bloc Will Not Allow ‘Color Revolutions’ in Post-Soviet Countries – Putin*, January 10, 2022, available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/01/10/russia-led-military-bloc-will-not-allow-color-revolutions-in-post-soviet-countries-putin-a76000> (accessed: June 10, 2022); Buss, K. “Russia Stirs Fear of Color Revolutions”, *International Republican Institute*, September 9, 2019, available at: <https://www.iri.org/news/russia-stirs-fear-of-color-revolutions/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

11 Dubnov, A. “Tashkent Goes, Problems Stay”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, July 10, 2012, available at: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/tashkent-goes-problems-stay/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

12 Grzegorzczuk, M. “What is the CSTO? And what exactly is it doing in Kazakhstan?”, *Emerging Europe*, January 7, 2022, available at: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/what-exactly-is-the-cstos-role-in-kazakhstan/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

13 Trenin, D. “CSTO: Ripe for Reform?”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 25, 2010, available at: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2010/08/25/csto-ripe-for-reform-pub-41469> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

of President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, CSTO Press Secretary Vladimir Zaynetdinov initially characterized the events as a domestic affair, expressing confidence that Kyrgyzstan could resolve its problems.¹⁴ Though CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas later offered to mediate between the factions, he was ignored.¹⁵

The CSTO has also not had a role in Russia's war in Syria, despite instances of Russian officials suggesting that the CSTO participate in the conflict. In September 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that "The CSTO cannot ignore as serious an issue as the Syrian conflict ... The issue of terrorism 'spilling over' from one country into another is very real and can affect the interests of any of our countries."¹⁶ In the summer of 2017, some Russian government officials probed whether some members would dispatch military observers to enforce the de-escalation zones that Russia, Iran, and Turkey had established in Syria. On 22 June 2017, Vladimir Shamanov, the chair of the Defence Committee of the State Duma, said that Russia was negotiating with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to send peacekeeping forces to Syria.¹⁷ Such a deployment could enhance the international legitimacy of the Syrian government and any Moscow-backed Syrian peace accord.¹⁸ Though Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan decided against making such a contribution, Armenia later sent military personnel to Syria, but this contribution, justified on humanitarian grounds to provide demining and medical assistance, occurred outside the CSTO framework.¹⁹

14 Sumaira FH, "Collective Security Treaty Organization Expresses Concerns Over Protests in Kyrgyzstan", *UrduPoint*, October 6, 2020, available at: <https://www.urdupoint.com/en/world/collective-security-treaty-organization-expre-1048945.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

15 TRT World, *Military called in to quell violent protests in Kyrgyzstan*, October 11, 2020, available at: <https://www.trtworld.com/asia/military-called-in-to-quell-violent-protests-in-kyrgyzstan-40458> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

16 Kremlin.ru, *Speech at a CSTO Collective Security Council summit meeting in narrow format*, September 23, 2013, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19270> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

17 Botobekov, U. "Russia wants to use CSTO in Syria", *Modern Diplomacy*, June 27, 2017, available at: <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2017/06/27/russia-wants-to-use-csto-in-syria/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

18 Kucera, J. "CSTO Ready, But Not Yet Willing, To Send Troops to Syria", *Eurasianet*, December 1, 2017, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/csto-ready-but-not-yet-willing-to-send-troops-to-syria> (accessed: June 10, 2022); Ramani, S. "CSTO Rift Grows Between Moscow And Astana", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 6, 2017, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-csto-kazakhstan-russia-nazarbaev/28661553.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

19 Rferl.org, *Armenia Sends Another Group Of Sappers, Medics To Syria*, June 5, 2019, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-sends-another-group-of-sappers-medics>

Even in Afghanistan, which neighbours several CSTO members and has been a perennial source of regional narcotrafficking and terrorism, the CSTO has eschewed a direct combat role, instead letting NATO assume responsibility for defending the Afghan government. The CSTO merely created a working group on Afghanistan and rendered limited support to the government's counter-narcotics and law-enforcement personnel.²⁰ The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly also granted Afghanistan observer status.²¹ Rather than pursue activities inside Afghanistan, the CSTO has prioritized blocking the flow of Afghan militants, drugs, and weapons into Central Asia through its annual *Kanal* (Channel) operations, which interdicts shipments heading northward from Afghanistan. The CSTO also established a counternarcotics centre and a database of transnational narcotics exporters.²²

The Armenian connection

Armenia has long relied on Russia's patronage and protection. The deep security, economic, and military ties between Armenia and Russia continued even after the former became independent from the Soviet Union and then experienced several changes in government. Most recently, following the so-called 'Velvet Revolution' of 2018, the new prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, quickly recommitted his country to Moscow-led regional structures such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO.²³ Since independence, Armenia has signed dozens of bilateral mutual defence and military procurement agreements with Russia. Armenia also hosts thousands of Russian personnel at several military bases and has established a joint group of forces and a united air defence system. In 2010, Moscow and Yerevan extended the

to-syria/29983442.html (accessed: June 10, 2022).

20 Odkb-csto.org, *Partnership and Observation*, available at: <https://en.odkb-csto.org/institute/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

21 Kazinform, *Afghan and Serbian parliaments acquire observer status at CSTO PA*, April 12, 2013, available at: https://www.inform.kz/en/afghan-and-serbian-parliaments-acquire-observer-status-at-csto-pa_a2549816 (accessed: June 10, 2022).

22 Hamroboyeva, N. "CSTO counternarcotics agencies sets up database of transnational drug dealers", *Asia-Plus*, December 2, 2009, available at: <http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/47/59880.htm> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

23 Huseynov, V. and Rzayev, A. "The 'Velvet Revolution' is affecting Armenia's ties with Russia", *EurActiv*, October 23, 2018, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/opinion/the-velvet-revolution-is-affecting-armenias-ties-with-russia/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

presence of Russia's military base in Armenia until 2044 in return for almost \$800 million worth of Russian arms supplies.²⁴ As Armenia is the only CSTO member located wholly in the South Caucasus, Russia's power-projection capabilities benefit from access to its bases. Armenia is a founding member of the CSTO and has remained one of the Organization's most active members. Armenia held the rotating chair of the Organization in 2007–2008, 2015–2016, and 2021–2022, and has regularly participated in CSTO exercises and meetings. The current Chair of the CSTO's Permanent Council is an Armenian general, Viktor Biyagov, while this country's Prime Minister Pashinyan is the Chair of the Collective Security Council.

Nonetheless, Armenians have long complained that the other CSTO members refuse to side with their nominal ally, Armenia, against non-CSTO-member Azerbaijan. Rather than support Armenia's position, though, the other members, especially Belarus and Kazakhstan, have either backed Azerbaijan or remained neutral. They have maintained that, since the zone of the [now former] conflict lay outside of Armenia's internationally recognized territory, this zone was not the Organization's responsibility.²⁵ In 2016, Belarus and Kazakhstan's objections and boycotts of CSTO sessions forced a one-year delay in former Chief of Joint Staff of Armenia Yuri Khatchaturov's appointment as CSTO Secretary General. Though Khatchaturov was scheduled to become Chair over a year earlier, according to the principle of alphabetical rotation embedded in the CSTO Charter, he only became CSTO Secretary General in May 2017.²⁶ That same year, the members of the Parliament of Armenia vetoed

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24 O'Rourke, B. "Russia, Armenia Sign Extended Defense Pact", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 20, 2010, available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_President_Medvedev_To_Visit_Armenia/2131915.html (accessed: June 10, 2022).

25 Chirciu, D. "Russia says defense pact does not apply to Karabakh", *Anadolu Agency*, October 7, 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-says-defense-pact-does-not-apply-to-karabakh/1999169> (accessed: June 10, 2022); Tariverdiyeva, E. "Envoy: Kazakhstan doesn't link Karabakh conflict with CSTO," *Trend*, July 14, 2017, available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/2777241.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

26 Shirinyan, A. "For Armenia, an Alliance That May Be More Trouble Than It's Worth," *Chatham House*, January 24, 2017, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/armenia-alliance-may-be-more-trouble-it-s-worth> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Pakistan becoming a CSTO observer due to the Pakistani government's support for Baku's position.²⁷ Additionally, when Belarusian authorities extradited the Russian-Israeli travel blogger, Alexander Lapshin, to Azerbaijan in 2017 for travelling to the latter's occupied territories, some Armenian politicians called for Belarus's expulsion from the CSTO.²⁸ In 2020, Armenia also sought to deprive the government of Afghanistan of its observer status in the CSTO parliamentary assembly for supporting Azerbaijan's recovery of its occupied territories.²⁹

In addition to Russia's refusal to back Armenia's claims to Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territories, another source of tension between Yerevan and Moscow was Russia's sale of arms to non-CSTO member Azerbaijan. Russian officials have not seemed overly concerned by Armenians' concerns about Moscow's ties with Azerbaijan.

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signed a declaration on allied interaction in February 2022, the Azerbaijani government did not make any commitment regarding membership of Moscow-led blocks.

Though the CSTO had been developing conflict-management and peacekeeping structures for over a decade, Russia established an ad-hoc peacekeeping force (with no connection to the CSTO command structures) to deploy in the Karabakh region after the Second Karabakh War following the signing of the 10 November 2020 Statement with Azerbaijan and Armenia. Not only did the CSTO have no role in negotiating or executing the ceasefire, but the 1,960 peacekeeping troops that Russia sent to enforce the agreement also lacked any connection to

27 Kucera, J. "Armenia Nixes Pakistan's Ties with CSTO," *Eurasianet*, November 29, 2016, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/81476> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

28 Kucera, J. "Armenia Proposes Kicking Belarus Out of CSTO," *Eurasianet*, February 10, 2017, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-proposes-kicking-belarus-out-csto> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

29 ArmenPress, *Armenia requests CSTO to oust Afghanistan as observer*, October 1, 2020, available at: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1029829.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

CSTO structures. Pashinyan later tried to invoke Article 2 of the CSTO treaty – which enables members to “immediately launch the mechanism of joint consultations” on orchestrating a collective response to threats to a member state – during a May 2021 clash with Azerbaijan in the southern sector of the two countries’ border region. When he raised the matter with Vladimir Putin in a phone call on May 13, however, Putin said the Russian government would deal with the issue through “active mediation efforts and close contacts with Yerevan and Baku, aimed at ensuring stability in the region.”³⁰ Meanwhile, CSTO Secretary General Zas called this situation “a border incident” that did not fall under the CSTO charter’s provisions on collective defence.³¹ At the May 2022 CSTO heads-of-state summit, Pashinyan observed, “Frankly, the CSTO member countries’ response during the 44-Day War of 2020 and the post-war period did not make the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian people very happy”.³²

Kazakhstan: A debatable precedent

Notwithstanding the CSTO’s long history of eschewing controversial military deployments in member states, the Organization made the exceptional decision on 6 January 2022 to accede to the request of Kazakhstan’s President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to send peacekeeping troops to help his government suppress escalating mass violence. What had commenced as a protest against subsidy cuts in the far west of Kazakhstan rapidly snowballed into urban rioters making political demands in the financial capital of Almaty. The member states justified the 6 January decision to dispatch CSTO forces to Kazakhstan that same day by citing the Collective Security Treaty, the CSTO Charter, and the CSTO Agreement on Peacekeeping Activities.³³ The decision

30 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Armenia Turns To Russian-Led CSTO Amid Border Standoff With Azerbaijan*, May 14, 2021, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-putin-troops-border-withdrawal/31254474.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

31 Ghazanchyan, S. “CSTO sees situation in the south of Armenia as a “border incident” with Azerbaijan”, *Public Radio of Armenia*, July 3, 2021, available at: <https://en.armradio.am/2021/07/03/the-csto-sees-the-situation-in-the-south-of-armenia-as-a-border-incident-with-azerbaijan/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

32 Kremlin.ru, *The Kremlin hosted a meeting of the heads of state of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation*, May 16, 2022, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68418> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

33 Kremlin.ru, *Session of CSTO Collective Security Council*, Collective Security Treaty

The deployment of CSTO peacekeeping forces in Kazakhstan dispelled many perceptions that the Organization was a virtual structure that engaged in exercises and mimicked NATO structures, but failed to engage in actual operations.

was executed surprisingly fast given the likely lack of planning for such a contingency. The Russian armed forces provided rapid transportation for the approximately 2,500-person collective force contributed by all the other members, but mainly by Russia. During their short sojourn, the CSTO forces eschewed direct directly confronting with the protesters and, in accordance with their restricted rules of engagement, instead secured strategic sites such as Almaty Airport, Baikonur Cosmodrome, and power plants. After the local security forces restored order, all CSTO forces left the country by 19 January.³⁴

The deployment of CSTO peacekeeping forces in Kazakhstan dispelled many perceptions that the Organization was a virtual structure that engaged in exercises and mimicked NATO structures, but failed to engage in actual operations. That the Russian forces entered Kazakhstan under the auspices of the CSTO, and refrained from using force against protesters by securing only key sites from potential attacks that never occurred, made it easier for the Kazakh population to swallow the intervention. They might have bristled more from an exclusively Russian intervention given Kazakhs' inferior treatment during the Moscow-led Soviet Union and more recent concerns that some Russians desired to control northern Kazakhstan, where millions of ethnic Russians reside. The Russia-led intervention proved effective at communicating to wavering Kazakh elites that Moscow backed the Tokayev government, leading most of them to join the bandwagon and support Tokayev. That said, the intervention apparently occurred without an explicit Russia-Kazakhstan quid pro quo. Despite the Moscow-led CSTO intervention, Kazakhstan did not follow Moscow's line when Russia invaded Ukraine the following month.

Organization, January 10, 2022, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67568> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

34 Pannier, B. "How Intervention in Kazakhstan Revitalized the Russian-led CSTO", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, March 7, 2022, available at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/03/how-the-intervention-in-kazakhstan-revitalized-the-russian-led-csto/> (accessed: June 10, 2022); and Samaran, S. "Kazakhstan, January 2022: A Strategic Surprise?", *IRSEM*, March 2022, available at: <https://www.irsem.fr/media/5-publications/nr-irsem-122-samaran-kazakhstan-en.pdf>. (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Impact of the Ukraine War

Azerbaijan's skilfully executed military operation in 2020 and the successful CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan may have misled the Kremlin into thinking that employing force against Ukraine would bring Moscow an easy victory (of course, the operations in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan occurred entirely within those countries' internationally recognized territories, in contrast to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.) The large number of Russian casualties in Ukraine have since led the armed forces of Russia to redeploy Russian soldiers and equipment from foreign bases and deployments to the Ukraine front.³⁵ Even so, there has been no formal Russian government statement of a military drawdown from the Russian bases in CSTO members Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Before the launch of the Russian attack on Ukraine on 24 February, CSTO Secretary-General Stanislav Zas suggested the possibility that the CSTO could, with the consent of the governments of Russia and Ukraine and with a UN mandate, deploy peacekeepers in the Donbas region.³⁶ Since the fighting began, only Belarus has supported the Russian invasion with military support, allowing Russian forces to use its territory to launch ground and missile attacks. This assistance has been provided within the framework of the Belarus-Russia alliance, rather than through the CSTO.³⁷

That said, the other members also have not withdrawn from the CSTO or suspended all military-industrial cooperation with Russian defence industries; some of them rely heavily on imported parts from CSTO members. Additionally, the government of Russia has thus far not made

35 Demirjian, K. "Russia begins to mobilize military reinforcements for Ukraine as casualties mount, Pentagon says", *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/25/russia-reinforcements-georgia-ukraine/> (accessed: June 20, 2022); Kingsley, K., "Russia begins transfer of troops from Syria to Ukraine as Finland signals Nato membership", *The Independent*, May 12, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-syria-troops-moved-b2077499.html> (accessed: June 20, 2022).

36 Bohdan, S. "Can Belarus use the Collective Security Treaty Organisation to fend off Moscow's pressure?", *Belarus Digest*, May 26, 2022, available at: <https://belarusdigest.com/story/can-belarus-use-the-collective-security-treaty-organisation-to-fend-off-moscows-pressure/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

37 Kremlin.ru, *The Kremlin hosted a meeting of the heads of state of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation*, May 16, 2022, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68418> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

One reason for the CSTO's absence from the current war may be that Moscow insists on calling its attack on Ukraine a 'special military operation', a condition the CSTO Charter does not provide for.

a formal call for CSTO involvement in the Ukraine War. That possibility was notably not discussed when the CSTO leaders met in May 2022 to celebrate the Organization's 20th anniversary, though Putin did give the other heads of state a briefing on the war.³⁸ One reason for the CSTO's absence from the current war may be that Moscow insists on calling its attack on Ukraine a 'special military operation', a condition the CSTO Charter does not provide for. The Ukrainian government would also not welcome a role for the CSTO since Moscow's leading role in the institution, the organization's ties to Russia's ally Belarus, and Ukraine's non-membership status mean that even CSTO 'peacekeepers' would be perceived as inherently biased in Moscow's favour. Furthermore, former CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha acknowledged that the required consensus among all the member governments for CSTO intervention is presently lacking.³⁹ Nonetheless, in June 2022, Andrey Kartapolov, Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Defence, suggested that CSTO peacekeepers might be needed in the Russian-occupied parts of eastern Ukraine after the fighting ends, as Russia would not permit the deployment of forces from NATO countries there.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan and Russia's attack on Ukraine have fuelled speculation about the organization's future role. Analysts no longer can dismiss the CSTO given its recent activities. Following the operation in Kazakhstan, the CSTO launched a task force to examine lessons learned from this 'baptism of fire' – the first deployment of CSTO forces in an actual operation – for improving the organization's effectiveness.⁴¹ Though such work may have been disrupted by the

38 Kommersant, *Gensek ODKB: vopros uchastiya organizatsii v voyennoy operatsii na Ukraine ne obsuzhdalsya v khode sammita*, May 16, 2022, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5355327> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

39 Solovyov, V. "Ukraina ni pri chem: Kak v ODKB obyasnili izmeneniya v soglasenii o mirotvorcheskoy deyatel'nosti organizatsii", *Kommersant*, March 4, 2022, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5240328> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

40 Interfax, *V Dume sochli, chto mirotvortsy ODKB mogut ponadobitsya na Ukraine lish po okonchaniy spetsoperatsii*, June 6, 2022, available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/844876> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

41 Krivosheev, K., Konstantinov, A., Mgdesyan, A. and Karabekov, K. "Kollektivnaya

Ukraine war, at some point Russia may return to pushing the items outlined in Putin's November 2019 statement regarding Moscow's objectives for its 2020 CSTO presidency, which included enhancing the CSTO's counterterrorism and counternarcotics capabilities, streamlining its organizational mechanisms, strengthening foreign-policy coordination, and elevating the organization's combat training and peacekeeping potential.⁴² The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the political and social crises in several member states, thwarted the realization of many of these goals during the 2019–2020 Russian presidency.

The CSTO was designed to defend its members from a traditional external military attack, but such a scenario has yet to arise. Though NATO and China have substantial military power, neither is going to invade a CSTO member the way that Germany attacked Poland and France in World War II. One reason the CSTO did not intervene in the wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan is that the fighting was confined to Azerbaijan's soil in conflicts that violated the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan. If a CSTO member ever genuinely faced a foreign military intervention, the CSTO could mobilize against the aggression, but Moscow would have to support (and presumably orchestrate) that decision. Without the Russian military, the CSTO lacks the power projection capabilities to execute such a mission. The Russian government also can, and generally does, employ substantial military power independently of the CSTO even in cases involving another member of that organization. The CSTO peacekeeping intervention in Kazakhstan offers a more plausible future scenario. As the CSTO governments justified the peacekeeping deployment by blaming the chaos in Kazakhstan on foreign terrorists, the intervention has not formally legitimized the CSTO's right to intervene within a member country to counter internal threats. But other governments could appeal for similar support to repress internal disorder by claiming that foreign terrorists or state sponsors were behind the incidents. Again, though, Moscow would have to support such a decision or the CSTO would lack the means to execute it.

bezopasnost krepchayet: Lidery stran ODKB otprazdnovali v Moskve dva yubileya", *Kommersant*, May 16, 2022, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5355404> (accessed: June 11, 2022).

42 Kremlin.ru, *CSTO summit*, November 28, 2019, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/62146> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Azerbaijan as a factor in the formation of relations between Türkiye and Armenia

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Türkiye and Armenia are geographical neighbours but have not formed fully-fledged diplomatic relations since Armenian independence (1991). Although Türkiye recognized the independence of Armenia in 1991, their relations did not develop further than unofficial contacts. One reason is the discrepancies between them based on a common history. However, another, important reason why Türkiye and Armenia did not establish relations is the aggressive war imposed by Armenia on Azerbaijan, the outcome of which left the latter's territories under occupation. Thus far, three attempts have been made to reconcile the two counties' relationship. In all three of Türkiye's attempts to establish relations, while the foreign policy of Türkiye and the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus region have changed, the factor of Azerbaijan has remained central. This article provides an analysis of the central role of Azerbaijan in the evolution of the relations between Türkiye and Armenia.

Keywords: Türkiye, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh region, normalization.



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Introduction

A new geopolitical and geo-economic reality emerged in the South Caucasus region in November 2020, in the aftermath of the 44-Day War, when Azerbaijan managed to radically change the long-term status quo and liberate its formerly occupied (by Armenia) territories. These events also unfolded new opportunities for shaping the attitudes of the countries in the region and neighbourhood.

For about three decades, because of the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia's ties with this country and Türkiye were completely blocked, its borders with them were sealed, and it was deprived of opportunities to join the regional projects and resume diplomatic relations with Türkiye.

Attempts to form relations never yielded a logical end result. Türkiye advocated the formation of relations in the early years of Armenia's independence; then after 2008, when its foreign policy strategy underwent a radical change; and after the 44-Day War in 2020. The third initiative caused more optimism that the two countries will be able to find a common language to form sustainable relations. So far, the minimum conditions have been created to move the normalization process forward.

The main approach of this article will be from Türkiye's point of view. Thus, Türkiye will be the main variable in analysing its relations with Armenia. Armenia's readiness for taking reciprocal steps toward Türkiye's initiatives will also be examined in parallel. While explaining Türkiye's initiatives towards rapprochement with Armenia, the reaction of Azerbaijan and the perception of Azerbaijan's foreign policy by Türkiye will be the central focus of this paper, as the main hypothetical line of research is the position of Azerbaijan with respect to the two countries' relations.

Türkiye's attempt to shape relations after Armenia's independence

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye was the first country to recognize Armenia's independence (December 16, 1991).¹ However, their first contacts were established even before this event, when an official Turkish delegation met Armenia's then-President, Levon Ter-

¹ MFA.gov.tr, *Relations between Turkey and Armenia*, available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-Turkey-and-armenia.en.mfa> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

Petrosyan, in Yerevan on 21 October 1991. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Türkiye recognized the former's independence on December 24, 1991.² In contrast, Türkiye considers the date of the recognition of Armenia's independence as the day when Türkiye's former Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, sent a letter to Armenia's president Levon Ter-Petrosyan. In this letter, Demirel stated:

Our government while recognizing the Republic of Armenia has acted with the understanding that it will abide by the principle of respect for its territorial integrity and the immutability of borders. I believe that relations will be established and developed on the basis of respect for these fundamental principles.^{3 4}

Recognition by Türkiye is also significant in the sense that, before Armenia became a Soviet Republic in 1920, there were hostilities between the two countries that ended in the complete defeat of Armenia and the signing of the Treaty of Gyumri (also known as the Treaty of Alexandropol) on 3 December 1920. However, the treaty never entered into force. Later, relations between Türkiye and Armenia were determined by the Treaty of Moscow (16 March 1921) and the Treaty of Kars (13 October 1921), signed between Russia and Türkiye, and within the framework of which all their borders and boundaries (including that between Azerbaijan and Georgia, as a signatory to the Treaty of Kars) were defined.⁵ These two international documents provide the basis for determining the current borders of Türkiye with the countries of the South Caucasus.

Until these fundamental changes happened at the beginning of the 20th century, for many centuries Armenians did not have their own statehood and lived mainly on the territory of the Ottoman Empire. The growth of national self-consciousness, which began to spread in Europe, did not bypass this ethnic group, which began to put forward the idea of "political self-determination". During World War I, these challenges led

2 MFA.am, *Bilateral relations with Turkey*, available at: <https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/tr#:~:text=The%20Republic%20of%20Turkey%20officially,1995%2C%20reopened%20its%20air%20border>, (accessed: March 6, 2022)

3 Göksedef, E., "Turkey-Armenia relations: What happened in the last 30 years?" (translation from Turkish), *BBC Türkçe*, December 27, 2021, available at : <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-59802160>, (accessed: March 6, 2022)

4 The text of the letter is translated from Turkish and may not match the original.

5 Ulchenko, N. Y., "A glimpse of history: How the Treaty of Kars was signed (March through October, 1921)", *Review of Armenian Studies*, No. 32, 2015, pp. 199–208

Several terrorist organizations were created, among which ASALA (the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) is the most infamous. As a result of their assassination attempts on Turkish representatives abroad, 31 Turkish diplomats were killed.

to a sharp escalation between the Ottoman government and Armenian military formations, which Armenians portray as the [so-called] “genocide of Armenians”. These events, combined with Armenia’s territorial claims against Türkiye, have been instrumentalized by Armenian diaspora. The wave of growing nationalism among Armenians across the world had dramatic effects. (The first generation of Armenian emigrants worried that their children would be assimilated within the societies where they lived. In this regard, the older Armenian generation believed that uniting around

“a common grief of the past” could become an impulse for preserving national identity.) Several terrorist organizations were created, among which ASALA (the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) is the most infamous. As a result of their assassination attempts on Turkish representatives abroad, 31 Turkish diplomats were killed.⁶

Moreover, the Armenian SSR had a football team named “Ararat” (the biblical name of Mount Ağrı, located in Türkiye) and the mountain itself was flaunted on the coat of arms of the Soviet Republic of Armenia;⁷ this mountain remained on the new coat of arms of Armenia after independence.⁸

In general, given the specificity of the federal system of the Soviet Union, in which Moscow was the decision-making centre and the Soviet Union member republics had no separate central governments, it was impossible to form direct relations between those republics and other countries. Thus, there were no relations between Türkiye and Armenia until the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence by Armenia. Even the existence of the railway connection between Kars (Türkiye) and Leninakan (Armenia) played no larger role, as it was of national importance only in linking Türkiye to the Armenian SSR. However, at the end of the 1980s, shortly before the collapse of

6 AA.com.tr, *31 Turkish diplomats and their relatives became victims of Armenian terrorist organizations* (translation from Turkish), November 22, 2019, available at : <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/31-turk-diplomat-ve-yakinlari-ermeni-teror-orgutlerinin-kurbani-oldu/1622156> (accessed: Mar 6, 2022)

7 Geraldika.ru, *Gerb Armyanskoy Sovetskoy Sotsialisticheskoy Respubliki*, available at: <https://geraldika.ru/s/2205> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

8 President.am, *State symbols of the Republic of Armenia*, available at: <https://www.president.am/en/state-symbols/> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

the Soviet Union, Türkiye began electricity supply to Armenia with a view to normalizing relations.⁹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye was eager to develop relations with all the newly independent states, including Armenia. Yet, the formation of relations with Armenia was different: historical events and the perception of Türkiye by the Armenian diaspora influenced this process. Türkiye believed that Armenians, who had lived for three generations during the country's 70 years of existence within the Soviet Union, would have managed to forget the reasons for animosity with their western neighbour. However, this expectation was proved incorrect at the very first stage of the formation of statehood in Armenia. In short, a statement reflecting Armenians' historical claims against Türkiye was included in their declaration of independence, adopted on 23 August 1991.¹⁰

In addition, the declaration also contained definitions such as “Western Armenia” reflecting Armenia's territorial claim to the south-eastern part of Türkiye. Despite these controversial provisions, Türkiye did not express dissatisfaction and recognized the independence of Armenia without preconditions. This circumstance was, nevertheless, the reason Türkiye limited itself to recognition only, without establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia.¹¹

Meanwhile, Türkiye kept its borders with Armenia open as a sign of goodwill towards its eastern neighbour and for the sake of developing its relations with the EU, as official Ankara applied for EU membership in 1987. Türkiye allowed Western humanitarian aid to reach Armenia (due to its difficult economic condition) from the EU via the Kars–Gyumri railway (the name “Leninakan” was changed).¹² Türkiye also

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9 Göksedef, E., *op.cit.*

10 Gov.am, “*Armenian Declaration of Independence*”, available at: <http://www.gov.am/en/independence/> (accessed: March 5, 2022)

11 Ibrahimov, R., “Turkish foreign policy towards Armenia in 2008–2009: Impact on Azerbaijani–Turkish relations”, *Bilge Strateji*, Vol. 7, No. 12, 2015, pp. 47–59, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339881863_Turkish-Foreign-Policy-Towards-Armenia-2008-2009-Impact-On-Azerbaijani-Turkish-Relations_1, (accessed: March 5, 2022)

12 Dündar, C., “Türkes reminded Atatürk's signature”, (translation from Turkish), *Milliyet*, April 25, 2005, available at: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/can-dundar/>

The Türkiye–Armenia border was officially closed on 3 April 1993 following Armenia’s occupation of Azerbaijan’s Kalbajar district.

actively contributed to the membership of Armenia in international organizations and invited the country to join the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) as a founding member.¹³

For a small country with scant natural resources, without access to the open sea, and at war with Azerbaijan, ties with Türkiye were of strategic importance for Armenia in this period. In the early years of Armenia’s independence, there was an increase in the mutual visits of tourists, businessmen, and journalists. The then-president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who is known as a pragmatic person, considered Türkiye a significant economic partner and a gateway to Europe and the Middle East countries. In addition, Ter-Petrosyan tried not to touch upon historical issues in relations with Türkiye and called for the formation of relations without preconditions.¹⁴ In general, he hoped to build non-hostile relations with Türkiye, which would be the most pragmatic assessment of reality. This “soft perception [of] the eternal enemy” Türkiye was misunderstood by several high-ranking politicians and intellectuals, who negatively perceived this kind of strategy. Disagreements on this issue led to the resignation of the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, a representative of the diaspora, and a citizen of the United States, Raffi Hovannisian. He also had different views on the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, insisting that Armenia should recognize the separatist regime established in Azerbaijan’s then-occupied (by Armenia) territories, as a result of which he had to resign.¹⁵

The Türkiye–Armenia border was officially closed on 3 April 1993 following Armenia’s occupation of Azerbaijan’s Kalbajar district. Later, on 30 April 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 822 which demanded “the immediate withdrawal of all [Armenian] occupying forces from the Kalbajar district and other recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan”.¹⁶

turkes-ataturkun-imzasini-hatirlatti-113327 (accessed: March 6, 2022)

13 MFA.gov.tr, *Relations between Turkey and Armenia*, *ibid*.

14 Demir, A.F., “Turkey-Armenia Relations in the Post-USSR Era”, (translation from Turkish), *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations*, Vol. 2, No 5 (Spring 2005), p. 113

15 Shogren, E., *Armenia’s Foreign Minister Quits Post: Caucasus: Fresno-born Raffi Hovannisian was Asked to Resign After Clashes over Foreign Policy with Newly Independent Country’s President*, Los Angeles Times, November 17, 1992, available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-10-17-mn-226-story.html> (accessed: March 5, 2022)

16 Ibrahimov, R. (2014), *op.cit.*, p. 49

Regardless that Türkiye had closed its borders, Ter-Petrosyan continued to look for ways to improve relations with the country. On 21 April 1993, Ter-Petrosyan arrived in Ankara to take part in the mourning ceremony for the former Turkish president, Turgut Özal.¹⁷ During his visit to Ankara, Ter-Petrosyan also met with the then-President of Azerbaijan Abulfaz Elchibey to discuss the conflict.¹⁸ Ter-Petrosyan was perhaps seeking contacts to change the current situation, but he failed. The delegation headed by Ter-Petrosyan, accompanied by then-Foreign Minister of Armenia Vahan Papazyan and presidential adviser Gerard Libaridian, was received by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel. As Libaridian recalls, Demirel took out a map, pointed to it, and said:

“This is Armenia, we have no problems with this, this is our neighbour; this is Karabakh, and this is not Armenian land, but Armenians live there, and you have your own concerns about this, this can also be understood; further, this is Lachin, this is also not your land, and the Armenians do not live here, you occupied it and stated that it was for security, this can also be understood somewhere. Well, how to justify Kalbajar? When you occupied Kalbajar, the Turks said that you were beating our brothers, right?”¹⁹

Nevertheless, for the sake of improving Armenia’s relations with Türkiye, Ter-Petrosyan banned the activities of the Dashnaksutyun party, known for its sharp anti-Türkish rhetoric, in October 1994.²⁰ Despite the steps taken by Ter-Petrosyan in this direction, Türkiye’s general foreign policy towards Armenia did not undergo major changes for quite a long time due to the issue of occupation of Azerbaijan’s territories. The borders between the two states remained closed, although mutual flights between Yerevan (Armenia) and Istanbul and Antalya (Türkiye) have operated since 1995.²¹

17 APNews, *World Statesmen Attend Ozal Funeral*, April 21, 1993, available at: <https://apnews.com/article/02b7e05ce58a42962b3a8db835524887> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

18 Ulman, S., *Thousands turn out for funeral of Turkish President Ozal*, UPI, April 21, 2022, available at: <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1993/04/21/Thousands-turn-out-for-funeral-of-Turkish-President-Ozal/1331735364800/> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

19 ANI, *Demirel ve Ermenistan: Ermeniler ve Türkler*, January 14, 2022, available at: <http://www.aniarc.am/2022/01/14/demirel-and-armenia-in-turkish/> (accessed: March 07, 2022)

20 Demir, A.F., *op.cit.*, p. 114

21 Shahnazaryan, D., “Nervous Neighbors: Five Years After the Armenia- Turkey Protocols”, *Journal of Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Fall 2014), p. 46.

Breakthrough in the foreign policy of Türkiye towards Armenia after 2008

After Ahmet Davutoğlu was appointed Foreign Minister of Türkiye in 2009, Turkish foreign policy sought to abandon the traditional status-quo policy in the international arena and pursue a more active engagement on the basis of Türkiye's historical, geographical, and cultural capabilities, as enshrined in Davutoğlu's book *Strategic Depth: Türkiye's International Position*.^{22 23} The foreign policy strategy of "zero problems with neighbours" pursued by Türkiye under Davutoğlu envisaged intensifying efforts to resolve, not to freeze, the existing disagreements with the countries of the region on a mutually beneficial basis.²⁴

Türkiye's zeal to open its borders with Armenia without waiting for the liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories was negatively perceived by official Baku.

Türkiye had actually begun the process of developing relations with Armenia as early as 2008. Türkiye had disregarded the factor of perceiving Armenia through the prism of the latter's occupation of Azerbaijan's territories. At that time, Türkiye believed that the comprehensive development of relations with Armenia would also have a positive impact on the latter's relations with Azerbaijan and the subsequent liberation of its occupied territories. In the initial stage, Türkiye planned to open its borders with Armenia and establish diplomatic relations with the country. Türkiye's zeal to open its borders with Armenia without waiting for the liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories was negatively perceived by official Baku. Thus, after 2008, there were attempts to form a policy toward Armenia without consideration of Azerbaijan's perceptions in this regard.²⁵

At that time, Türkiye's plans to open the border with Armenia without preconditions were based on the belief that, with the opening of the border, bilateral trade relations would boost the small economy of Armenia and Turkish investment therein. It was expected that, with

22 Davutoğlu, A., *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position*, (translation from Turkish), (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2014)

23 Çamlıbel, C., *The Neo-Ottoman Attribution is Malicious*, (translation from Turkish), August 29, 2011, available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/neo-osmanli-yakistirmasi-kotu-niyetli-18601714> (accessed: March 7, 2022)

24 MFA.gov.tr, "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbors", Official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Turkey, available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa> (accessed: March 7, 2022)

25 Ibrahimov, R. (2014), *op.cit.*, p. 52

closer economic relations, a subsequent political dialogue would be formed and, later, the parties would create an atmosphere in which each side should respect the other's memory of historical events.²⁶ This was an attempt to develop relations with Armenia without reference to Azerbaijan's expectations.

As a beginning of contact, the former President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, invited his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gül to watch a football match (dubbed "football diplomacy") between the two national teams in Yerevan on 6 September 2008. Gül's acceptance of this invitation meant the first (and only) visit of a Turkish President to Armenia since the latter's independence.²⁷ Later, on 14 October 2009, at the invitation of the President of Türkiye, Sargsyan's trip to the city of Bursa for the return match with a very representative delegation demonstrated that they have arrived in Türkiye not only to watch the match. During this visit, the parties had agreed that the next round of the negotiations would be concerned with defining specific steps to open the borders.²⁸

Azerbaijan's reaction to Türkiye's policy towards Armenia at that time was negative because the process of rapprochement between the two countries began without coordination with Baku and awareness of the possible consequences for Azerbaijan on the issue of de-occupation of its territories. Since a number of great powers had their own interests in the South Caucasus region in terms of maintaining the status quo in the [now former] conflict, Azerbaijan had limited opportunities to put pressure on Armenia to resolve the conflict peacefully. One lever was the introduction of economic sanctions and the isolation of Armenia from regional projects. Moreover, keeping the Turkish–Armenian border closed was an integral part of this strategy. If the border was opened, this instrument of pressure would lose its effectiveness and Armenia, encouraged by the indulgence of Türkiye, would continue

26 Davutoğlu, A., "Turkey-Armenian Relations in the Process of De-Ottomanization or 'Dehistoricization': is a 'Just Memory' Possible?", *Journal of Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 2014, p. 29

27 Ibrahimov, R., "Turkish-Armenian rapprochement: Defining the process and its impact on relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey", *Caspian Report*, HASEN, Winter 2014, p. 89

28 President.am, *Working visit of President Serzh Sargsyan to Bursa /Republic of Turkey*, September 14, 2009, available at: <https://www.president.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2009/10/14/news-74/> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

its occupation policy. Notably, albeit Türkiye was ready to reopen its border, Armenia did not plan to withdraw from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.²⁹

Azerbaijan closely followed this process and did not remain a passive observer. Thus, Azerbaijan reacted to Gül's visit to Yerevan and continued to protest all subsequent steps by Türkiye. The opening of borders between Türkiye and Armenia was endorsed by the West, in particular the United States. In April 2009, during the official visit of former U.S. President Barack Obama to Türkiye, it was expected that Türkiye and Armenia would sign an agreement on opening the border and mutual establishment of diplomatic corps in both states within a month.³⁰ The harsh and negative reaction of Azerbaijan, as well as Turkish society, alerted Türkiye, as Ankara did not want to spoil relations with a country with common ethnic roots. Therefore, Türkiye sought to obtain the endorsement of Azerbaijan for its policy of rapprochement with Armenia. As a sign of its dissatisfaction with the endorsement of relations between Türkiye and Armenia by the U.S. without coordination with official Baku in advance, Azerbaijan's President İlham Aliyev refused to attend the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) forum held in Istanbul on 6–7 April 2009, despite repeated invitations from then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.³¹

President Aliyev's refusal to participate in the forum in Istanbul had its effect. Türkiye realized that rapprochement with Armenia could cost it the deterioration of relations with Azerbaijan.

Considering the negative reaction within the country and from Azerbaijan, then Prime Minister of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tried to ease the tension. In his speech on April 10, 2009, he stated:

“Unless Azerbaijan and Armenia sign any agreement on the solution to the “Nagorno-Karabakh” conflict, we will not sign any final agreement with Armenia on ties. We are doing preliminary work, but this definitely

29 İbrahimov, R., (2014), *op.cit.*, p. 52

30 Richter, P., “Turkey, Armenia are likely to ease conflict, President Obama is to visit Turkey in a few days, and the expected deal would allow him to point to progress toward reconciliation”, April 4, 2009, available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/04/world/fg-Turkey-armenia4> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

31 Eurodialogue.org, *The Alliance of Civilizations Forum: A Major Test for Turkish Diplomacy*, available at: <http://eurodialogue.org/us/1513> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

depends on the resolution of the “Nagorno-Karabakh” problem.”³²

Nevertheless, six months after this statement, on 10 October 2009, Türkiye signed two protocols with Armenia in Zurich: (1) “Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Armenia” and (2) “Protocol on the development of relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Armenia”.³³ It should be noted that these agreements were signed because of the inertia of previous steps, and already had no importance.

Thus, the documents were not ratified either in Türkiye’s or Armenia’s parliament. In fact, the Armenian side acted as the initiator in freezing the process.³⁴ The two documents had to be approved by the Constitutional Court of Armenia, which suggested preconditions and imposed restrictive provisions impairing the letter and spirit of the protocols, which led to the suspension of the ratification process of by Armenia on 23 April 2010. In February 2015, Sargsyan withdrew the protocols from the Parliament of Armenia and, on 1 March 2018, declared these protocols invalid.³⁵

Türkiye–Armenia relations in the aftermath of the 44-Day War

On 27 September 2020, to the surprise of many, including those who had done their best to maintain the status quo since the 1994 truce, Azerbaijan launched a counteroffensive operation (a.k.a. the 44-Day War) that resulted in the liberation of its territories formerly occupied by Armenia.³⁶

Immediately after the end of hostilities, Azerbaijan made a constructive proposal for the development of relations with Armenia, as enshrined in the framework of the Trilateral Statement (10 November 2020), through the opening of transport communications, as well as the signing of a

32 Ibrahimov, R., (2015), *op.cit.*, p.53

33 BBC.co.uk, *Armenia and Turkey normalize ties*, October 10, 2009, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8299712.stm> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

34 BBC.co.uk, *op.cit.*

35 MFA.gov.tr, *Relations between Turkey and Armenia*, *op.cit.*

36 Ibrahimov, R. and Muradov, M., “Historical and legal aspects of the Karabakh Conflict An Azerbaijani perspective on a shared post-conflict future, in F. Ismailzade and D.K. Mišković (eds), *Liberated Karabakh* (Baku: ADAU, 2021), p.51

The post-conflict situation also presents one more stage for enabling Türkiye and Armenia to resume their relations. In fact, Türkiye's new proposal on the opening of the borders and the establishment of diplomatic relations was positively received by the Armenian authorities.

peace agreement. The parties have already started negotiations in bilateral and multilateral formats. In addition, a “3+3” platform was proposed by Türkiye (involving the three countries of the South Caucasus region: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia; and three countries bordering those countries: Türkiye, Russia, and Iran) to strengthen peace in the region by forming a cooperation platform. With the exception of Georgia (due to Russia's occupation of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia separatist regions), all these countries supported this initiative. The first meeting of the platform at the level of deputy foreign ministers of the five countries (in absence of Georgia) was held on 10 December 2021 in Moscow to discuss the issue of unblocking economic and transport lines in the South Caucasus. The parties agreed to meet at least twice a year.³⁷ Thus, the “3+3” platform can be another noteworthy opportunity for the development of relations between Türkiye and Armenia.

The post-conflict situation also presents one more stage for enabling Türkiye and Armenia to resume their relations. In fact, Türkiye's new proposal on the opening of the borders and the establishment of diplomatic relations was positively received by the Armenian authorities. Actually, after the 44-Day War, Armenia had imposed an embargo on the import of Turkish goods, which were secretly imported through third countries. For instance, in 2020, Türkiye's exports to Armenia amounted to about \$200 million and comprised clothing, citrus fruits, and household appliances.³⁸ In 2021, indirect trade between the two countries was, according to Turkish data, just \$3.8 million.³⁹ But at the beginning of 2022, the embargo was lifted.⁴⁰

37 TASS.ru, *Vstrechi v formate «3+3» budut proxodit ne reje dvux raz v god*, December 10, 2021, available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13173419> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

38 Arka, *Tovarooborot mezhdu Armeniyey, Azerbaydzhanom i Turtsiyey ne obsuzhdayetsya na peregovorakh - deputat pravyashchey fraktsii*, February 11, 2021, available at: https://arka.am/ru/news/economy/tovarooborot_mezhdu_armeniyey_azerbaydzhanom_i_turtsiye_ne_obsuzhdaetsya_na_peregovorakh_deputat_prav/ (accessed: March 14, 2022)

39 Aljazeera, *Turkey, Armenia talk normalizing ties after decades of animosity*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/14/Turkey-armenia-talk-normalising-ties-after-decades-of-animosity> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

40 Newsarmenia, *Armeniya otmenila embargo na import turetskikh tovarov*, December 30, 2021, available at: <https://newsarmenia.am/news/economy/armeniya-ne-prodlila-embargo-na-import-turetskikh-tovarov/> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

Recently, the two states appointed representatives (Serdar Kılıç from Türkiye and Ruben Rubinyan from Armenia) to start bilateral negotiations on the normalization of relations. The first round of negotiations took place on 14 January 2022 in Moscow⁴¹ and the second on 24 February 2022 in Vienna. Even though the parties did not come to any concrete decisions, they “agreed to continue negotiations without preconditions with a view to the full normalization (of relations)”. On 12 March 2022, within the framework of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF, 11-13 March, Türkiye), the Foreign Ministers of the two countries, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Ararat Mirzoyan, held a meeting where they “reiterated their will to conduct the process aiming at full normalization and good neighborly relations without pre-conditions”.⁴² Meanwhile, passenger flights between Türkiye and Armenia resumed from 2 February 2022.⁴³

The beginning of negotiations between Türkiye and Armenia was positively perceived by Azerbaijan. After each round of talks, Azerbaijani officials on different levels (such as the President and Minister of Foreign Affairs) declared their support for the normalization of relations between the two countries.

The beginning of negotiations between Türkiye and Armenia was positively perceived by Azerbaijan. After each round of talks, Azerbaijani officials on different levels (such as the President⁴⁴ and Minister of Foreign Affairs⁴⁵) declared their support for the

41 France24, *Turkey and Armenia welcome 'constructive' efforts to mend relations*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220114-Turkey-armenia-to-hold-talks-in-moscow-on-normalising-ties> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

42 MFA.gov.tr, *Press Release Regarding the Bilateral Meeting of H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Turkey, and H.E. Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Armenia at the Margin of Antalya Diplomacy Forum*, March 12, 2022, available at: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-83_-sayin-bakanimizin-antalya-diplomasi-forumu-marjinda-12-mart-2022-tarihinde-ermenistan-disisleri-bakani-ararat-mirzoyan-la-yaptigi-ikili-gorusme-hk.en.mfa (accessed: March 14, 2022)

43 MFA.gov.tr, *Press Release Regarding the Meeting of the Special Representatives for the Normalization Process Between Turkey and Armenia*, available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no-63-turkiye-ve-ermenistan-normallesme-sureci-ozel-temsilcileri-hk.en.mfa> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

44 London.mfa.gov.az, *Normalizing relations with Azerbaijan will create new opportunities for Armenia: President Ilham Aliyev*, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://london.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3119/normalizing-relations-with-azerbaijan-will-create-new-opportunities-for-armenia-president-ilham-aliyev> (accessed: May 22, 2022)

45 Report.az, *Azerbaijan supports the establishment of Turkish-Armenian relations*, (translation from Azerbaijani), December 27 2021, available at: <https://report.az/xarici-siyaset/azerbaycan-turkiye-ermenistan-munasibetlerinin-qurulmasini-destekleyir/> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

normalization of relations between the two countries.

Obviously, Azerbaijan's position towards the process of rapprochement between Türkiye and Armenia has changed since 2008, notably after the 44-Day War. This happened due to several reasons: first, for example, Azerbaijan has achieved its goal in restoring the country's territorial integrity; and second, Azerbaijan is eager to strengthen peace in the South Caucasus region through regional cooperation. In this case, the opening of Türkiye's borders with Armenia will also contribute to this goal.

Türkiye is conducting the current process of rapprochement with Armenia in active consultation with Azerbaijan. Türkiye checks its steps against the processes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In this context, Armenia has to carry out two processes of improving relations with two neighbours at the same time and not postpone the peace process with Azerbaijan. The visit of Türkiye's Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu to Baku on 5 March 2022, a week before the start of the ADF, was highly significant and symbolic. During his meeting with the President of Azerbaijan, İlham Aliyev, Türkiye's special representative in charge of the normalization of relations with Armenia, Serdar Kılıç, was also presented.⁴⁶ This indicates that, for Armenia, the improvement of relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan can only happen in conjunction with both states. In fact, Çavuşoğlu once again voiced this position during his visit to Baku, saying that there is full coordination between Türkiye and Azerbaijan regarding the process of normalizing bilateral relations with Armenia, and that "the main goal of Türkiye in the region is good-neighbourly relations in accordance with international law".⁴⁷

In fact, Armenia coordinates its steps with Russia too, since they suggested the first meeting to be held in Moscow. The second one was in Vienna. Only after Türkiye insisted that meetings should be directly held in respective countries, not in third ones, two ministers had meeting at the ADF.

46 President.az, *İlham Aliyev received Foreign Minister of Turkey*, March 5, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55580> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

47 Daily Sabah, *Azerbaijan fully supports normalization of Turkey – Armenia ties: FM*, March 6, 2022, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/azerbaijan-fully-supports-normalization-of-turkey-armenia-ties-FM> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

Conclusion

Since the independence of Armenia, there have been three initiatives between Türkiye and Armenia to establish relations. Albeit Türkiye and Armenia have their own agenda for discussion, Azerbaijan played a key role in shaping relations between these two countries. As this study shows, the development of relations between Türkiye and Armenia has never depended only on their bilateral perceptions of each other. In all attempts by Türkiye to start the process of rapprochement with Armenia, Azerbaijan's interests became an inevitable factor.

In all three initiatives, the Azerbaijan factor was present in different ways. Türkiye's first initiative to improve relations was undertaken in 1991. Türkiye's actions can be characterized as an integral part of the overall formation of relations with the newly independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time, the relations, after mutual attempts at developing them, became frozen. Although Armenia continued looking for ways of rapprochement, Türkiye considered them premature. Armenia supposed that, if the normalization of relations started, it could be perceived as Türkiye ignoring Armenia's occupation policy towards Azerbaijan. Given the historical, cultural, and strategic ties with Azerbaijan, official Ankara did not take this step but expressed solidarity with Azerbaijan by closing its borders with Armenia. Since then, Türkiye has shaped its position as follows: the development of ties with Armenia was directly related to the de-occupation of Azerbaijan's territories. Albeit this position remained steadfast until 2008, Türkiye began to form a different policy towards Armenia thereafter.

The second attempt of Türkiye to resume its relations with its eastern neighbour was in 2008. An important feature of this initiative was that, for the first time since 1991, Türkiye promoted a strategy for developing relations with Armenia, independent of Azerbaijan–Armenia relations. Türkiye planned to open the borders and establish diplomatic relations with Armenia despite the ongoing occupation of Azerbaijani lands. At that time, the Turkish foreign policy course was designed on the assumption that the formation of relations with Armenia would also have a positive impact on the resolution of the [now former] Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict and Azerbaijan would therefore not interfere. However, Azerbaijan reacted negatively to this, which led to dissatisfaction in relations, and the continuation of this process

would bear a cost for Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. Eventually, this disagreement led to the strengthening of relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, which reached the level of a strategic alliance.

The third initiative started with the new geopolitical reality after the 44-Day War. The peculiarities of the current format are that Azerbaijan fully supports the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Armenia, as Baku’s previous objections regarding Armenia’s occupation of Azerbaijan’s territory are not a factor any more after the liberation of these territories. Albeit Türkiye receives the full support of Azerbaijan, official Ankara coordinates its actions with official Baku. This indicates the strategic level of the relations between these countries and their political determination to consider each other’s national interests.

The Russia-Ukraine War: Perspective of Azerbaijan

Vasif Huseynov*

For the three countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), the Russia-Ukraine war has been both a challenge for their national security and a test for the resilience of their foreign policies. Armenia, an ally of Russia with multiple institutional and contractual arrangements, and Georgia, a country with traditionally strong pro-Western aspirations, sought to remain cautiously neutral and supportive-at-a-distance, respectively, without unequivocally allying with one side against the other. For Azerbaijan, a country that has, since the mid-1990s, prioritized its national interests in pursuing its foreign policy (i.e., maintaining more-or-less equal distance from all major powers while avoiding any alliance or confrontation with one against the others, which is often portrayed as a 'balanced approach'), the tense security situation in the close neighbourhood caused by the war reaffirmed the utility of this strategy. Having signed declarations on allied cooperation with Türkiye (June 2021) and Russia (February 2022), Azerbaijan sought to minimize the threats to its national security – which was critical amidst occasionally escalating tensions with Armenia. This has been, however, a remarkable challenge for Azerbaijan's foreign policy as the country is in a strategic partnership with Ukraine and cannot ignore the security challenges and humanitarian tragedies Ukraine has faced. The analysis pursued in this paper is focused primarily on the policy responses of Azerbaijan vis-à-vis the Russia-Ukraine War. Through analysing how Azerbaijan reacted to this war, the paper argues that, although Baku continued to take a vigilant stance in the West-Russia standoff and sought not to provoke a negative reaction towards itself, it provided tangible support to Ukraine and declared support for the country's territorial integrity.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, Balanced Approach, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia



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Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has caused a geopolitical earthquake in international relations, triggered the most severe confrontation between the West and Russia since the end of the Cold War, and reverberated across the entire globe. The countries in Russia's neighbourhood, particularly those that once belonged to the former

The South Caucasus, a region that is located between Russia in the north and Iran in the south, is one of those regions whose future fate is inextricable linked with the outcome of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Soviet Union, are among those most concerned about the existing dangerous security situation in the region and its future consequences. The South Caucasus, a region that is located between Russia in the north and Iran in the south, is one of those regions whose future fate is inextricable linked with the outcome of the ongoing war in Ukraine. For the three countries of the region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), a lot is at stake – a situation which requires them to

formulate their external policies with the utmost care not to jeopardize their independent statehood and sovereignty, regained at great cost in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Therefore, amidst the Russia–Ukraine war, each of the three countries, depending on their geopolitical weight, calculated its position (each to a specific extent) in a way that is intended to neither antagonize Russia nor undermine its relations with the West and Ukraine. Russia's still strong political and military influence over the South Caucasus leave these countries few choices in this critical geopolitical upheaval.

This paper is primarily focused on an analysis of Azerbaijan's reaction to the Russia–Ukraine war. The next section provides a brief overview

For Azerbaijan, however, its stance appeared more as a continuation of the conventional adept foreign policy (also interpreted as a 'balanced approach') that the country has undertaken since the mid-1990s.

of the approaches of the three countries of the South Caucasus vis-à-vis this war. It reveals that all three countries have sought to avoid totally allying with or antagonizing one side in the war against the other – a situation that is conditioned mostly by their geographic location. In the case of Armenia, this policy approach can be characterized as cautious neutrality, which is a relatively new phenomenon given Armenia's participation in Russia-led political and military integration projects. Given Georgia's aspirations to join the Euro-Atlantic structures, its stance was about being distantly supportive

towards Ukraine without radically provoking Russia. For Azerbaijan, however, its stance appeared more as a continuation of the conventional adept foreign policy (also interpreted as a ‘balanced approach’) that the country has undertaken since the mid-1990s. This approach, which tends to be conceptualized¹ by some Azerbaijani politicians also as ‘multivectoralism’, implies maintaining equal distance with major powers, pursuing mutually beneficial relations with them wherever possible, and avoiding any alliance with one geopolitical pole against the others. Accordingly, the rest of the paper, by closely following Azerbaijan’s foreign policy since the start of the Russia–Ukraine war on 24 February 2022 and primarily examining media news and the public statements of political leaders, explores how Azerbaijan applied the balanced approach in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war.

Brief Overview of South Caucasian Countries’ Approaches

The political leadership of **Georgia** – the only country in the South Caucasus aspiring to become a member of the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as the only country in the region in a conflict with Russia – initially held a rather restrained position that fell in the middle between that of Russia’s ally Armenia and the more balanced one of Azerbaijan.² Georgia is threatened, among other factors, by a possible escalation in its conflict with Russia and the annexation of its separatist (currently occupied) region of South Ossetia (Tskhinvali) by Russia. Hence, the government of Georgia refused to join the Western sanctions against Russia but, through the National Bank of Georgia, declared that it “cannot and will not help” anyone seeking to evade these sanctions.³ According to Georgia’s Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, alignment with the strictly imposed sanctions regime of the West would only damage Georgia and

1 Atlantic Council, *A Conversation with Hikmet Hajiyeu*, Atlantic Council, June 11, 2019, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFC2hOVh-yQ&ab_channel=AtlanticCouncil (accessed: April 14, 2022).

2 Menabde, G., “Georgian Parliament Supports Ukraine, but Fears Mentioning Russia”, *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasian Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 16, February 9, 2022, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/georgian-parliament-supports-ukraine-but-fears-mentioning-russia/> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

3 National Bank of Georgia (2022), “Statement of National Bank of Georgia,” available at: <https://nbg.gov.ge/en/media/news/statement-of-the-national-bank-of-geor-23> (accessed: April 12, 2022).

its people. *“I want to state clearly and unambiguously, considering our national interests and interests of the people, Georgia does not plan to participate in the financial and economic sanctions, as this would only damage our country and populace more,”* he said on 25 February, the day after Russia launched a war against Ukraine.⁴ In protest, Ukraine recalled its ambassador from Georgia. Such a policy stance of the government of Georgia outraged the country’s opposition and most of society, which have strongly condemned Russia’s war against Ukraine.⁵ Nevertheless, the government of Georgia has demonstrated an entirely pro-Ukraine position on international platforms and submitted its application for EU Membership, thereby reaffirming the country’s pro-Western aspirations.

For **Armenia**, it has been much more difficult to maintain neutrality due to the military and economic alliances with Russia under Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), respectively. Moreover, Armenia’s territorial claim to Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region made Yerevan dependent on Russia’s peacekeeping mission deployed there after the 44-Day War in 2020. On 25 February 2022, Armenia alone voted with the Russian delegation against a decision at the Council of Europe to suspend Russia from the organization due to the latter’s armed attack against Ukraine.⁶ In the face of criticism from the Western-aligned civil society and threats of sanctions, Armenia had to make some corrections in its policies that were reflected, among others, in the country’s ‘abstentions’ in the voting at the United Nations General Assembly on the resolutions condemning Russia’s actions vis-à-vis Ukraine in early March 2022.⁷

According to Armenian political experts, the Russia–Ukraine war might entail serious threats to Armenia, with possible Russian plans to strengthen its control over the countries on its periphery or to

4 Civil.ge, *Georgia Won’t Join Russia Sanctions, PM Says*, February 25, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/475153> (accessed: April 14, 2022)

5 Civil.ge, *‘Traitor Garibashvili’ Faces Resignation Calls*, February 28, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/476001> (accessed: April 14, 2022)

6 Council of Europe (2022), “1426ter meeting, February 25, 2022, 2.3 Situation in Ukraine – Measures to be taken, including under Article 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe”, available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680a5a360 (accessed: June 4, 2022)

7 Armradio.am, *U.N. General Assembly resolution demands end to Ukraine war*, March 2, 2022, available at: <https://en.armradio.am/2022/03/02/u-n-general-assembly-resolution-demands-end-to-ukraine-war/> (accessed: June 3, 2022)

pressure Armenia to join the Russia-Belarus Union State.⁸ They believe this threat can be neutralized or mitigated through the normalization of Armenia's relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan. For example, an Armenian journalist from the media channel Hetq.am tweeted that “against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine”, the normalization of Armenia's relations with its Turkic neighbours “becomes vital” and could provide space for manoeuvring “should [Armenia] face harsh choices”.⁹

For **Azerbaijan**, the Russia–Ukraine war has been another test for the balanced approach of the country's foreign policy that it has maintained since the mid-1990s. As opposed to Georgia, a country that is in a conflict with Russia and as such is threatened by the situation in Ukraine, and Armenia, a country that is economically and militarily dependent on Russia, Azerbaijan has had much more room for manoeuvre through these troubled times. Being economically and politically more independent thanks to rich oil and gas revenues, a growing non-energy economic sector, and having a strong strategic alliance with Türkiye, combined with the authority Azerbaijan has in multilateral diplomacy, official Baku feels more confident in dealing with foreign policy challenges. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan remains vigilant in foreign policy performance to avoid risks that might undermine its national security. Azerbaijan works with its northern neighbour on a number of economic issues, which culminated in the recent declaration the country signed with Russia on allied interaction on 22 February 2022.¹⁰ On this basis, the country demonstrated support to Ukraine without provoking

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8 Huseynov, V., “Post-War Status Quo in South Caucasus Trembles While Russia Fights on in Ukraine”, *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 47, April 5, 2022, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/amidst-russia-ukraine-war-armenia-seeks-to-normalize-relations-with-turkey/> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

9 Martirosyan, S., “Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations & eventually the establishment of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations becomes vital. If done properly & diplomatically, this could provide space for maneuvering should we face harsh choices”, Twitter, March 6, 2022, 12:15 a.m., Available at: <https://twitter.com/sammartirosyan9/status/1500203381469683712> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

10 Huseynov, V., “Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Declaration on Allied Cooperation”, *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 25, February 25, 2022, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-and-russia-sign-declaration-on-allied-cooperation/> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

discomfort in its relations with Russia. This paper will expand on the details of Azerbaijan's policies vis-à-vis the Russia–Ukraine War and its implications for regional security in the South Caucasus.

Reassurance for a Balanced Approach in Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

Azerbaijan is pursuing a policy of non-alignment in international relations, although unlike, for example, Moldova, its constitution does not prohibit joining military alliances. Since 2011, Azerbaijan has been a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an international movement uniting 120 member and 17 observer countries. Based on the understanding of non-participation in military blocs, the NAM was formally established by 25 states, including India, Egypt, and the former Yugoslavia, at the Belgrade Conference in September 1961. Azerbaijan has chaired the NAM since 2019 and actively promotes the goals and principles of the movement in international relations. Based on these principles, the government of Azerbaijan used to characterize its policy of non-alignment as an imperative conditioned by its geographical location. According to Hikmet Hajiyev, Azerbaijani presidential aide on foreign policy, the geopolitical realities of the region urge Baku to pursue a multi-vectoral foreign policy course and develop close relations with various regional and global players.¹¹

In upholding these principles, Azerbaijan seeks to avoid allying with one geopolitical pole at the expense of the country's relations with other actors.

In upholding these principles, Azerbaijan seeks to avoid allying with one geopolitical pole at the expense of the country's relations with other actors. A quick overview of Azerbaijan's foreign policies in recent years supports this inference. For example, in June 2021, Azerbaijan signed the Shusha Declaration on allied relations with its major ally Türkiye. The countries vowed to militarily support each other if either side is attacked by another state or group of states.¹² In February 2022, Azerbaijan signed another declaration with Russia in Moscow¹³ – a move that

11 Atlantic Council, *A Conversation with Hikmet Hajiyev*, Atlantic Council, June 11, 2019, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFC2hOVh-yQ&ab_channel=AtlanticCouncil (accessed: April 14, 2022).

12 President.az, *Azerbaijan, Turkey signed Shusha Declaration on allied relations*, June 15, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/52115> (accessed: June 3, 2022).

13 Mfa.gov.az, *No:056/22, Azərbaycan Respublikası Xarici İşlər Nazirliyinin Mətbuat xidməti idarəsinin məlumatı [No:056/22 Information of the Press Service of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan]*, February 22, 2022, available at: <https://mfa.gov.az/az/>

was interpreted by some Azerbaijani experts largely as a move for reassurance that Russia will not “pursue similar policies toward Azerbaijan [as Russia has carried out against Georgia and Ukraine] in exchange for Azerbaijan recognizing Russia as a dominant power in the broader former Soviet region”.¹⁴ However, this declaration does not bear the same legal status for Baku as the one signed with Ankara, which has been ratified by the parliaments of both states.

In March 2022, Baku made another important decision and signed a deal with Iran to establish new transport and electricity connections linking the western part of the main territory of Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via the north-western region of Iran.¹⁵ This was a timely move that assuaged Tehran’s concerns regarding the transportation projects promoted by Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War and provided necessary opportunities for Iran to become part of the transit hub emerging in its northern neighbourhood.

Azerbaijan is also seeking to develop relations with the EU and is keen to sign a new framework agreement with this union in the near future.¹⁶ Azerbaijan is also negotiating with its European partners about the possibility of increasing natural gas exports to the EU and thus help the efforts of member states to mitigate the risk of dependence on single sources and supply routes.¹⁷

The tragic experience of Ukraine came on the heels of the country’s abandonment of neutrality and the launch of efforts to accede to the EU and NATO, and demonstrated the failure of the West to protect Ukraine against the threats and challenges this choice brought about. For Azerbaijan, this reaffirms the importance of the balanced approach in the

news/no05622 (accessed: June 3, 2022).

14 Huseynov, V., “Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Declaration on Allied Cooperation”, *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 25, February 25, 2022, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-and-russia-sign-declaration-on-allied-cooperation/> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

15 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev received delegation led by Iran’s Minister of Roads and Urban Development*, March 11, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55603> (accessed: June 3, 2022).

16 Apa.az, *Azerbaijani FM: “Signing of agreement between EU and Azerbaijan in 2022 is possible”*, February 4, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/azerbaijani-fm-signing-of-agreement-between-eu-and-azerbaijan-in-2022-is-possible-367613> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

17 Caspiannews.com, *Azerbaijan, EU Working to Expand Natural Gas Supplies to Europe*, June 4, 2022, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-eu-working-to-expand-natural-gas-supplies-to-europe-2022-6-2-30/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Azerbaijan's external orientation. Hence, the signing of the declaration with Russia can be interpreted, *inter alia*, as an attempt by Baku to ensure that Azerbaijan will not face any threats from the north similar to those faced by Ukraine and Georgia. This is critical for a number of reasons, but primarily because of the lack of any capable balancing power that would dare to openly and militarily confront Russia in the case of a challenging security situation that might involve Azerbaijan.

This cautious approach is related, among other factors, to the fact that Azerbaijan–Russia relations have had problematic phases, both historically and over recent years. Russia's traditional support to Armenia in the former Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, Moscow's military supplies to Yerevan prior to and during the Second Karabakh War, and the deployment of Russian troops as peacekeepers in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan after this war constitute the rationale for Baku's vigilance in its Russia policies. Although the bilateral political ties at the top level remain stable, there are political circles in Russia that have threatened Azerbaijan in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, and the situation became tense in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan in March 2022. For example, Russian State Duma (lower chamber of parliament) deputy Mikhail Delyagin, quite contrary to the spirit of the Azerbaijan–Russia declaration on allied interaction, threatened Azerbaijan on state television with “harsh and unequivocal punishment” if the country disobeys Moscow's demands and sides more closely “with Türkiye, an ally of the United States”.¹⁸ On the Telegram channel, Delyagin asked his followers whether they thought Russia should attack Baku's oil industry infrastructure with nuclear weapons in response to Azerbaijani “aggression” in the Karabakh region.¹⁹ Although he later apologized for this comment, and although the spokesperson of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied such plans against Azerbaijan,²⁰ the scandal caused concern among Azerbaijani society.

18 İctimai TV, *Another provocation on the Russian state TV channel: a threat was voiced against Azerbaijan*, March 29, 2022, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLmJRhQpoEg&t=51s&ab_channel=İCTİMAİTV (accessed: April 14, 2022).

19 APA, *Russian state channels continue provocation against Azerbaijan: Proxy MP Delyagin on a leading role*, March 29, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/political/russian-state-channels-continue-provocation-against-azerbaijan-proxy-mp-delyagin-on-a-leading-role-video-371972> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

20 Apa.az, *Mikhail Delyagin's statements about Azerbaijan are unacceptable - Russian MFA*, March 29, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/cis-countries/mikhail-delyagins-statements-about-azerbaijan-are-unacceptable-russian-mfa-updated-372020> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Azerbaijan and Ukraine are Strategic Partners

Thus, amid Russia's war against Ukraine, the geopolitical situation in the neighbourhood has forced Azerbaijan to maintain the balanced approach in foreign policy that this country consciously adopted in the mid-1990s. Despite this balance at the geopolitical level, the political leadership of Azerbaijan, albeit it has refrained from openly criticizing Russia, has declared indirect support to Ukraine by highlighting the importance of international law, especially sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the basis for achieving a ceasefire between the conflicting parties. Azerbaijan and Ukraine officially consider each other 'strategic partners' and have consistently supported each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of their internationally recognized borders.²¹ This has been critical in the context of the occupation of part of Azerbaijan's sovereign territories by Armenia in the past and Russia's occupation of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.²²

Despite this balance at the geopolitical level, the political leadership of Azerbaijan, albeit it has refrained from openly criticizing Russia, has declared indirect support to Ukraine by highlighting the importance of international law, especially sovereignty and territorial integrity

The continuation of this support amid the Russia–Ukraine tensions came as a surprise for many observers, who expected Azerbaijan to unambiguously side with Russia in all critical international issues following the Moscow Declaration of February 2022. Just a month before the breakout of the war, and amidst the escalation of hostilities, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev was conspicuously the only leader from the post-Soviet space (excluding the Baltic States) who travelled to Kyiv, where he signed a number of agreements on deepening bilateral cooperation with Ukraine and declared his support for the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.²³ The visit was also seen as an attempt of Baku to mediate between Kyiv and Moscow,

21 President.gov.ua, *Presidents of Ukraine and Azerbaijan signed a Joint Declaration on Deepening Strategic Partnership*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezidenti-ukrayini-ta-azerbajdzhanu-pidpisali-spilnu-deklar-72389> (accessed: June 4, 2022).

22 Azernews.az, *Baku: Ukraine crisis should be solved in line with int'l law*, 25 February 2022, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/189785.html> (accessed: June 4, 2022).

23 President.gov.ua, *Presidents of Ukraine and Azerbaijan signed a Joint Declaration on Deepening Strategic Partnership*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezidenti-ukrayini-ta-azerbajdzhanu-pidpisali-spilnu-deklar-72389> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

as President Aliyev telephoned the Russian leader Vladimir Putin on his return from Ukraine.²⁴

In the course of the visit, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Ukraine expressed readiness to intensify cooperation in almost all spheres of their relations, including in fighting hybrid threats and, in the defence industry field, by completing current and developing new joint projects. For Paul Goble, a former US diplomat and presently an analyst at the Jamestown Foundation, “the fact that Aliyev went to Kyiv at this point, even though he and [President of Ukraine Volodymyr] Zelensky met as recently as at the end of last year in Brussels, underscores how resolutely Baku backs Kyiv on the issue of Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea.”²⁵

This closeness in relations was also reflected in the desire expressed by President Aliyev and President Zelensky to establish a transport corridor that would link the countries of the GUAM group together and with Europe.²⁶ The group, which includes Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova and was established in 1997, had mostly focused on economic affairs in recent years. The GUAM group has been traditionally seen by Moscow as a ‘Western-backed attempt’ of these four countries to form a counterweight against the Russia-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).²⁷ The mention of this format in the “Joint Declaration of the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Ukraine” during the January visit was largely interpreted as an attempt to reinvigorate GUAM. The possibility of Türkiye’s joining GUAM or the establishment of trilateral strategic cooperation among Türkiye–Ukraine–Azerbaijan has also been on the agenda of expert discussions in recent years.²⁸ Therefore, it is no coincidence that Russian political

24 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev made a phone call to President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin*, January 18, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55276> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

25 Goble, P., “As Tensions Over Ukraine Rise, Baku Signals Support for Kyiv, Worrying Moscow”, *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 6, January 25, 2022, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/as-tensions-over-ukraine-rise-baku-signals-support-for-kyiv-worrying-moscow/> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

26 President.az, *The Presidents of Azerbaijan and Ukraine made press statements*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55259> (accessed: June 4, 2022).

27 Radiokp.ru, *Voennyi ekspert Aleksandr Jilin: Vizit Aliyeva v Kiev - eto podgotovka k reanimatsii antirossiyskoy organizatsii GUAM*, January 17, 2022, available at: <https://radiokp.ru/podcast/utrenniy-mardan/543158> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

28 Goble, P., “Turkey seen seeking to reanimate GUAM as anti-Russian alliance,” *Euramaidan Press*, February 27, 2016, available at: <https://euromaidanpress.com>.

observers became alarmed that these ideas, if realized, would deal another blow to Russia's influence in its neighbourhood.²⁹

The bilateral relations between Ukraine and Azerbaijan in the fields of food security, agriculture, and energy are also of strategic importance for the sides. Azerbaijan is a major and reliable exporter of crude oil to Ukraine. Prior to the latest Russia–Ukraine war, 80% of Ukraine's total oil purchases were provided by Azerbaijan, which made Ukraine one of the top three buyers of Azerbaijani oil.³⁰ In 2021, Ukraine purchased about 850,000 tonnes of oil for \$373.4 million. Ukraine also expressed interest in buying natural gas from Azerbaijan in an attempt to diversify its energy sources away from Russia.³¹ The sides made the first practical steps in this direction in 2020 by carrying out reverse-flow deliveries of gas from Türkiye through the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline into the gas transmission system of Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania and on to Ukraine.³²

Against the backdrop of such a strategic partnership developed between the two countries, Azerbaijan did not confine its support for Ukraine only to political statements amidst the country's war with Russia. On 26 February 2022, Baku donated a reported €5 million (\$5.6 million) worth of medicine and medical equipment as humanitarian relief to Ukraine.³³ Georgia was the only other country in the South Caucasus that sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine, though in a smaller amount of

com/2016/02/27/Turkey-seen-seeking-to-reanimate-guam-as-anti-russian-alliance-euromaidan-press/ (accessed: June 10, 2022).

29 Radiokp.ru, *Voenniy ekspert Aleksandr Jilin: Vizit Aliyeva v Kiev - eto podgotovka k reanimatsii antirossiyskoy organizatsii GUAM*, January 17, 2022, available at: <https://radiokp.ru/podcast/utrenniy-mardan/543158> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

30 The Tribune, *Azerbaijan to suspend oil exports to Ukraine due to security risks amid military conflict*-source, February 25, 2022, available at: <https://www.thetribune.com/azerbaijan-to-suspend-oil-exports-to-ukraine-due-to-security-risks-amid-military-conflict-source/> (accessed: April 14, 2022).

31 Report.az, *Ukraine may receive gas from Azerbaijan through Trans-Balkan pipeline*, June 18, 2021, available at: <https://report.az/en/energy/ukraine-may-receive-gas-from-azerbaijan-through-trans-balkan-pipeline/> (accessed: June 4, 2022).

32 Report.az, *Ukraine may receive gas from Azerbaijan through Trans-Balkan pipeline*, June 18, 2021, available at: <https://report.az/en/energy/ukraine-may-receive-gas-from-azerbaijan-through-trans-balkan-pipeline/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

33 Caspiannews.com, *Azerbaijan Sends Humanitarian Aid to War-Hit Ukraine, Vows to Supply Ambulances With Fuel Free of Charge*, February 28, 2022, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-sends-humanitarian-aid-to-war-hit-ukraine-vows-to-supply-ambulances-with-fuel-free-of-charge-2022-2-28-0/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

approximately \$315,000, while Armenia did not send any.³⁴

The aid by Azerbaijan was announced by Ukraine's President Vladimir Zelensky on Twitter soon after his telephone call with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev on 26 February 2022, two days after the war started. In another tweet, Zelensky stated that all the gasoline filling stations of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) in Ukraine has been instructed to provide free fuel for ambulances and emergency vehicles, adding that the first plane with medical assistance from Azerbaijan was expected to arrive in the early hours of 27 February. Considering that there are more than 50 SOCAR gas filling stations in Ukraine, this assistance cannot be underestimated.

On 28 March 2022, President Zelensky further announced in a tweet that Azerbaijan will also provide fuel for Ukraine's agricultural needs during the sowing campaign. The announcement came two days after Zelensky told the Russian media that Russian forces had carried out attacks on fuel depots in Ukraine that were supposed to be utilized for sowing. It is worth noting that, over recent months, Azerbaijan has demonstrated increasing interest in cooperation with Ukraine in the agricultural sector and has sought to increase its wheat imports from Ukraine in order to diversify its supply sources and reduce its dependency on imports from Russia (currently 95%). This was on the agenda of President Aliyev's latest visit to Kyiv in January, in the course of which Azerbaijan agreed to lease an unspecified amount of farmland in Ukraine for sowing wheat and to deliver manufactured products to the country.³⁵

Azerbaijani society was much more vocal in their support to Ukraine. On 28 February 2022, a large number of Azerbaijanis gathered outside the Ukrainian Embassy in Baku and chanted pro-Ukrainian slogans. Political analysts and some Azerbaijani politicians expressed support for the people of Ukraine and condemned the war. This support in the Azerbaijani media was of such an extent that Russia blocked a number of Azerbaijani news websites. The Azerbaijani Press Council protested this decision of the Russian authorities, declaring that "Russia clearly neglects freedom of speech and expression and pluralism."³⁶ Russia's

34 Civil.ge, *Georgia Sends Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine*, February 27, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/475744> (accessed: June 4, 2022).

35 Haqqin.az, *Ilkham Aliyev beret v arendy zemli Ukraini dlya Azerbaydjana*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://haqqin.az/news/231638> (accessed: June 3, 2022)

36 Trend.az, *Azerbaijan's Press Council makes statement on Russia blocking access to*

ambassador to Azerbaijan, commenting on the blocking of Azerbaijani news websites, said, “We are surprised by the large number of materials in the Azerbaijani media that biasedly criticize Russia’s position and leadership”, adding that “We have repeatedly had to draw the attention of the Azerbaijani government to the anti-Russian hysteria raging in the local media.”³⁷

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Conclusion

The launch of Russia’s war against Ukraine caused alarm signals across the neighbouring regions, including the South Caucasus countries. The geopolitical restrictions caused by their location in a widely contested region where Russia still enjoys strong influence shaped the responses of these three countries to the war.

Concomitantly, there has been some variation in this context. While Georgia was careful not to provoke Russia but at the same time not to alienate its Western partners, Armenia had to demonstrate limited support to Russia, dictated by its alliance with Moscow within the EAEU and the CSTO and its dependence on Russia in military and economic terms.

Azerbaijan found more room for manoeuvre thanks to the country’s economic independence, traditionally balanced approach in foreign policy, and recently reinforced strategic alliance with the NATO member Türkiye. Baku has, nevertheless, been vigilant enough not to provoke Russia and has sustained economic ties with Moscow, which were further cemented in their joint declaration on allied interaction signed on 22 February 2022. The declaration was largely seen by Azerbaijani political experts as reassurance that Russia would not pursue similar policies vis-à-vis Azerbaijan as it did in its relations with Ukraine and Georgia. This reflects the geopolitical situation around Azerbaijan when two of the country’s post-Soviet partners

several Azerbaijani websites, March 28, 2022, available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3573923.html> (accessed: June 4, 2022)

37 Musavat.com, *The reasons for Russia’s discontent with Azerbaijan became known – reactions* (translation from Azerbaijani), April 1, 2022, available at: https://musavat.com/news/rusiyanin-azerbaycandan-naraziliginin-sebebi-bilindi-reaksiyalar_879277.html (accessed: April 14, 2022).

(Russia and Ukraine) clashed in a violent war in late February 2022.

Although Baku had to refrain from moves that would cause a backlash from its powerful northern neighbour, it did not remain indifferent to the troubles of Ukraine. The relations between Azerbaijan and Ukraine have been built on the basis of a strategic partnership that was boosted by the visit of President Aliyev to Kyiv in January 2022 amid rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine. Following the start of the war on 24 February, Azerbaijan carefully measured its support to Ukraine. Azerbaijani officials underscored the importance of territorial integrity and the inviolability of internationally-recognized borders in the context of the Russia–Ukraine War. Baku also provided humanitarian assistance and ordered its gas filling stations, numbering more than 50 in Ukraine, to fill the tanks of ambulances and emergency vehicles free of charge. Azerbaijan is also providing fuel for vehicles in Ukraine that are involved in the agricultural sector. Azerbaijani society and media have been more vocal in their support of Ukraine, which resulted in the ban Russia imposed on some leading Azerbaijani news websites.

Role of Russia's Peacekeeping Missions in its Foreign Policy toward the South Caucasus

Nina Miholjic^{*}

This article examines the nature of the peacekeeping missions conducted by the Russian Federation in the South Caucasus. It explores two cases of Russia's peacekeeping deployment in Georgia's separatist region of Abkhazia and Azerbaijan's Karabakh region in order to draw conclusions about the role of peacekeeping missions in Russia's foreign policy. It also briefly touches upon Russia's involvement in peacekeeping in Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia (Tskhinvali). This article highlights the extent to which Russia's peacekeeping policies differ from the established peacekeeping norms of the UN by portraying the unique features of the latter's peacekeeping missions. The article concludes that, due to the distinctiveness of Russia's peacekeeping concept that has been used as one of the country's foreign policy instruments in its near neighbourhood, Russian peacekeepers have been more focused on a presence per se, rather than on preventing tension or maintaining stability in the areas of deployment. The article further elaborates the possible military challenges that the presence of Russia's peacekeepers may pose in the deployment zones and beyond.

Keywords: Russian peacekeeping, peacebuilding, UN, Georgia, Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh region



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Introduction

The post-Cold War international system has witnessed a striking increase in both UN and non-UN peacekeeping missions. In the period between 1988 and 1993 alone, the United Nations managed more peacekeeping missions than in the previous 40 years combined, while non-UN missions also experienced a drastic rise, particularly after 1992, reaching 39 missions in 1999 and again in 2008.¹ Such a proliferation of peacekeeping missions is associated with the rise of interstate conflicts after the end of the Cold War and the need for preventing those conflicts with more monitoring missions for the smooth implementation of ceasefires or paving the way for comprehensive peace agreements.² With a rise in the engagement of individual countries³ as well as different organizations, such as NATO, the EU, OSCE, and the African Union, in addition to the UN in peacekeeping operations, the scope and role of peacekeeping have become more prominent yet more diffuse.

Today, many individual countries use peacekeeping as a potent foreign policy tool. Although the core of peacekeeping mechanisms relates

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to maintaining international peace and security, the motivations of some countries for engaging in peacekeeping missions can vary. For instance, depending on the country's foreign policy agenda, the decision to be involved in or conduct a peacekeeping mission can be based on range of goals, from common to individual. Thus, a mission that aims at lowering levels of violence and restoring peace and security in affected areas contributes to regional and

global stability, which, consequently, contributes to strengthening international peace and security. Even though the effectiveness of peacekeeping remains a debatable matter, research on the efficacy of

1 Meiske, M. and Ruggeri, A., "Peacekeeping as a Tool of Foreign Policy", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, September 26, 2017, available at: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-462> (accessed: February 27, 2022).

2 *Ibid.*

3 E.g., Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), Indian peacekeeping operations in Sri Lanka between 1987 and 1990; The Australian/New Zealand-led Operation Helpem Fren in the Solomon Islands from 2003 and 2017; and the Australian-led Operation Astute in Timor-Leste from 2006 to 2013.

specific peacekeeping missions in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali suggests that the missions did indeed manage to prevent major civil wars and large-scale conflicts.⁴

Russia has its own well-defined policy of peacekeeping combined with extensive experience in implementing it in practice.⁵ Russia's peacekeeping forces in Azerbaijan and Georgia are guided by Moscow's foreign policy agenda, which implies the principle of non-interference in Russia's near abroad by any other foreign power and entrenching control and presence in its backyard. As Berls claims, Russia perceives itself as a country surrounded by enemies, particularly by NATO in the west. Due to this stance, any attempt at rapprochement between the states in Russia's near neighbourhood and the West is assessed as a belligerent move that needs to be addressed appropriately.⁶ The Kremlin's primary interest is to increase its political and military control in the post-Soviet region in order to secure itself better against possible attacks, especially from the West, in the future. Perhaps Russian policymakers believe that their peacekeeping forces may somehow discourage foreign states from projecting backyard intrusion into the affected parts of Russia's neighbourhood. However, Türkiye standing with Azerbaijan both before and after the war will continue to balance this point of view within Russia.

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It is important to assess the particular motives and the role of peacekeepers in a country's broader geostrategic agenda in order to understand the decision to conduct a peacekeeping mission. This is particularly interesting in the case of Russia's peacekeeping activities

4 Coning, C., "Are UN Peace Operations Effective?", *ReliefWeb*, November 14, 2019, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/are-un-peace-operations-effective> (accessed: May 4, 2022).

5 Bratersky, M., "Russia and Peacekeeping Operations: Conceptual and Practical Components of Russia's Policy", *Journal of Bulletin of International Organizations*, December 2017, available at: <https://iorj.hse.ru/data/2018/05/23/1149410902/Russia%20and%20Peacekeeping%20Operations%20Conce..l%20Components%20of%20Russia%E2%80%99s%20Policy.pdf> (accessed: March 14, 2022).

6 Berls, R., "Strengthening Russia's Influence in International Affairs, Part II: Russia and Its Neighbors: A Sphere of Influence or a Declining Relationship?", *NTI*, July 13, 2021, available at: <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-ii-russia-and-its-neighbors-a-sphere-of-influence-or-a-declining-relationship/> (accessed: May 4, 2022).

in the South Caucasus, where the prevailing national interests and desire to expand influence in the immediate neighbourhood play a major role. Analysis of peacekeeping processes in Georgia's Abkhazia region and Azerbaijan's Karabakh region renders Russia as a country that places its foreign policy interests above the traditional and official aims of peacekeeping missions, that is, calling for the restoration and preservation of peace and stability.

Uniqueness of Russia's Peacekeeping Activities

The United Nations (UN) defines peacekeeping as “a unique and dynamic instrument developed to help countries torn by conflict create the conditions for lasting peace.”⁷ In respect of facilitating peace efforts in conflict areas, the UN firmly believes that peacekeeping missions are the most effective tool at its disposal for aiming to establish the basis for more effective and peaceful resolutions of hostilities. For example, the UN Peacekeeping remit is built on three fundamental principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.⁸ UN peacekeeping has gradually adopted a multidimensional approach, which has broadened the scope and role of the peacekeeping missions. Contemporary UN peacekeeping helps not only with maintaining peace and security, but also in promoting human rights and facilitating different political processes, such as assisting in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants, as well as the repatriation of refugees.^{9 10}

Even though peacekeeping was created primarily as the UN's tool for resolving global peace and security issues, today, many organizations conduct peacekeeping activities, including NATO, the OSCE, the African Union, the EU, the CIS, the Economic Community of West African States, and the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), as well as individual states that, in many cases, use peacekeeping operations to satisfy their own foreign and security policy objectives and ambitions.¹¹

7 UN, *2018 Theme: 'UN Peacekeepers: 70 Years of Service and Sacrifice*, 2018, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/events/peacekeepersday/index2018.shtml> (accessed: March 9, 2022).

8 UN, *What is Peacekeeping*, available at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping> (accessed: March 9, 2022).

9 *Ibid.*

10 Meiske, M. and Ruggeri, A., op. cit.

11 *Ibid.*

Since the 1990s, Russia has engaged in numerous peacekeeping missions in the post-Soviet space. Specific brigades of Russia's armed forces are experienced in peacekeeping missions, especially in neighbouring countries, such as in eastern Ukraine, Georgia's South Ossetia (Tskhinvali) and Abkhazia regions, Moldova's Transnistria region, and, recently, in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region. However, it is questionable whether such peacekeeping missions have always been aligned with the traditional understanding of such missions' goals and methods.

Interestingly, Russia has provided a very limited number of troops for UN peacekeeping forces. The only exception relates to the period 1992–97, when Russia supplied between 850 and 1,650 uniformed peacekeepers. However, Russia has consistently deployed many fewer than 100 UN peacekeepers.¹² Moreover, Russia has always been reluctant to allow any potential UN peacekeeping missions in the former USSR. That leads to the conclusion about Russia's zeal to retain an exclusive right to perform as the sole peacekeeper in the post-Soviet space.¹³

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The Case of Russia's 'Peacekeeping' Activities in Georgia's Abkhazia Region

Despite the official Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) coverage for the peacekeeping mission deployed in 1994 with the aim of supervising the implementation of the "Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian–Abkhaz Conflict", Russia played a decisive role in deploying and supervising the whole mission. This peacekeeping mission is referred to as being 'Russian' not in name only, but also substantially, due to the fact that the CIS's Peacekeeping Forces predominantly consisted of troops from Russia.¹⁴ The CIS operation

12 Williams, P., "Putin's 'Peacekeepers'", *IPI Global Observatory*, February 23, 2022, available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/02/putins-peacekeepers/> (accessed: March 9, 2022).

13 Kuzio, T., "Why Russian peacekeepers are a threat to peace in the South Caucasus", *New Eastern Europe*, November 25, 2021, available at: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2021/11/25/why-russian-peacekeepers-are-a-threat-to-peace-in-the-south-caucasus/> (accessed: March 10, 2022).

14 Korkelia, K., "The CIS Peace-Keeping Operations in the Context of International Legal Order", *NATO Democratic Institutions Fellowships 1997-1999I*, available at:

was terminated after a 14-year period that was marked by Russia's ubiquitous management and dominance in the decision-making process as, in practice, only Russian troops carried out peacekeeping.¹⁵

After the war between Georgia and Abkhaz separatist forces ended on 27 September 1993, Russia intervened and deployed its forces in the area of the previous conflict. It was in 1994, after signing the "Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces" between the warring sides, that the CIS's Council of Heads of States officially validated Russia's deployment of a peacekeeping mission, whereas the approval by the UN Security Council's Resolution 937 (1994) that followed was an additional endorsement for the mission.¹⁶ However, the USA and NATO showed a level of disorientation and distraction by instability and conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and did not consider Russia's foreign policy moves in the post-Soviet region as alarming, at least not in the beginning.¹⁷ The CIS remained the symbolic face of a seemingly multilateral endorsement of the Russia-led peacekeeping mission.¹⁸ It is highly questionable whether the Russian peacekeeping in the Abkhazia region earned genuine international support and legitimation or superficial approval due to the set of circumstances in world politics of that time, when the USA and NATO were focused on resolving issues in the Middle East and maintaining assumptions about Russia as still too weak to present a serious military threat in the region.

The 1994 Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces determined more closely the key objectives of the Russian peacekeeping forces. These objectives were related to maintaining and observing the ceasefire, promoting the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, especially to the Gali district in separatist region of Abkhazia, as well as supervising the implementation of the abovementioned Agreement

<https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/97-99/korkelia.pdf> (accessed: May 5, 2022).

15 *Ibid.*

16 MacFarlane, S.N., "On the front lines in the near abroad: The CIS and the OSCE in Georgia's civil wars", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.18, No. 3, 1997, p. 514.

17 Socor, V., "Russia Discards its 'Peacekeeping' Operation in Abkhazia", *The Jamestown Foundation*, October 14, 2008, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-discards-its-peacekeeping-operation-in-abkhazia/> (accessed: March 3, 2022).

18 Charap, S., Geist, E., Frederick, B., Drennan, J.J., Chandler, N. and Kavanagh, J., "Russia's Military Interventions: Patterns, Drivers, and Signposts", *RAND Corporation*, 2021, available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA444-3.html (accessed: March 3, 2022)

and its Protocol.¹⁹ However, Russia's peacekeeping mission failed to fulfil fundamental international norms of peacekeeping, including the objectives set by the Agreement. First, the CIS mission should have been an international, or at least regional, mission; however, it was conducted under a monopoly of one country only. Despite the fact that Georgia appealed for the internationalization of the peacekeeping forces in the Abkhazia region, Russia managed the whole mission independently.²⁰ Russia used this 'peacekeeping mission' under the CIS umbrella to preserve its military presence in Georgia.

Furthermore, during the Russian mandate, the peacekeeping forces did not show serious interest in resolving refugee issues and failed to create a secure environment for the safe return of refugees and IDPs to the Abkhazia region that they had been forced to leave, nor did they protect the refugees who decided to return. Even in the periodic voluntary returns of a small percentage of refugees that occurred in the following years, the returnees were exposed to substantial violations of human rights in the areas controlled by peacekeepers.²¹ It was estimated that, out of at least 300,000 refugees and IDPs, only about 47,000 were allowed to return, exclusively in the occupied Gali district.²² However, many returnees faced renewed hostilities and, as a result, more than 1,500 homes of ethnic Georgians were destroyed and some 40,000 Georgians were forced to flee again.²³

A troublesome decision that additionally questioned the impartiality and aim of Russia's peacekeeping mission was the so-called 'passportization' process.

A troublesome decision that additionally questioned the impartiality and aim of Russia's peacekeeping mission was the so-called 'passportization' process. This process officially started in 2002 with Russia amending the "Federal Law on Citizenship of the Russian Federation", however,

19 United Nations, *Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces*, signed in Moscow, May 14, 1994, available at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1994/583 (accessed: March 4, 2022).

20 Socor, V., *op. cit.*

21 MacFarlane, S.N., *op. cit.*, p.515.

22 Human Rights Watch, *Georgia/Abkhazia: Back Home, but in Limbo* Abkhaz Authorities Curb Ethnic Georgian Returnees' Rights, July 15, 2011, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/15/georgia/abkhazia-back-home-limbo> (accessed: May 5, 2022).

23 Shanahan Cutts, N.M., "Enemies Through the Gates: Russian Violations of International Law in the Georgia/Abkhazia Conflict, *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Vol. 40, Iss. 1, 2008, p.292, available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol40/iss1/17> (accessed: March 4, 2022).

it had been exercised in the Abkhazia region without legal basis since 1999.²⁴ The Federal Law introduced a simplified procedure for the admittance to Russian citizenship for foreigners and stateless persons who were citizens of the former USSR. Such a simplified procedure allowed defined categories to be granted Russian citizenship without having, as previously, to live for five years on the territory of the Russian Federation, to have a legal means of subsistence, or to master the Russian language.²⁵ Passportization was successful to the extent that more than 80% of the Abkhazian population received Russian Federation passports in 2015.²⁶ This makes Russia's role as an unbiased facilitator unclear when it is concurrently conducting a

Russia could not accept that countries located within its very backyard had become western oriented, with NATO and EU membership aspirations. That is why Russia continued with other means to diffuse its presence in its neighbourhood.

policy that encourages passportization as a fast-track extraterritorial naturalization *en masse* of citizens residing outside its borders, in this case favouring the residents of the Abkhazia region.

One of reasons why Russia deployed peacekeeping forces to Abkhazia region was to act as a regional power creating decisive rule in that part of its backyard. Even though Russia, through its peacekeeping activities, tried to establish itself as a major mediator in the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict, it still did not succeed in stabilizing the region as the peacekeeping mission terminated with a full-fledged war between Georgia and Russia that undermined the latter's peacemaking capabilities. Russia could not accept that countries located within its very backyard had become western oriented, with NATO and EU membership aspirations. That is why Russia continued with other means to diffuse its presence in its neighbourhood.

Russia was also involved in a multinational peacekeeping contingent in another breakaway region, Georgia–South Ossetia (Tskhinvali). Albeit the Joint Control Commission (established in 1992 to preserve

24 Iovu, A., "The role of the West in countering Russian Passportization in the Black Sea", *Middle East Institute*, November 16, 2020, available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/role-west-countering-russian-passportization-black-sea> (accessed: March 5, 2022).

25 Max Planck Institute, "Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia", *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law*, Report, Volume II, September 2009, available at: https://www.mpil.de/files/pdf4/IIFFMCG_Volume_II1.pdf (accessed: May 23, 2022).

26 German, T., "Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Collision of Georgian and Russian Interests", *Russie. Nei. Visions*, Vol. 11, 2006, available at: <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/germananglais.pdf> (accessed: March 5, 2022).

stability in South Ossetia) comprised, along with Russian forces (500), also Georgian (320) troops and North/South Ossetian (500) personnel,²⁷ Russia's plans behind the peacekeeping mission did not change at all here, either. Thus, the relations between Russia and Georgia started deteriorating, because Georgia accused Russia of being partial and politically supporting the separatist forces of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. In 2006, the Parliament of Georgia requested the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from South Ossetia and Abkhazia.²⁸ Just two years later, in March 2008, the local authorities of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions submitted formal requests to Russia's parliament for their 'recognition', following the West's 'recognition' of the Kosovo region of Serbia that was condemned by Russian officials. Russia was among the first countries harshly criticizing Western countries' support for the province's secession from Serbia, describing such a decision as a terrible precedent that disturbed the core of the whole system of international relations.²⁹ However, soon after, Russia misused the 'Kosovo precedent' formula in regard to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. In August 2008, the local hostilities escalated into a full-scale war between Russia's peacekeeping forces together with Russia-backed Ossetian forces on one side, and Georgia's armed forces on the other. Following the Russo–Georgian War, Moscow recognized the 'independence' of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on 26 August 2008. The case of Russian peacekeeping activities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali) regions testifies to how Russian peacekeepers can turn into a martial force and change their role quickly depending on the situation on the ground.

Russia's Peacekeeping Mission in Azerbaijan's Karabakh Region

The Second Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia that lasted for 44 days in 2020 represents one of the most fundamental changes in the regional situation that impacted greatly the geopolitics of the South

27 Peace Operations Review, *South Ossetia-Georgia*, May 2015, available at: https://peaceoperationsreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2007_sou_oss_georgia_mission_notes.pdf (accessed: March 13, 2022).

28 *Ibid.*

29 The Sydney Morning Herald, *Putin calls Kosovo independence 'terrible precedent'*, February 23, 2008, available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/world/putin-calls-kosovo-independence-terrible-precedent-20080223-gds2d5.html> (accessed: May 25, 2022).

However, Armenia has not fulfilled, nor has Russia made any efforts towards the fulfilment of, Article 4 of the Trilateral Statement concerning the withdrawal of the armed forces of Armenia in parallel with the deployment of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation. Thus, some remnants of the armed forces of Armenia still act in the Karabakh region.

Caucasus and wider neighbourhood.³⁰ Azerbaijan managed to liberate its territories that were under Armenian occupation for almost three decades. At the beginning of the conflict, Russia and the West were surprisingly passive, calling sporadically for “peaceful resolutions” and “diplomatic efforts” to end the hostility, while Türkiye was very vocal in supporting Azerbaijan’s position throughout the conflict. Such a weak initial response of Russia might be interpreted as a sign of the country’s strategic thinking. Russia did not want to take sides and disturb the status quo in this region that was bringing more leverage to this regional hegemon. However, Azerbaijan’s armed forces succeeded in retaking most of their country’s formerly occupied territories. This caused a great

deal of distress to Armenia, which at that point called for help from its traditional ally – Russia. Russia started gradually to interfere by demonstrating itself as an impartial mediator and meanwhile seeking to alleviate the effects of the boosted partnership of Azerbaijan and Türkiye that could diminish Russia’s dominance in the region, and eventually managed to facilitate the signing of a Trilateral Statement between the warring sides to terminate the war.

According to the Trilateral Statement (signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia) that came into effect as of midnight on 10 November 2020, the peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation, to be precise, 1,960 armed troops, 90 armoured vehicles, and 380 motor vehicles and units of special equipment, were deployed in certain areas of Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region where ethnic Armenians were settled and along the path extending through Azerbaijan’s Lachin district (also referred as the “Lachin Corridor”). According to the Trilateral Statement, Russia’s peacekeeping forces would be stationed there for five years, with an automatic extension for subsequent five-year periods unless either party of the statement decides to terminate this provision.³¹

30 Valiyev, A., “Karabakh After the 44-Day War: Russian Peacekeepers and Patterns”, *Ponars Eurasia*, August 23, 2021, available at: <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/karabakh-after-the-44-day-war-russian-peacekeepers-and-patterns/> (accessed: March 6, 2020).

31 Kremlin.ru, *Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation*, November 10, 2020, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384> (accessed: March 7, 2022).

Russia definitely benefited from the statement as it was the only foreign signatory of this document, which placed the Russian forces as the only peacekeepers responsible for monitoring its implementation.³² The rationale behind Russia's involvement in peacekeeping in Karabakh was most probably related to Russia's zeal to establish a military presence in yet another part of the South Caucasus and prevent the spread of Western, as well Türkiye's, influence in this region.

The statement also proposed the phased withdrawal of Armenia's armed forces from Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin districts, as well as the areas that would stay under the temporary control of Russia's peacekeeping forces.³³ However, Armenia has not fulfilled, nor has Russia made any efforts towards the fulfilment of, Article 4 of the Trilateral Statement concerning the withdrawal of the armed forces of Armenia in parallel with the deployment of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation. Thus, some remnants of the armed forces of Armenia still act in the Karabakh region.³⁴ Even though there were assumptions that Russia might at some point of time start implementing the passportization policy within Armenian community in the Karabakh region, Russia is still more interested in securing its presence and keeping the population "firmly attached to the land" in order for its presence to be justified and secured.³⁵ Indeed, Russian peacekeeping forces have managed to organize secure transportation for the mass return of Armenian residents from Armenia to the part of Karabakh region that is under temporary control of its peacekeeping forces.³⁶ Such actions can be interpreted in terms of Russia's efforts to alleviate or prevent massive outmigration from this region, which could make Russian peacekeeping forces' role and existence in the Karabakh region irrelevant.

Russia's peacekeeping forces have conducted many activities in the Karabakh region that go beyond their peacekeeping duties. Russia

32 Gabuev, A., "Viewpoint: Russia and Turkey - unlikely victors of Karabakh conflict," *BBC*, November 12, 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54903869> (accessed: March 8, 2022).

33 Kremlin.ru, *op. cit.*

34 President.az, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation*, November 10, 2020, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923> (accessed: May 6, 2022)

35 Socor, V., "Russia's Karabakh Protectorate Taking Clearer Shape (Part One)", *The Jamestown Foundation*, March 18, 2021, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-karabakh-protectorate-taking-clearer-shape-part-one/> (accessed: May 6, 2022).

36 Ibid.

In addition to humanitarian work, Russian peacekeepers have also conducted military parades and live-fire and anti-terror exercises in the region, which raises questions about whether peacekeeping forces are eligible to conduct such acts.

established the Interagency Center for Humanitarian Reaction in this region – which was not presented in the Trilateral Statement of 2020 – in order to support the resettlement process of refugees, restore civil infrastructure, and set conditions for normal life. Russian peacekeepers have been very active in local schools and kindergartens, where they have propagated their mission by providing humanitarian aid to youngsters and interactive lectures regarding the importance and aims of peacekeeping missions.³⁷

In addition to humanitarian work, Russian peacekeepers have also conducted military parades³⁸ and live-fire and anti-terror exercises³⁹ in the region, which raises questions about whether peacekeeping forces are eligible to conduct such acts.

Whatever the outcome of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh region may be, Russia might seek to shift its behaviour and strategy in order to align them with its foreign policy goals that support a constant spread of influence in the post-Soviet republics. In the case of Georgia, at first, Russia tried to maintain its influence through peacekeeping missions in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, however, such an instrument of foreign policy proved to be insufficient and resulted in Russia shifting to other, more violent methods (i.e., warfare) for increasing and preserving its dominance in the region. Due to the distinct relations that Russia has with Azerbaijan, it is expected that official Moscow will put more effort into extending the presence of its peacekeeping mission in the Karabakh region. Such presence might prove to be a more effective method of foreign policy engagement than applying aggressive military strategies, which might lead to damaging relations with Azerbaijan – a mistake that was made in the early 1990s and that the Russian leadership does not want to repeat.

It is interesting to note that, currently, Russia has troops in all three of the South Caucasus countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – either

37 Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, “Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno Karabakh”, *News*, 2022, available at: <https://mil.ru/> (accessed at: May 28, 2022).

38 KarabakhSpace.eu, *Russian soldiers in Karabakh rehearse for Victory Day parade...*, April 19, 2021, available at: <https://karabakhspace.commonspace.eu/news/russian-soldiers-karabakh-rehearse-victory-day-parade-stepanakert-airfield> (accessed: May 28, 2022).

39 “Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno Karabakh”, *op. cit.*

by invitation or occupation.⁴⁰ Although, unlike the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia's peacekeeping forces in the Karabakh region are not perceived as a direct military danger, their presence, nevertheless, causes a certain degree of anxiety within Azerbaijani society.⁴¹ Especially in terms of extending Russia's peacekeeping presence, Azerbaijan might not be in favour of such arrangements. Previous experience of Russia's presence in Moldova and Georgia suggests that Russia will probably seek ways to turn its current temporary military presence to a "de facto permanent" one in the Karabakh region to expand its military influence in the region.⁴²

Russia has extensive experience in conducting peacekeeping missions, particularly in the post-Soviet space. Looking at Russian peacekeepers' track records in Georgia, it is reasonable to conclude that they can act as a biased mediator and as an extended arm of the Kremlin's foreign policy agenda that prioritizes a restricted set of goals concerning the expansion of influence abroad and increasing power and control, especially in its neighbourhood. Russia's peacekeeping forces in the Karabakh region were welcomed by Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who admitted after signing the November statement in 2020 that this deployment was "the best possible solution for the current situation".⁴³ However, there is always the possibility that the longer Russian soldiers stay in the zone of their temporary deployment, the chances of rising military threat, as well as zeal for an extended presence, will increase, as the examples of Russia's peacekeeping engagement in Georgia and Moldova suggest.

Conclusion

Russian peacekeeping in the South Caucasus remains a controversial topic in the public political discourse. On the one hand, conflicts in

40 Coffey, L. and Little, J., "Russia's Influence in Azerbaijan Makes Lasting Peace Unlikely", *The Heritage Foundation*, December 3, 2021, available at: <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/russias-influence-azerbaijan-makes-lasting-peace-unlikely> (accessed: May 6, 2022).

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 RFE/RL, *Russian Peacekeepers Deploy To Nagorno-Karabakh After Truce As Political Crisis Hits Armenia*, November 10, 2020, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-peacekeepers-deploy-to-nagorno-karabakh-after-truce-as-political-crisis-hits-armenia/30940268.html> (accessed: March 13, 2022).

this region required resolution and a foreign mediator that would be capable of reconciling the warring parties. On the other hand, Russian peacekeeping methods in Georgia have not been focused on establishing a long-lasting secure environment in the conflict spaces per se, but rather on satisfying Moscow's foreign policy interests. Establishing sustainable peace requires an unbiased and unsullied peacekeeper, a role that Russia has not been able to deliver.

Experience with peacekeeping in the Abkhazia region shows that Russia can turn its peacekeeping forces into a serious military threat if the political situation dictates such a transformation. Due to the fact that Russia's peacekeeping activities are aligned with the country's foreign policy objectives, it is impossible to talk about impartial and peace-oriented peacekeeping. Moscow tries to dictate foreign policy in order

to strengthen Russian influence and power in the post-Soviet space with the aim of preserving and boosting its position as a regional hegemon.

The resolution of issues in those zones and the establishment of long-lasting peace signify the withdrawal and departure of peacekeepers, which, ultimately, would lead to the abandoning of the outposts of Russian influence established under its control in these areas.

Russia's peacebuilding methods might not be completely aligned with the UN's basic peacekeeping principles and aims. Unlike traditional peace missions that have to follow and respect fundamental ideas such as impartiality, orientation to long-lasting peace solutions, and contribution to global peace and security realms, Russia's peacekeeping efforts are usually limited to the country's narrow goals that do not necessarily align with the mentioned principles.

While UN peace efforts are guided by principles and ideas that try to facilitate and strengthen international peacebuilding processes around the globe, Russian peacekeeping remains a distorted concept that seemingly promotes maintaining peace and security, but strictly follows Moscow's instructions on how to expand and retain control in its near abroad.

Analysis of Russian peacekeeping in Abkhazia and Karabakh regions reveals unique features of Russia's peace efforts abroad. Particularly in the case of Georgia, the motives for conducting missions in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions were more about Russia's military power projection and retaining control in that part of the South Caucasus than resolving political and military issues in these

areas accommodating ethnic separatists. Another significant reason for Russia's active involvement in peacekeeping in the South Caucasus is to prevent the further spread of foreign influence, primarily that of the West and Türkiye. Previous cases of Russian peacekeeping, especially that in the Abkhazia region, suggest that Russia might not be genuinely interested in producing real security with its deployed forces, but rather on sustaining its military presence with the potential to turn it into a military threat or extend its presence in the region.

Russia tries with its peacekeeping missions to consolidate its presence in the region. In the case of Georgia, especially during the initial phases, Russia sought to spread its influence over Georgia through peacekeeping missions in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to avert Tbilisi's western path. Once this did not yield a result, Russia used different means (warfare) to restrict the Euro-Atlantic path of Georgia. In the case of Russia's peacekeeping mission in the Karabakh region, Russia sees this an opportunity to anchor its presence in yet another part of the South Caucasus.

Even though Russia's peacekeeping has proven to be an effective tool of the country's foreign policy, it has only contributed to a limited set of objectives and thus missed fulfilling its core value, that is, to assist in sustainable peacebuilding in the areas of deployment. However, it might not be, in the first place, Russia's intention to resolve security and political issues in the zones in which its peacekeepers are deployed, but rather to exploit unstable situations and maintain its presence, as well increase its influence, by stationing its peacekeeping forces. The resolution of issues in those zones and the establishment of long-lasting peace signify the withdrawal and departure of peacekeepers, which, ultimately, would lead to the abandoning of the outposts of Russian influence established under its control in these areas. That is why keeping peacekeeping forces in the South Caucasus for as long as possible represents one of Russia's strategies for dominating its near abroad.

Azerbaijan's Digitalization Efforts, Revitalization of the Liberated Territories, and Role of China's Huawei

Vusal Guliyev*

After the restoration of its territorial integrity, the government of Azerbaijan (GoA) started an immense reconstruction effort for critical infrastructure such as highways, railways, and airports in the conflict-affected territories. Alongside these projects, the GoA is devoting significant attention to building smart settlements through innovative and digital solutions to provide comfortable living conditions for the safe return of internally displaced people (IDP). As a part of a government-led recovery strategy for these territories' development, the GoA is also encouraging foreign companies to participate in the rebuilding process. The Chinese company Huawei is among the first group of high-tech vendors to gain a foothold in the digitalization process for the liberated territories by implementing key technologies and enhancing digital connectivity. This Chinese multinational technology giant has been involved in several national projects in Azerbaijan that have implemented new networking technology with smart solutions, as well as successfully employing its products and services in strategically important areas of the Karabakh region. This article sheds light on the effectiveness of these innovative policies and assesses whether the adoption of advanced digital solutions will enable achieving the sustainable socio-economic growth of Azerbaijan's liberated territories.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, China, Karabakh region, Revitalization, Digitalization, Huawei



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Introduction

The digitalization of Azerbaijan as an entire country has become one of the top priorities in recent years. The GoA is increasingly embracing digitalization by developing or outsourcing high-tech industrial technologies to simplify administrative tasks and enhance economic growth.¹ With the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, cloud computing, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT) in multiple spheres of life,² the GoA-led digital transition policy has become a new direction of economic growth and social development.³ In the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan is devoting significant attention to the rehabilitation of essential infrastructure in the war-torn cities and villages throughout the liberated territories.

Within the framework of that rehabilitation effort, the GoA has invested in the development of emerging communication technologies.⁴ The innovation policy is currently deemed to be one of the main axes for improving the efficiency of the region's economy and infrastructure. The post-war infrastructure and advanced digital connectivity, in collaboration with sophisticated AI assistance and innovative communication technologies, are projected to boost socio-economic development in the immediate future.⁵ The GoA-

In the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan is devoting significant attention to the rehabilitation of essential infrastructure in the war-torn cities and villages throughout the liberated territories.

1 Mincom.gov.az, *President signs Decree on some measures to improve governance in the field of digitalization, innovation, high technologies and communications in Azerbaijan Republic*, April 27, 2021, available at: <https://mincom.gov.az/en/view/news/1322/president-signs-decree-on-some-measures-to-improve-governance-in-the-field-of-digitalization-innovation-high-technologies-and-communications-in-azerbaijan-republic> (accessed: March 1, 2022).

2 Huseynov. A., "Our goal is to bring Big Data analytics and artificial intelligence to Azerbaijan" (translation from Azerbaijani), *Fed.az*, April 8, 2021, available at: <https://fed.az/az/ikt/azad-huseynov-quotmeqsedimiz-big-data-analitikasini-ve-suni-intellekti-azerbaycana-getirmekdirquot-103920> (accessed: March 1, 2022).

3 Qasimli. V., "Digital transformation is a priority" (translation from Azerbaijani), *Azertag*, September 2, 2021, available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Vusal_Qasimli_Reqemsal_transformasiya_prioritetdir-1866877 (accessed: March 2, 2022).

4 Economics.com.az, *Foreign support is an important factor in the process of restoration and development of Karabakh* (translation from Azerbaijani), January 27, 2021, available at: <http://economics.com.az/index.php/tedbirler/yenilikl-r/item/2058-zharabazhh-n-baerpas-vae-inkishaf-prosesindae-kharidzi-daestaek-muhum-amildir.html> (accessed: March 2, 2022).

5 Muradzade, N., "The digital aspect of the restoration of Karabakh", *Azertag*, July 5, 2021, available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Qarabagin_berpasinin_reqemsal_aspekti

led digital transition strategy also contributes to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which will touch every aspect of people's lives upon their return to the liberated territories. In addition to the construction of new facilities, the GoA plans to improve the quality of life and well-being of potential returnee populations in both urban and rural areas through innovative and people-centric technological solutions.⁶

When the GoA invited foreign companies to help rebuild the war-devastated region, the Chinese private telecommunications company Huawei took on a direct role in the planning, building, and managing of interoperable infrastructure there.

Hence, when the GoA invited foreign companies to help rebuild the war-devastated region, the Chinese private telecommunications company Huawei took on a direct role in the planning, building, and managing of interoperable infrastructure there.⁷ In fact, digital transformation is already having a profound impact on the Chinese economy as the central government invests productively and successfully develops one of the world's most sophisticated digital ecosystems.⁸ When it comes to the global digital ecosystem, China is among the main promoters of the intense expansion of the practices of sustainable digital inclusion globally – investing in, adopting, and building advanced technologies such as the AI ecosystem, cloud computing, blockchain, the 5th generation of mobile internet networks (5G), big data, and robotic process automation (RPA).⁹

Serh-1823735 (accessed: March 2, 2022).

6 Azertag.az, *President Ilham Aliyev received Rashad Nabiyeu in a video format on his appointment as Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies*, January 26, 2021, available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/President_Ilham_Aliyev_received_Rashad_Nabiyeu_in_a_video_format_on_his_appointment_as_Minister_of_Transport_Communications_and_High_Technologies_VIDEO-1697023 (accessed: March 4, 2022).

7 President.az, *Speech by President Ilham Aliyev in a video format at UN 77th session of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific presented*, April 26, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/51287> (accessed: March 3, 2022).

8 M.Zhao, R.Liu, and D.Dai, "Synergistic Effect between China's Digital Transformation and Economic Development: A Study Based on Sustainable Development", in Special Issue *Sustainable Management of Digital Business and Information Technology*, (ISSN 2071-1050), December 14, 2021, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132413773> (accessed: March 24, 2022).

9 Gov.cn, *Thirteenth Five-Year National Strategic Emerging Industry Development Plan* (translation from Chinese), available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-12/19/content_5150090.htm (accessed: March 24, 2022)

Azerbaijan's efforts to become a digitally empowered country

The National Strategy on Information and Communication Technologies for the Development of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2003-2012) was the first official document signed by the country's former president Heydar Aliyev in 2003 to promote the systematic development of the ICT sector in Azerbaijan.¹⁰ This document set the primary goals oriented towards the continuous improvement of technological standards in the country for the initial period. In this context, since the 2010s, incumbent President Ilham Aliyev has been leading the process of promoting a large-scale expansion of the domestic high-technology industry through numerous national initiatives including launching the E-Gov Development Center,¹¹ establishing ASAN service centres,¹² implementing Single Window systems,¹³ and creating high-tech parks¹⁴ to make society, the government, and the economy more digital.¹⁵ Azerbaijan's zeal in pursuing science, technology, and innovation-based policies is based on the GoA's belief that digital technologies are key to future effective governance and a competitive economy.¹⁶

Therefore, the GoA has been demonstrating growing interest in cooperation with China's Huawei. While attending the World Economic Forum in *Davos in 2011*,¹⁷ Ilham Aliyev met with the leadership of Huawei to discuss further joint cooperation efforts in communications

10 Anl.az, *Co-development with the ICT sector* (translation from Azerbaijani), February 21, 2014, available at: http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/hafta_ichi/2014/fevral/354102.htm (accessed: March 23, 2022).

11 Digital.gov.az, *About E-GOV Development Center*, available at: <https://www.digital.gov.az/en/page/about> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

12 Asan.gov.az, *General Information about the "ASAN service" centers*, available at: <https://asan.gov.az/en/about> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

13 Customs.gov.az, *Single Window*, available at: <https://customs.gov.az/en/faydali/innovativ-layiheler/bir-pencere> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

14 Mincom.gov.az, *Projects on innovation development in Azerbaijan presented*, October 26, 2018, available at: <https://mincom.gov.az/en/view/news/416/projects-on-innovation-development-in-azerbaijan-presented> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

15 President.az, *National Strategy for the development of the information society in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2014-2020*, April 2, 2014, available at: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/11312> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

16 Digital.gov.az, *About E-GOV Development Center*, available at: <https://www.digital.gov.az/en/page/haqqimizda> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

17 President.az, *Working visit of Ilham Aliyev to Switzerland*, January 28, 2011, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/1491> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

networks.¹⁸ Alongside such high-level dialogue, Ilham Aliyev also visited the Huawei's Exhibition Center in Beijing¹⁹ during his state visit to China at the invitation of China's President Xi Jinping in 2015.²⁰ During his visit to the exhibition centre, President Aliyev praised the company's activities and expressed satisfaction with its commitment to technological development in Azerbaijan. Similarly, in his speech at Beijing's Renmin University, Ilham Aliyev repeatedly underlined the importance of close collaboration with Chinese scientific research institutions and universities.²¹ Additionally, in 2019, Ilham Aliyev held a high-profile meeting with Huawei's then leadership to reaffirm the close cooperation in the field of intelligent settlement, digital government, digital economy, digital education, smart healthcare, and innovative agriculture.²² The direct supervision of President Aliyev over the digitalization process helped boost cooperation with China in the field of digital technologies. Indeed, the growing involvement of Huawei in the technological development of the country comes in the context of increasing political and economic ties between Azerbaijan and China over recent years.²³

The government is currently running the Azerbaijan Digital Hub programme, inaugurated in 2018, to stimulate the country's socio-economic development and digital transformation efforts.

Moreover, as part of its non-oil-sector development, Azerbaijan utilizes multilateral projects to advance national priorities.²⁴ Consequently, the government is currently running the Azerbaijan Digital Hub

18 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev met with Chairwoman of the "Huawei Technologies" Co., Sun Yafang*, January 26, 2011, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/1500> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

19 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev visited Exhibition Centre of Huawei Company in Beijing*, December 10, 2015, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/17128> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

20 President.az, *State visit of Ilham Aliyev to China*, December 11, 2015, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/17170> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

21 President.az, *Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Renmin University of China*, December 11, 2015, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/17287> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

22 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev met with Huawei chairman in Beijing*, April 25, 2019, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/32865> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

23 V. Guliyev, "Azerbaijan-China relations in the Context of Belt and Road Initiative", in A. Merthan Dundar & Gurhan Kirilen (eds), *APAM China Studies* (Ankara: Ankara University Press, 2021), p.129-150, available at: <http://apam.ankara.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/485/2021/02/APAM-Cin-Calismalari-I.pdf> (accessed: March 23, 2022).

24 Vergiler.az, *Azerbaijan Digital Trade Hub*, October 11, 2019, available at: <https://vergiler.az/news/economy/4754.html> (accessed: March 24, 2022).

programme,²⁵ inaugurated in 2018, to stimulate the country's socio-economic development and digital transformation efforts.²⁶ Along with the implementation of the Azerbaijan Digital Hub programme, Azerbaijan is aiming to reduce its reliance on foreign countries such as Russia²⁷ and Ukraine^{28 29} for internet access; enlarge the capacity of transmission networks; and, ultimately, increase its pivotal role as a regional digital hub in the South Caucasus.³⁰

In the context of the Asia–Europe telecommunications corridor, several important intergovernmental agreements were signed in 2019

Azerbaijan is investing heavily in critical digital infrastructure to improve the variety of broadband services and remove the remaining barriers to cross-border data flows, thereby catalysing the process of transforming Azerbaijan into a transnational digital hub along the Asia–Europe telecommunication corridor.

between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan to upgrade domestic communication infrastructure and construct commercial undersea optical telecommunications cables.³¹ The resulting high-capacity subsea fibre-optic cable lines will connect Azerbaijan with Central Asian countries via the Caspian Sea floor

As part of its Digital Silk Way initiative, a project that facilitates the creation of a technological foundation for the implementation of the Azerbaijan Digital Hub programme, Azerbaijan

25 Adh.az, *About the Azerbaijan Digital Hub program*, available at: <https://www.adh.az/en/about>, (accessed: March 27, 2022).

AzerTelecom.az, *Key Dates*, April 25, 2019, available at: https://www.azertelecom.az/en/key_dates/ (accessed: March 27, 2022).

26 Azertelecom.az, *Azerbaijan Digital Hub program*, available at: <https://www.azertelecom.az/en/projects/key/> (accessed: March 24, 2022).

27 Gunduz, O., “Russia-Ukraine war: Azerbaijan may face another threat” (translation from Azerbaijani), *Facebook*, March 9, 2022, 4:14 pm., available at: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1985122988356088&id=100005752170227 (accessed: June 14, 2022).

28 Gunduz, O., “If the Internet in Russia Collapses” (translation from Azerbaijani), *Yeni Azərbaycan*, March 15, 2022, available at: https://www.yeniazərbaycan.com/MEDIA_e67043_az.html (accessed: June 14, 2022).

29 Bayramov, R., *What would happen in Azerbaijan if the Internet in Russia collapses*, (translation from Azerbaijani), *Xəzər Xəbər*, Youtube video, March 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld4WUw2Eiwc> (accessed: June 14, 2022).

30 Sultanov, A., “Azerbaijan: From the Energy and Transport Center to the Digital Center” (translation from Azerbaijani), *Trend*, February 2, 2021, available at: <https://az.trend.az/business/it/3374100.html> (accessed: March 26, 2022).

31 Trend.az, *Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan sign intergovernmental agreement on laying fiber-optic backbone cable line through bottom of Caspian Sea*, November 29, 2019, available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/3156297.html> (accessed: March 25, 2022).

is investing heavily in critical digital infrastructure to improve the variety of broadband services and remove the remaining barriers to cross-border data flows, thereby catalysing the process of transforming Azerbaijan into a transnational digital hub along the Asia–Europe telecommunication corridor.³² Against this backdrop, the main internet service provider (ISP) that connects Azerbaijan to the global internet network – AzerTelecom LLC, a subsidiary of Bakcell – is currently working on delivering the regional digital backbone for boosting solid internet connectivity that binds together the networks of neighbouring countries in the wider Caspian Sea basin through the Azerbaijan Digital Hub programme.³³ Azerbaijan is proactively seeking to promote international partnerships under multinational consortiums for this project as part of its extensive efforts to become a centre of regional digital development within the framework of the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) intercontinental project.³⁴

During the 7th Meeting of the Azerbaijan-China Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, held in Beijing on 28 February 2019, Azerbaijan’s Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies Ramin Guluzade and Minister of Economy Shahin Mustafayev met high-ranking representatives of both Huawei and China Telecom (the Chinese state-owned telecommunications firm) to discuss the further development of the TASIM project and to explore possible areas of cooperation on direct fibre connections via the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. The technical issues and physical security concerns of the potential transnational submarine fibre-optic cables that would run across the bottom of the Caspian Sea between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, and the possibility of China’s potential involvement in this digital route project in the near future, were the

32 ADH.az, *Azerbaijan Digital Hub*, January 24, 2019, available at: <https://www.adh.az/en/> (accessed: 30 March 2022).

33 President.az, *Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of Turkmenistan on Joint Construction, Ownership and Operation of Fiber-Optic Communication Lines on the Bottom of the Caspian Sea on the Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan Route by Communications Operators of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan* (translation from Azerbaijani), April 10, 2020, available at: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/36415> (accessed: March 25, 2022).

34 Mincom.gov.az, *Project Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM)*, available at: <https://mincom.gov.az/en/view/pages/83/tasim/> (accessed: March 25, 2022).

main topics of discussion during the meeting.³⁵

In April 2019, President Ilham Aliyev participated in the second Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) International Forum, at which AzerTelecom and China Telecom signed a Strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to create an Asia-Europe telecommunications corridor within the framework of the Azerbaijan Digital Hub programme with the aim of fostering cooperation and coordination on cross-border internet traffic between Europe and Asia.³⁶ China's decision to demonstrate support and provide assistance to this programme within the BRI was a significant commitment in the direction of deepening ties. In the context of increasing bilateral relations, Beijing will focus on extending its reach to the non-oil sectors in Azerbaijan and will play a central role in certain key areas, especially in the field of digital technologies, under the BRI deals, as Baku simultaneously seeks to initiate a digitalized Silk Road and strategically position itself at the centre of it.³⁷

There is a range of opportunities that China can utilize to reinforce its role in the region, as the partnership between China and Azerbaijan has been elevated to a historically unprecedented level in recent years. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, both sides have committed to building strong and substantive relations by strengthening bilateral political cooperation. Although China was not geopolitically involved in the South Caucasus region, regarding the former Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, official Beijing has repeatedly declared that it supports the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on the matter, which urged the unconditional withdrawal of Armenia's armed forces from Azerbaijan's territories that the former occupied during First Karabakh War (1988–1994).^{38 39}

35 Mincom.gov.az, *Minister Ramin Guluzade meets with heads of Huawei and China Telecom in China*, February 28, 2019, available at: <https://mincom.gov.az/en/view/news/541/nazir-ramin-quluzade-chinde-huawei-ve-china-telecom-shirketlerinin-rehberliyi-ile-gorushub/> (accessed: March 26, 2022).

36 AzerTelecom.az, *Key Dates*, April 25, 2019, available at: https://www.azertelecom.az/en/key_dates/ (accessed: March 27, 2022).

37 AzerTelecom.az, *Contribution of "Azerbaijan Digital Hub" Program To Digital Economy Building Discussed*, available at: <https://www.azertelecom.az/en/news/2020/02/18/96.html> (accessed: March 27, 2022).

38 Azernews.az, *China's stance on Karabakh 'clear and unchanged'*, September 23, 2011, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/36541.html> (accessed: June 9, 2022).

39 Mfa.gov.cn, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference*, October 23, 2011, available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cohk/eng/Topics/fyrbt/>

The role of China's Huawei in the digitalization of Azerbaijan

Huawei has in fact already established an extensive business presence in Azerbaijan's information and communications technologies (ICT) industry with service provision and the contribution of extensive technical assistance at all levels since the early 2000s.^{40 41 42} For years, Huawei provided different forms of technical assistance and transferred technological solutions and services to Azerbaijan's domestic mobile network operators Bakcell,⁴³ Azercell, and Azerfon.⁴⁴ Comprehensive agreements on bilateral partnership between the GoA and China's Huawei have multiplied extensively over the past decade as the development of digital infrastructure has become a key pillar of the government-led project Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development.⁴⁵

Although the company eventually expanded its business into building telecommunication networks, it also funded collaborative research initiatives with leading technical universities and conducted several ICT training courses⁴⁶ to prepare a highly skilled workforce with digital literacy within its Seeds for the Future programme.⁴⁷ Azerbaijan's

t1826262.htm (accessed: June 12, 2022).

40 Azerbaijan-news.az, *A presentation of Huawei Technologies Azerbaijan was held at Azerbaijan Technical University* (translation from Azerbaijani), April 22, 2014, available at: <https://www.azerbaijan-news.az/posts/detail/azerbaycan-texniki-universitetinde-huawei-technologies-azerbaijan-sirketinin-teqdimati-olmusdur-37598> (accessed: March 13, 2022).

41 Ictnews.az, *Huawei accelerates implementation of new technologies* (translation from Azerbaijani), June 6, 2012, available at: <http://ictnews.az/read.php?lang=1&result=ok&content=13753> (accessed: March 13, 2022).

42 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev viewed Bakutel-2017 exhibition*, December 6, 2017, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/26208> (accessed: March 13, 2022).

43 People.com.cn, *Huawei SmartCare Wins the Bid for Bakcell Customer Experience Management Contract in Azerbaijan* (translation from Chinese), August 5, 2014, available at: <http://tc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0508/c183008-24992410.html> (accessed: March 19, 2022).

44 Trend.az, *Azercell extends its support to Formula 1 by even stronger network*, April 28, 2018, available at: <https://en.trend.az/business/it/2895075.html> (March 19, 2022).

45 President.az, *Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on approval of "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development*, February 2, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/50474> (accessed: March 13, 2022).

46 Ictnews.az, *Huawei launches ICT development program for Azerbaijani students*, May 30, 2017, available at: <http://ictnews.az/read-48096-news-2.html> (accessed: March 16, 2022).

47 Huawei.com, *What is seeds for the future*, available at: <https://www.huawei.com/minisite/seeds-for-the-future/history.html> (accessed: March 16, 2022).

Ministry of Digital Development and Transport works closely with Huawei to continually engage students in the Seeds for the Future project. Each year, students at Azerbaijan Technical University (AzTU),⁴⁸ the Azerbaijan State University of Oil and Industry (ASOIU),⁴⁹ Nakhchivan University,⁵⁰ Nakhchivan State University,⁵¹ and Nakhchivan Teachers' Institute⁵² actively take part in this educational initiative. To date, dozens of Azerbaijani students and employees of domestic tech vendors had benefited from the aforementioned programme at Huawei's headquarters in Shenzhen.⁵³ Moreover, Huawei ICT Academies,⁵⁴ a global educational programme developed by Huawei, has been established within the Baku Engineering University (BEU) and the Baku State Vocational Training Center for Industry and Innovation to train local students by providing them with more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of ICT trends.⁵⁵

Furthermore, in 2019, the Baku Higher Oil School (BHOS) and Huawei agreed to set up an ICT Academy and a joint laboratory.⁵⁶ Within

48 Tehsil-press.az, *The Seeds for the Future project has been launched at the Azerbaijan Technical University* (translation from Azerbaijani), November 5, 2018, available at: <https://tehsil-press.az/index.php?newsid=34270> (June 12, 2022).

49 Asoiu.edu.az, *Huawei makes presentation of "Seeds for the Future" project at ASOIU*, May 18, 2022, available at: <http://asoiu.edu.az/en/news/147-huawei-sirketi-adnsu-da-geleceyin-toxumlari-adli-layihe-proqramin-teqdimatini-kecirib> (accessed: June 12, 2022).

50 Nu.edu.az, *The program of the seeds of the future in the ICT field have been started* (translation from Azerbaijani), available at: <https://nu.edu.az/az/nu/geleceyin-ikt-sahesindeki-toxumlari-adli-proqram-layihe-heyata-kecirilib> (accessed: June 12, 2022).

51 Nuhcixan.az, *Students from Nakhchivan have returned from a summer training camp organized by Huawei in China* (translation from Azerbaijani), July 27, 2019, available at: <https://nuhcixan.az/news/cemiyyet/18077-naxcivanli-telebeler-cinde-huawei-sirketininteskil-etdiyi-yay-telim-toplantisindan-qayidiblar> (accessed: June 12, 2022).

52 Azertag.az, *Students from Nakhchivan will have an internship at Huawei* (translation from Azerbaijani), June 2, 2017, available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Naxchivanli-telebeler_Huawei_sirketinde_tecrube_kechecekler-1067029 (accessed: June 12, 2022).

53 Asiatimes.com, *Inside Huawei's huge HQ campus in Shenzhen*, June 28, 2019, available at: <https://asiatimes.com/2019/06/inside-huaweis-huge-hq-campus-in-shenzhen/> (accessed: March 19, 2022).

54 Huawei.com, *Huawei ICT Academy: Building a Talent Ecosystem and Boosting the ICT Industry's Development*, available: <https://e.huawei.com/en/publications/global/ict-insights/201907041409/talent-ecosystem/huawei-ict-academy> (accessed: June 12, 2022).

55 Ted.az, *Huawei plans to establish training and practice laboratories in educational institutions*, September 3, 2019, available at: <https://ted.az/az/view/news/4873/nazirlik-tehsili-muessiselerinde-huawei-shirketinin-tedris-ve-tecrube-laboratoriyalarinin-yaradilmasi-nezerde-tutulub> (accessed: June 12, 2022).

56 Bhos.edu.az, *Baku Higher Oil School and Huawei signed a joint cooperation contract*, available at: <https://bhos.edu.az/en/news/1199> (accessed: June 12, 2022).

the framework of a bilateral agreement, Huawei would supply computer equipment and software to undergraduate students of the Process Automation Engineering Department of the BHOS. Accordingly, the students and junior researchers would conduct scientific research at the cutting-edge laboratory facilities built through the joint efforts of Huawei and BHOS. In addition, there are plans to open more Huawei ICT centres at ASOIU and AzTU.⁵⁷ By establishing a Huawei ICT Academy, partner universities can receive authorization from the company to conduct free and independent training.⁵⁸ These centres are expected to deliver training practical skills in the latest technologies.

Huawei, with extensive project experience innovative and intelligent solutions across the globe, is now leading efforts to build smart settlements and the broadband ecosystem that will accelerate the spread of solid internet connections in the highlands and mountainous areas of the Karabakh region with innovative yet affordable devices.

Most recently, in December 2021, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, ADA University and Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd. signed an agreement to establish a joint research and development centre (R&D Center) to cultivate the next generation of indigenous technology experts under the Huawei-led training programme.⁵⁹ This newly established centre at Azerbaijan's ADA University focuses on the development of innovative technologies through close collaboration with Chinese engineers.⁶⁰

Moreover, in 2019, government agencies such as Azerbaijan's State Customs Committee, along with mobile network operators, signed a contract with Huawei for the modernization and automation of the entire customs system through the implementation of Single Window systems. The agreement aims to enhance proficiency in applying technological resources and make innovative technology more accessible to achieve

57 Trend.az, *Huawei opens academy in Azerbaijan*, April 17, 2016, available at: <https://az.trend.az/business/it/2519223.html> (accessed: June 12, 2022)

58 Huawei.com, *Facing the Digital Future, Building an ICT Talent Ecosystem*, available at: <https://www.huawei.com/cn/tech4all/stories/ict> (accessed: June 12, 2022).

59 Azertag.az, *Azerbaijan's Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, ADA University and Huawei sign MoU*, December 8, 2021, available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijans_Ministry_of_Digital_Development_and_Transport_ADA_University_and_Huawei_sign_MoU-1946306 (accessed: March 15, 2022).

60 Mofcom.gov.cn, *Huawei signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan and the ADA University* (translation from Chinese), December 14, 2021, available at: <http://az.mofcom.gov.cn/article/jmxw/202112/20211203228422.shtml> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

the national digitalization goals as a part of the e-governance strategy.⁶¹

Huawei, with extensive project experience innovative and intelligent solutions across the globe,^{62 63} is now leading efforts to build smart settlements and the broadband ecosystem that will accelerate the spread of solid internet connections in the highlands and mountainous areas of the Karabakh region with innovative yet affordable devices.⁶⁴ In this context, Huawei's digital solutions are being employed to track, accumulate and diagnose issues in agriculture, healthcare, and the environment to improve food safety and availability in relatively unpopulated rural areas.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Huawei has deployed its AirPON end-to-end (E2E) hardware solution – a newly developed gigabit optical network services introducing speedy internet connection – in Aghali village of Zangilan district of the East Zangezur economic region of Azerbaijan.⁶⁶

In the wake of massive reconstruction works, Huawei's smart village concept and the digital services that envisage bolstering the revitalization of rural industries and the resettlement of IDPs are also being applied in Aghali village, specifically in the agriculture, education, healthcare, rural estate management, and renewable energy sectors.⁶⁷ In practice, Huawei's smart village concept, combined with powerful data analysis platforms, remote diagnostics services, surveillance tools, solid internet networks, and AI-enabled frontier technologies, can improve the quality

61 Anews.az, *Azerbaijani State Customs Committee introducing innovative technologies*, September 12, 2019, available at: <https://anews.az/en/azerbaijani-state-customs-committee-introducing-innovative-technologies-photo/> (accessed: March 19, 2022).

62 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev visited Jabrayil and Zangilan districts*, April 26, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/51295> (accessed: March 10, 2022).

63 Ping. G., "Go far and build a smart city with a sense of gain, happiness and security", *Huawei*, available at: https://e.huawei.com/cn/publications/cn/ict_insights/ict31-digital-government/cover/smart-city (accessed: March 7, 2022).

64 Guliyev, V., "How Huawei contributes to digitalization in Karabakh", Op-Ed, *Daily Sabah*, January 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/how-huawei-contributes-to-digitalization-in-karabakh> (accessed: March 3, 2022).

65 Azertag.az, *Huawei to apply its most advanced technologies in Karabakh*, April 28, 2021, available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Huawei_to_apply_its_most_advanced_technologies_in_Karabakh-1767419 (accessed: March 4, 2022).

66 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev visited Jabrayil and Zangilan districts*, April 26, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/51295> (accessed: March 10, 2022).

67 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev viewed works done under the "smart village" project implemented in Aghali village, Zangilan district*, October 21, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/53631> (accessed: March 12, 2022).

of life and economic well-being of communities who are going to live in low-density rural areas rich in natural resources. Reportedly, another Huawei smart village project, covering 450 houses, is currently under construction in the Fuzuli district of the Karabakh economic region of Azerbaijan.⁶⁸ Once fully completed, these projects will tend to stimulate the region's socio-economic and environmental development and gradually help to overcome the technological gaps between urban and rural areas. As Huawei gains a major role in building the digital backbone of the Karabakh region, its ability to shape the region's high-tech landscape in the long term will grow exponentially.

Given that Azerbaijan also embraces Chinese technology for economic development purposes, and Azerbaijan's major domestic network operators still have strong ties to Huawei for collaboration on critical digital infrastructure, questions might be raised about the potential security issues that might be posed by Chinese tech firms.

Given that Azerbaijan also embraces Chinese technology for economic development purposes, and Azerbaijan's major domestic network operators still have strong ties to Huawei for collaboration on critical digital infrastructure, questions might be raised about the potential security issues that might be posed by Chinese tech firms. Chinese digital products and services, including those of Huawei, are much more affordable, faster, and come with greater regulatory flexibility compared with what other global tech suppliers offer, thus making them attractive. In contrast, Georgia, for example, in order to counter China's regional digital footprint, banished Huawei from Georgia's 5G network (following the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the USA).⁶⁹

However, the GoA is committed to ensuring the security and resilience of the nation's internet networks.⁷⁰ Consequently, in 2012, the GoA established the State Agency for Special Communications and Information Security to protect the country's network infrastructure

68 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev laid foundation stone for "smart village" in Dovlatyarli village, Fuzuli district*, October 18, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/53507> (accessed: March 13, 2022).

69 Ge.usembassy.gov, *United States – Georgia Memorandum of Understanding on 5G Security*, January 14, 2021, available at: <https://ge.usembassy.gov/united-states-georgia-memorandum-of-understanding-on-5g-security/> (accessed: June 15, 2022).

70 President.az, *Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on measures to improve activities in the field of information security* (translation from Azerbaijani), September 26, 2012, available at: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/6298> (accessed: June 15, 2022).

and avoid potential threats caused by network security issues.⁷¹ The agency provides cyber security guidance and ensures that the network security and privacy protection strategy is well implemented across the country. Moreover, the Cyber Security Center under the Ministry of Communications and High Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan was launched in 2012 to address systemic cybersecurity challenges.⁷² This centre is responsible for safeguarding network service continuity, reducing risks, and securing the digital transformation efforts of the government.⁷³ In light of the foregoing, while deploying its technologies, Huawei must be fully aware of the importance of privacy protection and committed to protecting the personal data of customers based on the country's personal data protection laws⁷⁴ and regulations.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The GoA is increasingly implementing emerging technologies and actively embracing all aspects of digitalization to build a high-quality digital government by pursuing practical and responsive policies. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a favourable environment for exploiting new digital solutions in widely diversified industries in the midst of lockdown and social distancing, and this has resulted in catalysing the digital transformation to close the technological gap.

With significant official support, innovation policies driven by advanced technologies will lay the foundation for the sustainable economic revitalization of the liberated territories. The deep integration of digital technology in numerous cities and villages

71 Dxm.gov.az, *About State Agency for Special Communications and Information Security*, available at: <https://dmx.gov.az/page/55/xritda> (accessed: June 15, 2022).

72 E-qanun.az, *On measures to improve information security* (translation from Azerbaijani), September 26, 2012, available at: <https://e-qanun.az/framework/24353> (accessed: June 15, 2022).

73 Cert.az, *Statute on Cyber Security Center under the Ministry of Communications and High Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, available at: <https://cert.az/en/about-us/statute1> (accessed: June 15, 2022).

74 E-qanun.az, *About Personal Information* (translation from Azerbaijani), May 10, 2010, available at: <https://e-qanun.az/framework/19675> (accessed: June 15, 2022).

75 Dataguidance.com, *Azerbaijan - Data Protection Overview*, November, 2021, available at: <https://www.dataguidance.com/notes/azerbaijan-data-protection-overview> (accessed: June 15, 2022).

across the liberated territories would increase the overall industrial capacity and consequently make the region an attractive foreign investment destination. Most importantly, the rapid reconstruction and digitalization process is expected to attract hundreds of thousands of IDPs back to their homes.

From the economic point of view, the widespread diffusion of critical technologies and exploitation of key digital advances will have profound effects on the country's economy, dramatically affecting the cost-efficiency of manufacturing production and reducing manufacturing costs; maximizing the quality of products; decreasing the price of goods and services; and ramping up the scale of production.

Nevertheless, strategically implementing and exploiting large-scale technological solutions in such a vast territory is no easy feat. In many cases, it requires meticulous planning and preparation, vast amounts of financial and technical capital, and plenty of time to deploy and install the necessary technologies. Thereafter, it remains to be seen whether it will, in practice, be possible to effectively apply all these technologies in multiple spheres of individuals' lives.

Presently, the government-led initiative heavily relies on investment from central government and, despite the massive investment, the process remains one of adaptation rather than innovation. Unfortunately, the pace of innovation is relatively slow and it remains a frustrating pursuit for many domestic tech vendors in Azerbaijan. In order to build digital independence and establish Azerbaijan as a digital development leader in the region, the GoA also needs to encourage private sector technology innovation, supporting small to medium-sized enterprises (SME) and innovative start-ups to enable the rapid advancement of digital services and build a high-quality indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystem. In addition, the lack of a skilled technical workforce poses another unprecedented challenge to the ongoing transition process. In this case, for overcoming skill shortages and fostering innovation, the government has to focus on launching nationwide workforce development programmes to boost digital prowess by systematically training a sufficient number of people who possess the essential technical skills that align with the needs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Clearly, without achieving

higher levels of human capital development and strengthening the competitiveness of knowledge-based industries, as well as without effectively coordinating of the implementation of innovative policies and providing substantial support to SMEs, attaining digital independence and distancing the country from foreign technology over the coming years will be difficult.

Armenia's Obligations under International Law in the Area of Mine Action

Najiba Mustafayeva*

Azerbaijan's conflict-affected territories that were previously under the occupation of Armenia are severely contaminated by landmines and the explosive remnants of war. This poses a serious threat to human life as well as creating a significant impediment to the implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts by the government of Azerbaijan. This commentary argues that Armenia's constant refusal to submit the remaining maps of mined areas located within Azerbaijan's liberated territories, as well as the deliberate planting of landmines in these territories even after the end of the war, is in violation of its international anti-mine obligations. This has resulted ipso facto (by the fact itself) in war crimes and crimes against humanity that raise the issue of Armenia's responsibility under international law for their perpetration. This author finds that, despite the fact that Armenia is not a state party to the international conventions on mine action, it should uphold their provisions because those conventions were created based on long-standing international customary rules regarding the conduct of warfare and address the humanitarian aspects of attacks on civilians and the violation of the jus cogens (peremptory norms) of international law.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Armenia, landmines, explosive remnants of war, international humanitarian law, war crimes, crimes against humanity



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Introduction

As a result of the Second Karabakh War in 2020, Azerbaijan restored its jurisdiction over its internationally recognized territories that had been under Armenian military occupation for almost three decades. After the signing of the Trilateral Statement by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia that put an end to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, Azerbaijan has launched a comprehensive policy of reconstruction of its liberated territories to establish decent conditions for the return of internally displaced people (IDP) to their homes.

However, today, when Azerbaijan is starting its post-conflict development policy, it faces another obstacle created by Armenia: that is, large-scale contamination of the liberated territories with landmines and unexploded ordnance. Such remnants of the war were deliberately planted during the period of occupation in blatant violation of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law. These international crimes of Armenia have caused the deaths of, or injuries to, far more than 200 people following the liberation of the occupied territories.¹

Azerbaijan is starting its post-conflict development policy, it faces another obstacle created by Armenia: that is, large-scale contamination of the liberated territories with landmines and unexploded ordnance.

Although, last year, Armenia submitted to Azerbaijan the maps of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines planted in the Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Zangilan districts of Azerbaijan during the occupation,² Yerevan still has not released the remaining maps of mined areas located within Azerbaijan's liberated territories. Moreover, the submitted maps were only 25% accurate.³

Furthermore, even after the end of the war, Armenia's armed forces,

1 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev attended "New vision for South Caucasus: Post-conflict development and cooperation" international conference held at ADA University*, April 13, 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/51088> (accessed: May 2, 2022).

2 Permanent Representation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe, "Armenia submits to Azerbaijani side maps of mines planted in Fuzuli and Zangilan districts", available at: <https://coe.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3518/armenia-submits-to-azerbaijani-side-maps-of-mines-planted-in-fuzuli-and-zangilan-districts> (accessed: April 10, 2022).

3 Azertag.az, *Leyla Abdullayeva: Pashinyan's baseless allegations seriously question Armenia's desire for peace*, May 12, 2022, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Leyla_Abdullayeva_Pashinyan_039s_baseless_allegations_seriously_question_Armenia_039s_desire_for_peace-2131412 (accessed: June 2, 2022).

while withdrawing from the then-occupied territories of Azerbaijan, deliberately planted landmines therein. As a result, two Azerbaijani journalists lost their lives in an anti-tank mine explosion in Kalbajar district in 2021. The aim of this incident was to inflict as much damage as possible on Azerbaijan and create additional obstacles for the safe return of the civilian population to their homes.⁴

The goal of this commentary is to provide an overview of the anti-mine obligations of Armenia under international law, including its responsibility for the neutralization of the explosive remnants of the war and for releasing all maps of mined areas. Hence, this commentary analyses the issue of the legal accountability of Armenia under international law for casualties among the civilian population as a result of mine explosions, as well as the legal instruments for enforcing mine action under the IHL and international human rights law.

This overall stance that claims there has been a breach of international law is also linked with “the importance of pursuing every effort which may contribute to the progress towards general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control”⁵ created under the international conventions on mine action and labelled as “humanitarian disarmament”.⁶

The legal framework for mine action: Humanitarian disarmament

The legal framework for the humanitarian control of weapons has significantly changed in the last several decades, as marked by the dramatic shift from mere disarmament to “humanitarian disarmament” that implies the outlawing of certain weapons and providing remedial mechanisms for affected civilians. Today, the concept of human

4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, “No:202/21, Information of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the death of civilians as a result of a mine explosion in Kalbajar”, June 4, 2021, available at: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no20221-information-of-the-press-service-department-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-on-the-death-of-civilians-as-a-result-of-a-mine-explosion-in-kalbajar> (accessed: March 12, 2022).

5 ICRC, Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, “1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons”, May 21, 2021, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/1980-convention-certain-conventional-weapons> (accessed: March 6, 2022).

6 The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), “Laws and Standards in Mine Actions”, 2014, available at: (accessed: March 6, 2022).

The legal framework for the humanitarian control of weapons has significantly changed in the last several decades, as marked by the dramatic shift from mere disarmament to “humanitarian disarmament” that implies the outlawing of certain weapons and providing remedial mechanisms for affected civilians.

security is a core dimension in this field, in which comprehensive international legal instruments have been established. Thus, mine action is realized within a context of special international treaties that regulate issues such as a total prohibition of certain types of weapons, including their production, transfer, and stockpiling, as well as requiring remedial measures such as the clearance of the explosive remnants of war, including landmines and unexploded ordnance.⁷

Among these international treaties are the 1980 “Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects” (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, CCCW) and its protocols; the 1997 “Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction” (Ottawa Convention), as well as the 2008 “Convention on Cluster Munitions” (CCM) that sets obligatory rules regulating particular methods of warfare through the prohibition of inhumane weapons that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering.

These international treaties on mine action have been built on customary international rules codified in the 1949 Geneva Conventions (and their Additional Protocols) that aim to protect people not taking part in war⁸ and minimize their suffering during armed conflict.

The 1980 CCCW adumbrated the beginning of the transition from “traditional” to “humanitarian” disarmament. This international treaty sought “to protect civilians from the effects of weapons used in an armed conflict and to protect combatants from suffering in excess of that necessary to achieve a legitimate military objective”,⁹ and hence

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The First Geneva Convention protects wounded and sick soldiers on land during war; the Second Geneva Convention protects wounded, sick and shipwrecked military personnel at sea during war; the Third Geneva Convention applies to prisoners of war; The Fourth Geneva Convention protects civilians, including those in occupied territory, see: ICRC, The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/geneva-conventions-1949-additional-protocols> (Accessed: April 30, 2022).

⁹ ICRC, Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, “1980 Convention on

reflects the principles of IHL that provide for a similar regulation of conduct during armed conflicts. Notably, this Convention is a dynamic treaty that has been modified several times by additional protocols in response to the emergence of new weapons or their variations in the conduct of warfare.

Protocol II (on Landmines, Booby Traps, and other Devices)¹⁰ and Protocol V (On Explosive Remnants of War, ERW) to the CCCW are of particular significance in this context. In accordance with Protocol II to this Convention, landmines, booby-traps, or other devices should not target the civil population, civilian objects or be used indiscriminately. The document also outlaws the use of anti-personal and anti-vehicle mines. Among the obligations of states under Protocol II are the removal of such weapons following the end of the active part of armed conflict, taking all feasible precautions to provide protection for the civilian population, guaranteeing advanced warning of the placement of these weapons, and maintaining records of their locations, as well as implementing measures for peacekeeping and the protection of humanitarian missions.¹¹

Considering the severe post-conflict humanitarian problems produced by ERW, Protocol V (on Explosive Remnants of War) to the CCCW was adopted with the aim of providing remedial measures of a generic nature in order to minimize the negative effects of ERW.¹² This Protocol determines unexploded ordnance (UXO) and abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO) as being ERW. In accordance with Article 2(2) of the Protocol V, UXO “means explosive ordnance that has been primed, fused, armed, or otherwise prepared for use and used in an armed conflict. It may have been fired, dropped, launched or projected and

Certain Conventional Weapons”, May 21, 2021, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/1980-convention-certain-conventional-weapons> (accessed: March 6, 2022).

10 In order to strengthen the provisions of Protocol II to the CCW, Amended Protocol II was adopted in 1996.

11 ICRC, International Review, Amended CCW Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and other Devices (Amended Protocol II), adopted 3 May 1996, available at: <http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng.nsf/html/57JRLI> (accessed: March 8, 2022); United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs “CCW Amended Protocol II”, available at: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/ccw-amended-protocol-ii/> (accessed: March 8, 2022).

12 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “CCW Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War”, 2003, available at: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/ccw-protocol-v-on-explosive-remnants-of-war/> (accessed: March 10, 2022).

should have exploded but failed to do so”. Hand grenades, mine-thrower shells, explosive submunitions or bombs that have been utilized but which have not detonated as planned relate to the UXO group of ERW.¹³ Pursuant to Article 2(3) of Protocol V, AXO is “explosive ordnance that has not been used during an armed conflict, that has been left behind or dumped by a party to an armed conflict, and which is no longer under control of the party that left it behind or dumped it”.¹⁴

Protocol V, which was defined by Human Rights Watch as a “new international law on ERW”,¹⁵ assigns responsibility to state participants in an armed conflict with respect to all ERW in the territory under their control. Thus, after the end of an active phase of hostilities, such a state party to an armed conflict “shall mark and clear, remove or destroy ERW in affected territories under its control”.¹⁶ It could be suggested that this provision also implies the responsibility of states with respect to ERW in territories occupied by them and where that occupying state realized effective control.

Protocol V also includes obligations for the state which no longer exercises control over the territory, demanding the provision of, *inter alia*, technical, financial, material, or human resource assistance, bilaterally or through a third party, to facilitate the marking and clearance, removal, or destruction of such ERWs.¹⁷ This obligation also includes recording and retaining information on the use of ERW, and dissemination of such information to the party in control of the affected territories.¹⁸ Reaffirming the “humanitarian” approach, Protocol V specifically addresses the responsibility of states to “take all feasible precautions” to protect civilians from the potential tragic consequences of ERW.¹⁹

13 The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), “Laws and Standards in Mine Actions”, 2014, available at: <https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/GICHD-resources/info-documents/guide-to-mine-action-2014/GICHD-guide-to-mine-action-2014-chapter-3-Laws-and-standards-in-mine-action.pdf> (accessed: March 6, 2022).

14 United Nations, Official Document System, Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War, November 23, 2003, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G03/653/61/PDF/G0365361.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: March 10, 2022).

15 Human Rights Watch, “New International Law on Explosive Remnants of War”, November 28, 2003, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2003/11/28/new-international-law-explosive-remnants-war> (accessed: March 10, 2022).

16 See: Article 3(2) of the Protocol V.

17 See: Article 3(1) of the Protocol V.

18 See: Article 4 of the Protocol V.

19 See: Article 5 of the Protocol V.

This “humanitarian” dimension also constitutes the very essence of the 1997 Ottawa Convention. The dramatic shift from “traditional” to “humanitarian” disarmament is tracked directly in the preamble to this treaty, which emphasizes the extent of human suffering from landmines and obliges states parties to put an end to human suffering caused by anti-personnel mines that kill or maim hundreds of innocent and defenceless civilians.²⁰ It is noteworthy that the preamble of the Convention makes explicit reference to IHL while proclaiming “the necessity to implement the principle of distinction that should be made between civilians and combatants”.²¹

The 2008 CCM, from the very first word, addresses the anxiety that “civilian populations and individual civilians continue to bear the brunt of armed conflict”.²² The preamble of the treaty specifically addresses the humanitarian concern that “cluster munitions remnants kill or wound civilians, and delay or prevent the return of IDPs. Furthermore, the remnants of war hinder post conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, as well as have a potential to negatively impact the peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance actions.”²³ The CCM also imposes on states an obligation to clear mine-affected areas.²⁴

All of these international treaties, built upon applicable IHL and international human rights law, constitute the comprehensive legal framework for mine action. Thus, it could be argued that their provisions should be implemented by all states of the international community, including Armenia. In support of this view, the CCM, for example, requires each state party to universalize this treaty “to promote the norms it establishes and to make its best efforts to discourage states not party to this Convention from using cluster munitions.”²⁵

20 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, September 18, 1997, available at: <https://geneva-s3.unoda.org/static-unoda-site/pages/templates/anti-personnel-landmines-convention/APLC%2BEnglish.pdf> (accessed: April 12, 2022).

21 Ibid.

22 UNMAS, “Convention on Cluster Munitions”, May 30, 2008, available at: <https://www.unmas.org/sites/default/files/documents/convention-eng.pdf> (accessed: March 12, 2022).

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

'Law-making' international treaties

One of the basic principles in classical international law is that an international treaty creates obligations only for the parties to it. The famous Latin maxim *pacta tertiis nec nocent nec prosunt* (a treaty binds the parties only, and not a third) is embodied into the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT). Thus, the Convention provides that a treaty does not create obligations or rights for a third state without its consent, and consequently, in order to bind a third state with an obligation that arises from a provision of a particular treaty, the parties to that treaty should express their intent, as well as third state needing to expressly accept that obligation.²⁶

However, as Hernandez argues, “that only tells a part of the tale”; not only do treaties “influence the development of other sources of international law, but also they are very much a part of the process through which custom is made.”²⁷ He asserts that the above-referenced VCLT provisions are about so-called “ordinary” treaties, but not about “law-making treaties”, i.e., multilateral conventions “which create a regime of legal rules of general application, and not merely limited to the conduct of the parties *inter se* (between each other)”.²⁸ Among these treaties are the 1949 Geneva Conventions, CCM, the Ottawa Convention, and CCCW, which set up basic obligations in the area of warfare, as well as landmark human rights treaties such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, “which seek to prohibit such conduct universally and without exceptions”.²⁹

Despite the fact that there is no formal classification regarding “ordinary” and “law-making” international treaties, the latter have received widespread acceptance by the whole international community.³⁰ Moreover, the specific provisions of the aforementioned treaties go further than setting obligations only for state parties and

26 United Nations Treaty Series, “Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, May 23, 1969, available at: https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf (accessed: April 3, 2022).

27 G.Hernandez, *International Law*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.45.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

hence are treaties that “create general rules, and which arguably also guide states and other actors that are not parties”.³¹

All the above-analysed treaties on mine action are multilateral conventions that establish international legal rules of common application. Hence, it could be suggested that these “law-making” treaties make Armenia responsible under international law for upholding their rules and principles.

All the above-analysed treaties on mine action are multilateral conventions that establish international legal rules of common application. Hence, it could be suggested that these “law-making” treaties make Armenia responsible under international law for upholding their rules and principles.

Armenia’s responsibility for international crimes on mine action

As argued in the previous section, the international treaties on mine action laid the foundation for the dramatic shift from “traditional” to “humanitarian” disarmament through the outlawing of certain inhumane weapons and providing remedial mechanisms for civilian victims. As these international treaties have been built upon legally binding IHL, including international customary rules, it could be suggested that Armenia could be bound by their provisions that address customary rules. Thus, the VCLT’s Article 38 also provides that a rule set forth in a treaty could become binding upon a third state (non-state-party) as a customary rule of international law.³²

Armenia is not a party to any of the international treaties on mine action specified above. Meanwhile, Armenia is fully engaged in the consumption of the prohibited types of weapons, including anti-personal landmines and other devices, with the aim of causing damage and suffering to combatants, as well as to civilians.³³ However, being a

31 *Reparation for Injuries suffered in the Service of the United Nations*, Advisory Opinion, ICJ Reports 1949, p. 174, 185; *Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa)* notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), Advisory Opinion, ICJ Reports 1971, p. 16, 59.

32 United Nations Treaty Series, “Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties”, May 23, 1969, available at: https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf (accessed: April 3, 2022).

33 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, “No:121/21, Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the 4th of April - International Mine Awareness Day”, April 4, 2021, available at: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no12121-statement-by-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-on-the-4th-of-april-international-mine-awareness-day> (accessed: April 28, 2022).

non-signatory state of the international conventions on mine action does not waive Armenia's anti-mine obligations under international law, i.e., IHL that has been created upon long-lasting international customary rules regarding the conduct of warfare and which have been further codified within the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

IHL: 1949 Geneva Conventions

Under IHL, namely the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocol I relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, Armenia is obliged to implement its anti-mine obligations, including the disclosure of information on the location of landmines and other explosive devices that pose a threat to civilians in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. By joining these treaties that were adopted in order to limit the atrocities of wars,³⁴ Armenia undertook a legal obligation to comply with their provisions under any circumstances.³⁵

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols include the principles of 'distinction' and 'proportionality', which constitute a part of customary IHL and provide protection to individuals who are not taking part in war. It is noteworthy that these principles have been addressed in some international treaties on mine action such as the Ottawa Convention, Protocol II to CCM, etc.³⁶

The principle of distinction demands that belligerents distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, i.e., civilians, who are not taking part in hostilities and thus receive protection under IHL. This principle that demands parties to armed conflict distinguish between civilians and combatants is codified in Article 48 of the Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The rule of 'principle of distinction' is further developed by the rule against indiscriminate

34 ICRC, "The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols", available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions/overview-geneva-conventions.htm> (accessed: March 12, 2022).

35 Safarov, N. and Mustafayeva, N., "Violations of international humanitarian law by Armenia in the Second Karabakh War", *Caucasus Strategic Perspectives*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, Winter 2020, pp.131–142.

36 Safarov, N., "Failure to provide Azerbaijan with maps of mined areas is contrary to international humanitarian law", *Oxu.az*, April 12, 2021, available at: <https://oxu.az/politics/483819> (accessed: May 2, 2022).

attacks enshrined in Article 51 of Protocol I, which entails, *inter alia*, that the civilian population, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack.³⁷

Another important principle of customary IHL is the principle of proportionality that is codified in Article 51(5)(b) of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and demands that belligerents refrain from attacks “which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians”³⁸ that cannot be justified by military purpose.

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols include the principles of ‘distinction’ and ‘proportionality’, which constitute a part of customary IHL and provide protection to individuals who are not taking part in war.

Hence, there is a total violation of the entire set of 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols by Armenia through, *inter alia*, the deliberate and large-scale planting of landmines in the territories of Azerbaijan with the aim of inflicting damage on the civilian population and hindering the post-conflict rehabilitation and reconciliation efforts. As a result of mine explosions in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan after the end of hostilities, more than 200 persons, including civilians and military personnel, lost their lives or were injured.³⁹ Armenia is responsible under international law for all these intentional killings that *ipso facto* are war crimes and crimes against humanity.

War crimes and crimes against humanity

The concept of war crimes has been established through the codification of customary IHL. The most recent and comprehensive definition for war crimes is provided by the 1998 Rome Statute of the International

37 ICRC, “Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)”, June 8, 1977, available at: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/470?OpenDocument> (accessed: April 23, 2022).

38 ICRC, “Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)”, June 8, 1977, available at: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/470?OpenDocument> (accessed: April 23, 2022).

39 The Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan periodically reveals the numbers of victims who have been killed or wounded as a result of a landmine explosions – see: Office of the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Azerbaijan, available at: <https://genprosecutor.gov.az/az/page/media/xeberler> (accessed: May 30, 2022).

Hence, intentional killings committed by Armenia through, inter alia, the use of prohibited inhumane weapons (such as certain conventional weapons like cluster munitions and anti-personal mines) that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering in violation of the principles of distinction and proportionality fall under the above-mentioned definitions of international crimes.

Criminal Court (ICC) in the form of grave violations of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, specifically through acts against persons or properties protected under these documents. Among these acts, Article 8(2) of the Rome Statute lists, *inter alia*, wishful killings and intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as a whole or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities.⁴⁰

Crimes against humanity are crimes committed on a widespread and systematic scale against a civil population. Under the ICC's Statute they include, *inter alia*, murder and other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.⁴¹ Prior to this codification, crimes against humanity had

been formulated within long-established customary rules and further developed through the jurisdiction of international criminal tribunals.⁴²

Hence, intentional killings committed by Armenia through, *inter alia*, the use of prohibited inhumane weapons (such as certain conventional weapons like cluster munitions and anti-personal mines) that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering in violation of the principles of distinction and proportionality fall under the above-mentioned definitions of international crimes.

Moreover, the issue of responsibility of Armenia is based also on the *jus cogens* (peremptory norms of international law) character of the norms that outlawed war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In accordance with Article 53 of the VCLT, "A peremptory norm of general international law is a norm accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character".⁴³ Thus,

40 International Criminal Court, "Rome Statute of ICC", 1998, available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf> (accessed: 20 April 2022).

41 Ibid.

42 United Nations, "Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect, Crimes against humanity", available at: <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/crimes-against-humanity.shtml> (accessed: May 2, 2022).

43 United Nations Treaty Series, "Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties",

jus cogens norms are recognized as hierarchically superior to the ordinary norms of international law.⁴⁴ Regarding war crimes and crimes against humanity, it should be also noted that they had been recognized as a breach of *jus cogens* norms by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its verdict on *Jurisdictional Immunities of the State (Germany v Italy: Greece Intervening)*.⁴⁵

The enforcement of *jus cogens* norms is implemented within obligations *erga omnes* (towards all), i.e., obligations “toward the international community as a whole”.⁴⁶ In accordance with the concept of *erga omnes*, all states have a legal interest in ensuring compliance with obligations contained in particular treaties, and consequently could invoke the issue of responsibility under international law, even if they are not directly affected.⁴⁷ Thus, any state party to 1949 Geneva Conventions and its Additional Protocols can invoke the issue of the responsibility of Armenia for violation of the principles of distinction and proportionality due to the war crimes committed by Armenia.

Thus, considering the landmark principles of IHL that prohibit weapons and methods of warfare that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering to humans, the international community, in the framework of obligations *erga omnes*, should raise the issue of Armenia’s responsibility under international law for its intentional killings, i.e., war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Azerbaijan is not a state party to the international conventions on mine actions on due to the fact that its contaminated-with-landmines territories, remaining since the period of occupation of Armenia, deprives the former from full implementation of the provisions of these treaties. However, considering the humanitarian nature of these landmark documents, Azerbaijan constantly supports their objects and purposes, as well as endorsing common efforts to address concerns about

May 23, 1969, available at : https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf (accessed: April 3, 2022).

44 International Law Commission, “Second Report on *Jus Cogens*”, UN Doc A/CN.4/706, 2017, pp.12-14.

45 ICJ, *Jurisdictional Immunities of the State (Germany v Italy: Greece Intervening)*, 2012, available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/143> (accessed: May 1, 2022).

46 Barcelona Traction Heat, Light, and Power Co. (*Belgium v Spain*), Second Phase, ICJ Reports, 1970, para 33, p.3.

47 Obligation to Prosecute or Extradite (*Belgium v Senegal*), Judgement, ICJ Reports, 2012.

However, considering the humanitarian nature of these landmark documents, Azerbaijan constantly supports their objects and purposes, as well as endorsing common efforts to address concerns about civilian casualties.

civilian casualties. Azerbaijan, albeit it is not a state party to the Ottawa Convention and acknowledging the indiscriminate danger of landmines for civilians, has consistently voted in favour of resolutions relating to the implementation of this Convention adopted by the UN General Assembly.⁴⁸ In fact, this is a vivid example of how a state even without formally acceding to the international treaty can uphold their terms and provisions, due to considering the humanitarian nature of these agreements, as well as the mandatory character of the IHL rules that constitute the very basis of these documents.

Conclusion

It is argued in this paper that the IHL, namely the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocol I related to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, create international obligations for Armenia in, *inter alia*, the area of mine action. Since Armenia is a state party to these international documents, the large-scale mine contamination by Armenia of the liberated [formerly occupied] territories of Azerbaijan and official Yerevan's unwillingness to release the location of all mined areas that could prevent human casualties make Armenia responsible under these treaties.

Considering the fact that there have been more than 200 human casualties as a result of mine explosions in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan even after the end of the war in 2020, Armenia is also responsible under international law for committing intentional killings (i.e., war crimes and crimes against humanity). These crimes represent breaches of the hierarchically superior and non-derogable *jus cogens* norms of the international law, violation of which entails obligations *erga omnes*.

48 Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, "Intersessional meetings of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, Thematic session, Statement of the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva, June 22, 2021", available at: https://new.apminebanconvention.org/fileadmin/_APMBC-DOCUMENTS/Meetings/2021/IM21-3-Universalization-Azerbaijan (accessed: March 25, 2022).

Furthermore, it also suggested in this commentary that an overall stance, through the obligations *erga omnes*, asserting Armenia's violation of international law and its anti-mine obligations may contribute to common efforts towards complete disarmament for the creation of a *mine-free world*.

Adoption of the comprehensive legal framework for mine action, i.e., the “humanitarian disarmament” conventions analysed in this commentary, could be evaluated as a milestone in the move towards a mine-free world. These international conventions have been built upon IHL and international human rights law, as well as being ‘law-making treaties’ that create a regime of legal rules of general application. Hence, it is argued that Armenia should uphold the rules and principles of these conventions – even without being a state party to them.

Armenia could be bound to uphold the provisions of these international conventions due to the fact that they were created, *inter alia*, upon long-lasting international customary rules in the area of the conduct of warfare. This statement emanates from the rule enshrined in Article 38 of the VCLT which provides for rules in a treaty becoming binding on third states through international custom.

BOOK REVIEW:

“Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy” edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova.

REVIEWED BY NAGHI AHMADOV



Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy” edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova, Routledge, 2022, 318 pp

Reviewed by Naghi Ahmadov

After Vladimir Putin came to office, there have been dramatic shifts in Russian domestic and foreign policies. “Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy” edited by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova analyzes broad aspects of Russian foreign policy, Russian political identity, NATO expansion and Russia’s reaction. The aim of this volume is to shed some light on the factors that influence Russian foreign policy and to show the reasons behind the deterioration of Russian relations with the West in recent years.

Roger E. Kanet is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at both the University of Miami and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A. He has been the primary editor for 36 edited books and 5 special issues of journals. He has contributed over 155 chapters to edited volumes and published 95 peer-reviewed journal articles. Besides “Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy”, R. Kanet recent edited/coedited works include “Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century, The New Security Environment: The Impact On Russia, Central And Eastern Europe”; “A Resurgent Russia and the West: The European Union, NATO and Beyond”; “Power, Politics and Confrontation in Eurasia: Foreign Policy in a Contested Region”; “Russia, Eurasia and the New Geopolitics of Energy: Confrontation and Consolidation”; “Routledge Handbook of Russian Security”.

Dina Moulioukova is a Lecturer of International Studies at the University of Miami, U.S.A. She is Assistant Director and co-founder of the Global Security Initiative. D. Moulioukova completed her PhD at the University of Miami with focus on innovative approaches to security studies. Prior to her studies at UM, Dr. Moulioukova received her Master of Law degree (LL.M.) at the University of Cambridge.

Collective authors attempt to analyze the factors that affect Russian foreign policy and, in particular, the reasons behind deterioration of

relations between Russia and the West over recent years. What happened to bring about this dramatic turnabout? To what extent was this change largely the result of the Russian reaction to Western actions, such as the expansion of NATO into formerly Soviet space? To what extent does it respond to authoritarian developments in domestic politics in Russia since the rise of Vladimir Putin and his supporters to power and to their commitment to reestablishing the “Great Power” image of Russia that coincides with the centuries-old view of Russia under both the czars and Soviet leaders? The readers can find answers to these questions at length in the book.

The book is organized around eleven interrelated topics. The first part of the book, entitled “Sources and tools of Russian foreign policy”, explore broad aspects of Russian policy. More specifically, in the first chapter, “Russia’s self-image as a great power”, Dina Moulioukova, with Roger E. Kanet, outlines the long historical development of Russia’s view of itself as one of the dominant states in the world. In this part, Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet have given a generalized statement that the self-perception as a great power is one of the fundamental aspects of Russia’s identity and its sense of ontological security (p.12). Referring to Richard Pipes, the authors argues that Russia’s identity as a great power is closely linked with Russia’s geography (p.13). In the geographic sense, Russia lacks any clearly defined borders, which makes it vulnerable to attack from its neighbors. Or, to put it differently, physical security threats led to an increased need for a strong leader who could mobilize people effectively. This ontological need has been a main motivator for Russia’s foreign policy for centuries, and even it remains a driving force today (p.15).

Discussing the Russia foreign policy and the return to authoritarian roots, Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova bring out that it is the communal nature of Russian society that granted favorable conditions for further implanting the ontological need for a strong leader (p.14). Russian perception of authority throughout the centuries has been historically ingrained in perceiving a strong state as a guarantor of physical security and political stability (p.18).

Many different ethnic groups and languages that were annexed to Russia as a result of her expansionist aspirations made it more difficult to define Russian identity (p.20). Championing the idea of the unification

of all Slavs under the leadership of Russia, Panslavism portrays Russian ontological awareness as different from that of the West. Followers of this belief assert that Russia's integration into Europe has always been accompanied by the sense of inferiority and disdain from Europe for its backwardness. The authors highlight that the lack of acceptance of Russia as an equal among Western European powers subsequently affects the construction of the Russian biographic narrative and the basis of the country's ontological awareness (p.23).

Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet intriguingly assume that rather than viewing Russia as a backward, almost barbaric, society with a repressive political system, acknowledgment of Russia's status by European states was crucial for the external approval of Russia's self-perception as a great power. In authors' opinion, this lack of acceptance possibly triggered ontological anxiety in Russia's biographic narrative (p.24).

Furthermore, the authors are of the view that 'conflict with the West brings internal identity coherence...In present-day Russia, these fears have been used by Russian elites to consolidate the power in the face of external pressures and economic challenges' (p.25).

In the second chapter, "Russian strategic culture and renewed conflict with the West", Roger E. Kanet identifies that over the centuries Russian strategic and security culture has been built on the self-perception of a great power that necessitates military power to maintain this status (p.34). This chapter mainly investigates the reasons for the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West from the early 1990s until now. After consideration the dynamics of events during last three decades, the author comes to a conclusion that it arises from exterior and interior developments which are closely interrelated (p.34). The first factor stemmed from the expansion of the liberal international order in the names of both NATO and the European Union toward the Post-Soviet space which resulted in changing Russian strategic culture in a much more assertive and aggressive way (p.35). The second development was related to Putin's accession to power and surrounded himself with former security service officers which caused to a shift in Kremlin's strategic culture and sense of national identity (p.36).

In Chapter 3, entitled "Images and Decision-making in foreign policy: the case of Vladimir Putin", Aleksandar Jankovski points out the

images of Vladimir Putin as a chief decisionmaker. Defining images as complexes of theories, the author contends that ‘decision-makers have beliefs, or stored mental representations of facts, which may be true or not, and which in part help construct the images they hold’ (p.68). By mapping out the foundational image of Vladimir Putin, Jankovski claims that it notably coincides with the Grotian image. The author reaches a conclusion that Putin, having conservative approach to international relations, predominantly believes the centrality of states in world politics (p.74). The second core ontological element of President Putin’s foundational image is ‘power plays a significant role in international affairs’ (p.76). The third and fourth ontological beliefs of President Putin’s foundational image are that the systemic balance of power and the great powers’ management are indispensable for the keeping of international order, respectively (pp.78, 82).

In the fourth chapter of Part I, “Atlanticism in an age of great power competition: is Russia achieving its goals?”, Suzanne Loftus touches upon the impact of NATO members’ reactions to Russian policy initiatives. Briefly describing great power competition during the Cold War, Loftus identifies that the main threat for the alliance at that time was the Soviet Union, since it not only posed a military threat but also a threat to the values, such as peace and democracy enshrined in the Atlantic political community (p.92). The author argues that, the destabilization of the world order that was founded on Atlantic principles after World War II enables authoritarian actors, such as Russia and China to get some more leverage in the international system (p.93). Loftus concentrates on NATO’s intervention in the former Yugoslavia without a UN mandate as a starting point of friction between the West and Russia which mostly based on a lack of shared perception of fair security architecture in Europe. In this and other cases, both Russia and China have evaluated the West’s use of “liberal interventionism,” on the premise of ensuring peace and security as a violation of a nation’s sovereignty (p.94). Loftus points out that ‘the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the financial crisis in 2008, which destabilized the world and raised doubts about the U.S.’s capacity to lead’ (p.95).

When Vladimir Putin came to power, he initially endeavored to restore relations with NATO. After the September 11 terrorist attacks Putin reached out a helping hand to the United States by granting them to use Russia’s air bases in Central Asia for access to Afghanistan. To do

this Putin was seeking to build a new security architecture where the West and Russia could be equal partners (p.95). However, the Russia–NATO relations turned aside during Putin’s second term as he gained the courage because of rising oil prices. Enlargement of NATO to the Baltic states and Western support for the Color Revolutions in Russia’s near abroad, according to Loftus, incited Putin to change his strategies toward the West (p.96). The author asserts that ‘the annexation of Crimea was the greatest revision of Europe’s geopolitical landscape since German reunification and shows to what length Russia is willing to go to defend its sphere of influence against the West’ (p.98). Analyzing the developments around NATO enlargement, Loftus comes to a conclusion that the Ukraine crisis indicates the decline of U.S. hegemony and the West’s sanctions regime is not much capable to change Russia’s behavior (p.99). Domestic challenges and tensions among allies impede the transatlantic alliance from maintaining primacy in the world (p.100). Considering the Western alliance system as the U.S.’s greatest strength to counter to China and Russia, the author expresses hopelessness in front of challenges that are already irreparable (p.110).

In the fifth chapter, called “The battle of ontological narratives: Russia and the annexation of Crimea”, Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet analyze Russia’s annexation of Crimea as a struggle between views from ontological perspectives. The authors highlight that only a couple of decades ago, Russian and the Ukrainian people peacefully lived together and chose their future together in the referendum for the preservation of the Soviet Union. They conclude that ‘while seeking to build a *Russkii Mir*, the Kremlin fell victim to its own strategy and promoted the opposite – Ukraine’s consolidation with Europe’ (p.134).

In chapter 6, Arsen Gasparyan studies the role of energy in Russian foreign policy. The author discloses that the Putin administration consolidated the oil and natural gas industries into the state-owned corporations, such as Gazprom, Rosneft and Transneft. These companies have served President Putin to accomplish Russia’s global role as an energy provider in return. It can be concluded that Russia views the oil and gas ‘not just a source of wealth, but as a resource for political power and state policy’ (p.141).

The second part of the book discusses NATO's enlargement and its consequences for U.S. post-Cold War grand strategy. Rajan Menon and William Ruger in Chapter 7 assess NATO's continuing relevance after the end of the Cold War. They debate over NATO's post-Cold War expansion and its consequences. Also, the authors evaluate Russian reactions to NATO enlargement and its effects on US-Russian relations. Menon and Ruger particularly focus on the danger of constant enlargement of NATO, especially in regard to Ukraine and Georgia. The authors hold the view that 'the continuation of the Atlantic alliance has been central to the U.S.'s post-Cold War grand strategy of maintaining global primacy for several reasons' (p.179). In the end, they open a discussion on the future of NATO and Europe.

In the eighth chapter, Charles Ziegler accentuates the sanctions as a tool of choice in U.S. relations with Russia. Condemning sanctions as groundless interference in Russia's domestic affairs, Russian leaders claims that it is an attempt to curb Russia's great power ambitions. The author opines that 'Russia is far more integrated into the global economy than was the USSR, and so is more vulnerable' (p.223).

The third section of the book, "Russian policy in the developing world", Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova compare Soviet and Russian foreign policy and Nuray Ibryamova examines Russia's expanding role in the Eastern Mediterranean in Chapter 9 and Chapter 10, respectively. The last chapter has been devoted to ontological factors in Western and rising powers competition in Venezuela by Dina Moulioukova and Karina Brennan.

In a concluding section, the co-editors, Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova, stress that after a brief period, Russia under President Putin shifted to the objective of re-establishing the great power status (p.296).

The book has overwhelmingly relied upon empirical evidences rather than academic approach to prove the central argument of the study. The authors have tried to highlight official Russian version on various developments, in particular NATO-Russia contradiction, however, absence of echoing of strategic rationale for NATO enlargement make the volume seem less impartial. Despite aforementioned weaknesses, the book answers a series of questions about the nature of Russian foreign policy and her great power ambition. In addition, Russia

watchers might conceivably find some clues on the causes of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in this work. Therefore, anyone who is interested in Russian foreign policy, in particular NATO-Russia rift, should put this well-written and highly informative book in his/her reading list.

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